

**HOW CULTURE INFLUENCES TEACHER SELF-REFLECTIVE PROBLEM  
SOLVING BEHAVIOR AND SELF-EFFICACY: EXPERIENCES OF WHITE  
FEMALE TEACHERS WORKING THROUGH RELATIONSHIP WITH BLACK  
STUDENTS IN A MID-WESTERN AMERICAN CITY**

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**Dedicated to the Hue-man Family**

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Beginning with W.E.B. Dubois in 1903, his seminal work *The Souls of Black Folk* opened honest public discourse on slavery and the condition of the Freedmen. His work continues to inspire educators and others to move towards making schools relevant for students of color. For decades black people have struggled for “decency and dignity” as Cornell West (2000) explained. In the twentieth and twenty-first century many African American educators such as Banks, Gay, Delpit, Lawrence, Diop and others have sounded the clarion call to America to live out the truth of its creed of equality and justice for all.

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## Abstract

Teachers make a difference. White female middle-class teachers represent 84 percent of Americas' teachers. How does culture influence the self-reflective problem-solving behaviors of urban teachers? Urban schools fail youth by opening the doors for a mass exodus. The problem solving behavior of urban teachers may contribute to the student exodus through suspensions, expulsions and unchallenged idleness. Fifty-percent of urban youth, mostly black and brown, who enter high school as ninth graders leave without a diploma. They "drop out." Students who drop out of high school have an increased chance of going to prison, while many die on the streets. Americans tolerate these casualties in urban schools. The research conducted was a traditional qualitative case study. A non-probability purposive sampling technique was utilized to recruit participants. Nine white middle-class female teachers and one African American female were interviewed about the strategies each used to solve a specific difficult problem situation with one of their black students. During semi-structured taped interviews teachers were asked several questions about a difficult problem situation with a black student that they had resolved. The four broad themes generated from the data were, Teachers as Adolescents; Agency, Self-efficacy, and Problem Solving; Relationship and Language; concluding with Teachers' Experiences and Benefits. A surprising finding was that teacher cross-cultural training utilizing Ruby Payne's (2005) controversial approach *A framework for understanding poverty*, seemed to initially make a positive impact on the teachers' approach to problem-solving. In the long term, however, such training supported a deficit model for urban students. One important finding was when teachers had personal contact and a loving relationship with people of color outside of the school day; that appeared to have a positive effect on their problem-solving abilities and relationships with students. When teachers' cultural ideas conflicted with students, a positive sign was that some teachers were willing to change their minds and their story. When teachers were able to change their minds, the result was a positive transformation in their relationship with students and the students' relationship with their education, which tended to influence agency and self-efficacy.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### Background Frame

Jon was one of my eighth grade art students in an urban middle school in my first year of teaching. He had blond hair and blue eyes; he was inquisitive and generous. Jon got kicked out of several classes daily. He came to my room nearly once a day for refuge. I knew he had difficult personal issues, problems at home and in school. However, at twenty-one years old, I did not know how to help Jon. I did not realize the severity of his problem until I learned that he was in critical condition and brain dead after a game of Russian roulette. Jon was fourteen-years-old. He died. I was too afraid to visit him in the hospital. And I did not go to his funeral.

My absence during this difficult time for Jon did not reflect my affection for him. When Jon died, I knew that I did not know how to help him or students like him. Jon's death allowed me to see that I was not just teaching art; I had to teach students about living and choosing life. The aim of educational research is to examine and perhaps uncover dynamics that affect the process of education. Today it is acknowledged that the current educational system, especially in urban schools, is not particularly effective. Broken. It is clear that something needs to change.

A significant part of this study is a non-traditional journey through possible hidden elements that affect school reform. This dissertation seeks to explore a number of hidden dynamics including culture in urban classrooms to understand phenomena that may point to some reasons for student and teacher failure. The hidden dynamics presented in this dissertation are examined through traditional methods but are framed in a non-traditional manner. The traditional part of the study is a qualitative analysis of white female teachers working with African American students in urban schools. This includes a literature review, a methods section, findings and analysis, and recommendations. What makes this dissertation unconventional is that the study is framed within a larger conversation that needs to happen if educators really care about helping all children to be successful in school. In this study some things that are missing and have been left out of the conversation will be examined. The missing parts play a major role in the accumulative negative effects on the life, education, health, economics

and wealth of black Americans (Hill, 2008). For example (Hill, 2008) the “life expectancy” of African Americans is 73.3 and for whites it is 78.3. The “infant mortality rate” for blacks is 13.65/1,000 and for whites it is 5.65/1,000 (p. 2). Finally, the household net worth for blacks in 2000 was 7,500 and for whites it was 79,400 (p. 2).

How can the disparity and the resulting devastation to African Americans lives be explained? Hill (2008) asserted, “Since common sense requires White Americans to reject the idea that these racial disparities are due to racism as they understand it -[Ku Kluxers, and Skin heads] that is, as overt expression of White supremacy – they often conclude that they result from some fault of those who suffer” (p. 3). The assertion here is that instead of blaming students and their community entirely for school failure there could be other explanations available by expanding the lens.

The literature review especially in Part Two and throughout the dissertation, explores such diverse topics as the power of words, language, perception, identity, agency, self-efficacy, the teachers adolescent experiences, being, history of civilization, the color line, white female teachers, white talk, women and wealth, fear and power, black girls and their teachers, black boys school to prison pipe line, white boys and men in crisis, belief and habit, perception and problem assessment, right and wrong, hue and other topics. All are woven together in an attempt to present an expanded, more comprehensive view of the cultural issues facing students and teachers in urban schools.

## **Culture**

Culture,

[H]elps define who we are. It influences our knowledge, beliefs, and values. It provides the blueprint that determines the way we think, feel and behave...[c]ulturally determined norms guide our language, behavior, emotions and thinking; they are the do’s and don’ts of appropriate behavior within our culture...[W]e often misunderstand the cultural cues of persons from different cultures. (Gollnick & Chinn, 2009, p. 13)

When people from different cultures have a misunderstanding it may not seem important, but it can be crucial. For example, “how loud is too loud, how late one may arrive to an event and how close can one stand to another” (p. 13) are culture specific. However, by not knowing the culture one might appear “rude or disrespectful” (p. 13).

How loud is too loud will be explored in this chapter and the impact it has on the education of black students especially girls working with white teachers. Understanding urban culture is critical for teachers in inner city schools.

### **Two Lenses the Circle and the Line**

The larger conversation is argued and written from both a Western linear perspective favored in academia and a comprehensive African worldview, a circle, which includes many elements that influence an individual life. Payne (2005) believed that poor students (black) who “meander almost endlessly” (p. 28) during conversation are deficient, because they do not “get straight to the point” (p. 28), as in formal English.

The root problem of school failure may require a more complex comprehensive explanation that a direct approach might not allow; thus the need for a different approach. The expanded lens further explores how internal and external influences impact educational outcomes for students and teachers. West (2000) supported the idea of a “holistic” approach that included a variety of influences affecting schooling. He said, “One cannot talk about school without talking about family, community, quality of life and motivation, and the undeniable cultural decay of our time” (p. 43).

An African holistic worldview suggested by West (2000) will be employed in this dissertation. The idea metaphorically may be thought of as a spider web. Influences on student education are more than a single thread; rather the tension of one thread affects and contracts another, and sometimes the breaking of threads compromises the integrity of a spider web or a system. Urban education is broken. Each strand of silk radiates from a center point, a nucleus. The white female teacher and black students relationship are situated at the center of the web. At the same time each person as an individual self sits a top of the same web. All they have experienced together and separately are the lenses that shape and focus the educational process for urban youth in particular ways. The combined and individual cultural variables and their responses to them influence the connected radiating threads of relationship and are not fully understood. These variables will be discussed and their possible meanings will be interwoven while various connections are argued in this dissertation.

## **A Search for Solutions**

The research might appear to be a threat to many educators now and to those who have gone before. This is not the intention of this dissertation, yet the search for solutions to failing schools in urban America must move forward in spite of the discomfort. In a climate where teachers are blamed for what does not work this investigation might be unwelcome to some. No one wants to assign blame or insist on yet another project for teachers to assume. However, if there are hidden problems they must be uncovered. The problems will not be resolved until courageous adults are willing and committed to revisit old paradigms and methods and, if necessary, change them (Gollnick & Chinn, 2009). Urban students are part of the equation as well, but they do not have the maturity or understanding to tackle the complex issues in school or in society. Teachers and concerned adults must take the lead if there is any hope of reform.

Past attempts at educational reform have failed “[R]eform will never be achieved by renewing appropriations, restructuring schools, rewriting curricula and revising text” (Palmer, 1998, p. 3). Root issues must be addressed. America has a “race” problem. Urban schools are not immune. So much of what goes on in urban classrooms revolves around the conversation about race and underachievement that holds teachers and students hostage to a discourse that has been detrimental to their personal growth. There is a need for a different conversation with different language that acknowledges aspects of truth that has been hidden or unrecognized.

## **Connecting Threads**

To give an overview and description of a number of the connecting threads of influence, this dissertation points to the important hidden elements in the use of words, one example is the silence between the words, where the true meaning often lies. In fact, a great deal of communication is “communicate[d] by absence and silence that invite inferences” (Hill, 2008, p. 41) like the words “poor people.” Poor people is a phrase most often used when one refers to black people. Though it does include poor people in general, one has to understand the context of its usage to determine who is actually being talked about. Some words will be used in new ways and some new terms are invented in this dissertation. A number of different phenomena and how they influence education will be important to keep in mind while reading the study, remember the spider web metaphor.

A major phenomenon, a problem in human relations in American society based on “race” is skin color, which was mentioned earlier. This issue has existed for several hundred years now. Du Bois early in the nineteen hundreds described it as “The problem of the color-line” (1994, p. v). Cornel West (2000) in a speech asked “How does it feel to be a problem in a civilization that has put such a premium on problem solving...How does it feel to be cast as part of a problem people, rather than people with problems? We all have problems” (p. 40).

The arrangement of words as West (2000) illustrated is critical to meaning. The use of certain words is also critical. Some words such, as “racism” is often viewed as confrontational and threatening and many people close their ears and minds once it is uttered. In this conversation therefore, when the topic of racism arises, from this point on “hue-ism,” an invented word will replace the word “racism” when possible and it will be explained later. When hue-ism, classism or oppression in society are discussed and explored, defensive postures often easily arise in those who reject that such forces might be at work. This group of people seems to be unable to see the hidden forces. Possibly the oppression and the denigration of others may be invisible to whites and therefore unquestioned because “‘white virtue’ [makes them] highest in the hierarchy because their qualities deserve this arrangement” (Hill, 2008, p. 21) and the positions of others are seen as “normal,” and unambiguous. They are where they belong and are treated in ways commensurate with their “lower” position.

Many whites view their “ascendancy, not as a historical product, but as a moral imperative” (p. 22). However, some do see the hidden forces, and for them these are “known denials.” This group may not want to confront their conflicted and often painful feelings around the issues and do not want to think about the possibility of relinquishing personal privilege. Most refuse to entertain any possible collusion with the forces, but simply wish the problems would go away. Hill (2008) suggests “white Americans come to understand the world in terms of race, to practice racism, and to learn to tolerate its effects, sometimes in full consciousness of what they are doing, and sometimes in reduced consciousness or denial” (p. ix). West (2000) acknowledged the need to dialogue about people’s experience of “race” in America,

How do we confront it critically, candidly in such a way that we highlight the best of each and everyone of us but remain frank and candid in terms of the psychic scars, existential bruises, and ontological wounds that have been left by this legacy of race? (p. 40)

West's question reflects the approach and direction intended in this dissertation. Many average white American cannot see their complicity in the oppression of people of color instead “White virtue is protected by projecting racism onto an imagined category of ‘skinheads’ and ‘Ku Kluxers’ that Whites seldom encounter in real life” (Hill, 2008, p. 23) who Hill asserted are small in number compared to the total population.

### **Virtue Verses Deficit and Bad Verses Good**

The difficult situation of hue-ism has to be confronted candidly because, the phenomena of not seeing, projecting on to others or having a narrow focus of black and white where people and cultural practices are termed bad and good, keeping quiet, or being confused and many other psychological states of mind may have played a major role in the current school crisis in urban areas today. Denial. What may not be realized is that the qualities of bad that are often attributed to the other many times are one's own hidden characteristics projected onto another; this dynamic is called the shadow (Campbell, 1971). The shadow mind consists of material that belongs to an individual but is not part of their conscious awareness of themselves, and is often “the text” from which the hidden curriculum and deficit thinking is derived (Palmer, 1989).

Much of what this dissertation addresses is the hidden, the denied, and that which is beyond personal awareness and how that affects the educational process. The individual shadow (hidden from self) material around hue-ism, however not only applies to educators; some students of color and their families might have limited and distorted perceptions about white teachers, which further complicates the matter. Every person is an individual and different than another.

The urban community has had grievances with the educational system for decades. It is imperative that the voices of the oppressed groups who are aware of the negative effects of “the hidden” be heard. People of color in America and African Americans in urban educational settings have a special voice and a particular vision about school problems and resolutions. These voices may prove to be a valuable asset in the



discussion. One of these voices will be heard in this dissertation in chapter six. Though people of color hold a variety of viewpoints about school reform, many agree that the hidden curriculum has a significant influence on the effectiveness of urban education. The curriculum is often hidden from the teachers as well. Yet they are the instruments through which the hierarchy of class, color and gender is taught and perpetuated (Howard, 2006; Orenstein, 1994; McIntosh, 1988).

### **Hidden From Self**

The idea of the hidden curriculum is not unique to people of color. It is discussed widely in educational literature. However, what may be different about the discussion is the interpretation of school failure, through a psychological lens dealing with problem situations that include the teacher and students in the classroom, both of whom may lack historical clarity, experience and knowledge about themselves and others that might influence educational outcomes. Self-knowledge and choice is important because the initial assessment of a problem, “what is true,” the personal narrative, the created story about the situation, often leads to specific actions based on a cultural interpretation that may or may not be accurate. The action taken may resolve the problem or exacerbate it. West (2000) cautioned about the “truth” of the individual or one particular group. No one of us or one group has the truth, capital “T,” but rather has argument, visions, and perspectives that can grow and be strengthened as they interact, listen to, are informed by those of others in a public sphere, a public life, a public conversation, mediated with mutual respect and civility. (42)

This dissertation is but one voice in the cacophony of discordant voices in the school reform debate. People who are oppressed are another voice and are aware of the role institutional hue-ism and sexism plays in their lives. Teachers often believe that student failures in urban schools have nothing to do with the institution or the educators, but that the responsibility is entirely the student's. Unfortunately, some students believe this about themselves as well, when failure may not be entirely their fault (MacLeod, 2008). Indeed, (Hill) “White racism is not just part of American history. Instead White racist culture today organizes racist practices in White dominated institutions such as schools...and everyday choices and behaviors by the vast majority of Whites operating as individuals” (2008, p. 4).

Palmer argues that teachers and students “are constantly engaged in a seamless exchange between what ever is ‘out there’ and whatever is ‘in here’, co-creating reality, for better or for worse” (Palmer, 1998, p. 47). The power group often does not see nor has to see these hidden dynamics at work or their culpability in order for them to thrive and succeed in American society. Unfortunately, the negative experiences of people outside of the dominant group force them to see and confront these hidden dynamics regularly in order to survive.

Therefore, it is important to address directly the unseen, unspoken phenomenon that often lies in the silence of “the not said,” and the denied. School reform may be self-reform in earnest. Palmer (1998) suggests, “If we were to turn some of our externalized reformist energies towards exorcising the inner demons of fear, we would take a vital step toward the renewal of teaching and learning” (p. 37). Through self-examination and honest discussion, an agreement on the nature of and the definition of the problems may be a result, which is the first step towards resolution or conflict management and school reform.

In the process it may be necessary to deal openly with a possible perceived threat and defensiveness that might arise when the dynamics are explored from a direct and unfamiliar vantage point. Again, this dissertation is intended to assist the educational process for both the teacher and the students. In order to unveil that which is hidden, it is necessary to search broadly and in some instances meticulously for answers. Concerned teachers who want student success are committed to the process of reform. Having the will and being receptive to different paradigms may garner new solutions, which may lead to positive outcomes for students and teachers.

### **A Tale of Two Worlds**

Palmer asserted, “We must be intentional about exploring the real issues of our lives” (Palmer, 2004, p. 91). The following example is an attempt to illustrate a hidden conflict between two different worldviews of teachers and black students. It is a behavioral and psychological interpretation based on cultural and historical differences of the parties that probably affect student teacher interaction and relationships in urban schools. A point of reflection might be, does the teacher's “patriarchal,” rearing and the student “matriarchal” upbringing negatively or positively influence their relationship in

the classroom? Diop (1974) affirmed, “The matriarchal system is the base of the social organization in Egypt and throughout Black Africa” (p. 142).

Consequently when black slaves arrived in America their matriarchal tradition came with them. In addition, the conditions of slavery supported that tradition by emasculating the black male, which made him appear weak in a patriarchal society. The question is: how do these seemingly antithetical perspectives amalgamate and affect student teacher interactions, relationships and success? Many white middle-class female teachers are taught to defer, acquiesce, and remain silent in the presence of male figures at home and in society. On the other hand, a large number of black students are raised in a matriarchal household, and many girls are trained to be strong, assertive and vocal. What are the possible repercussions of such diverse perspectives?

### **A Loud Conflict Two Views**

The next section explores cross-cultural perspectives on “loud” and demonstrates the need for cross-cultural competencies. The research (AAUW, 1991) indicated that one of the teacher's complaints and source of conflict with black girls was that they were “too loud.” This idea of too loud is also a construct voiced in the broader society through the media concerning black females. This may be an interpretation based on the teachers’ home training, a specific social construct that insisted that girls are to be nice, which often includes remaining silent thus invisible, which is inconsistent with black girls' training.

According to researchers, when black girls are perceived in negative ways such as, “too loud” the teachers are often reluctant to engage with the students, though the girls repeatedly attempted to get their attention (AAUW, 1991). A similar assertion is supported by Payne, (2005) in her controversial book *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, in which she stated that a behavior related to poverty is that poor students “ARGUE LOUDLY WITH THE TEACHER” (p. 79). For Payne “loud” for urban students in poverty appears to be a “common” truth. Do teachers argue back loudly, or do they moderate their voice in a lower register? What constitutes “loud”? Who decides? Researches suggest that some teachers are afraid of black students (Kohl, 1994; McIntyre, 1997). Does “too loud” have anything to do with fear? Why is loud important? Is there some association with loud that assumes a particular outcome? Are

strong painful emotions and loud voices in school okay? Can fun be loud? Is it safe to express oneself authentically with emotion “arguing loudly” in school? Is there any appropriate place for strong, loud, emotional expression?

There are strong public expressions of loud voices regularly at ball games, angry argument as well as affirmations and team support. Are all the loud, arguing fans poor? Are loud, arguing fans more acceptable than loud, arguing students in urban schools? Why? Could the concern and the discomfort with loud students be related to Payne’s and many white middle-class teachers upbringing that girls and women are to remain quiet? Is loud bad and quiet good? Are these the only options allowed black and white girl/students or the urban poor? Often those in power make the decision. This brief example illustrates the complexities of mental perception and cultural norms.

There seems to be a layered, hierarchical, and loaded complex message in Payne’s assertion in general. An attempt is made here to unveil the possible meaning (Hill, 2008). Language in general is loaded. What is important is a conscious use of language gained through self-reflection and self-knowledge and the desire to help people. Nobody is perfect, a sentiment that reveals a human condition, but each has a choice to aspire for self-perfection anyway.

### **Payne and Poverty Often a Code Word for Black People**

In the first part of the quotation “ARGUE LOUDLY WITH THE TEACHER,” Payne believed that certain behaviors are specific to “poor” people and people who live with poverty. A 2012 national presidential candidate expressed a similar idea and uttered his belief in a deficit model for poor people; he asserted that poor children (black) had no role models of working adults in their community. Hidden in the language of the words “poverty” and “poor” is often an unspoken association, coded in silence, that “poor” is synonymous with “black people.” Sometimes words like “the culture of poverty” and the like “is nothing more than a euphemism, a socially acceptable labeling of ...category of races” (Hill, 2008, p. 22). To cite a second example, the term “free and reduced lunch” is another coded phrase that indicates the economic condition of the student population generally meaning, in the urban core, another code word for black people.

On occasion, poor brown people, and poor white people are also included in this term as well as other poor people in urban America. Within these words “poor” and

"poverty", the extended meanings, the object of conversation rests in the silence (Hill, 2008). Rural and suburban students benefit from free and reduced lunch; that remains in silence and unacknowledged in the media. Are the similarities seen but not talked about?

Who is Payne's audience when she writes about understanding poverty? Do poor people understand poverty the way she explained? With 84 percent of all American teachers being white middle-class females, is that the target population that needs to understand poverty? It is unclear. She seemed not to be talking to teachers of affluent students; maybe she was talking to teachers of rural students or suburban students who also experienced poverty.

Another condition Payne explored and wanted to explain to her constituents about impoverished people was that "Poverty is participatory, and the culture has a distrust of authority. [They] [s]ee the system as inherently dishonest and unfair" (p. 79). Which people in poverty do not trust authority? Who are the people considered to be an authority in her statement? Does the statement include the students' parents, ministers, and leaders in the community, and all teachers, administrators? There might be an unspoken assumption here about who is an authority figure.

Do all of the students in poverty distrust all people in authority? Is the system inherently dishonest and unfair? Can fairness be taken for granted? Is fair treatment the norm for all Americans? Would teachers of color or men have the same perspective about students in poverty? Are black middle-class girls or boys in suburban and rural districts innately loud or distrust authority, or might they be socialized differently?

There seems to be a common belief in society that girls and boys in poverty argue loudly at the teacher and distrust authority figures. If the teacher believes these ideas about urban students, then her problem solving behavior may proceed in a particular direction. Nevertheless, many teachers in the literature believed that black girls were too loud in general, not necessarily accompanied with arguing, and as a result they did not interact with them as often as they did with other girls (AAUW, 1991). There was a corresponding negative educational impact on black girls due to teacher's negative perceptions.

"Loud" and the meaning placed on it created distance between students and teachers. What is the appropriate volume for speech in school? There appeared to be a perception of right or wrong, good or bad, a black, and white about volume. This is just one illustration of how negative cultural perceptions influence thought and behavior. What mechanism can bridge the diverse views points? Communities, in reality, have differences, but they are not isolated from the other. They are intimately related. One would not exist without the other. They are inexplicably bound one to the other. In essence there is one community with segments governed by different rules. Do the differences constitute a zero sum scenario, one right, the other wrong, or one good the other bad?

If Payne's observation is true for youth in poverty might students who argue loudly point to something hidden, like fear? How do interested parties move the conversation forward and investigate what might not be obvious to the casual observer? West (2000) explained, "[G]ood teaching is all about unsettling perspectives and unstiffening prejudices and allowing persons to be emancipated and liberated from whatever parochial cocoon they find themselves in at the moment" (44). "Argue loudly" or being "too loud" is an example of how social agreements outside of school intrude on the urban educational process. Teachers and students bring their culture into the schoolhouse each day. It is important to note "Whatever self-knowledge we retain as teachers will serve our students and our scholarship well. Good teaching requires self-knowledge" (Palmer, 1998, p. 3).

### **Urban Teachers**

The previous illustrations demonstrated how teacher cultural perceptions might influence behavior. Due to the mismatch of cultural experiences, and beliefs, misunderstandings and subsequent fallout, teacher classroom management skills in urban schools remain a major concern. Teacher assertiveness and self-efficacy may be another hidden elements to consider when uncovering the dynamics that are actually at work in classrooms. Does the teacher believe that she can set an educational goal for her students and achieve it? Sometimes the mind entertains a quiet voice beneath the surface, "self-talk" affirming a black deficit that may support some teachers' lack of agency and self-efficacy. It might mutter that the problems "[A]re intractable. You can't do anything

about it; you're hitting your head against the wall; you're having very little effect; there's nothing you can do; soothe your agonized conscience" (West, 2000, p. 43).

A possible lack of self-efficacy paired with micro-interactions especially in the misinterpretation of classroom behavior based on a deficit model might play a far greater role in student success than is known. However, many educators may have similar goals for student success to engender enthusiasm in youth and create an eagerness to learn and be proficient in academic acumen. This research merely touches the surface of several interesting arguments about students and teachers. Future research conducted in a systematic way could investigate how teacher cultural experience, views, psychological belief, self-reflection, problem solving behaviors, agency and self-efficacy work synergistically to impact student success.

### **The Journey Home**

In this dissertation some threads investigate the subconscious and the hidden world of thought, belief, expectation, attitude and other such internal phenomenon. Ironically "White Americans, while claiming to be anti-racist, are somehow able to acquire and to share with one another negative stereotypes that they use, consciously or unconsciously, to justify the subordination and oppression of people of color" (Hill, 2008, p. 31). The investigation may also point to particular behaviors that naturally flow from various psychological positions and demonstrate how social constructs and information unwittingly shape teachers' and students' experiences in school.

Delving into subconscious arenas is similar to birthing a baby. The labor can be long and painful. Once the opening is created, the truth that is hidden will push its way forward to be seen, embraced, and incorporated into the community consciousness. This necessary internal journey of the individual in the Western world through self-reflection, is just one method of self-discovery and is a relatively new frontier of exploration in the United States in the twenty-first century. It is a revolutionary idea that is currently gaining momentum in educational research and practice in the United States. "Good" teachers often understand what informs their thoughts and behaviors and question their actions regularly. Self-query might reveal thoughts and behaviors that support the classroom experience, or they may be found to constrict communication and relationships with self and students. The end result could be that teachers model self-reflective

behavior for students, and they too develop that essential skill. Another possible result is that a conscious partnership between students and teachers might lead to school success for urban youth. Educators, students, communities and government have to be willing to join together in reconciliation to allow the birth of freedom from social mores and the status quo that can bring new life into this challenging situation.

### **Invisible Threads**

The non-traditional material is a significant part of the study because schools are a part of society; they are not separate from it. School is a microcosm of society no one leaves their culture at the front door. Educational research often utilizes a broad approach, with few particulars when discussing societal influences on schooling. This dissertation aims to use fine brush strokes similar to that of an archeologist to unearth important finds that may demonstrate the possible significance of particular societal influence on students and teachers. The assertion here is that society's influence is invisible but indivisible from the educational process because it resides in the individual minds of students and teachers. The specific nontraditional thread of information in this dissertation is an essential ingredient in this investigation.

The thread that will be emphasized throughout is the mental aspect of the individual expressed through their words. How people behave in school is a reflection of what they think, feel, and experience (Cupitt, 1998). These fundamentals of human nature have been virtually ignored in the educational reform movement. One specific example is, school and society's propensity to celebrate the intellect and a near total disregard, fear and even scorn of feelings and emotions (Brooks, 2011).

The celebrated scientific method of the observable “fact” is difficult to apply to “mind” thought, feeling and experience, which are internal, subjective, invisible and intangible phenomena. However, that does not mean that “mind,” feelings and experience are not vital to the discussion or any attempts to investigate them infertile. In particular the “mind,” and its perceptions must be considered in educational discourse because without it, *what is there?* Without mind, there is no such thing as education, or a scientific method, nor a hypothesis or facts to discover. Nothing. Music is also an intangible phenomenon yet its validity and significance is not questioned. There are many questions raised in this dissertation and all cannot possibly be addressed



adequately. However, raised questions individually and collectively sometimes create an opening for a broader discussion and the possibility of change.

### **Skin Talk**

Students and teachers are an amalgam of their individual thoughts, feelings and experiences in the world as such a wider lens, can take in more of these factors. People usually act in specific ways especially given their upbringing, cultural position based on skin color, gender, class in school and most behaviors are primarily dictated by society. Consequently, teachers and students white and black retain their position in school as in the society based on a hierarchy. The “way in which race was constructed is a thoroughly modern affair; no one had thought about dividing humankind by appealing to observable and physical characteristics until the age of Europe...beginning in 1492” (West, 2000, p. 40).

The complexity of the social norms based on skin color and gender has been a challenge to understand and decode in classrooms for teachers and students. It seems as if many in education believe that skin color has no significance during the school day. A common statement among educators is “I don’t see skin color.” Consequently, school reform in the face of an infinite number of unacknowledged variables remains knotty. Realization and innovation is needed for effective school reform.

Skin color is but another variable among many in the web that needs to be considered when redressing grievances in urban schools. The social agreement about individual ethnic groups, class, and women in society contains many complex branches of hierarchy that is embedded in the psyche of the individual throughout childhood and beyond. The divisive behaviors are often played out across the country in schoolhouses between students and teachers, administrators and teachers, teachers’ aides and teachers, teacher to teacher, counselors, and staff, boards of education and administration, maintenance workers, cafeteria workers, auxiliary teachers, other school personnel, parents, community, and the government in an infinite number of combinations and specific complex ways.

The perceived distance between ethnic groups is due in part to the “bad mouthing” between groups about “inherent deficient qualities” of the other. Such illusions and exaggerations have made communication difficult and, in many cases,

hostile. However, West (2000) believed that everyone can work together in spite of the perceptions because, “[T]he world is incomplete and history is unfinished and the future is open ended, and what we think and do can make a difference, individually and collectively” (p. 44).

Many have attempted to explain the problems in communities simply, in terms of black and white. According to Cupitt (1998) much has been interpreted in terms of black and white, bad and good. More often than not grey is needed to mediate what appears to be black and white, in other words, to develop the ability to generate a continuum of ideas and solutions rather than a dichotomy that truncates imagination and options. Grey is the web of influence that often requires an individual willingness to move from a static black and white an “already always knowing” position into the arena of infinite possibility. In order to ferret out the grey, West (2000) suggested one has to possess,

[S]omething called courage in the form of self-criticism. How do we get beyond simply having the courage of convictions and actually have the courage to attack our convictions? The only way we grow and mature is by taking seriously what Socrates said—the unexamined life is not worth living. (p. 44)

West in his statement suggested that people investigate, reflect and challenge personal beliefs. In other words people with courage will look at themselves and make necessary changes.

### **Challenges in Urban Education**

Teachers in urban school districts across America face a number of challenges to both the retention of and successful completion rates for high school seniors. Even among those who do graduate, many can neither perform basic math calculations nor read or write at grade level. In major metropolitan areas, students have about a 50/50 chance, or less, of graduating with their class (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson 2004).

People of color, according to the 2010 U.S. Census, make up 35% of the population in metropolitan areas. By 2042, they may be the majority population (Rockey Moore, 2010). High school dropouts who lack basic skills and students who are poorly educated overall may be unable to secure America's place as leaders in the world.

Once students drop out of school, their chances of becoming involved with the American penal system increase, as part of the "school-to-prison pipeline" which often germinates in the cycle of suspension, expulsion, and subsequent dropping-out (Christensen, 2011-2012). This appears to be one of the many "hidden" social mechanisms that trains urban youth to be punishable and prepares them for mass incarceration.

Among the research looking at possible causes for the phenomenon of student failure, researchers examined what may be thought of as a mismatch between suburban white teachers and inner city African-American and Latino students. Whites represent 84 % of the teaching force in America. Meanwhile, African-American teachers make up only 8 %, Latinos 6 % and Asian 1.6% (Simons, 2011) of the remainder. Due to white female teachers' predominance, this dissertation will focus on them and their relationship with African-American students.

There have been a number of attempts to address the problem of student failure for decades. For example, districts frequently institute staff development workshops focused on diversity and multicultural education. Some have adopted new curriculum materials that better reflect the faces of the student body. Schools have also hired reading specialists who pull children out of regular classes for specialized, targeted help with reading skills-building. Furthermore, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation currently being implemented often requires a comprehensive and scripted approach to education, in order to address the achievement gap.

These attempts to ameliorate the issue have, according to many educators, exacerbated the problems. Gay (2007) asserted the negative effect of NCLB on teachers, particularly that "test scores are interfering with, rather than facilitating, their professional efficacy, motivation and imagination" (p. 280). As schools struggle to meet such "high" standards and "high" stakes imposed by NCLB, government authorities have recently uncovered systematic cheating in some districts by both teachers and administrators, who changed answers on students' standardized tests. In Atlanta, "179 educators suspected of cheating have vacated their positions" (Sarrío & Dodd, 2011, p. 1).

Another claim is that teachers' language, perception and behavior may have a profound influence on student teacher relationships in the classroom, which might diminish students' potential for school success (Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2007; Kohl, 1994;

Orenstein, 1994;). Other contributing factors may include "[c]ultural and racial conflicts in the larger society, [that] get played out in the educational system" (Bandura, 1995, p. 22).

Hue-man<sup>1</sup> beings are called to solve small and large problems during their day. A teacher-student cultural mismatch, when brought to the surface within some classroom conflicts, may contribute to dropout rates and academic failure. It might be that the student physically drops out of school or merely refuses to learn (Kohl, 1994). The results of the mismatched cultural interactions, whether positive or negative, can influence teacher self-efficacy. Much of the potential disconnect between urban youth and their teachers may be hidden within the language that is spoken, as well as in words that are left unspoken. Both the teacher and the student may be unclear or unaware of the role that words and personal bias play in these encounters, especially during emotionally charged situations.

### **The Power of Words**

Since words mediate thought, this dissertation begins with "the word." Out of the pitch blackness of infinite possibilities came the word. The Western view of creation began with the dark void, and the word was the sound of light that created all things. The Hawaiian people of the Pacific Rim, meanwhile, described creation as "lipo, [a] deep blue-black color" (Ka'ano'i, 2008, p. 4). Both stories suggest that creation materialized out of the rich blackness through the sound of words. In other words the phenomenal world through word unfolded out of this mysterious darkness the womb of creation. Hue-man beings also emerged from the dark womb into reality.

These are two stories, but hue-man beings throughout the ages have had many creation stories that frequently form the foundation and subtext of their belief system. These stories, the words that are spoken, often tell of exalted beings and hue-man beings, their frailties and failings. The stories tend to inform the masses of what is right and wrong, good and bad, what is valuable and what has no value. Some of the narratives

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<sup>1</sup> "Hue-man" is a term used to replace human beings, pointing to the designation of the word "hue" to suggest color rather than different "races."

identify social hierarchies that are used to categorized people, which offer a privileged position to some in society, usually those in power, while denying it to others. In America, skin color and maleness have been the primary determinants of who is privileged and who is not. It is a very old story. These are very old words.

America's creation story shaped much of today's reality and social order. It is an invisible structure that defines and maintains people's experience of life. In that story an essential feature was that dark skin was deemed to be of less value. That "black" skin made a person three-fifths of a hue-man being, a separate "race," born to be enslaved. Today's science asserts that hue-man beings are one race of people.

Women's marginal position in society is another group whose station was justified by that same story. They are person with less value. The story of "not like me" remains an essential ingredient within the fabric of American life, which appears resistant to eradication. These same narratives find their way into America's classrooms. This creation story might reveal another hidden element that influences the education of urban youth and their teachers.

Words create. Words are powerful in our creation and shaping of reality. It is important to be mindful of their impact on the listener and reader. Words are important in this dissertation in that they may point to certain beliefs of the participants in this study. Many of the teachers struggle with different realities, theirs and the students. Several teachers could not figure out why students responded one way and not another. A few mentioned that they were unsure and did not know what words to use when talking to students. This may indicate the teachers' awareness of how important appropriate word usage is for communication and relationship building especially in cross-cultural exchanges.

Words can describe, explain, uplift or denigrate. Therefore, whenever possible within this dissertation, in being mindful of the nature of invention, and creation, words like "race," "racist" and "racism" will be replaced by the words "hue," "hue-ist" and "hue-ism;" hue signifying colors, as in the rainbow. These terms will replace the pejorative inflammatory words used to describe people who discriminate against people with skin colors different than their own. When observing skin color, or hue, terms such as black and white in American society are metaphors and are not actual skin colors. The polarity

may be used to demonstrate the perceived extreme difference between the two groups. In reality skin tones around the world appear to range from deep brown to beige. However, the diversity in shades of skin does not constitute different races or species.

What does skin color and the creation stories have to do with this work? The problem of discrimination was addressed in the sixties, was it not? Though America is a diverse land with many people and many beliefs, one creation story has been dominant since the beginning. In this story a hierarchy in society based on skin color and maleness determined the distribution of goods, services and the freedom to be. When it comes to “black skin” or darker skin and maleness, the initial justification for poor treatment was in part based on that creation story.

In urban classrooms, people with black skin and people with white skin, along with others come together, often for the first time. They attempt to sort out and struggle with stories, social myths and create a reality for themselves challenging popular ideas about the one on another. Some are conscious of this process while others hold fast to their initial beliefs knowing they are “right” according to the accepted stories.

Many mainstream American women may not be aware that they too are an oppressed group. It could be due to their apparent comfort in a social position that obscures the facts, or the fear of reprisal for confronting their male counterpart. They appear to be constrained like most Americans by the *illusions of inclusion*. According to MacLeod (2008) a majority of Americans live and die in the same socioeconomic group that they were born into, both male and female, black and white, regardless of their ethnic group. Being unaware of their own predicament might make it difficult for teachers to see the oppression of their students. The inability to see or voice one's own oppression could be another hidden element that might affect the teachers' ability to help children who are oppressed succeed in urban schools and in society.

Throughout American history there has been resistance to the negative characterization of women and people of color by those who are aware of the issues. Words such as misogynist, racist, bigot, and many others were created to “push back” against the oppression. “Name calling” however tends to detract and abort positive dialogue. The intention has been to write this dissertation in such a way that the predictable thoughts, habitual words and reactions between the different cultural groups

might be derailed long enough to create a space to move beyond the rhetoric and automatic responses to a new paradigm. The idea is to hopefully unearth hidden elements that might be important to the educational process and communicate them clearly so the issues can be dealt with and excellence achieved.

The new terms are also designed to open an expanse between the dualities of thought and help facilitate that internal and external process of reflection within the individual. It is important to define these terms as they are intended in this dissertation. Hue and its derivatives will replace “races” in this document when possible. A hue-ist<sup>2</sup> can also be understood to be someone who, while merely observing differences, believes in a simplistic "diversity equality"<sup>3</sup> model for people. This double-definition of hue-ist unlike the word “racist” is important to consider, so as not to immediately interpret it as a negative construct, but rather to engender a neutral response. To replace one pejorative term with another perpetuates the dichotomy and polarization. Polarization does not leave room for grey, which is where a great deal of the work of reconciliation and personal growth is actualized. The contextualization of hue-ist, will signal the intended inference of hue-ist, whether in terms of a hierarchy or equality model. Finally, hue-ism is a concept accepted as authoritative to describe a hierarchical stratification of people based on skin colors.

The definitions for the words "race," "racist," and "racism" are used specifically to define the distinctions among hue, hue-ist and hue-ism. These definitions are useful. An entire new language and definitions is beyond the scope of this document and is unnecessary. Many of America’s ideas, concepts and creations are commendable, and the whole or parts ought to be preserved as long as they are useful. Also some continuity in concepts is essential at this time in order to be understood in the study. The process of word substitution is evolving in such a way that, at a later date, the "e" and the hyphen may be excluded, an entirely new term may arise that may be more appropriate, or a

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<sup>2</sup> Hue-ist, then, will be defined as: an individual who follows a system of belief in the hierarchy of skin color, which gives privileges to some, but not to others.

<sup>3</sup> Generally, diversity might be viewed as negative; however, "diversity-equality" is a celebratory term of difference.

conscious and deliberate preference to use the words "people," or "human being" may emerge. For clarity, however, the substituted words will be the preference, whenever possible, in this document.

A far more significant reason for introducing a substitute word for "races" herein is that there is but one hue-man race, and the "multiple idea of races," is merely a destructive mental construct, an invention that is "false", an unproductive idea in society according to Daynes and Lee (2008, p. 2). They asserted, "Race exists only because people believe it exists" (p. 1). Their book, *Desire For Race*, articulated the fictitious nature of the mental construct of the "races" that it is not supported biologically and only serves to maintain the current social order and inequitable allocation of resources in the United States of America. The "races" concept deceives people into believing that some people are better, more intelligent, more beautiful, more worthy of good than other people. Simultaneously, there are those who believe that they are less than others and undeserving of good; this group has also been bamboozled as well. Both notions are equally false. People through self-awareness will come to know this falsehood for themselves, which can release them from the orbit of the "races ritual" into freedom and possibility. Many scholars who write about different "races" say they do not wish to continue this falsehood, but appear to be at a loss as to how to rectify the dilemma. In this document, "hue" has been substituted for "race" as my humble attempt to bridge that divide.

As Daynes and Lee (2008) pointed out, it is obvious that there is "a reality of physical difference, but this reality is not equivalent to race in either the biological or social sense" (p. 5). Adelman (2003) also supported this idea. To get a clearer idea of the fluidity of "race," the Census Bureau explained, "[F]or this [2010] census, 'Hispanic origin' is considered to be a separate concept from [that of] race." These guidelines were first adopted formally for the 1940 census (Census, 2010). However, according to Gibson and Jung of the U.S. Census Bureau (2002), when speaking about Mexican Americans in particular: "The race category of Mexican was eliminated in 1940, and 1930 race data were revised to include the Mexican population with the White population." The 2010 overview went on to report, however, that while "over half of the Hispanic population identified as white and no other race, one-third responded to other"



(p. 6). Some Latinos identified as black and/or Native American as well. It should be noted that the revisions in the 1940s category of Hispanic were enacted not only for Mexican Americans but also other Spanish-speaking individuals. Do the newly white Latinos receive the same privileges as those who have been white for much longer?

Though Americans spend an enormous amount of time, money and energy to maintain the illusion of "races" for political, economic, and cultural reasons, a footnote on page two of the *Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin 2010* stated, "The race categories included in the census questionnaire generally reflect *a social definition of race recognized in this country* [emphasis added] and are not an attempt to define race biologically, anthropologically or genetically" (p. 2).

A few questions then arise from 2010 census report about Latinos and "race." The 72% of respondents who self-declared as white in 2010, is that an accurate representation of what the United States has socially categorized as the "white race." Will the Latinos eventually benefit from the privileges customarily afforded the "white race" because of their inclusion? What is the true purpose of such categorizations, and re-categorizing, and who ultimately benefits from the "fluidity of race" in 2010 and beyond? The answer is inextricably bound to America's power-politics of money, resources, skin, "race" and words.

The politics of color reflected in official documents such as the 2010 census demonstrated the prominence of categorization in society and in governmental institutions. Public schools are government institutions. Public school systems receive a certain amount of funding based on their student population and their economic status. An example of the politics of money and words might be a statement such as "we are a school where 97% of our students are on free-lunch." This utterance by educators and others is often coded language for urban schools whose enrollment is predominately black, brown poor children. This may also be thought of as the hidden language of skin, the sub text of color that permeates American speech whether written or spoken, public or private. Who is a real American? This question does not always include some groups in America.

Some have written about the idea of "race" using the term "skin privilege," most often when speaking about those who have white skin. While the term "races" articulates

the power of skin color in America, "hue," on the other hand, ascribes a color-value to skin. The difference is that, implicit in hue-creation, is the notion of rhizome or the equality of color rather than the inherent hierarchy of "races." Generally, people do not speak of the color of flowers, meadows, or mountains in terms of "bad or good", "inferior or superior." The words "racist" and "racism" when heard, often carry with them the weight of denial that can blind the listener or reader to the possibility of a perspective different from their own. The philosopher Cupitt (1998) stated that language has "a huge psychological power over us" (p. 12).

Therefore, another intention of this dissertation is to create a distance between the false non-biological constructs of "races" while addressing the logical observation of different hues, or colors, in order to create an opening for the possibility of enlightened discourse. "The future will belong to the creative individuals who can 'dream bigger and more innovative dreams'" (Gay 2007 p. 291). Also see (Florida, 2002; Houston, 2006; Pink, 2005). One day the color of skin and the importance that it carries will be obsolete in the world. Unfortunately, today it is critical to the current discussion and to the eventual elimination of discriminatory practices in the society.

The language of "races" and the negative beliefs and behaviors that accompany the concept have been major contributors to the inequities in the urban school landscape (McIntyre, 1997). The age of inequality and neglect must be abandoned. People in society can endeavor to cooperate with one another to find ways to move beyond words and beliefs that divide to create a respectful, mutual language that articulates willingness to sincerely address the problem situation. Teacher layoffs and firings based on "poor job performance" move us further from the solution, while teachers changing test scores only covers up the problems. Gay (2007) further contended, "Threat, intimidation and punishment [are not] very good motivators for the professional growth and sense of ownership among educators that school reform requires" (Gay, 2007, p. 283), especially when teachers are committed to change.

This study attempted to illustrate how the white female teacher, as a hue-man being in America is discriminated against based on gender. Simultaneously she is a part of the dominant culture caught in an in-between world in which "the democratic vision of equal opportunity had somehow left [her] out" (Evans 1980, p. 16). Yet, with a

conscious awareness of self and others, and a commitment to urban children, she can help them and herself experience success. To begin to address school failure, educators need to move towards "a demand for definite acts ... people are interdependent, individual and collective; [their] survival [is] intertwined: the well-being of one is inseparable from the well-being of all...in an age of potential destruction around nuclear energy, terrorism, AIDS, and climate change" (Olssen, 2006, p. 19). In other words people have to cooperate with one another in order to survive. America cannot afford to continue to squander the intellectual and bio-talent of its citizens, particularly students and teachers. Therefore, educators can act in cooperative and informed ways that make a positive impact on urban students' lives. As a result "[t]he students [can] view the classroom as a forum where multiple perspectives are valued" (Banks, 1996, p. 22).

Educators' administrators are charged with the task to create environments where, with teacher assistance, all children can have a safe place to explore and learn about themselves. Through self-discovery, they can engage the world and understand not only who they are, but also how they plan to contribute to it. This dialogue begins, however imperfectly, in a parallel reality of a hue-man creation. The new creation of hue-man beings within this document should not negate the ways in which the antiquated concepts of "races" and skin color impact the current reality; hue-man beings continue to suffer and die in the face of this falsehood. Maleficent cultural perceptions and practices must be discarded to make way for positive transformation, because "[a] transformative vision is always impelled by a deep set of convictions about the real meaning and purpose of human life" (Gay, 2007, p. 284).

### **Statement of the Problems**

During the past twenty-five years or more, I have served as both an art teacher and a school counselor, working with a diverse population of students from pre-K to adults at the community college level. From 2005 to 2009, I was an art history instructor at a rural community college. However, much of my earlier work was in an urban setting, and two years was spent in several schools with large populations of white students.

My first six years of teaching was in a neighborhood where I once lived with my mother during a couple of summers while in college. I was in my twenties, confused, and scared the first three years of teaching in an urban multicultural middle school. Since I had grown up with a similar background to many of my students, I felt I understood viscerally what some of their fears might be. However, it took a while for me to admit that I was afraid and to find out what scared me. Once I discovered a number of fears, I tried to understand how they adversely affected my relationship with students and myself. I did not yet know how to help myself, so I did not know how to help them.

These fears were perhaps engendered by several factors, including the socially designated place that black females hold in the American hierarchy. Last. It is obvious that I have been seen as a nuisance, a possible thief to be watched. Today on many occasions store clerks tail me when I shop, or women on the street clutch their handbags and their children close to them when I walk past. Sometimes men pat their back pockets or breast pockets where their wallets reside to make sure they are still there. Politicians, popular media and others informed me by their dismissive behavior and my apparent invisibility that I do not count or matter. The media portrayals of black females are often as compromised women or simply they are absent. Also, the hidden curriculum and numerous experiences throughout life revealed to me my “worth” in America.

People without value often become targets of abuse as a result of others' predatory behavior. Black women throughout history have been and continue to be subjected to suspicion and unwanted advances by men in dominant positions (Hill, 2008; McIntosh, 1988). Being an occupant of the last position meant in general that black females were not expected to do anything useful. According to the research presented in this document and gleaned from the literature, many urban youth seem to be hearing the same messages today AAUW (2008).

Fear is not unique; many educators with whom I have worked seemed to feel a great deal of it. McIntyre (1997) supported this assertion especially for teachers working in urban schools. A definition of fear includes the accompanying feelings of uneasiness, angst, anger, depression, frustration, sadness, hopelessness, self-indulgent behavior, lack of agency and self-efficacy, as well as other negative feelings and emotions. There were also the fears of not wanting to be emotional, “going native,” get too close or too involved with people.

Jon's life and death planted the seed that got me involved and that continually ignites my desire to grow and increase my helping skills. What follows are more details about Jon's school experience and the impact he had on my life. Jon was unwelcome in many of his classes due to his behavior and non-compliance. He told me that one teacher would ask him each day, "Do you have a pencil?" And he would say "no", and the teacher would say, "Get out." This was their ritual. I never witnessed or asked him or his teachers about any of the other behavior that may have gotten Jon "kicked out" of his classes. When he was kicked out however, we agreed that he would come to my classroom to avoid trouble in the hallways. Nearly, every day he spent an hour or two in my art class working on his project. I offered him a place to stay, but I did not know what else to do to help him. Furthermore, I did not want to be in conflict with other teachers about Jon.

As mentioned before, I did not realize the severity of his problems. Jon was fourteen-years-old. When he died, I felt guilty that I only provided a place for him, but not much time. I enrolled in a counseling and guidance program at the university to learn more about my students and myself. Self-reflection provided one approach that facilitated that process. Counseling education gave me some insight about the human condition, both my students' and mine. Jon's death forced me to learn more about how to succeed in helping students to navigate through the world. It had been a luxury and self-deception to avoid my painful feelings. I finally realized that I had to confront the fear in order to overcome its limitations.

For most of my life up to then, I avoided problem situations when I could and was unconscious of many of my feelings. By twenty, I believed I had experienced more than my share of problems. Others and I use a number of behaviors to avoid painful feelings. Some people use aggression to deal with uncomfortable feelings and emotions. Getting mad allows an individual to avoid others and remain unconscious about their feelings and the emotional pain. I have seen some teachers use aggression when under stress to mask their fear of losing control of the class. However, when people are afraid and under stress, they can make poor choices. Teachers' aggression towards students hurts them emotionally and sometimes physically. According to Baucom (2003), stress is another word for fear.

As a first-year teacher, while in the restroom in the nurse's office, I heard a student yelling, "Stop choking me, stop choking me," and I recognized the voice of the male teacher who was doing the choking. I remained in the toilet; I did not want to witness the abuse or get involved. Through the years, teachers' loss of control has resulted in verbal and physical violence against children. In the process, teachers lose students' respect and trust, and the students get an idea of their value.

There have been teachers who slammed elementary students back into their seats, pulled them by their ears, grabbed them by their collars, dragged them down the hall by their arms, and called them out of their names, (using derogatory language). In anger, some have thrown books, pencils, erasers, papers, blocks and notebooks on students' desks. Teachers have chased and snatched things out of children's hands and shamed them in front of classmates. There are still many more who, while they do not often lose control, appear to be "barely" functioning, just surviving. Fortunately, there are some teachers who do well in inner city classrooms.

I was not a perfect teacher. When corporal punishment was the norm, the first year of teaching, I gave an eighth -grade-student three swats (sanctioned hits) after he repeatedly misbehaved. By the third lick, I knew I could never hit a student again. More than ten years later however, when I taught in the basement in a behavior disorder classroom, I came close to it. A student turned out the lights to allow a classmate to attack another student in the room. In the dark, I heard the licks, and the student yelled in pain. In the pitch-black silence, I stood still and did not move. I demanded that the lights be turned back on. When the lights were turned back on the perpetrator was crouched on the floor in front of me. With one step, I would have tripped over him. Livid, I reached down, grabbed him by the collar, raised him to eye level and saw the face of a scared little seventh-grade boy. I released him, went to the intercom to call security, and wrote out a discipline report. I have encountered many such problem situations during my tenure. Teaching is difficult.

However, many successful educators seek creative ways to help children succeed in urban schools. Hue-man beings according to (Patterson, Genny, McMillian, & Witzer, 2012) often deal with conflict through silence or violence. Under stressful conditions, it is imperative for teachers to know themselves, to know what they are doing and why they

are teaching, because it is easy to lose control. Stress is often the result of negative thoughts about problem situations in the classroom. When the issue occurred, the teachers might have felt as if their belief system were under threat, thinking that the situation ought to be different. During the conflict, did the teacher experience fear? If so, what was it? Was there a cultural aspect that had not been recognized?

In that moment or later on, the teacher has an opportunity to reflect upon the situation to see what was useful. They have the opportunity to assess if their belief system in that situation helped or interfered “and see what they made the incident mean” in other words their story about it. Then determine if what they thought and did was the most appropriate given the circumstances and the student involved. Teaching cross-culturally can exacerbate problems if the teacher is unaware of the culture, has personal bias, or lacks the appropriate skills to solve problems in the classroom. Far too many situations escalate out of control due to teachers' lack of self-awareness and self-control. A lack of understanding and experience with the student population might also be a culprit. It is important for teachers to develop self-knowledge in order to be effective in cross-cultural urban settings. However, this idea is not limited to white middleclass female suburban teachers. Teachers in general can benefit from self-awareness and cultural sensitivity in any setting. What teachers' do or do not do affects the quality of the child's entire life. For any hope of success as an adult in America urban youth must graduate from high school with skills commensurate with the diploma they were awarded. Teachers are the change agent.

### **Research Questions**

Given the condition of urban education and the fact that students' success in school can affect their entire lives, it is important to understand why many children fail to graduate. It has been suggested that the inner-city neighborhoods fail because schools fail children in that milieu. Since teachers are major players in the educational success of students, this dissertation will investigate two questions:

1.1 How does a white female middle-class teacher's upbringing, agency, sense of presence, beliefs, actions, bias, self-knowledge, perceptions, and language influence her relationships with students?

1.2 How does culture influence teachers' self-reflective problem-solving behavior and what impact does it have on self-efficacy and relationship with students?

### **Significance of the Study**

There have been numerous studies conducted through the decades since Brown versus the Topeka Board of Education on the decline of urban education for inner city youth. See Delpit (2006) and MacLeod (2008). School personnel blamed students, their family and the community for the decline. Urban communities blamed society, white flight and teachers with "hue-bias," as well as class and cultural discrimination. Delpit (2006) dealt with dialogue and cultural conflict and provided possible remedies. Hill (2008) illustrated the subtleties of "hue-ist" conversation and the significance of everyday language bias. Others have discussed the importance of cross-cultural education and being sensitive to different perspectives (Banks, 1996; Gay, 2007; Howard, 2006; & Kohl, 1994).

Previous studies tended to focus primarily on a specific problem area like perception and being (Cupitt, 1998), girls and school culture (Orenstein, 1994), language (Delpit, 2006; Hill 2008), teacher presence, self-reflection (Korthagen, 2005), and problem solving (Posner, 1973). However, this dissertation seeks to bring seemingly disparate parts, the teacher, society and schools together and move towards a holistic analysis. In other words use a spider web approach. The paper's intention is to include language sensitive words that may open a space for discourse, which might bring some clarity to this complex situation. First, society and schools do not have to remain "stuck" within language and paradigms that bind people to cycles of decline, in schools, society, or the world in general.

This document will illustrate how teachers' unwitting use of words dehumanizes and alienates students. One underlying assumption of this study and hidden from view is that white female teachers have suffered through similar treatment in their own suburban communities when they were children. They also suffer from problems based in society and their community that positions them in second place in the hierarchy. Their treatment in a fundamental way mirrors urban youths' experiences as less-valued hue-man beings. Another is that their upbringing according to (Orenstein, 1994) has had a negative impact on their development, self-efficacy, and self-esteem.



Since female leadership was not usually encouraged during their early education they had no role models. Few white females acknowledge the differential treatment they endured or the often deleterious impact that it has had on their individual power, agency, vision, and aspirations. These white women, because of taboo and fear of domestic violence (which will be discussed later in this document) have been nearly silent about the effects that their upbringings have had on their adult lives. Many of the women deny that a problem even exists. Again, they choose to accept, consciously or not, the illusion of complete inclusion. This position makes it nearly impossible for them to know themselves, their hidden curriculum or have the courage to help urban youth navigate cultural bias. As a result they cannot develop their full potential, nor do they have access to their infinite power. They often feel like victims, as do their students. This “shadow material,” may be one of the reasons educators blame students, their families and the community for student failure.

Orenstein (1994) and Bandura (1995) discussed women's silence and self-censorship, noting that many of these individuals may not have developed the self-efficacy, self-esteem, confidence, resilience, problem solving skills and persistence that are required when dealing with difficult problem situations. They may not recognize the significance or benefits of self-awareness, in terms of their success as teachers and as human beings, or how that may affect their lives, their own children's lives, and the lives of their students.

Howard (2006) suggests, "The extent to which we can know who our students really are is the extent to which we can avoid projecting onto them our own, imagined assumptions and biases" (p. 127). Some of the stories that teachers believe as "the truth" about urban students may in fact be personal bias or a projection. McIntyre (1997) asserted that there is a particular way that white people talk about black people in terms of deficit. Many of them may perceive a deficiency within themselves and denigrate others to feel superior (Palmer, 1998). The term McIntyre (1997) used to describe the talk that maligns was “white talk.” The white talk tradition in America will be explained later in the dissertation. When an urban educator acts on that kind of "truth," the results can lead to a depreciation of students.

Individual teachers decide whether or not it is important to reflect on their beliefs and teaching practice. However, educational institutions can assist pre-service teachers and in-service teachers in confronting difficult issues and help them to do the necessary hard work essential for educational success. American teachers are predominately members of the dominant ethnic group. Their perceptions of the world might be due to their majority membership. Many appear to believe in the social norms dictating, what is “right,” “good,” and “natural.” Majority beliefs are often an unquestioned, unchallenged reality for many (McIntosh, 1988). In contrast for urban youth many of their teachers' beliefs about, for example, “middle-class life,” with the attendant values and perceptions are foreign concepts.

One such Western value is an over emphasis on the cerebral life at the expense of the emotional creating an imbalance. Being “too” emotional seems to mean showing any emotion at all which is viewed as a deficit. It is important for individual to learn how to manage their emotions. However, in order to do that one has to first feel them not suppress them. People are emotional (Brooks, 2011). When feelings are consistently unexpressed significant dysfunction often result, such anger, rage, sadness, depression and violence (Brooks, 2011). The mental and emotional are both part of the whole life of any hue-man being. Urban youth appear to express their minds and feelings freely when they have opinions and want to communicate them. These hue-man expressions may reveal themselves through, seriousness, laughter, jubilation, camaraderie, anger, grief, “loud voices” and a full compliment of normal emotions and behaviors.

“Be like me” the teacher invites, it seems to imply that being “you” an individual student is not good enough. Therefore, teacher efforts to persuade students to abandon their own sense of self, to become “like them” fails. In fact it would be an exercise in futility given the social order in society and the impossibility of the request. This dissertation strives to uncover and reveal what is too-often hidden “in plain sight” from those of us who teach. It could be our self (Palmer, 2004).

### **Structure of the Dissertation**

There are six chapters included in this dissertation. Chapter 1 introduces the context and the purpose of the study and includes the statement of the problem, the research questions and the significance of the study. Chapter 2 is the literature review.

There are two parts to the literature review section. Part one is basically traditional. However, the second section is the expanded lens, a non-traditional frame of the literature review. The expanded lens material in part two of the literature review is written in a particular way that serves to further demonstrate and explain more comprehensively and contextually the influence that society has on the educational process. Chapter 3 focuses on the research methodology used in the study. The chapter describes case study, qualitative method design and justification for using it instead of another design. The chapter also discusses data collection, analysis and findings. Chapter 3 includes the role of the researcher in a cross-cultural study interviewing white middle-class female teachers. A second researcher a white female interviewed a different group of white middle class female teachers. There was for each interviewer a question of positionality whether one would be perceived as an outsider, insider or both and if that made a difference during the interview process. Chapter 4 presents the research findings and the four significant themes that were revealed through the data analysis. Chapter 5 analyses and discusses the research findings and addresses the two main research questions. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the research, the limitations, summary of the findings, and the analysis, the implication for practice and concludes with suggestions for further study. Chapter 6 primarily focuses on strategies to change negative persistent troublesome thoughts and beliefs, and the first step is a *commitment* to personal transformation.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

The literature review examines a number of threads and some seemingly imperceptible influences that may negatively impact the lives of students and teachers. As a reminder the first section of the literature review is more traditional. The expanded lens in section two is non-traditional and reveals the landscapes in a panoramic, or spider web spiral that includes phenomena that affect students and teachers and a number of possible repercussions from external social forces.

As illustration: an expanded view, for example, around speech, an important element in human communication, will include the use of language by white female teachers in their relationships with students, particularly in terms of how it may impact student performance. According to Gay (2000), "How teachers talked to students interfered more with their academic engagement than the topics being discussed" (p. 56). Many teacher distortions are media-driven and socially accepted linguistic conventions that are normal such as, "white talk" (McIntyre, 1997; Hill, 2008).

Especially at work and in society, in the political arena and among associates, Hill (2008) used the term "light talk" [hue-ist utterance], similar to "the wrong thing" where the speaker claims they were only joking, and "what they said did not match what they believe, and that this does not discredit them" (p. 92). In 2007, Don Imus a radio talk-show host, "referred to the young African American [female] players on the Rutgers...basketball team ...as 'nappy-headed hos'" (p. 92). Hill (2008) stated that for a white man with a celebrated position to make such statements "is profoundly unsettling for many White Americans" who supported them (p. 92).

According to Hill (2008) white men in high profile positions have the "admiration, envy, votes, financial contributions, [and] hero-worship (p. 93) of many Americans. The public "backlash" against the perpetrator is taken personally and supporters feel an "attack on their own creditable selves and on White virtue" (p. 93). Often the men continue to be supported anyway by whites "to preserve that credit and virtue" (p. 93). Hill seemed uncertain that "light talk permit[ted] words to be separated

from belief” (p. 92). In fact words mediate thought and belief according to Cupitt (1998). People speak their beliefs unless they are purposefully deceiving others,--in light talk, to what end?

A further exploration of phenomena regarding cultural influence, personal power and girls' experiences in society will also be investigated. A conversation about societal values that are transmitted through the hidden curricula within the school milieu will also be examined (Orenstein, 1994). Negative treatment and social conditioning experienced by white adolescent girls is often invisible to both the girls themselves and the teachers who unwittingly deliver the messages to their students that undermine self-confidence. Additionally, themes include causes for student failure; white boys in crisis, and the experience and power of women. This section will consider how teacher agency, self-reflection, self-knowledge, self-efficacy, problem solving and hue-identity impact student-teacher relationships. Teacher belief, behavior and perceptions will be examined.

Finally, in the section on women and wealth, relevant examples of gender inequality faced by women and girls in America seek to demonstrate the disparity and possible links to poverty and low self-esteem. Diminished personal and political power, lack of wealth, the ethnicity of women, and lack of land ownership enable social inequality and structural bias to continue. Due to the disparity, women are left behind economically and politically, and share no authentic influence in what happens in society and in their own lives. Each topic presented is an essential silk thread that holds the basic structure of the current web of gender inequality together. The breaking of any one thread compromises the structure. If teachers become aware (a thread) of the hidden curriculum within and begin to change the way they teach, boys and girls the students would have a different experience of school, as would the teacher.

White skin for women offers some social privileges, but the reality is they suffer from a real power shortage like any other woman and disenfranchised person of color in America. Many white women suffer from the illusion of inclusion. Not only are white women not included or considered equal by many of their male counterparts, the existence of inequality in their relationships is often rejected and denied by the white male power structure (McIntosh, 1988). In fact, "these denials protect male privilege from being fully acknowledged, lessened or ended" (p. 1). Research suggests that factors

such as exclusion can lead to low earnings (NWLC, 2008). Low wages, poverty, fear and insufficient influence in their own lives and in society negatively impact women and girls in terms of self-confidence, which often leads to self-censorship and self-restraint (Orenstein, 1994).

## **Part 1: Cross Cultural Communication and Perception**

### **Language and Being**

The Western Anglo-Saxon language influence extends around the globe; "our language, interpretation of things runs everywhere, shaping everything" (Cupitt, 1998, p. 20). Consequently, Western values are the standard, which other people and cultures are measured and judged by, including urban students. With that standard comes a uniquely Western perception of "order," right versus wrong, and people, evil ones versus good ones. Cupitt was especially interested in the "nature of being," and how individuals in society become who they were, through language. Hue-man beings are shaped by language that existed before their birth, an inheritance, a pre-existing social structure, often sorted by gender, skin color, religion, class, power and wealth. Cupitt (1998): the being "waits for [a] language to make something of it" (p. 16). Hill (2008) and Kiros, (1998) illustrated how important language is in creating hue-man identity and hue-man experience in the world. One way this is accomplished is by naming and "shaping everything everywhere" (Cupitt, 1998, p. 20).

People of color and women have not named or shaped anything anywhere in any way that has been acknowledged. They cannot fit into the ideal standard of the Western "interpretation of things" when the standard model of what is "good" favors white male Protestants with money and influence (McIntosh, 1988). Other groups with opposing characteristics have been given different names, spaces and lesser ranks. Only white males can be white males; nobody else fits. To be fair, not all white males fit into the elite group of men; some are excluded.

Girls, people of color, and some white men unconsciously slip into a lesser rank. The view or lens through which women and girls see themselves affects them psychologically, emotionally, spiritually, physically, economically, and socially. If their skin is white, they will likely benefit from often-unacknowledged and unrecognized

privileges that the language teaches them they deserve (Hill, 2008). Such privileges are "an invisible package of unearned assets that [they can] count on cashing in, each day" (McIntosh, 2011, p.1). If they are black, this package is denied.

Hill's (2008) suggests that the peculiarly American expression of hue-ism is "the most important and influential form of racism in the world" (p. x), that what goes on here is "an inspiration for racists, globally" (p. x). She reported that many people across the globe are confused by America's official doctrine promoting "freedom and justice for all," while in reality people of color are frequently treated with disdain. Hill (2008) offered a number of examples of "everyday middle-class White discourse, published in widely distributed and respected media, and circulating as well in ordinary talk, [which] continues to produce and reproduce White racism" (p. 47).

Poor whites were believed to engage in such discourse, while critical race theorists suggested "the most educated and cosmopolitan Whites frequently deploy these expressions" (Hill, 2008, p. 50) as well. Educated peoples' conversations about people of color routinely shroud their true meaning, which "lurks in the shadows of [their] discourse" (p. 47) finding voice in the silence, where the true meaning lies in the subtext vaguely referred to, or pointed to, while veiling individual basic beliefs and personal bias.

Furthermore, facial expressions, "looks," gestures, and nods of agreement are all part of the secret code of insider deception (Hill, 2008). This "race talk is usually engaged in among intimates, or in internet chat rooms, where a person can remain anonymous, where slurs and epithets are object[s] of fascination and pleasure for White Americans" (p. 50). In the coded gaps "the theme of race is both everywhere and nowhere, consisting largely of silences" (p. 47). Hidden.

Hill focused predominately on the media in "everyday language," McIntyre (1997), a college professor was interested in the "white talk" that middle and upper-middle-class female student teachers engage in. The "white talk" [is] talk that serves to insulate white people from examining their/our individual and collective role(s) in the perpetuation of racism" (McIntyre, 1997, p. 45).

McIntyre (1997) conducted qualitative research among twenty-year-old, white middle-class female students in a teacher education program. Her goal was to explore whiteness and "race." She wanted the students to critically investigate their own

whiteness and privilege in order to get a better understanding of themselves through deconstructing the language they used. McIntyre encountered a great deal of resistance, explaining, "What is so striking about whites talking to whites is the infinite number of ways we manage to talk ourselves out of being responsible for racism" (McIntyre, 1997, p. 45).

### **Perceived Deficit and Failure**

Language and its hidden mechanisms tend to be used to express negative beliefs that maintain the color line in urban schools thus affecting student outcomes. Deficit language describing black students makes it difficult for teachers to accurately assess student behavior and progress in the classroom according to (Delpit, 2006). Deficit language often limits teachers' ability to see the reality of a situation in order to generate possible solutions for intervention, resolving and alleviating problems in the classroom. Often an intervention can be as simple as a shift in perspective (Posner, 1973).

As human beings, teachers solve hundreds of problems daily. The choices can be as simple as, "Do I arrange students desks in a row, a circle or facing each other?" Or as difficult as, "Can I help my 5<sup>th</sup> grade students learn to read?" Some issues are more complex, making it difficult to sort through all of the intangible influences that come to bear on a particular problem situation. The inner-city school dropout rate is one of those complex issues in the web of urban life that involves the teacher.

Several causes have been suggested as to the reason for urban students drops. Just as in the twentieth century the "problem of the color line" in the twenty-first century is likely a significant factor that contributes to student failure in urban schools. For more than twenty years, the blame was placed on poor children, children of color and their families, who were believed to be "innately deficient" a sentiment "recognized" as legitimate in society (Hill, 2008). Howard (2006) noted, "some teachers, politicians, and educational leaders, wishing to avoid or minimize issues of race, would prefer to attribute the achievement gap to socioeconomic differences alone" (p. 2).

It is obvious, in any case, that student effort and participation are essential ingredients. However, the achievement of urban students may have more to do with caring, self-efficacious intelligent teachers who have a sense of respect towards students that can create a feeling of belonging believed to be necessary for achievement in urban



schools (Kohl, 1994). Dewey (1964), Gay (2000), Banks (1996) and others asserted that the curriculum was saturated with "knowledge" that was not relevant to the students' lives. Old, dilapidated school buildings and the need for financial resources have also been blamed.

Teachers' own contributions, however, had been virtually ignored during the earlier debates. Nieto stated in the forward of Howard's (2006) book, "I had always thought it odd that white teachers—who are, after all, the teachers of most students of color in U.S. schools—were largely missing from the discourse on multicultural education" (p. xv). Brooks, of The New York Times commented, in a (2011) article that "For the past 30 years we've tried many different ways to restructure our educational system—trying big schools and little schools, charters and vouchers that, for years, skirted the core issue: the relationship between a teacher and a student" (2011, p. 1). This study also endeavors to understand the relationship a teacher has with herself and how that influences her relationship with students.

Currently the teachers are being viewed as "the problem" or a major cause of student failure. Constituents who search for "the one reason" for student failure will not find it in the individual teacher alone. The school system, the network or web of teachers, administrators, parents, the media, government, students and society at large share in the responsibility for the success and failure of children (McIntyre, 1997; Hill, 2008). Brooks' (2011) article explored other ways in which the social community might assist in a constructive school reform movement.

One approach to urban school reform may be the use of community and individual bonds where they exist. However, more often than not, social bonds do not exist cross-culturally to any significant degree. Where they do not exist, intelligence is required, which includes the ability to engage, bridge and reconcile with, and change one's mind and story about the other. Relationship and bonding is important, as is the ability to think and utilize one's intelligence.

There might be another compounding invisible factor that influences school reform and limits the teacher's ability to be a powerful advocate for urban youth in cities. Many of today's educators appear to be gender-marginalized in society, and that marginalization has to be considered in the equation (NWLC, 2008; AAUW, 1992, 2008;

Orenstein, 1994). This investigation is not designed to apologize for or excuse teachers from their responsibilities or performances but, rather, to reveal the personal challenges many face along with their students in an unequal society that may make the teacher's job that much harder. A number of teachers may be unconscious of how their own culture negatively impacts their lives, self-efficacy, self-image, and the exercise of power, thoughts and behaviors. The teachers' early education and social development was generally different, and distant from that of the urban students they teach. Many rely on information about their students of color from the media, relatives, friends and colleagues rather than having a first-hand experience with them (Hill, 2008).

Instead of exploring student teacher relationships, early reformers spent millions of dollars on suppliers of services and goods that were delivered to urban school districts, such as new text book series, test materials, upgraded facilities, grants, vouchers, staff hiring's and the contracting of outside consultants who promised "sure bet" programs that would meet student needs (Brooks, 2011; Palmer 1998). During a casual conversation, one of the providers of services to students of color was asked about the effectiveness of their program and how success was measured. The response was, "Nobody cares;" nobody cares about *effective solutions* in dealing with problem situations where children of color were concerned. Could a major cause of student failure in the inner city be that simple; that teachers working with "other peoples' children" (Delpit, 2006) just don't care?

### **Science and Hue-ism**

In many cases, other peoples' children of color have been seen as inferior. "Scientific racism" (hue-ism) emerged in America when Samuel Morton, a scientist and anthropologist born in 1799, alleged that the larger skull-size of Caucasians made them far superior to "any nation on earth, " (Adelman, 2003). According to Cupitt, "Every scrap of our scientific world-picture is an intra-linguistic and intra-historical construct. We cannot separate the way the world is, absolutely, from the way our current theory represents it" (Cupitt, 1998, p. 23). Morton's conclusion that a larger skull made whites superior was a mental construct, a theory, and a commonly accepted story at the time disguised as scientific fact. Cupitt further insisted that "Everything can be explained-or

explained away, if you wish-in terms of everything else" (p. 37). Truth and fact is often an agreement.

For the last few centuries the scientific method has been the measure of "truth." Science, early on, especially in the "multiple races" discourse, turned out to be little more than personal bias that cemented the fate of groups of people. The contemporary individual, historical and cultural influences cannot simply be separated from the "science" of today. One would expect a spirit of forward thinking and intelligence in science today that might mitigate the obvious tendencies in the past towards personal bias and "virtue production" for whiteness and "deficiency productions" for blackness and people of color. The new scientific findings through DNA analysis support the notion that human beings have never "evol[ed] into separate subspecies or races" (Adelman, 2003). Many agree that, "Despite the surface difference [s], we are among the most similar of all species" (Adelman, 2003). The idea of "races," or subspecies, has presented "race-justified social inequalities as natural" (Adelman, 2003).

Du Bois (1903) offered a sociological account of how discrimination and an eventual scientific racism affected a category of ex-slaves known as the Freedmen, in terms of their struggles for housing, education and employment. He analyzed how "race" was used as justification for road-blocking blacks' paths to success. The behaviors were most likely due to white fear of African-American possible retribution, and believing them to be competitors for employment and resources.

Furthermore, whites often believe that they alone deserve to be number one and should have preferential treatment, the right to jobs and every "good thing" due to their "superiority" (Hill 2008; Cupitt, 1998; Gollnick & Chinn, 2009). This again and other ideas led Du Bois to conclude, "The problem of the twentieth-century is the problem of the color-line" (Du Bois, 1903, p. v). Gollnick and Chinn, (2009) dealt with many of the issues that Du Bois discussed. However, they extended their conversation to include a number of different ethnic groups, including whites. They explored a variety of social issues such as cultural identity, ethnic identify, privilege, immigration, hate groups, accessibility, class, gender and a number of other topics and how they influenced educators and education.

## **Influence Experience and Power**

Orenstein (1994) investigated the experience and obstacles that adolescent middle school girls from diverse ethnic groups faced. Some of her findings were disturbing. Eventually, many of the white adolescent middle-class girls in the study will represent the majority (84%) of America's teaching force. How they are raised could have a profound influence on the school success of the urban youth they teach. What they do and do not do in classrooms does directly affect the quality of the students' lives in school and on into adulthood (Gay, 2007; West, 2000; Kohl 1994; Howard, 1993). Teachers' decisions are especially influential on graduation rates and student proficiency. School success for some students may make the difference between freedom and incarceration or between life and death.

Some scholars such as Orfield, Losen, Wald, and Swanson (2004) reported that only 51 % of Native American students who entered 9th grade graduated with their class earned a standard diploma in 2001. While 50.2% blacks, 53.2% Latinos and 74.9% white Americans graduated with their class and earned a standard diploma. Males in each ethnic group graduated at rates 4 to 13 percentage points lower than their female counterparts. Part of the reason for the dismal statistics may be that many teachers lack "real life experience," with the students they teach and rely on hearsay and the mass media for information about the students' culture (Hill, 2008). Some also might have a limited knowledge about themselves (Palmer 1998; McIntyre, 1997).

A few participants expressed a fear of "saying the wrong thing" a verbal offense that might slip out during a casual conversation. What comes out is usually what is meant, but not meant for all listeners (Hill, 2008). Utterances of deficiencies about people of color are natural in society and the media, and are so easily accepted by the speaker as "normal" that they do not realize the offensive nature of their words (Hill, 2008; McIntyre, 1997). Korthagen (2005) suggests a need for teacher self-reflection and problem solving skills. He argued that teacher beliefs and upbringing affect the decision-making process and self-efficacy. Indeed, many "beliefs about the world and themselves are shaped and inhibited" by these factors (Korthagen, 2004, p. 82).

Rogers (2009) emphasized that it is crucial that teachers be mindful of their "female gender and white race, and how those factors affect their decision making, especially [in] addressing diversity" (p. 1) in school.

Do daily decisions that teachers make lead to positive changes in American schools, or are they merely one of the many social threads that perpetuate and maintain the status quo (Freire, 2010)? Are they unwitting players forwarding the hidden agenda through the curriculum which is "the running subtext through which teachers communicate behavioral norms and individual status in the school culture; the process of socialization that cues children into their place in the hierarchy of larger society" (Orenstein, 1994, p. 5)?

One potentially pivotal influence to note is that the typical white adolescent girl lives in a community dominated by male figures who have shaped the landscape of their lives and the larger world for centuries (Cupitt, 1998). It is important to recall that on July 4, 1771, the Declaration of Independence did not include human rights for women or people of color. As Cupitt (1988) points out the dominant group continues to display a possessive attitude towards the world. That is a territorial attitude, a capturing of resources and an unwillingness to share (Hill, 2008; Gollnick & Chinn, 2009) usually reserving access, opportunity, privilege and resources to their own ethnic group. Cupitt (1988) insisted that it is difficult for:

Anglo-Saxons to grasp and accept [that] the point has been gradually to undercut the distinction between *our world and the world*. [Emphasis added] The objective world is, all the way down, a world that we ourselves have formed, described, theorized, appropriated and constructed. The world is always already our world that we have spread ourselves over. We get to know things by making them ours. We give all the orders and we fill all the meaning, everywhere. (p. 20-21)

A prevalent deception for the vast majority of Americans, regardless of their hue or gender, is the illusion of inclusion, MacLeod (2008). Another deception among many Americans today is the idea of "reverse discrimination" and inability to acknowledge white privilege and male privilege, (McIntosh, 1988). McIntosh pointed out the simple unrecognized privileges that whites enjoy of which they are often unaware. Reverse discrimination may be a difficult case to make given the unequal distribution of money, real-estate, "things," position, political clout, opportunity and respect in this country according to McIntosh (1988).

## **Part 2: An Expanded Lens**

### **Introduction**

The following is an expanded lens of the literature review. This section of the literature review is less traditional in that it includes an array of arguments, postulations, clarification, metaphor and interpretive comments on topics that may not ordinarily be considered as part of educational research. For instance the internal and external phenomena, and the personal experiences of both students and teachers growing up are discussed and how that may influence urban education. The expanded view may elucidate and flesh out some of the points of contention between the different narratives in black and white minds and communities about the same phenomena. For example black girls being perceived as too loud by white teachers and people in society (AAUW, 1991). Here again, the spider web metaphor reminds the reader to view the argument through a number of interlocking threads and propositions.

The expanded view is also written in such a way as to advance ideas, to peer beneath the surface and probe accepted postulations and suggest new ones. The emphasis here is that a wide-angle discourse must include the social sphere, culture and different perspectives, inasmuch as all ideas are inexplicably bound to the formation of identity and the relationship between students and teachers. The other person's perception is their reality whether student or teacher. Perception must be dealt with. Examples are provided to clarify from a different point of view the phenomena in dispute--perception--and illustrate how different worldviews (mind) might affect students' and teachers' behavior given their dissimilar backgrounds.

This section seeks to include ways in which hue or color, historical, social, and cultural knowledge or the lack thereof shapes the educational landscape. What goes on in school is a microcosm of what goes on in society. For example, the deficit model in the public discourse concerning blacks finds its way into teachers' conversations about students in urban schools (Hill, 2008; Delpit, 2006; Howard, 2006; Kohl, 1994). Seldom examined social practices are brought to the fore to be considered as significantly impacting the educational process of students and teachers, such as discrimination in the housing and job market and the impact that it has on urban youth and the black community.

Many acts of discrimination in the past were overt and were accepted demonstrations of enmity: normal. Today, acts are often veiled in the shadows; agreements in offices and schools, whispers in the dark, silence between words, a knowing gaze, or a glance are the convention. For decades, it has not been uncommon for well-established rules to be changed to advantage whites.

From the beginning, the disparate treatment and injustice dispensed to African Americans by whites has created a psychological and physical distance between them whether in public spaces, schools or in neighborhoods (Hill, 2008). The distance is often achieved by the dominant group segregating themselves and by creating opportunities that allow them to be perceived as virtuous while at the same time affirming the other (people of color) as deficient (Hill, 2008). Most of the time, if the story is not “virtuous” for whites, and if it can be silenced, it is. For example, white male suicide rates are hardly mentioned in the media especially on the nightly news.

The disparagement of blacks and the separation of whites from people of color in the twenty-first century may differ in method, but not in effect from nearly two-hundred-fifty years of slavery and almost a century of Jim Crow. The “color line effect” thwarts many blacks' aspirations though they struggle to achieve quality education, accumulate wealth, power, comfort and recognition for their continued contributions to American public life (MacLeod, 2008).

Concrete examples of problems may provide a worm’s eye or possibly a bird’s eye view, view, a getting underneath the curtain into the hidden practices, or on top to unveil disparate paradigms, to examine alternative points of view that cause conflict. To possibly show how the “Oz” effect works and pulls back the curtains to reveal not omnipotence but hue-man beings. This section seeks to expose the “underbelly” of social relations to view the delicate scaffolding beneath appearance. The study might also be thought of as a journey into the bowels of an entrenched social order to determine how it is maintained with few of the participants, either black or white being aware of their essential collaboration.

It could be that most people learned and some now practice discriminatory behaviors and defensive moves that are acted out knowingly or unknowingly. Such acts are often hidden from one's own consciousness, as in women oppressing girls, as revealed

in Orenstein's (1994) study of white female teachers oppressing white girls in suburban schools. Howard's (1993) analogy to explain this phenomenon "is like a fish in water." Only when the fish leaves the water or bowl does it realize its existence in water, a seamless existence. To take the analogy a step further, discrimination anywhere sucks the oxygen from the bowl, and the fish began to suffocate slowly. One example could be the girls' self-censorship; loss of courage and low self-esteem might indicate a lack of air. The same thing happens to a nation as to an individual, macro as micro and vice versa.

America is suffocating from an unwillingness or inability to understand the interconnectedness, the ecosystem of humanity and the planet. There is one humanity, one planet; all is bound together. The middle class has now begun to experience the effects of being considered a tangential people. It can take decades, hundreds of years, but all of the fish eventually become distressed, disoriented and finally the entire bowl of creatures collapses. Conflict, disconnection anywhere, internal or external, soon affects the whole inside the culture, individuals including students and teachers. Many systems in America are gasping for breath whether it is government, religious and economic institutions, employment, relationships between individuals and nations. A positive intervention is needed. The failure of urban students and teachers is probably a symptom of the persistent social break down.

The anxiety and fear of breakdowns enter the school building in concrete ways that affect students and teachers when budgets are cut, policies such as NCLB make improvement doubtful, teachers are laid off, and when developmental programs for students are dropped. Knowledge and self-knowledge and intellect are essential under these deteriorating conditions for those who teach the next generation to understand the relationships between everything and everybody. When one fish in the bowl dies, the whole bowl stinks; the decay affects all. It will take that kind of knowledge and understanding of inclusion for America and the educational system to move forward.

By using the intellect and accepting the validity of the problems while recognizing human interconnectedness, critical problem situations in urban schools might begin to be resolved. Denial of the problems cannot be an option for caring teachers especially today. An Indian wisdom tradition explained that problems are created in the sphere of difference, but the resolution exists only in the field of unity,



finding commonalities and coming together (West, 2000). Both difference and unity are fundamental, like yin and yang they are the whole of life inseparable, not either/or, but both working together like the ebb and flow of tides.

For example, the "colorblind" issue is the rhetoric used in public schools among some teachers who claim not to see the different skin color of their students. Pretending not to see does not resolve America's obsession with skin color and the problems students face (Hill, 2008). In this case addressing difference is critical. The inability to acknowledge different skin color might make some specific student needs nearly impossible to accommodate. Skin color and the ramifications that it has for students of color must be taken into account in school and in society. The field of skin color is the reality in which Americans play. Acknowledging skin color creates unity with students, and they know the teacher understands that reality.

Questions that teachers might ask are: How do black students "make it" in school and in society where skin color determines so much about daily experiences and access? (MacLeod, 2008) How can teachers help them to reframe what has happens to them as oppression and victimization, a huge distinction that may allow for personal success? How can educators design progressive methods of thought for black students in the face of hue-ism and maintain positive identities, and attitudes where they feel powerful and not like victims? White female teachers must first see the need to do the work for themselves, and then they can help their students.

White women for centuries have been relegated to second-class citizenship and most of them today seem not to notice. Discrimination against women and girls can also make them feel like victims rather than recognizing what happens to them as oppression and victimization, where one part of the onus is on the perpetrator. The perpetrator is responsible for their aberrant behavior towards others, while the other part of the onus rests with the story created by the person victimized and their response to it. Thinking of oneself as a victim makes it difficult to utilize one's power. Unfortunately, many teachers are unwitting participants in their own oppression (AAUW, 2008; Orenstein, 1994). Even in suburban classroom with white students and white female teachers, researchers noted that boys and girls were treated in particular ways that advantage boys over girls (Orenstein, 1994).

As mentioned earlier there are inferences in public discourse that something is wrong with both women and people of color. Unstable. Criminal. Such labels harm people. As a result many feel like victims and think and behave as such and can become blinded by the struggle. If women and people of color accept such designations, personal power to achieve is usually in short supply. This idea may be another factor that could explain school failure in urban areas: students and teachers have been unable to access their ability to utilize a substantial amount of personal power burdened by the strain of oppression and victimization. This may have led to the practice of teachers blaming students, while many students refute the claims, and as a result some students refuse to comply (Kohl, 1994). Indeed, in urban schools teacher and student skepticism of the other and ineffectiveness may be another symptom of their collective victimization and feelings of powerlessness.

In summary, people of color and women have been labeled as deficient, and some might unconsciously believe it to be true and may be burdened with the thoughts of “not being good enough.” As a result, these individuals have been unable to overcome as a group and penetrate the social structures and the hidden psychological barriers that are erected against them and inside of them. As such they have been powerless to improve their social and economic standing in society. Consequently, many poor people of all hues, poor single women and those with children, and people of color historically have found it difficult to meet their fiscal responsibility and personal aspirations in America (AAUW, 2008; MacLeod, 2008).

### **History Distorted**

A careful study of American history, which includes slavery, is valuable in understanding the role discrimination played in the creation of a perpetual inferior being, the “negro.” The belief in an intellectual inferiority of blacks was used to justify slavery and the subsequent vilification that African Americans experience today (Hill, 2008; Diop, 1974; Du Bois, 1994). America has designated a few individuals as essential players; except for their free labor during slavery, blacks have been assigned to the non-essential group.

Slavery of the past and discrimination today serves to devalue black people in their own eyes. Without knowledge of the history of African people, many black people

suffer from an identity crisis and have not as a group discovered how to be successful in the midst of oppression. The good news is that blacks can be whatever they want to make of themselves given their unique position as unbounded people not beholden to any immutable culture. For example, African Americans have changed their names through the decades to reflect a kind of pride a renaming of oneself from the Negro, to blacks and finally African American. But the social position and poor treatment remain. Many have educated themselves to move in progressive ways in society. More blacks have wrenched themselves out of poverty and have reached the highest office in the land, but the stereotypical labels remain in everyday white conversation.

Blacks have made some progress in spite of intense opposition. Their historic, collective journey took them from being prevailing kings and queens and creators of civilization to slaves and outcasts in a foreign land (Diop, 1974). Hill (2008) suggests “much of the economic history of the United States can be understood as a vast capture by Whites of resources from people of color, from the labor of black slaves” (p. 23). By stealing black bodies, and turning them into slaves, taking Native Americans and Mexican lands and water resources, America became wealthy as a result of these actions (Hill, 2008).

Ironically, the foundation of America and Western civilization finds its roots in black Africa, a people ostracized for centuries. This same people were the mothers and fathers of hue-man kind. All but a small minority in the scientific community today accept this as “truth.” Diop (1974) contested the Western account of civilization's emergence from Greece and committed himself to telling the story of civilization using an African paradigm. Cheikh Anta Diop, an African scholar born in 1923 in Dakar, Senegal, earned renown as a historian, physicist, philosopher and Egyptologist.

Diop insisted, "It is for us to dig out our own past; a task that no one people can do for another" (1974, p. 195). There has been much objection in the West about the interpretation of history and civilization by Diop and other black researchers. As referenced earlier, West (2000) stated that no one people have a monopoly on truth. This dissertation offers a different perspective, another truth, and another agreement. When a people know the truth about who they are and what their ancestors accomplished, they intuitively realize that they have the same qualities.

When a black history week in the past and a black history month today is set aside, it might suggest to students both black and white that their history is not counted as part of American history. When whites and blacks know the truth about themselves and each other, an honest open dialogue can begin in order to deal with the reality of the individual and the collective life on the color line.

What is rarely acknowledged or known by the dominant group is that both groups suffer as a result of the false histories and identities of the “inferiors” and “superiors”, the good and bad people. Living with a false pretense and a fear of the other is one of the consequences of living on the color line. Having to continuously create virtue for a people when it may not exist in any given situation must be onerous. The use of billions of dollars for virtue productions to criminalize black, brown, red, yellow and poor people could be better spent on serving all the people, including the propagandist.

An example of this miswriting of history is the account of Rosa Parks, in particular an important black figure, whose actions started the civil rights movement. The pre-service teacher in McIntyre's (1997) study discovered that Parks was not tired, and her feet did not hurt. The dominant ethnic group created a deficit story, “tired, hurting feet” about the event and constructed a history that was not truthful. Parks was a well-seasoned activist when she refused to move on the bus in Montgomery Alabama and that action had been a planned strategy for years (McIntyre, 1997). By omission and rewriting history, such devices serve to perpetuate blacks' psychological enslavement and create a feeling of hopelessness contrasted with a national virtuous supremacist persona for whites.

Diop (1974) argued that “[t]he memory of the recent slavery to which the Black race has been subjected, cleverly kept alive in men's minds and especially in Black minds, often affects Black consciousness negatively” (p. 26). Blacks and whites are like the opposite sides of the same coin, where one feels like a victim and the other feels supreme. The psychological markers are identical, both states of being point to a “lack of self-esteem,” (Palmer, 1998). This lack of self-esteem in conjunction with insufficient self-knowledge between teachers and students may operate in urban classrooms in ways not fully comprehended.

For hundreds of years, students were taught that civilization began in Europe, with the Greeks. They were also taught that the Egyptians, the pyramid builders were white, which also turned out to be untrue (Diop, 1974). Students were taught that Columbus discovered America; in fact, Leif Eriksson landed in the Americas centuries before Columbus arrived. Of course, the Native people lived on the North American continent thousands of years before Europeans landed. Facts must be separated from fiction, and a people must lift black and white history's weathered bones out of obscurity.

In early Africa, Egypt was the place of innovation with extensive knowledge housed in libraries, both public and private. The Great Pyramids drew people from far lands. To understand the importance of black Egypt, the Greek historian Herodotus, stated, "Greece borrowed from Egypt [black Africa] all the elements of her civilization; even the cult of the gods" (Diop, 1974, p. 4). Herodotus' reported that Egyptians, black Africans, were the first modern hue-mans and the creators of civilization. The Greeks learned from Africa not the other way around.

Shaukar (2013) cites Diop and Clark who argued, "According to Dr. Leaky, the European paleontologist who discovered Lucy, the oldest set of human bones ever found on this planet, Africa is the birthplace of the human family. According to Mendel, the European scientist who proved that dark genes are dominant and light genes are recessive, Africans are the original people, and the parents of all human beings."

Egyptians were black people with black skin, broad fleshy noses, full-lips and tightly curled, ferruled hair (Diop, 1974). The Greek historian Herodotus visited Egypt and personally confirmed the "Negro character of the Egyptians...they are black skinned and have wooly hair" (Diop, 1974, p. 1). Strabo, a Greek geographer born in 64/63 B.C. E., also supported Herodotus' observations when he wrote about the migration of "the Egyptians, Ethiopians and Colchians [who] belonged to the same race" (p. 2).

Egyptian wealth and knowledge was unprecedented; they created "Pythagorean mathematics, the theory of the four elements of Thales of Miletus, Epicurean materialism, Platonic idealism, Judaism, Islam and modern science...rooted in Egyptian cosmology and science" (Diop, 1974, p. xiv). Simple items in use today are attributed to Egyptian ingenuity, such as paper, eye makeup, toothbrush and paste, locks, keys, deodorant (Diop, 1974). Accurate historical information may make a positive psychological impact on urban students and their teachers if they know the hidden reality.

The research suggest that many teachers who work with black students believe the myth that African-American students lack the inherent capacity to learn complex concepts and ideas, "accept[ing] as revealed truth the equation: Negro=inferior humanity" (Diop, 1974, p. 25). Not realizing that African-Americans students are direct descendents of the creators of civilization placed by Herodotus and Egyptian priests at 17, 000 B.C.E., the earliest date, and 4,245 B.C. E., the latest (Diop, 1974). The historical black Egyptians integrated with the aggressive white nomadic paternalistic people, merchants and conquerors, and the mixing created the many light-skinned Egyptians seen today (Diop, 1974). Foreign customs eventually eroded Egypt's matrilineal agricultural civilization (Diop, 1974).

A few centuries ago, what was clear, Diop argued, was that white [I]gnorance of the Black's ancient history, differences of mores and customs, ethnic prejudices between two races that believed themselves to be facing each other for the first time, combined with the economic necessity to exploit--so many factors predisposed the mind of the European to distort the moral personality of the Black and his intellectual aptitudes. (p. 24)

A black distortion remains today. Knowles and Prewitt (1969) argued with candor after the 1968 riots, a salient moment in the nation's history, "*Possibly, the racial sickness in our society is not, as we have so long assumed, rooted in the black and presumably 'pathological' subculture, but in the white and presumably 'healthy' dominant culture*" (p. 4). [emphasis added]

### **National Obsession**

The sickness does not reside in one ethnic group alone, but exists everywhere and is believed to exist nowhere by some (Hill, 2008). According to Hill (2008) "American Whites obsess about racial labels (and take the obsession for granted as natural) because they make choices about how to think about other people based on racial categorization" (p. 12) while claiming not to see "race" or color. The continued distortions and oppression make it impossible for blacks to rise as a people and for whites to realize they are just people.

Fear that impairs judgment is rampant between various ethnic groups in this country. When taking into account the large numbers of black, brown and even whites people who are marginalized and imprisoned it is difficult for America to rise as a prosperous nation because resources are used to lock up large numbers of people instead of educating them. The obsession leads people to jockey for advantage through discriminatory and oppressive behavior, such as the 83,000 black and brown people victimized in the Bank of America discrimination case, discussed in the next section, not realizing that few people of any color move into a higher social class; the vast majority will live and die in the same class as argued by MacLeod (2008).

However, for whites to appear liberal a few people of color are designated as “honorary whites.” Hill (2008) suggests that some of the people of color that are allowed access to white spaces are there for a purpose. “White virtue...is constructed through creating ‘honorary Whites’ whose presence...shaped entirely by White power serves as a sign that Whites who associate with them...are not racist” (p. 23).

The obsessive fear of blacks leads to discrimination and inhumane treatment. As a result of fear they are viewed as deficient and menacing people who must be punished for their blackness. Marable’s (2012) research on incarceration and education in America was concerned with a new system of black disenfranchisement in the school-to-prison pipeline machine that has a negative impact on society's purse and wastes intellectual assets. During "the past 30 years there has been a 500 percent increase in the number of Americans behind bars, amounting to 2.2 million people, which represent twenty-five percent of the world's prison population. The prison population is disproportionately black and brown" (Marable, 2012, p. 1).

Blacks are forced to live behind "the veil" of inequality and imprisonment due to white obsession. The literature postulates that jail is just another form of slavery in the twenty-first century. Cornell West (2000) makes a similar argument in his discussion about the persistent obstacles blacks have faced in America through the centuries. Marable (2012) asserted that school personnel increasingly prefer to enact punitive measures as a "first option" to solve any number of social or educational problems. What Hill (2008) suggests may not always be a conscious thought but is a broadly accepted construct anyway, that “people of color are deficient as citizens” (p. 31) and deserve to be punished.

Some of the massive incarceration of youth caught within the pipeline may be due to teachers' lack of basic historical knowledge about their students and Americans' obsession about black skin. Earlier we referred to the misrepresentation of Rosa Parks, one pre-service white middle-class teacher in McIntyre's study (1997) stated, "[I]f we portrayed things and gave them [black people] the respect they deserve, we'd start building this respect" for them (p. 103). She had not realized that Parks was a political activist and the bus incident had been planned. She complained, "It just shows you how a textbook [can be] so biased...maybe that's why we don't hold these people [blacks], like, revere them the way we should because, like, from kids we were never taught to be like, Ah, she's a great woman" (p. 103). Why were white children taught not to revere black people? Rosa Parks and other historical figures have been reduced to thumb nails or snippets of information lacking details. To marginalize black accomplishment is another tool utilized by the nationally obsessed.

It is important to acknowledge, "details matter. Do not let people slip to abstraction," (Adler, 2008, p.116) warns. The next few sections will provide a few more details to illustrate, not in abstraction but facts about black peoples' experience in a nation obsessed with their "unforgivable blackness."

Teachers must be able to help students by including their history in an effort to assist students in reframing their collective struggle. The reframing work is mental, emotional, spiritual and behavioral. In her work on the prison pipeline Christensen (2011-2012) insisted, "We need to create a curriculum that demonstrates an interest in and understanding of our students' heritage, by studying their history or literature or language ...The curriculum needs to acknowledge that their lives are important and worth studying" (p. 2). Such an acknowledgement is a sign that teachers care about students. It may be difficult to care about students when many teachers, according to McIntyre, have not taken responsibility for their own hue-ist struggles. One pre-service student teacher stated when talking about responsibility and talking about "racism," in McIntyre's (1997) study, "It was like (unint.) being almost like angry, and I don't even know why" (McIntyre, p. 78). Could this anger be a hidden legacy of past injustice denied? Where did the fear, anger obsession come from, especially for the pre-service teachers since they scarcely had an opportunity to interact with black people?



Is it possible to inherit ancestral memory? Using the intellect one might ask, what did scores of black people do to harm scores of white people at any time in America's history to justify or cause the individual and systemic reactions of obsessive fear, anger and discrimination against them?

Several of the white female participants in this study pointed to being discriminated against because of their color. None of the participants acknowledged and most tended to dismiss student complaints about hue discrimination by teachers. What is surprising is behind the backdrop of massive discriminatory practices against blacks and other people of color in school and in society "whites believe that they have replaced blacks as the primary victims of racial discrimination in contemporary America, according to a new study by researchers at Tufts University's School of Arts and Harvard Business School" (Desmondharris, 2011, p. 1). The study also revealed "whites see racial equality as a zero sum game, in which the gains for one group mean losses for the other" (p. 2).

This idea reveals white thinking that supports current and past practices between the groups that maintains the historical reality of perpetual "inequality." When whites believe that they lose when people of color win, it might be difficult for them to authentically be in relationship to help them, because "it would contribute to their own personal loss." If such thinking is pervasive how do white female teachers overcome the fear of loss, and create a different story where they and their students can win? The unresolved obsessive relationships of the past could be the legacy faced by students, teachers and society today.

### **Individual Acts of Discrimination**

There is a notion common among some sectors of the American public that people of color no longer experience significant discrimination in society or in schools (Gollnick & Chinn, 2009). They mistakenly believe that the civil rights legislation in the 1960's eradicated such practices. During the unfolding of this section it will become evident that peoples' obsession, irrational thoughts and rationalizations cannot be legislated. Discrimination remains. What follows are some current examples of hidden discriminatory practices that might make clear how, what, where, when and who is involved in continued acts of oppression, conscious or not.

Hill (2008) suggested “Your race is what you are when the cops pull you over at two o’clock in the morning” (p. 13). People of color experience discrimination in society and in schools today (Gollnick & Chinn, 2009). Discrimination most often takes place at the individual level, with conscious or unconscious acts. Slavery may have planted the seeds of discrimination and oppression; however, a large number of average Americans today water and plant new perennial crop daily (Gollnick & Chinn, 2009).

Details matter (Adler, 2008); the discriminatory practices that will be illustrated below are typical examples of the grim seeds that fuel divisiveness and black anger and white fear. Black people and white people are afraid of each other possibly due to white guilt and blacks' continued negative treatment in America (Hill, 2008). It is evident, in the examples that follow, that people of color earned their right to the benefit and were systematically denied what had been earned. The people who denied them entry to white spaces were not skinheads, poor whites or Ku Kluxers like many want to believe; they were regular everyday Americans (Hill, 2008). The acts seemed to be automatic, sometimes unwitting. Nevertheless, black gains were often viewed as taking away something that belongs to white people. Consequently they were stopped by any means available to the perpetrators (Gollnick & Chinn, 2009; McIntyre, 1977; Culpitt, 1998).

Systematically, blacks are kept out of “white spaces,” which includes schools. The Courthouse News Service from Pine Bluff, Arkansas, reported,

A high school southeast of Little Rock would not let a black student be valedictorian, though she had earned the highest grade-point average. It was stated that [The graduate claimed in Federal Court that they] wouldn't let her mom speak to the school board about it until graduation had passed. (Abel, 2011, p. 1)

Kymerly Wimberly, 18, made only one B during her four years of high school. The counselor informed her that she'd received the top honors for her academic achievement. The sentiment of school administrators, despite her grade point average, was that it would be a "big mess" if she was given what she had earned, therefore "[they] treated two other white students as heir[s] apparent to the valedictorian and salutatorian spots" (Abel, 2011, p. 1).

The lack of acceptance of black scholarship and achievement by school officials in this case demonstrated their complicity with the social narrative of a black intellectual

inferiority and white superiority (Diop, 1974). The 60's equal rights legislations cannot enforce personal integrity. School officials upheld a false image of white virtue at the expense of a deserving African American student through fraud and cheating. The rules of the game were changed to the advantage of the white students. Changing the rules is another tool in the arsenal of the obsessed. Often, as demonstrated in Kimberly's situation, the school advocated a black deficit model reflected in society as a whole to celebrate the "virtue" of white intellectual superiority when that, in fact, was not the case. Individual educators' acting against one black female high school student denied her the earned honor of valedictorian.

### **Unfair Housing Loans**

Unfair housing loan practices are another example of twentieth and twenty-first century fraud and cheating by changing the rules to disenfranchise black and brown families. Many families were denied access to middle-class American communities, the culture, the friendships, and connections that could have been important in personal advancement and financial security. A home is an investment and the accumulation of wealth through property ownership tends to be difficult to acquire under the circumstances. Are such practices partially responsible for the deficit between black and white accumulated wealth of \$7,500 verses 79,400 (Hill, 2008)?

Housing discrimination illustrates how society and individuals today share responsibility in the predicament that people of color, women, and poor people find themselves. Such practices contribute to inferior education for children, inferior housing and property value, denied access to people and resources for self-improvement, and denied inheritance. Having bootstraps and pulling them up matters little when earned credit and privilege is systematically denied. According to research, residential segregation "illustrates how White racist culture can be perpetuated in a sort of closed loop feedback as Whites gain credit and people of color are discredited" (Hill, 2008, p. 24).

There has been and continues to be a systematic significant disparity between the ability of whites and people of color to secure fair housing loans. For example, Countrywide, a mortgage firm owned by Bank of America, recently had to pay \$335 million dollars to settle a "racial bias" case. After an investigation centered around

83,000 loans [that] originated in Illinois between 2005 and 2007, [what they found] was that, if you were African-American or Latino, you were three times more likely to be directed to a subprime loan than if you were a similarly credit-situated white borrower. (Brown, 2011)

Hill (2008) supported these finding and pointed out “studies have shown that people of color are much more likely than Whites to be steered into the ‘sub-prime’ mortgage market” (p. 26). Remember, the report focused only on a single state, Illinois. Is this an isolated incident with hate group members at the helm or an accepted lending practice? Eighty-three thousand loans were given by individual brokers, with conscious or unconscious bias that withheld credit to qualified black and brown people that resulted in a class action lawsuit. What can explain the identical actions of so many individual loan officers? Each acted as an individual working independently, but in each case people made the same decision to discriminate against African Americans and Latinos. This is a real life example of how one cog of social reproduction works on the individual level, (MacLeod, 2008) influenced by mainstream constructs, and the agreed upon *ethnic contract* with a specified “treatment” for brown and black people.

When the state of Illinois questioned employees about the practices, Lisa Madigan the Attorney General who is one of the "new abolitionists," said on the PBS News Hour, “We learned by talking to brokers and various other Countrywide employees that they were given the discretion to be able to, you know, decide what the interest rate was going to be, what the fees were going to be, what the terms were going to be” (Brown, 2011). In other words, the employees decided for themselves without restriction what people would "qualify" for prime and subprime mortgage rates. More often than not, blacks and Latinos were chosen regardless of income to "qualify" for the subprime rates that turned out to be an individual, but collective act. The *ethnic contract* for certain groups of people may be one explanation of this phenomenon unwittingly or consciously practiced by the individual loan officers with a zero sum game in mind. Whatever the case, qualified buyers were denied prime rates. White bias is difficult to detect when individual actions were hidden behind closed doors in private offices within stacks of documents.

According to Knowels & Prewitt (1969) "Racism is both overt and covert. It takes two closely related forms: individual whites acting against individual blacks, and

acts by the total white community against the black community" (p. v). Madigan further stated, *"When I heard that, if you were African-American making \$100,000, you were still more likely to be put into a subprime loan than if you were white making \$35,000 a year, that was absolutely shocking"* (Brown, 2011). [emphasis added] In this case white privilege allowed whites an unfair advantage, an un-earned edge to purchase a home, and most were probably unaware of white privilege, a cashed-in loan benefit that they had available to them (McIntosh, 1988). Latinos and African Americans were denied the earned benefit of prime rates, though their income greatly exceeded whites.

It is difficult for people of color to make progress in the face of such perpetual discriminatory practices (Gollnick & Chinn, 2009). How do housing issues relate to schools and urban students' education? Siegel-Hawley (2011) a study conducted in Memphis explained, "School segregation is related to housing segregation, largely because most districts rely on the common practice of drawing school attendance zones to correspond with approximate neighborhoods" (p. 1). If black and brown buyers had the means, and 83,000 did, some may have wanted to purchase homes in a wealthier district, based on the assumption that "a wealthy neighborhood means good schools," (p. 1) that was their right under the law.

America is thought of as a meritocracy, with equal access and opportunity for those who are willing to "work hard." The 83,000 families worked hard to pull up their bootstraps, and they earned the right to purchase homes in the communities of their choice but they were denied that opportunity (Gollnick & Chinn, 2009).

### **Gender Bias**

Kymberly Wimberly, the high school valedictorian, experienced first hand discrimination not necessarily because of her gender but due to school officials' fear of a backlash from the white school community. Stripping her title was an example of living on the color line "while black" in school in the twenty-first century. It was an "outside in" problem where the broader negative social ideology about blacks' inferiority versus white virtue infringed on the educational process in school. The administrators were the gatekeepers for the broader society when they changed the valedictorian rules to advantage white students. Just as the loan officers were the gatekeepers for wealthy neighborhoods.

A black hue plays such a dominant role in the lives of African Americans that gender discrimination might not be immediately recognized. However, a white girl's and a white woman's position in America is also ambiguous, relative to that of white males. They as white persons ought to benefit from the same privileges as white males, but theirs are limited in that they have been excluded from wielding power. Gender bias clearly restricts their access to personal success in school, and eventually in the market place.

In suburban schools, male students get more teacher attention and advantages than their female counterparts. It may be difficult for a child to clearly see or articulate the hidden phenomenon. The AAUW (1991) research suggests, "Whether one looks at... curriculum design or teacher-student interaction, it is clear that sex and gender make a difference. Girls continue to be left out of the debate-despite the fact that, for more than two decades, researchers have identified gender bias as a major problem at all levels of schooling" (p. 7). Teachers, mostly white women, are the perpetrators of gender bias against girls due to their larger numbers in the teaching force.

Renewed discourse surrounding the 1991 AAUW *Annual Report Executive Summary on How Schools Shortchange Girls* asserted that boys are now in crisis, possibly in part due to the past focus on girls, possibly a reverse discrimination claim. The AAUW Annual Report Fiscal Year 2008 finds that girls have made strides since the 1991 report, but notes, "Today, much of the popular discourse on gender and education reflects a shift in focus from girls to boys, implying that issues of equity for girls have been addressed and now it is time to focus on boys" (AAUW, 2008, p. 11). The report further explained,

One of the statistics most often cited to support assertions that a boys' crisis in education exists is the increasing percentage of women earning college degrees. Since 1982, women have earned more bachelor's degrees than men since 1982, 57 percent of the total. (p. 55)

Women seemed to have realized after the 1991 report that "a college degree provides [them] with a measure of insurance against poverty, because college-educated women earn higher wages" (p. 56). When it came to comparing the earning levels of women and white men between ages 25 years and older, the gap was nearly *consistent with the earlier report* by the National Women's Law Center (NWLC) 2008. [emphasis added] With the increased college graduation rate of women, their earnings remained consistently lower than their male counterpart. The AAUW Report of 1991 is relevant today because the average age of teachers is 43, the report was conducted about 20 years ago, and it most likely reflects the early adolescent experience of many teachers today. Sixty-five percent of teachers today are 43 or younger (Mann, 2002). The report is also relevant because the history of the women does not change.

Discrimination against women is not a new phenomenon. Discrimination against women is older than the foundational "creation story" that undergirds American philosophy about how to treat specific groups of people. During the twentieth century, between 1940s and 1960s, professional women experienced "blatant discrimination, as their salaries and promotions increasingly lagged behind those of men with the same training and experience" (Evans, 1979, p. 18). There were also women who supported their disenfranchisement and sought to maintain the status quo.

In 1956, Life magazine produced a special issue on white women and their growing discontent. Mrs. Peter Marshall complained, "Many of women's current troubles began with the period of her *preoccupation with her 'rights'*" [emphasis added] (p. 3). Mrs. Marshall was satisfied with her position in life but many women no longer wanted to be a "model mother;" they found it difficult to be "constantly available, both physically...and emotionally" (p. 7) for their family and wanted to enjoy their own life. The women that Mrs. Marshall complained about seemed to recognize that the "virtuous" image of motherhood as described by society was not worth the price they paid in lost aspirations, identity, self-worth and self-esteem. They wanted the full rights their white male counterparts enjoyed but as women they were routinely denied such privilege. These preoccupied women wanted rights that extended beyond home.

## **Women's and Girls' Fear and Power**

Journalist Maria Hinojosa of the *One-on-One* television program interviewed Fay Wattleton, the former head of Planned Parenthood and co-founder of *The Center for the Advancement of Women*, about her research on the status of women, Hinojosa commented,

You recently released this report basically on the status of women, what's interesting to them, what matters to them. And I have to say, I was just fascinated with this statistic. 92% of the women who you asked said that the biggest issue that they face, that they're most concerned with as women in America today, is domestic violence and sexual assault. (2011)

Among the women who were surveyed, what this seemed to suggest is that nearly all of them lived in fear in their own homes. What does a woman who fears for her safety demand inside or outside of her home? How can they be powerful vocal advocates for student needs when they are afraid? Is there a way to assuage the fear in ones home? Like many people of color, white women have not been allowed nor have they in recent times demanded space to exercise their power at home or in society. Black females, in their community, however, enjoy some of the benefits of exercising power that has a positive effect on how they feel about themselves nearly equal to that of white males (AAUW, 1991).

Palmer (1998) suggests that people who have to put others down to feel good about themselves do not know who they are. And if they knew who they were, they would not need to engage in that activity. According to McIntyre, pre-service teachers in the study would not confront their own whiteness without comparing themselves against blackness, what they were not, rather than what they were. For many, black was "bad." white was "good." The young pre-service teachers were good. Without the comparison to black, they did not know who they were, according to McIntyre, (McIntyre, 1997; Palmer, 1998). Superior whites and inferior blacks reside as the same coin. The paradox of thinking of oneself as superior in actuality, may demonstrate a feeling of inferiority. Nevertheless, both inferior and superior hue-man beings are an illusion; there is simply humanity (Adelman 2003).



The fear and obsession of blackness that distances oneself from it is evident in language, in foreboding words and phrases such as black code, black Friday, black list, blackballed, blackmailed, black death and the like. African American students often struggle with teachers' unconscious fear of "blackness" (McIntyre, 1997; Howard, 1993; Kohl, 1994). With blackness and, by association, black people being scary, Gay (2000) suggests that teachers may have low expectations of boys and girls. When social agreements both elevate and denigrate different groups of people, those with limited influence in society suffer while the broader society denies the damage. When one is in a dominant position, it seems that others' points of view are not valued. Howard (2006) stated, "Dominance dies a difficult death, for individuals as well as nations" (p. 58). Whether it is a fear of domestic violence for women or social violence for people of color that includes women, being afraid and feeling dominated interferes with agency and self-efficacy. Women must figure out how to regain their ability to utilize power for positive ends in the world for themselves and others.

### **White Girls' School Experience**

Many female teachers seemed to have internalized and accepted a male superiority and privilege, Orenstein (1994) indicated: "By sixth grade, it is clear that both boys and girls have learned to equate maleness with opportunity and femininity with constraint" (p. xvii). It has been argued that teachers do not recognize their bias against girls. The AAUW (1991) believed that teacher certification standards should "require coursework on gender issues, including new research on women, bias in the classroom-interaction patterns" (p. 6) to help them to become self-aware of their behavior and the effects it has on girls and boys. Could the problem that teachers have with girls in the classroom signal a lack of their own self-appreciation and a surfacing shadow? Posner (1973) asserted, "a problem is influenced both by what is in the problem and by what is in the problem solver" (p. 152).

Girls in middle-class America face obstacles in the classroom. For example, when the teacher asked for answers to questions, male students "yelled out or snapped the fingers of their raised hands" for the teachers' attention (Orenstein, 1994 p. 11). In contrast, girls feared giving the wrong answer; even when they had the right answer, many lacked the confidence. Consequently, they did not often raise their hands to answer

questions. One student reported that "[my] self-confidence will be taken away, so I don't want to raise my hand even if I really do know" the answer (Orenstein, 1994, p. 12).

Does the fear of male competition and aggression for white girls and women go away at school or at home? Where do they feel safe and supported in suburban America?

Gender specialists Myra and David Sadker, cited by Orenstein, found that "in a typical classroom, boys overwhelmingly dominate the proceedings: they consistently command more of the teacher's time and energy than girls, receiving more positive reinforcement, more remediation, more criticism" (1994, p. 13). Girls in those environments rarely get an opportunity to develop confidence, resilience or to demonstrate their intellectual competence. In one hundred classrooms in four states, the boys were regularly "asked more complex questions than girls, and were complimented on their academic acumen, while girls were commended for social skills and docility" (p. 13). Being quiet. One girl in Orenstein's study complained that she did not understand why she could not speak in class.

Adolescent girls in Middle America are plagued by "patterns of low self-image, self-doubt, and self-censorship of their creative and intellectual potential" (Orenstein 1994, p. xx). According to an AAUW (1991) focus group, "girls [found] that people, including their teachers, believe girls cannot do things girls think they [themselves] can. The result for girls is lower self-esteem" (p. 10). What complicated the situation was that many female students did not want to be perceived as smart by their classmates and hid their intelligence. Being pretty appeared to be more important.

Not only did these girls fear being labeled a "schoolgirl," but also the more devastating label of being a "slut," by both boys and girls in their school (Orenstein, 1994). "A slut is not merely a girl who does it: but any girl who-through her clothes, her makeup, her hairstyle, or her speech-seems as if she might" (p. 51). This could be a controlling mechanism for girls' behavior in school just as the label of emotional instability plagues them in adulthood. The name-calling seems to cause the women and girls to censor their behavior and feel bad about who they are as human beings. Facing such scrutiny, most girls become hypersensitive about their body image and are "far more likely to develop eating disorders and to experience depression. Adolescent girls attempt suicide four to five times as often as boys" (AAUW, 1992, p. 3).

Verbal and psychological abuse in the school environment can undermine the confidence of girls, which ensures their silence. Boys may recognize on some level that such abusive behaviors control girls' behavior through fear. When they grow up many women, are afraid in their own homes, according to Wattleton (cited by Hinojosa, 2012). The results seemed to be that boys' negative words towards girls resulted in less competition for them and fewer opportunities for girls (Orenstein, 1994). Orenstein suggested that girls who are "ignored by their teachers and belittled by their male peers lose heart ...unable to withstand the small failures necessary for long-term academic success" (p.14). Does the poor treatment and low self-esteem of adolescent girls in suburban America persist into adulthood or influence teaching careers? Can a girl who was trained to be docile be a strong teacher in urban classrooms and feel confident when the job may be difficult? Do her early experiences in school and in society in general help her create a firm foundation from which to build a successful career in inner city schools?

### **Women and Wealth**

As these girls and boys grow into women and men, the patterns of dominance and male privilege appear to persist. Women are generally sidelined and excluded in many power arenas across America as reflected in their small numbers in the Senate, House and the Supreme Court in the nation's capital where laws are made. Howard (2006) pointed out, "Women were pre-emptively eliminated from the inner circle of authority and power" (p. 58). In today's world, most women are at an economic disadvantage probably because of their small numbers in power centers and being discriminated against. White women might enjoy skin-privilege, but that does not translate into economic parity. There remains a significant wage gap between her and her white male counterpart. Women of color in general earn less money than the majority of white women and men, and Latino women earn less than most Americans.

According to the National Women's Law Center (NWLC, 2008) *Congress Must Act to Close the Gap* report, white women made nearly 77 cents for each dollar earned by a white male in 2005. The dollar figures of the median annual income in 2006 for a white woman who worked full-time, year-round, was \$32,515. For white men during that same year, it was \$42,261. White women made do with nearly \$10,000.00 less than

white men in 2006. African-American women who worked full-time, year-round in 2006, meanwhile, earned just 63 cents for each dollar a white man earned, which proved to be an \$18,000.00 difference; \$30,352 versus \$48,420. Latina women made less money than each group represented in the study, making only 52 cents to every white male's dollar. They earned an annual salary in 2006 nearly half of a white male, \$24,968.00 as compared to \$48,000.00.

Depending on occupation, for example, there existed a gap for women physicians who made 72% of the weekly wages of their male counterpart. When education is a factor, a white male high school graduate, in 2006, made an average salary of \$36,000.00 and a white female college graduate working full-time in that same year made \$39,000.00. A white female college graduate made \$3,000.00 dollars more than a white male high school graduate. According to the NWLC "There is not a single state in which women have gained economic equity with men" (p. 2) regardless of their educational level.

Women and children from every community represent the greatest number of individuals needing public assistance. White welfare recipients represent 38% of the total; blacks, which are only 12% of the population, represent 37%; Latinos make up 17%. In 2002, 76.8% of Latinas between 25-44 years of age, 83% of white women and 56.2 % of black women were married. Could this disparity in wages and marital status account for a significant number of American women being dependent on welfare? Do women have to be married in order to experience economic security in America? According to the NWLC:

If women in the workforce earned the same amounts as men who work the same number of hours, have the same education, age, and union status and live in the same region of the country, their annual family income would rise by about \$4,000 and their poverty rates would be cut by half or more. (p. 2)

The NWLC also calculated that "a typical woman who graduated college from 1984 on, and who was in her mid-40s in 2004, has lost more than \$440,000 during that period due to wage gap" (p. 2). According to Utopianist (2011), "despite comprising 50% of the global population women own just a tiny fraction of the world's wealth: 1%." The percentage of women in government reflects this level of inequality as well, since

their representation in congress and the state legislatures remains "abysmally low, at 14 percent and 22 percent respectively" (WEDO, 2005, p. 156). [T]here [were] no women of color in the U.S. Senate in [2005], and 12 African-American women and seven Latina women in the U.S. House of Representatives" (p. 159).

The AAUW 2008 report corroborates the National Women's Law Center (NWLC) report in 2008, summarizing women's earnings from 2005 to 2006. The AAUW showed disparities consistent with the NWLC earlier report. The AAUW 2008 reported that white women with some high school education earned \$20,923 to her male counterpart's \$31,049. African-American women with some high school made \$19,061, while Latinas made \$18,859. White male counterparts earned \$39,559. African-American female high school graduates' wages were \$24,001 and Latinas earned \$23,283. Finally, white women who earned a bachelor's degree earned \$42,261 and white men earned \$61,486.

As in the earlier NWLC report, a college-educated white female earned \$2,700 more than a white male high school graduate. White women who held a bachelor's degree earned \$19,225 dollars less than their male counterpart. African-American women with a bachelor's degree made \$45,210, which was \$16,276 dollars less than white men, but \$2,949 more than white women.

Could this surprising difference be due to educated African-American women's asking for higher wages because of their self-confidence? These ideas and others would need further investigation to confirm or disprove. Latina women with a bachelor's degree earned \$37,534, \$23,952 less than white males. When it comes to economics, even though wages have risen for both women and men from 2005-2008, the gap has remained consistent. The wage crisis between women and men in America underlines their inequality in the work place.

The agreement for middle-class women taught as girls in school is to remain silent and compliant according to Orenstein's (1994) study. Single white women and women of color and single or divorced women with children often find themselves below the poverty line needing assistance due to unfair wage practices. The system unfairly disadvantages women as a result many cannot provide for themselves or their family and are silenced in the process. McIntosh (1988) stated, "Taboos surround the subject of

advantages that men gain from women's disadvantages. These denials protect male privilege from being fully acknowledged, lessened, or ended" (p. 1). The long silences of married white women who represent the majority of women in America benefit them in personal comfort, but not in personal finance or emotional security. Generally, the voiced grievances of single women and women of color concerning unfair compensation lands on deaf ears. In fact, the male denial morphs into accusations of women wanting a hand out such as welfare and being lazy not wanting to work. The irony is the one who was victimized is accused of being the cause of her victimization and her condition (Hill, 2008).

### **White Boys and Men in Crisis**

It is evident that girls and women are denied equal treatment in American society. It may appear that boys and men have the clear advantage. When it comes to access, opportunity, and advancement that is ordinarily the case. However, boys struggle in school and within themselves. They are often placed in special needs programs, display more problem behavior, and graduate at lower rates than do girls (Way, 2011). Today, it is believed that schools are not "boy-friendly" (Way, 2011, p. 1). Ways to ameliorate this "inhospitable" milieu such as single-sex schools, male teachers, and extended playtime have been suggested. These recommended remedies assume that boys require different conditions than do girls, in order to thrive. Way asserted that this is a "false assumption," that "boys face a much deeper problem" (2011, p. 1).

Her research, and that of other scholars, asserted that the boy crisis is alienation from self and others regarding the "most basic social and emotional needs and desires" (2011, p. 1) of human beings. Brooks (2011) supported this idea, "When we raise our kids, we focus on traits measured by grades and SAT scores. But when it comes to the most important things like character and how to build relationships, we often have nothing to say" (2011, p. 1). Brooks (2011) asserted that American emphasis is on trusting the rational, rather than the emotional. Emotions are thought to be, according to Way (2011), the domains of women and gay men. Current research suggests, however, that the "emotional and rational are intertwined" (Brooks, 2011, p. 3). Brooks (2011) insisted that research supported the idea that "emotion is not opposed to reason; our emotions assign value to things and are the basis of reason" (2011, p. 2).

Males and females have to utilize both reason and emotions to thrive. Way (2011) quotes Brooks in her article, in support of his assertion that "caring about others, empathy, emotional sensitivity, cooperation, and the desire to be cared for are not only human capacities and needs, they are essential for survival" (p. 1). Way (2011) argued, "what Americans have called 'girly' or 'gay' is, in fact, 'simply human' and overwhelmingly important for girls and boys to thrive" (p. 1). Boys in this society are saddled with stereotypes that they themselves embrace, which support the values of competition, self-interest, stoicism, lowered sensitivity and a rugged independence that may leave them isolated and feeling alone. This construct for maleness perpetuates isolation and all but assures their inability to get basic emotional, psychological and social needs met in school, at home or in society (Way, 2011).

Neuroscientists Lise Elliot and Antonio Damasio stated, "gender stereotypes have greatly exaggerated what minimal differences there may be in the social and emotional worlds of boys and girls" (Way, 2011, p. 1). Boys' emotional and social needs often are unmet by family, school or society. Many boys carry with them a stoic and unemotional facade, believing that these qualities make them "more mature" (Way, 2011, p. 1).

When boys are younger, relationships are important in their description of what friends are, "sound [ing] more like out of a plot of Love Story than the Lord of the Flies" (p. 1). Several adolescent boys expressed their feelings in this way, "Sometimes you need to pour your heart out to your friends, [and]...without friends to share your deep secrets, you would go wacko" (p. 1). Even more telling about the emotional world of these adolescent boys who admitted, "My best friend and I love each other...that's ...it" (p. 1). This study suggests that boys are just as empathetic and as emotional as are girls when they are younger.

However, most boys tend to "grow out of" and devalue human emotional qualities as they are further socialized to believe them to be feminine and/or gay. Boys who identified strongly with a high level of masculine stereotypes were "more likely to report depressive symptoms and do poorly in school than those who report low levels" (p. 1).

Child Trend Data Bank (2012) reported that, in 2010, 12.9 per 100,000 white males between the ages of 15 and 19 committed suicide, which was about double that of black males at 6.8 per 100,000 (p. 11). In 2005 there were 32,637 suicides in the nation, and 23,478 were white males. A vast majority of male suicide victims, 57.6%, used a handgun to kill themselves according to Suicide Prevention, Awareness and Support Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The majority of white males today who commit suicide are between the ages of 45 and 54. Several reasons were given such as depression, body changes, relationships, isolation, disillusionment, regret, marriage problems, debt, and the unwillingness to seek help, were reasons cited by Dan Fields (2013). Several of the reasons for adult male suicide were identical to many of the concerns cited by Way (2011) associated with boys' upbringing. Is there a correlation between significant middle-aged male suicide rates and social rearing practices as children? According to Way (2011) many of the boys were raised to be independent, stoic, and unemotional. It is possible that when the males reach middle age, they have not developed adequate emotional resilience or close relationships to cope with failure, loss and aging and as a result they lose hope and kill themselves.

Thousands of men in America both white and black die from either homicide or suicide each year, and most use guns. It appears that whatever the man's or boy's age or hue, thousands of them lose hope, and that ends in death. During the last couple of decades there were a number of instances when suburban youth became enraged and killed many students in schools, more often than not, the killer died during the rampage. Sandy Hook Elementary, in New Town, Connecticut, is the most recent case where twenty children and six adults were killed. The shooter and his mother also died in the process. Men have gone to former places of employment, theaters, malls, targeted police and public figures for shooting rampages due to grievances and sometimes mental illness. Does isolation and alienation from others cause mental illness, or is it purely biological, or both? Which comes first?

Suicide and homicide can be thought of as the individual experiencing a considerable amount of psychological and emotional pain that remains unresolved. Painful emotions are real for people; if ignored or expressed inappropriately they could lead to early death for large numbers of boys and men (Fields, 2013). The cause of that



pain may be blamed on others. Wattleton's (2012) research reported that what women in her survey feared the most was domestic violence and sexual assault. Women are often blamed for others failures.

Could the large number of males who are suicidal in Middle America many who feel angry, isolated and alone (Fields, 2013), Brooks (2011) and Way (2011) be a contributing factor to the fear that many women experience in their homes? Self-reflection, critically and lovingly assessing one's thoughts and actions, and changing them may be beneficial for these men. Either way the shadow, the negativity in one's own life becomes destructive, whether turning in on the self or outward towards others, including against women and girls.

Men and women support a culture where men are trained to shut down emotions that can lead to explosive behavior (Way, 2011). The process often leads to alienation from self with little hope of developing an honest open relationship with another person that supports survival. While young black males die early because they have no hope for the future, given America's obsession with skin color and the lack of opportunity, white males die later because the hope and opportunity for the future never materialized, soured, or maybe did not meet expectations.

When men and boys cannot see a future, thousands die one way or another. What can be done to assist boys to grow up in ways that promote better mental and emotional health as men? Is it possible given the current male model in America, to help boys discover an authentic self that values emotion and relationships (Way, 2011; Brooks, 2011)? The massive number of white male suicide victims is not commonly known. It would be accurate to say that some white men and boys have problems in America given the suicide rates. As West (2000) suggest nobody is perfect. Some of these causalities might have been prevented if boys were taught earlier to honor their feelings and to empathize with others.

The media and society in general have been nearly silent about the problem of suicide. It would be important for the media to focus on middle-aged white males suicide rates in addition to the attention given to young black males homicide rates. There is a crisis in America. An honest admission of the problems could generate dialogue needed to address the critical issues. If such information was acknowledged

America could honestly investigate the conditions in society that create men who kill. And possibly determine what might ameliorate these problems, not only in the black and white communities, but in other communities as well. Does the excessive focus on black youth homicide rather than white male suicide have a social function?

Way (2011) argued that schools and the social milieu perpetuate the "blunting of boys' and men's capacity for empathy, intimacy and emotional expression" (p. 2) and that this "denies boys and men the very relationships they need to thrive" (p. 2). How can parents and schools assist these boys in reconnecting with themselves, as well as to their feelings toward and with other people?

Accepting and recognizing "the social and emotional nature of all humans" (p. 2) is important. Parents, students, educators and society need to realize that intimacy, emotional expression, authentic relationships, caring and affiliation are innate human qualities. Way (2011) suggests, "educators [should] foster boys' natural empathy and desire for intimacy with others-both peers and adults"(p. 2). And then, "boys would not disconnect from others and from themselves and wreak havoc on the world" (p. 2). The "wreak havoc on the world" is the work of the shadow, the negative thoughts inside of oneself, are often projected onto others, exemplified by those who shoot numbers of people in public spaces. There are no virtuous people, just as there are no deficient people. People are virtuous and deficient, dark and light, yin and yang, mixed together the result is gray, complex people are gray.

When boys' and men's issues are addressed, "who knows, it may transform the way our policy makers see the world," Brooks (2011) suggested (p. 3). What Brooks (2011) and Way (2011) seemed to say is that unexpressed negative emotions turned inward or outward may harm self and or others. It is critical that teachers, students, parents and society understand that "our social and emotional capacities are not restricted to those categories of girly and gay, but are fundamentally human and essential for us to succeed" (Way, 2011, p. 2) and survive.

### **Teachers and White Talk in America**

Just as Americans underestimate the importance and value of emotions, white talk is a language that devalues and underestimates the importance of black people. White talk itself may be thought to be harmless. The condition of America is reflected in black

people's eyes. More importantly, black people serve as the conscience of the nation. And though white talk in the mass media, books, newspapers, movies, and television preserves the black image as deficient and demented (Hill, 2008), African Americans have demonstrated a great deal of restraint and resilience during four hundred years of oppression.

McIntyre (1997) conducted an action-research project exploring white student teachers' readiness to work with diverse student populations. She explained, "It is essential for students in teacher preparation programs, specifically white students, to be well-prepared to teach and interact effectively with diverse student populations" (p. 5). McIntyre acknowledged that the student-teachers *"uncritically embrace a discourse about race, racism and teaching that serves-many times-to reinforce a white, class-based Euro-American perspective on life"* (p. 3). [emphasis added] Her interest for both herself and her students was to examine "the meaning of whiteness" [and to] think critically about race and racism" (p. 3).

McIntyre (1997) defines whiteness as "a system and ideology of white dominance that marginalizes and oppresses people of color" (p. 3). The domination maintains privilege for whites in America. According to McIntyre (1997) "white talk" is a language used by white people when talking to both black and white people during daily conversations; it's completely natural. This talk has particular features that set it apart from other discourses, most notably when dealing with controversial and/or uncomfortable topics about "people of color."

Some of the devices employed by the group of student teachers during the discussion to distance themselves from uncomfortable conversations about people of color, and blacks in particular, included, *"derailing the conversation, evading questions, dismissing counter-arguments, withdrawing from the discussion, remaining silent, interrupting speakers and topics, and colluding with each other in creating a 'culture of niceness' that made it very difficult to 'read the white world' "* (McIntyre, 1997, p. 46). [emphasis added]

The participants repeatedly tried to commandeer the conversation in an attempt to steer it back to "safe talk" that was comfortable. Some of the other tactics utilized included, "caring for each other, [being nice and] not wanting to deal with the discomfort

of personal racism" (p. 46) and not confronting each other about personal bias. Furthermore, *"rather than admit that we, as whites, have all internalized various dimensions of racism, the participants persistently rejected that notion"* (p. 55). [emphasis added]

"Persistently reject[ing] that notion" is a consistent roadblock to school and social reform. Participants in this dissertation persistently rejected that hue had anything to do with them as teachers, which supported McIntyre's (1997) claim. White talk is complex, McIntyre asserted, and "resists a simple explanation" (p. 46). Many white people are "unaware of how [they] contribute to its formation" (p. 46). White talk may be one of the "fish in water" matrixes that reinforce the social order of things in and outside of school. How do the blind begin to see? The lack of awareness and rejection of the possibility of any problem of bias may be included with the invisible vehicles that allow a black deficit model to persist. White teachers will have to choose to see in themselves what has been up to now invisible for many. This is where agency comes into the picture. Teachers can choose to see.

A student in the study had an overwhelming fear of "losing something" if blacks and other people of color were given equal treatment. One participant emphatically stated, *"I'm not willing to give up my privilege"* (p. 58). [emphasis added] Is that a zero sum game, one wins and the other loses, a black and white scenario, as Adler (2008) discussed? Gollnick & Chinn (2009) observed that, "dominant groups are usually not willing to share their power and wealth with others" (p. 28). Could this prevalent idea of "losing something" unwittingly work against urban youth? Or for that matter against any American that is not a member of the privileged moneyed male group? Is it possible for middle-class teachers to authentically help urban students when they may perceive them as taking something away from them?

When considering privilege is America a meritocracy? The idea that anyone can pull themselves up by their bootstraps with hard work "permeates white American culture" (McIntyre, 1997, p. 65). However, the participants in her study continued to "ignore and deny multiple barriers that are consciously or unconsciously built to advantage white people in this country" (p. 65). Bank of America again illustrates this point. The pre-service teachers seemed to be bewildered, unable to comprehend the

inescapable "*racial hierarchy that exists in the United States*" (p. 61). [emphasis added] McIntyre revealed, "Not only do they fear their own performance as teachers [but] they fear students of color, in a very real sense" (p. 73).

According to McIntyre, "Distancing themselves from blacks, in particular was not a difficult thing for these participants to do" (p. 60). Kohl (1994) reinforced McIntyre's (1997) findings that whites had a "generalized fear of people of color" (p. 73). The fear may have occurred for several reasons. "*They have had limited interaction with blacks, little education about the realities of black life in this country, and false teachings about what it means to be black in the United States*" (McIntyre, 1997, p. 60). [emphasis added] This lack of knowledge sets the teacher and student up for failure. When people deal with stories about others rather than the one who stands before them problems arise. When asked to "think about their own whiteness," [one student replied,] "It's hard to think about yourselves without comparing to something other" (p. 60). Wellman, as quoted by McIntyre (1997), suggested, "The fundamental feature of [white people's] collective identity is that they do not know who they are without black people. "Without a 'black other,' the American [white] self has no identity" (p. 60).

When the project was completed McIntyre (1997) stated, "We brought to consciousness our uncritical and limited ways of thinking, and subsequently, through critical self-and collective dialogue, many of us experienced a new awareness about the myriad issues ...raised. Such an engagement was excruciating [ly] painful at times" (p. 78). One participant explained it like this, "I almost felt like we were all in like this huge fight (unint.) [but] it...was just a discussion. It was like (unint.) being almost like angry, and I don't even know why" (p. 78). Many Black students and other people of color also feel angry in America; it is "like this huge fight" each day to be acknowledged, heard and treated fairly.

Language such as white talk matters in that it continues to marginalize and exclude the majority of black people and other people of color and women from access to the fruits of American life. Quoting Freire, McIntyre (1997) wrote, "*changing language is part of the process of changing the world*" (p. 78). [emphasis added] Language is thought. One cannot change language that changes the world without first changing the mind, the self. Changing the world is changing the mind (Cupitt, 1998; McIntyre, 1997).

## **Teachers' Self-Development**

Earlier white girls and boys school experiences and relationship with self and others was discussed and the profound affect their thoughts and behaviors had on their lives. When white teachers enter an urban classroom, their early education has shaped their personality in particular ways that might leave them feeling less sure of themselves, unprepared, passive and afraid. Such teacher qualities are a mismatch for what is needed in urban schools according to Renzulli, Parrott, and Beattie (2011). Teachers need to develop particular skills and ways of being that would be effective when working with urban youth.

What are some ways that teachers can begin to develop themselves? Self-development is first a mental process that shapes emotional and behavioral processes? Howard (2006) suggests, "We must face our feelings of inadequacy, discomfort and guilt. We must seek to transform both ourselves and the social conditions of injustice" (p. 8).

How does one encourage people to see what they do not wish to see? How does one encourage self-reflection and introspection that begins transformation when people feel neither discomfort nor guilt because the "other" is perceived as less than human and undeserving (Tuan, 1979)? How do people develop empathy for people outside of their own ethnic group? A first step may be to realize oneself as nothing special no different than other humans on the planet. A second step might be to recognize the truth in the humanity of people different than oneself. The truth is as one teacher mentioned, people are people. The words cannot be empty utterances they must be actualized in school and in society.

Another part of self-development is people need to challenge themselves to, "speak the truth to power," Howard (2006) quoting Cornell West, (p. 8) and to themselves thus realizing their own power. If truth is spoken to the nation's leaders by whites, the process may assist them in the development of skills and wisdom that might help many to weather inevitable disappointments and crisis and may move society closer to the truth of its creeds. Olssen (2006) quoted Foucault who believed that "power is exercised, rather than possessed...it is productive, as well as repressive; and ...power arises from the bottom up" (p. 19). There is power in individuals speaking truth; (West, 2000) truth speaking is a major part of self-development. Not speaking truth often leaves

people empty and feeling powerless. Palmer (2004) spoke of the "inner void" [where people who feel powerless stuff it with] "competitive success, consumerism, sexism, racism or any illusion" (p. 38) that would have them feel superior to others. He further stated:

We embrace attitudes and practices such as these, not because we regard ourselves as superior, but because we have no sense of self at all. Putting others down becomes a path to identity, a path we would not need to walk if we knew who we were. (p. 38)

Know thy self. Self-reflection and speaking truth is an important way to begin the process of self-discovery and self-development.

### **Self-Reflection and Self-Knowledge**

There are two types of self-reflection: one is action-oriented reflection, and the other is meaning-oriented reflection. Action-orientation reflection deals with the steps that one takes to solve a problem, while meaning-oriented reflection is concerned with those factors that explain why the situation evolved. Both Hoekstra (2011) and Korthagen, (2005) were concerned with teacher self-knowledge and reflection. One is not necessarily exclusive of the other. Korthagen (2005) explained self-reflective behavior in the workplace:

[P]eople are capable of learning how to consciously and systematically reflect on their work experiences. This involves a process which constantly alternates between work and learning from that work, and which culminates in learning during work. (p. 4)

Teachers can increase self-awareness through the self-reflective process by critiquing and changing thoughts, meanings, words and behaviors. Self-reflection has to do with "thinking about what happened and why, " (p. 4) utilizing both current and historical information in the present as a point of inquiry. It is critical that teachers understand how they may have contributed to the problem situation. Self-reflection is a tool to assist them in more accurately assessing problem situations with students in the urban school milieu. Many teachers do not recognize the profound impact that cultural influences have on their assessment of problem situations, cross-culturally. The narratives they make up about students and "what happened," and the meanings assigned

to them, are culturally influenced. Cupitt (1998) expressed it in this way, “We actively sign and impress all the time: *we project ourselves out*, we impress ourselves upon, we appropriate for ourselves, *we remake things*, [to suit us]” (p. 16). [emphasis added]

Therefore, self-reflection that encourages presence, self-awareness, and accurate perceptions is critical in cross-cultural student-teacher relationships. One can recognize the truths about oneself and others, and possess the faculties of "presence" in the classroom. Core Reflection advocates, (Meijer, Korthagen, & Vasalos, 2011) explained that presence, “[T]he full awareness of the here-and-now,” they also go on to say that presence “encompasses and connects both the teacher's self and his or her strengths and the environment,” (p. 8).

Being in the "here-and-now" with "presence," truly feeling the "now," creates a space, an opening for something new to evolve unfettered by the past that might help the teacher to consider what would be best for the child's personal growth Kothagen (2004). Negative social constructs and stereotypes during conflict cloud the teacher's vision and result in teacher confusion and feelings of victimization. One of the participants in this study, Pem, did not understand the urban environment or what to do in problem situations. As a result she blamed the students, parents, and another teacher for her difficulty. This kind of behavior is called a projection (Palmer, 1988). It is an inability to accept the positive or negative qualities in the self and instead claim they exist in the other. In other words, it is the intolerable shadow.

Paulien, a teacher in a Core Reflection study, received coaching on how to use self-reflection as a way to understand her core beliefs and reactions to problem situations. She wrote in her journal about an incident that happened with one of her students. “When Merel told me last week that the lesson was chaotic, I tried at that moment to feel my feelings in the here-and-now. I managed to do so for a moment, but I immediately felt dizzy, very unpleasant” (Meijer et al., 2004, p. 19). Here the student spoke truth to power and that truth made the teacher feel dizzy. Truth sometimes throws people off balance, but without that disequilibrium, situations usually do not change, get better or ever go away. When skin color is on the line in America, it is one of those entrenched problems that has not been truthfully considered; consequently, it has never gone away.

Self-reflection causes the individual to not only become more aware of the past



and present situations in the here and now, including the historical significance, but also to witness their own reactions to the situation, psychologically, physically and emotionally, at the core level. Core level self-knowledge is referred to as "spirit," but Core Reflection advocates envision this as being the seat of one's "mission" in life. That teacher's dizziness came out of her willingness to feel her feelings at that moment, which may have been scary. Paulien's courage allowed her to learn how to be present (presence) to her core-self and her life in each moment. It is possible that *"the more that teachers know about themselves, their own private curriculum within, the more their personal decisions are apt to be about how to pave the way for better teaching"* (Hamachek, 1999 as cited in Korthagen, 2004, p. 82). [emphasis added]

### **Hue Identity**

Howard argued that teachers' reflections upon their own attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors about hue, (race) are especially important in cross-cultural communication. Helms (1996 as cited in Howard, 2006) identified six stages of "racial identity development" that white people move through. A complete explanation of the stages of "racial identity development" can be found in Howard's (2006) book.

Personal growth can be like birthing a baby, creating a new reality, another truth based on wisdom. When people take on the task of "growing up," they are often confronted with personal fears, emptiness, bias and limiting beliefs. For white teachers it would be important to realize that overall "identity development is linked, yet incongruent, with [their] racial identity development" (p. 2). Many teachers may have to overcome past educational conditioning that might have resulted in low self-esteem, lack of self-efficacy and blunted aspirations for girls as they developed into women (Orenstein, 1994). The girls' education in school, in the community and in society often included, without their knowledge, a deficit model of themselves and possibly an "itness" model based on "inherent deficiencies," inhuman qualities of especially blacks and other people of color. The sentiment seems to have been "they are not like me." Many whites have to reclaim the self they have lost.

## **Self-efficacy**

Bandura defined self-efficacy as "belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Henson, 2001, p. 3). Consequently, "self-efficacy beliefs influence our choices, our effort, our persistence when facing adversity and our emotions" (Henson 2001, p. 3). Teachers with high efficacy experimented with materials, implemented alternative methods of information delivery and were persistent in helping students. The behavior was observed in high efficacy pre-service teachers as well (Henson, 2001). Finally, efficacious in-service and pre-service (Henson, 2001) teachers were more committed to student success.

Teachers who are self-efficacious motivate their students to be the same. Watson (as cited in Henson, 2001) observed "greater achievement in rural, urban, majority-black, and majority-white schools [among] students of efficacious teachers" (p. 4). "Teacher efficacy is also related to students' own sense of efficacy and student motivation" (p. 5). Bandura (1995) observed that "people regulate their level and distribution of effort in accordance with the effects they expect their actions to have. As a result, their behavior is better-predicted from an understanding of their beliefs than from examining the actual consequences of their actions" (p. 4). Belief predicts behavior more effectively than does the consequence of their actions. Students of efficacious teachers have a higher level of performance than do their peers (Henson, 2001). This is a reliable predictor of student achievement, per the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. "Efficacious teachers persist with struggling students and criticize less after incorrect student answers" (p. 5).

Teachers can develop a feeling of self-efficacy when they reflect upon their beliefs and behaviors. Cross-cultural relationships with students can be stressful due to different beliefs and a lack of familiarity with the urban culture. Some teachers feel overwhelmed and stressed by the clash of the two paradigms. Baucom (2003) said that stress is another word for fear. It may be difficult to know what stress is, but usually people can identify their fears. Fear if debilitating interferes with self-efficacy. Baucom (2003) explained that there is three core fears: a threat to "security," a loss of "control" and a fear of not being "accepted."

## **Student and Teacher Disconnection**

### **Introduction**

Urban students also share these three core fears, a threat to security inside and outside of school, a loss of control because they are children and a fear of and many experiences of not being accepted in school and in society. Fear may interfere with courage, confidence, self-efficacy, personal growth and school success for both students and teachers. In this section a brief historical overview of the possible causes of urban youth school failure will be reviewed, including how teacher bias, perceptions and language may negatively influence black girls during student-teacher interaction. Negative interactions could also play a supporting role in the supply of bodies for the school-to-prison pipeline of black males in particular. African and African-American history's relevance in education will be considered. The section ends with a reflection on why teachers choose to teach.

### **Black Girls and Teacher Interaction**

Black women's and girls' rank within the hierarchy of Western culture and throughout the world has been assigned as last place. The sentiment is that black females do not matter, they have been reduced to "it." Teachers' are aware of the designation, and this knowledge might be part of the hidden curriculum, the "itness," factor of black girls an unspoken "reality" in urban schools between white teachers and black girls. According to AAUW (1992) "African-American girls have fewer interactions with teachers than do white girls, despite evidence that they attempt to initiate interactions more frequently" (p. 2). Black girls' repeated attempts to make contact with white female teachers are often ignored, and the students are usually perceived to be too "loud, and unruly" (Yoshimitsu & Shouse, 2008, p. 370).

Many white teachers grew-up in suburbia where girls were to remain silent and were often praised for compliance. In black America, girls have been trained to lead and be the matriarch of the family. This is African culture historically, before they were brought to America. In other words, they are and have been expected to take responsibility for others, to be in charge and to help each member to survive physically, psychologically and emotionally. Orenstein (1994) stated that the AAUW report found:

Far more African-American girls retain their overall self-esteem during

adolescence than white or Latina girls, maintaining a stronger sense of both personal and familial importance. They are about twice as likely to be "happy with the way I am" than girls of other groups and report feeling "pretty good at a lot of things" at nearly the rate of white boys. The one exception for African-American girls is their feelings about school: black girls are more pessimistic about their teachers and their schoolwork than other girls. (p. xxi)

Could white teachers' expectations and biases about black girls behavior reflect the distance between the roles of girls in their own community? Can teachers bridge the cultural mismatch? Is there any value for the teacher in understanding this independence? A teacher can become a,

[C]ultural broker who thoroughly understands different cultural systems, is able to interpret cultural symbols from one frame of reference to another, can mediate cultural incompatibilities, and knows how to build bridges or establish linkages across cultures that facilitate the instructional process. (Gay, 1993 as cited in Rogers, 2009 p. 5)

Intercultural conflict is inevitable and normal, as is interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict. Urban teachers who have developed effective self-reflective problem solving skills can positively influence the school experience for their students and themselves and bridge the cultural divide.

Oppressive social conditions have existed for both students of color and teachers alike since the nation's founding. This similarity was recognized as early as the 1840s, during the movement to abolish slavery, when women's rights advocates joined slaves to pursue freedom and justice. Urban teachers in the twenty-first century stand at a similar precipice. If white female teachers would allow themselves to recognize their position in the hierarchy as one with little influence or real power, they could vigorously pursue freedom from oppression for themselves and their students. Black girls and their perception of themselves may provide a positive model for women to emulate.

### **Pipeline Introduction**

Many urban middle and high school students enter their school buildings each day via front door checkpoints. Normal. They often put their book bags, purses, keys and

personal belongs on a long table for inspection. After security guards and school personnel rifle through them, their items are pushed along to the end. They step through a metal detector. Several times during the morning search, a student, usually a male, walks through the detector and causes the alarm to scream. The student steps back, pats himself to look for the offending object. He removes his belt, and then passes through once more. The machine sounds off again.

The male student is pulled aside and, in plain view of his peers, raises his shirt for the security guard to check his pant-waist. The student lifts his arms while the guard wraps around and grabs him on either side of the spine. He brushes downward on the boy's back, fingers running around to his chest and side, outwardly tracing his limbs from the armpits to the wrist. The hand-check runs along the right inseam, then outer seams of the boy's britches, and up to his groin. Then, the guard slices across the knee and down the back of the leg to the ankle. The left leg gets the same treatment.

This is a "normal" ritualized scene, witnessed and experienced daily by many inner city students before they are permitted to enter a classroom. Do these searches make inner-city schools safer? Are the searches and metal detectors in urban schools partly due to white female teachers fear of African American students? Do such searches regularly take place in suburban schools? Are these body violations training students *to be punishable* thus securing their underclass position in society, as prisoners? Do these searches affect the students' self-esteem? Do the searches of urban students desensitize them to body frisks," preparing them for body violations? Do the searches have a normalizing effect on the student and those who witness the body checks in school? Does this behavior train youth in urban neighborhoods to comply without objection to police stops and searches while "black on streets" (Editors, 2012)? One afternoon a white female urban Mid-Western elementary school principal called the police on a third-grade black girl. When the two officers entered the office, the child dropped to the floor, put her hands behind her back, and said, "Assume the position."

The third grade black girl was perceived as a threat, feared and dangerous. In recent years suburban students and teachers have been victims of and traumatized by a number of mass school shootings, twenty-six killed recently. Have metal detectors been placed in most suburban schools to make them safer? Does the reality of the situation

warrant such action? Is this an example of self-deception or denial, ignoring the reality of mass killings in suburban schools in an effort to perceive oneself and be perceived as non-violent or virtuous? Nevertheless, metal detectors and body searches is a daily ritual in urban schools.

### **Black Boys' School-to-Prison Pipeline**

Have suburban schools established a pat-down policy due to the school killings? According to the editors of *Rethinking Schools* (2012), the increased number of police in schools and "zero tolerance" policies implementing checkpoints and surveillance has fueled an increase in student suspensions and expulsions, especially among African American and Latino youth. Witt (2007) of *The Chicago Tribune* reported, "Black students are suspended and expelled at nearly three times the rate of white students" (p. 1). In New Jersey's public schools, black students *are "almost 60 times as likely as white students to be expelled for serious disciplinary infractions"* (p. 1). [emphasis added] Research studies show that "a history of school suspensions or expulsions is a strong predictor of future trouble with the law... for black youths, who represent 16% of U.S. adolescents but 38% of those incarcerated in youth prisons" (p. 2).

In 2006, 46% of the penal population was white, while 41% was African-American and 19% Latino. By 2001, "about one out of every six African-American males had experienced jail or imprisonment" (Marable, 2012, p. 1). The war on drugs fueled the increase in incarcerations. America's "war on drugs" was first conceived in 1971, during the Nixon years, an initiative that Ronald Reagan later expanded, funding with 1.7 billion dollars. This prompted changes to sentencing laws and practices that reverberated throughout the country. Since the 1970s, the prison population in this country has increased from 325,000 to over 2 million today, according to the editors of (Editors, 2012).

The same source, importantly, notes that "***Whites are more likely to violate drug laws than people of color***, [yet] in some states, black men have been admitted to prison on drug charges at rates 20 to 50 times greater than those of white men" (2012, p. 2) [emphasis added]. Given the disparity in sentencing practices, "middle-class college students could use heroin and receive community service, but people with less privilege could receive a lengthy prison sentence for the same offense" (Lakshmi, 2012, p. 1). A

particular concern is with the implementation of New York's strict Rockefeller Drug Laws and the unforgiving Three Strikes Laws in California, which may send even more black and brown people to prison (Lakshmi, 2012).

The "get tough" attitude seemed to have trickled down into the schools, where the educational system appears to be moving away from its role in correcting normal teen behavior towards student criminalization. Schools are complicit in this development; (Editors, 2012) "what has come to be called the school-to-prison pipeline... [is fast becoming a path] to incarceration, rather than opportunity" for students (p. 1). For example, one teacher placed a jar of candy on her desk, from which students were welcome take one piece. When several girls "grabbed handfuls, this teacher responded by promptly sending them to report to a police officer assigned to the school" (p. 1). The teacher turned a "minor transgression" (p.1) into a criminal offense. Why not deal with such student behavior as normal, but inappropriate, and use the situation as a teaching moment? Lakshmi (2012) asserted "[t]he school-to-prison [notion] is really a classroom-to-prison pipeline" (p. 1). The cultural deviant model of urban students might influence teacher problem solving behavior especially if they are afraid of them and inexperienced. The trouble often begins with the choices that teachers make when attempting to solve relatively basic problems in the classroom, such as not having a pencil that can result in suspensions, expulsions and/or other methods of punishment.

It appears that the school-as-prison culture is "considerably more common in schools populated by children of color, in poor communities, as opposed to majority-white, middle-class schools" (Editors, 2012, p. 3). According to the editors (2012) the school-to-prison pipeline and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policies actually provide incentive for teachers and school personnel to "get rid of students." They argue that "[b]y focusing accountability almost exclusively on test scores, and attaching high stakes to them, NCLB has given schools a perverse incentive to allow, or even encourage, students to leave" (2012, p. 2).

Another concern, regarding examples of possible test score "fall out," was cited by the Fair Test factsheet. They found that schools in Florida gave low-scoring students a longer duration of suspension than it did for those committing similar offenses that scored higher on the tests. In Ohio, meanwhile, "students with disabilities were twice as likely to be suspended out of school than their peers" (p. 2).

The classroom-to-prison pipeline has a lot to do with how teachers respond to problem situations in urban classroom, whether the teacher decides to use punitive measures or finds creative ways to respond to issues directly impacts student lives far into the future. If teachers in inner city schools believe in a deficit model for black and brown students, that they are by birth “deviant” criminals deserving of punishment, then they will continue to set children up for prison. The research is clear that black boys are punished more often and more severely than their white male counterparts, a disparity that may reflect white perceptions of black youth as bad people.

These prejudices have negative consequences that impact school completion rates, students' lives, and American democracy and its security in general. Uneducated and undereducated people will not be able to govern successfully as the nation transitions from a majority white population to a majority of people of color in the not-so-distant future. American assets and global position will be lost at home and abroad as a direct result of the dismissal of urban students' education. People with few skills and no work do not often sit still.

What affects one in society eventually affects the entire society, especially when it comes to financing prison populations. Massive prison threads pull the nation in one direction towards punishing black, brown and white men, which seems to be paramount, while the remaining part of the web deteriorates due to limited resources.

### **Perception and Problem Assessments**

A teacher's awareness of her hidden fear and bias must come to the conscious level in order to be resolved. *"I've seen a number of cases where white teachers treat very young African-American boys as if they were seventeen, over six feet tall, addicted to drugs and menacing"* [emphasis added] (Kohl, 1994, p. 8). Delpit, (2006), was interested in reading literacy and teachers' language when working with students when she lamented that she had "encountered a certain sense of powerlessness and paralysis among many sensitive and well-meaning literacy educators;...their job is to teach literate discourse styles to all their students [and] they question whether that is a task they can actually accomplish for poor students and students of color" (Delpit, 2006, p. 152). These uncertainties to perform their task calls into question the teacher's self-efficacy and commitment.



Delpit (2006) had a conversation with Caroline, Anthony's teacher. He was a five-year-old black boy in her classroom. Caroline was a white Irish-American teacher that seemed to exemplify McIntyre's (1997) and Howard's (1993) assertions that some white teachers cannot see the positive attributes of black students. Caroline employed stereotypes, Hill (2008) and she was unaware of the hidden curriculum within that has been explored throughout this dissertation. She failed to realize that she was also engaged in "white talk" speaking about a black child from a deficit model. Carolyn wanted young Anthony to be assessed so he could receive extra "help." Lisa Delpit (2006) was the interviewer and the first speaker below,

L: Anthony told me that he liked school and that his favorite thing in his class was group time.

C: That's amazing, since he can't sit still in it. He just says anything, sometimes. In the morning he's OK; after nap he's impossible.

L: He's really talking more, it seems!

C: He's probably never allowed to talk at home. He needs communicative experience. I was thinking of referring him to a speech therapist. He never even got to use scissors at home.

L: He told me about his cousin [that] he plays with after school. It seems he really does have things to talk about.

C: It's unfortunate, but I don't think he even knows what "family" means. Some of these kids don't know who their cousins are [or] who their brothers and sisters are. (p. xxii)

The teacher's white talk revealed a belief that Anthony was a flawed child. The five-year-old and his family were viewed as having deficiencies in Caroline's eyes. This is the unwitting language, the hidden curriculum, that perpetuates the notion of a black deficit that is passed on and affects children and families in negative ways (Hill, 2008; McIntyre, 1997). The rush to negative conclusions is not uncommon in urban schools. What Caroline did not know was that in the African-American matrilineal community, there are allowances for "play" mothers, fathers, cousins, sisters, brothers, uncles and many other people who are accepted as family and "kinfolks." Banks (1996) and Gay (2003) support a cultural competence curriculum for teachers like Caroline.

Another example that Delpit (2006) wrote about concerned Charles, a three-year-old black boy who seemed to have a crush on a little white girl in their nursery school. According to Delpit (2006), the little boy grabbed the girl from behind and gave her a bear hug, and the girl protested. Later, when he tried to kiss her on the cheek, the teacher put him in time-out. Delpit commented to the teacher, "He seems to have a little crush on Kelly," to which the teacher replied that he is 'way out of line;' continuing with disgust in her voice, [she said that] '[s]ometimes what he does just looks like lust'" (p. xxii).

What would have the teacher see a "lustful" three-year-old black child instead of one merely exhibiting age-appropriate behavior (Delpit, 2006; Kohl, 1994)? This may be one way that the lack of professional knowledge, self-knowledge, and not knowing the developmental stages of children or having a cultural historical perspective serves to validate the teacher's story of black immorality and "deficiency" in a three-year-old.

Both teachers in this case may have had faulty judgments such as a lustful three-year-old or a five-year-old child who could do nothing right and did not know his relatives. It appeared that the teachers were unaware of the parts of the web and how the threads connected and interplayed with one another. As a result, certain decisions were made that may not benefit the child. Kohl's (1994) illustrated how teacher language, perceptions, and behavior toward children leads the children to reject the educator and the message when they get old enough to understand what teachers think of them:

Not learning tends to take place when someone has to deal with unavoidable challenges to her or his personal family loyalties, integrity and identity. To agree to learn from a stranger who does not respect your integrity causes a major loss of self. The only alternative is to not learn and [to] reject the stranger's world. (p. 6)

Kohl (1994) suggests, "We also have to understand ourselves as victims of the same system we are imposing on our students" (p. 77). Some students, in an effort to save themselves, "push things so far that they get put in special classes, or get thrown out of school" (Kohl, 1994, p. 28). Kohl (1994) does not blame students for "pushing back." Teachers must also push back reflect and challenge cultural assumptions to determine the viability and usefulness of their beliefs in urban schools.

### **Hue-ism and Being Right.**

The teachers in the previous section seemed to believe that their perceptions of the boys and their "problems" were accurate. Delpit saw a different reality. Today, such observations can lead to boys and girls being placed into "special education programs." Howard (2006) explained, "Dominant groups don't hold 'perspectives;' they hold 'truth' (p. 54)." Kohl suggests, "Unfortunately, many teachers become socialized to taking power away from students, to judging, stigmatizing, and failing young people" (p. 29).

Research suggests, "racism is so entrenched in society that individuals cannot see it" (Rogers, 2009, p. 3). Many American teachers claim not to be color conscious. Rogers (2009) reports, "Often teachers claim to be colorblind; that they do not see the color of their students' skin" (p. 3). Many may not be conscious about skin color, but it is a genuine currency that secures opportunity, goods and services for some people in America. Ponterotto, as quoted by Rogers (2009), defines "colorblind" as "ignorance, denial and distortion of reality" (p. 3). Gordon (2005 as cited in Rogers, 2009) asserted that, "colorblindness provides a way for individuals to absolve themselves of racism" (p. 3).

Teachers have to find the courage to see what is "hidden in plain sight" through self-reflection (Palmer, 1998). Rogers (2009) argues, "the end-result of the self-awareness process is to become a more culturally competent leader, with the capacity to understand and validate individuals' ideas and ways of doing things" (p. 3). Kohl (1994) was optimistic about teachers. He stated, "They [the critical voices] can be unlearned through a return to the original sources of one's love of learning and of teaching" (p. 77).

After a group of teachers participated in a core reflection project, it was reported that, "at the end... it had become clear to them how little their school cultures were directed toward reflection and collaboration with colleagues, on matters related to personal development of children" (Kothagen, 2004, p. 91). Most teachers want to be good teachers but given cross-cultural challenges along with tainted cultural bias about urban students makes it difficult to achieve. A significant number seem to teach in the same way that they, themselves, were taught. However, how they were taught may not be an appropriate model for inner city youth.

One student, named Paul Luciano (Kohl, 1994) argued that what he learned in

school was someone else's history, not his own. That the "'little piece of paper' (the diploma) ... [is] proof that you have been 'whitey-fied' for four years" (p. 30). McIntosh (1988) asserted, "Whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow 'them' to be more like 'us'" (p. 1).

It is often difficult for white teachers to understand why a student like Paul would reject this form of "education." The issue continues to be that there is little in the system that validates his history and worth as a human being. Instead, he is told to "be like me." That is a message hidden from the teacher; she is the fish in water. However, teachers can educate themselves and "the[ir] word takes on new power... a means by which people discover themselves and their potential" (Freire, 2010, p. 32-33). Though Freire was discussing people in the "third world" countries who may not understand their potential, this idea seems to be applicable for urban teachers and students in America. Powerful, conscious teachers are able to confront "those who wish to negate humanity, and assume a new and bolder position, with a clear invitation to all who wish to participate in the reconstruction of society" (p. 158).

### **Teaching and Personal Growth**

Teaching is not "just a job," it is also a form of personal "growth," for teachers and students. Personal growth is about a critical introspection, especially in culturally diverse environments, to achieve positive outcomes (West, 2000). It includes student and teacher relationships that result in self-knowledge, empathy and cultural understanding. It has been suggested "most [university] students who are white in teacher preparation programs function at a low level of ethnic identity formation" (Rogers, 2009, p. 4). What has proven difficult is that many teachers do not see their own low level ethnic identity formation and resort to blaming children for the dysfunction in urban schools. This notion of deficiency does not square with their perception of personal virtue. Pre-service teachers need to develop "pluralistic attitudes and behaviors" (p. 4) when teaching in environments rich in student diversity. Schools of education must do a better job in assisting pre-service and in-service teachers to investigate their own hidden curriculum and personal bias. Rogers (2009) maintained that a "culturally ignorant pre-service teacher becomes a culturally insensitive in-service teacher, who equates diversity with deficiency" (p. 6).

## **Language and Belief**

Teacher language signals to a student whether the teacher likes them or not (Hill, 2008). The kind of language that the teacher uses in the classroom can either help children develop their potential or inhibit their growth (Gay, 2000). The words they use are generally a reflection of their internal life and what they believe about themselves and others. Negative words, for example, may be a mental projection of the teacher's rejection of the self (Palmer, 1998). It might be a result of teachers having a vague sense of their own ethnic identity.

Cupitt (1998) explained, "Language is experienced as the currency of thought...Thoughts are words"(p. 51). Beliefs, according to Herrnstein-Smith (1997), are "traditionally conceived as sets of either discrete true/false mental positions about the world, or discrete correct/ incorrect interior representation[s] of it" (p. 44). Cupitt further asserted, "We think in language ...signs are the coinage of thinking...language supplies the entire milieu; the space within which thinking moves" (p. 32). The experience of the world can be transformed in one's head through thinking because that is ultimately where people experience the world and their lives.

"Language precedes us ... [i]t is older than we are, and it has made us ourselves," (Cupitt, 1998, p. 33). The dominant force in society created the language that helps it to maintain its "superiority." A language of hierarchy is a useful way to allocate resources such as power, jobs, money, education, food, housing and opportunity.

Research demonstrated that white people and many people of color experience life in America in dissimilar ways. McIntosh, (1997) illustrated this concept when she created a list of "daily effects of white privilege" (p. 2); she explained,

I can avoid spending time with people whom I was trained to mistrust and who have learned to mistrust my kind, or me...I can choose to ignore developments in minority writing and minority activist programs, or disparage them, or learn from them. But in any case, I can find ways to be more or less protected from negative consequences of any of these choices. (p. 3)

People of color do not share the privilege to choose whether to spend time with white people or not. They have little recourse to address language that denigrates or offends them. As Hill (2008) suggests, a great deal of information and communication

lies between the words. Thus it is difficult to verbalize many of the offenses in the silence and know exactly what it means contextually. Another intangible influence profoundly affects discourse, Kiros (1998) explained: "The speaker of the language, or the author, is not as important as the underlying structure; the so-called unconscious of language" (p. 9). Many people are unaware, as Cupitt concluded, "Your unconscious is not hidden within your interior... [it is] legible in the form of a subtext on your exterior, as when your body-language is at odds with your spoken words" (p. 23). Teachers who are unaware of personal bias and hidden curriculums do not go unnoticed by their urban students. Unfortunately, some students may push back hard against such a teacher and cause themselves and their teacher harm (Kohl, 1994).

### **Summary**

Both students of color and white teachers can begin to embrace the spirit of cooperation and collaboration for mutual gain by changing their minds. When people change their minds language also changes. Teachers can encourage students to be themselves and, in the process, teachers can be themselves once they understand more about "who they are." The school experience can become one of shared freedom and self-development if students and teacher work together through relationship. It is important for both teachers and students to understand one another's beliefs and respect cultural values while assessing them to determine if they support educational outcomes. Teachers and students in urban schools have to change their minds, create new language, and behaviors that support positive relationships with each other.

Teachers are the leaders in urban schools. They can be "cultural protectors," theirs and others. Within the process of multi-cultural acceptance, they can seek justice for themselves and their students. Teachers who have the courage to support such ideals would signal a new kind of school reform that would likely change the educational landscape. Howard (2006) argued, "Change is possible and white educators do, indeed, have a significant and unique role to play in the healing process" (p. 67).

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

The main purpose of this study is to understand how teachers' self-reflective problem solving behaviors influence relationship with black students in urban schools. To accomplish this research objective a case study qualitative method approach was utilized. Case study, qualitative method is the most appropriate approach to investigate white female teachers working with African American students in an urban school in a Midwest City. This study primarily focused on cross-culture communication, relationship, problem-solving behavior and teacher self-efficacy. The data collected in "a qualitative study can include virtually anything that you see, hear or that is otherwise communicated to you while conducting the study; there is no such thing as "inadmissible evidence" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 79). The data can be thick and "rich" (p. 110). There are a number of ways to collect data. The method chosen for this study was to use purposeful selection of middle-aged white female teachers, "in which particular settings, persons, or activities [were] selected deliberately in order to provide information that can't be gotten as well from other choices" (p. 88). The women were audio recorded during an interview process.

#### **Goals of Purposeful Selection**

There were a numbers of goals for using a purposeful sample; with the objective of gathering detailed rich, descriptive data that can best be ascertained through such a sampling process. Four goals of a purposeful sample, the first is "deliberately selecting cases, individuals, or situations that are known to be typical provides far more confidence that the conclusions adequately represent the average members of the population" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 88). The second is that it tended "to adequately capture the heterogeneity in the population" (p. 89). The third is to examine the participants' transcripts and mine concepts that are critical, which can support the theories that undergird the study (Maxwell, 2005). A final goal, of purposeful selection "can be to establish particular comparisons to illuminate the reasons for differences between settings or individuals" (p. 90).

### **Limitation of the Study**

There were two districts represented in the study. I interviewed teachers in district one. A white female colleague interviewed teachers in district two. In this study I thought that I might face some challenges due to cultural suspicions. However, what I did experience was a first-encounter-reserve, and I did notice that teachers hesitated and were careful when making certain statements about their students. A couple of the teachers attached a qualifier to a broad statement they made about students' home lives. In general the teachers appeared to be open in their communication during the interviews. A couple of teachers revealed their struggles with authentic thoughts about a situation, however for the most part participants did not expose vulnerabilities, or failures.

As an African American interviewing white teachers in a social climate of teacher blame and accusations about student failure, I did not experience that teachers were reluctant to speak candidly to a certain level. Traditionally it has been difficult for black people and white people to be open and honest with each other, which can be a limitation. In this case a minimal amount of hesitancy was detected but the depth of the disclosure was minimal. I attempted to put the participants at ease early in the interview process. I met teachers at the door and thanked them for their participation. I was open and interactive during the interview to create a relaxed environment.

My white female colleague who interviewed the participants in district number two collected important information for the research. She has known her subjects for many years and they revealed personal struggles and shared freely. The material that she gathered seemed to be from an insider's perspective. And the data was valuable to the research study to be able to contrast the two districts as well as to determine if there was a difference between the information gathered by the two interviewers.

For decades, I have participated extensively in cross-cultural situations at home, as a student in school, a teacher, counselor, and with friends, and have not found communication in most cases to be difficult. However, the depth of the revelation depending on the case was variable. I have crosschecked for similarities and difference in my findings by asking a fellow teacher to review the data. The study is limited in that the primary focus was on white female teachers' interactions with black urban youth. While other teachers, males and females of different hues, are nearly excluded in the



dissertation, the study may have some value for them as well. Homogeneity was discovered in the target population due to a specific teacher training; consequently, I interviewed a female African American teacher to gain a different perspective. The study was limited in that no interviews were conducted with students and there were no teacher observations to verify responses.

### **Limitation of Purposeful Selection**

One of the limitations of purposeful selection is that the informants' views may not be the norm and may be decidedly more homogeneous than the broader population (Maxwell, 2005). Most teachers in this sample either had participated in workshops, read literature, or were familiar with the philosophy of Ruby Payne. Her book, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, (2005) has come under a great deal of scrutiny and attack for what has been called her promotion of a deficit model for black youth and their community (Bomer, Dworin, May, & Semingson, 2008).

Many of the participants in this study appeared to be speaking the same language during the interview process. This indicated that some of them had been trained or had internalized a particular philosophy. I was given a copy of Payne's (2005) book by an administrator and recognized the participants' utterances as part of the information that she advocated. Group number one did not on the surface fit the model of the teachers that I had been exposed to in a number of school districts during my tenure as an educator. However, this revelation about teacher training shifted my focus in approaching the interview process as well as the data analysis.

I wanted to discover if the Payne training made a difference in the teachers approach to problem solving. After reviewing Payne's book, relationships with student were emphasized and that was the main idea that teachers focused on during the interview. The research shifted to include training as an important element that needed to be understood. The new discovery, teacher training, was a catalyst to a rare opportunity to investigate how teacher language and the effects of training made on student teacher relationships (Orenstein, 1994). Teacher training and staff development is often the norm in school districts. What was different in school number one was teacher "buy in." Due to the training it became necessary to seek a different perspective in teachers outside of the demographic to deal with the homogeneity (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I informally

interviewed several black female teachers and one agreed to an interview. Notes were taken to capture the informal conversations with the remaining black teachers.

Had a qualitative method case study interview process not been employed, it may have been difficult to discover this homogeneity of the group. There are also a number of ways to study this population quantitatively; however, it would be incongruous for me to do so because my research question deals with the teachers' personal qualities and how they approach problem situations. I was interested in, for example, their thoughts, motivations, beliefs, problem-solving methods, challenges, and self-efficacy. A person talking to another person is the tool most appropriate to discover specific qualities about a participant.

Numbers probably would not be able to tell the story of teacher exhaustion, as I observed in one participant; she explained that she was a single mom who worked two jobs and had several children to care for.

The preceding example is another feature that makes qualitative methods a suitable choice "data are not restricted to the results of specified methods...you are the research instrument in a qualitative study, ...and your eyes and ears are the tools you use to make sense of what is going on" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 79). Finally, as the research instrument and the data analyst, I had the opportunity to determine nuances that may be difficult to capture with other research methods (Creswell, 1998).

### **Administrators Outside the Demographic**

I was unable to interview the specific teachers in the school district where I observed most of the phenomenon of teachers using ineffective problem solving strategies. I talked to several administrators and school personnel in the district, "gatekeepers" who agreed to help me with the process. That district has had a long history of difficulties in a number of areas. Possibly since I knew these individuals as friends, and colleagues, I might have given them too much information about the study. Given the problems in the district, they may have been afraid to give me access.

I did however interview two female administrators, one white, the other black, from my former district. They both had been in education for thirty-five to forty years. Both women seemed to have grown up in a two-parent home. The black woman married her college sweetheart, and they remained married. In particular, both women seemed

unable to empathize with black single mothers. Each in her turn had something disparaging to say about a particular single mother and her shortcomings. One single mother came in while I was present during my conversation with the black administrator.

Both women seemed to talk about students and mothers from a deficit model approach. Each woman expressed dismay about student and parent behavior. A number of urban students live in single-mother-homes and it may be important to assist the mothers rather than make derogatory remarks about them. The support of the mothers may in turn facilitate student success. These administrators wanted to help urban students but appeared to be overwhelmed by the task and seemed to lack empathy for the mothers. I spoke with each of the women for about forty-five or more minutes. They said that they would find teachers in the building who met the target population for the study but they did not. I then made contact with several former colleagues that agreed to help but nothing materialize. I went in another direction completely, because the window of time to collect data was closing.

A church member supplied a contact for a new school district where the interviews were conducted. I had no previous relationship with the district. The basic information about the project was e-mailed to the School Superintendant, the project was approved and the school notified, and I was permitted to conduct research in the building. The demographics of the participants and school population were basically the same demographics as the inner city school populations where I initially sought access. Since the population demographics was congruent, the study provided the information needed to answer the research questions.

### **Interviews**

Audio-recorded interview was the method used for most data collection; I was in several inner-city schools where the majority of the student body was African American. All but one of the teachers interviewed were white females. I noticed after a couple of days of interviewing that many of teachers where tremendously optimistic. I believe what they revealed in the session was true for them. It felt authentic to me; however, it appeared that something was incomplete. The way several of them described their approach to problem solving was quite similar. Teachers' conversations focused on how well the students performed, that their students outperformed students in similar districts

in the area. Maxwell (2005) cautioned "[a] participant can be very engaged intellectually in an interview, but not be revealing anything deeply personal" (p. 83). A couple of the women voiced personal reservation about their ability to reach their urban students. Within the group, a couple of teachers revealed their fears and gave a mixed account of their progress. Mostly in district two teachers revealed positive and difficult times, feelings of doubt, uncertainty, shock, and fear, to list a few of the terms used during sessions.

There was a sense of optimism in district one as the teachers recounted the success stories during the first couple of days of interviews. I was entirely present with each of them. One teacher's heart-felt description of why and what she was doing with students made both of our eyes water with joy. However, something was still not quite "right" in my gut. "What one does is observe, intuit, sense what is occurring in natural setting," (Merriam, 1988, p. 17). I recognized a pattern in conversations, during several interviews that alerted me to a possible issue. There were common phrases and themes, as mentioned before; for example, "develop relationships with students", "direct communication", "choices", and a number of other concepts which were uttered by a number of participants. I sought to interview a Black or Latino teacher who might provide a different insight.

### **Teacher Training**

I talked to an administrator and asked if there had been specific teacher training. He said they had in previous years conducted teacher training dealing with specific issues teachers may encounter in urban schools. Much of the training focused on a book entitled, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* by Payne (2005). I was given a copy to review. New teachers were encouraged to read the text and adopt methods of behavior to gain positive results as well as understand student perspectives. (This was already said in Limitations section)

Some teachers may have attended workshops at the school several years back. However, all of them had access to the book. I felt I had encountered a homogeneous bias with the white teachers. Payne's (2005) idea about white optimism may have been what I observed when the teachers focused on student successes. Payne viewed black people as pessimistic.

A criticism leveled against Payne in a number of articles was that she believed that white standards were superior, better, and more optimistic. I returned to the school for an extra day to record and interview one of the black teachers. I also informally talked with several others. Their perceptions about student progress and success were the antithesis of the white teachers. They seemed to be predominately focused on failing students. These two views seem to support Payne's assertions. However, successful students do not erase the fact that the other half was failing.

The fifty percent dropout rate of black students has been a national focus. There is something legitimate about this concern. Payne's over simplification of optimism attributed to whites may be what McIntyre discusses in "white talk." It might be a resistance to the facts of student failure. Not wanting to acknowledge that they may have some responsibility in that failure. In the short term Payne's ideas gave the teachers legs on which to stand. In the long term, I believe the student deficit model harms students. The ideas in the book seem to be designed for teachers to maintain control and not necessarily to develop authentic caring relationships with students that facilitated educational and personal growth.

### **Colleagues and Relationship**

It was stated by the interviewees that the white teachers in the school supported each other and were friends outside of school. The black teachers, however, complained that the white teachers did not even speak to them. Consequently, each felt alienated from them. One stated, "I get tired of trying to make them speak to me...It's like I'm invisible"; she was visibly angry about the continued disrespect.

It appeared that the relationship that the white teachers developed with students did not include relationships with teachers of color. They seemed not to be a part of the camaraderie. Many of the black teachers were raised in similar conditions as the students and might have provided important information for the white teachers (Howard, 1993).

There appeared to be an incongruity and a possible compartmentalization of relationships, which questions the teachers' commitment to authentic relationships with people of color. Was relationship used as a tool with students rather than a genuine caring and affiliation with them? Why did that caring and relationship not extend to the African American teachers in the building? (A very good question. The contrast shows attitude, belief, motivation, and possibly fear.

## **Conclusion**

During the investigation "previously unknown relationships and variables ...emerged [which were] leading to a rethinking of the phenomenon being studied" (Merriam, 1988, p. 13). I wrote in a journal some of what I was questioning, which is an important element in qualitative analysis (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). I also wrote about general observations and feelings. What I believe I was seeing in the black teachers' account of student progress and white teachers' account is illustrated in Payne's book (2005) as a difference in perspectives. Neither perspective is ideal in this situation because it only illuminates part of the story.

## **Data Analysis**

After transcribing several of the interviews, I used open coding to categorize initially some of the information (Creswell, 1988). Corbin and Strauss (2008) stated that coding is "like "mining,"--digging beneath the surface for hidden treasures" (p. 66). Creswell also noted that it was important to "identify a central phenomenon" (p. 57). I conducted twenty interviews in total. There were people not in the target population who I felt necessary to interview to gain a broader perspective, though their information may not directly be reflected in the findings. I interviewed a couple of administrators, counselors, substitute teachers, a white female college student, community members, and two generations of black mothers.

I have included a number of qualitative writers' ideas in this paper such as Merriam (1988), Creswell (1998), Corbin and Strauss (2008), and Maxwell (2005), and many of their methods for data analysis. I believe the strengths of qualitative research methods are that each theory advocates asking questions of the data, segmenting, creating categories and organizing them (coding), identifying relationships, avoiding standard ways of thinking, comparisons, contrast, rearranging parts, triangulation, contextual unity, and reflection. Journaling and writing memos as well have been a significant part of my data analysis. What is most important is a "critical connection with the research question" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 102). From the data four major themes emerged: teachers' adolescence experiences, agency and self-efficacy as unveiled through self-reflective problem solving, relationship and language, as well as teachers' self-care and benefits.

## **Weakness**

When the qualitative research results or findings are documented, it tends to be in narrative form. For some who are quantitatively inclined, reports such as this may be seen as an inherent weakness. Some may believe that the analyzing process is subjective, therefore fallible, just one person's opinion, which may also constitute a weakness. Numbers, charts, and mathematical computations are believed by some to be more reliable and objective. Also, with this work, according to practitioners, claims about one site's findings cannot be applied, generalized, or broadened to include other similar situations. Therefore, the relevancy of the findings may be limited.

However, attempts were made to "raise the concepts of study up to a more abstract level where it can have broader applicability" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) in the future. After reviewing tapes, I thought about the broad themes. I would have liked to ask follow-up questions but could not, given the physical limitations of distance. Since there were no follow-up questions, a weakness of this study is the inability to ask follow-up questions of participants. One example might have been, "have you personally encountered a cross-cultural situation or concern that confronted your previously held beliefs?" My colleague, however, did return to a couple of the participants that she interviewed to obtain more information about the teachers' adolescent years. Another weakness may be that students were not interviewed and classroom observations were not conducted, which may have supported or contradicted the teachers' comments during the session.

## **Transcription and Possible Directions**

I reviewed and transcribed the entire tapes of nine of the targeted population of white teachers and one tape with the African American teacher. , I have used one of the administration tapes, and notes taken from the other for the discussion concerning black mothers. A colleague of mine, who is a white female teacher, conducted interviews with three teachers, fifty years old and above, which represent about 35% of the teaching population in America today. She used her own digital recorder. (Two of the three teachers interviewed are currently teaching in suburban school districts, but had previously been teachers in an urban district. One recently retired, prompted by an incident with a student in her classroom.) Since the co-interviewer used her own

recording device, I had to transcribe the material before I left the city. One of the participants whom she had known for years seemed to hold back information, and she was subsequently interviewed a second time. I also transcribed the second interview as well as the other three.

To transcribe some of the interviews, I listened to the tape and typed what was stated. I bought a program called Dragon Dictate, by Nuance. The software was invaluable, I listened to the tape recorder and then spoke the words into the head microphone and the words appeared on the screen. The voice recognition program was about 95% accurate so the screen had to be watched carefully. I had to rewind the tape many times to be as accurate as possible. For a slow typist, or people who want to dictate ideas quickly, this saves some time.

Initially, the transcripts were mined for broad themes and categories. They were typed out in paragraph form with headings. I asked questions of myself as suggested by Strauss & Corbin, (2008) and continued to question what I saw. I had to figure out what new direction the interviews had taken given the unexpected events surrounding the new population and teacher training. With large sheets of white paper attached on the wall, brainstorming sessions showed relationships between categories. I asked myself a number of questions about the data and pondered deeper meanings of words, ideas, and how teachers' beliefs influence word choice. More reading was required, especially around language, because teachers had been trained and were conscious of their use of language. Therefore, it was difficult to find the deeper meaning behind words and phrases that were already censored.

I had ongoing discussions with an individual teacher who assisted me in questioning my ideas and offering suggestions about clarity. I e-mailed each section to him; he would read it, make comments on the document, and return it by e-mail. When it appeared that I was being biased, he pointed out the sections, and I rewrote them after lengthy discussions. Often the Skype sessions lasted from two to three hours. I continued this process on almost a weekly basis for more than a year.

I also asked a retired school administrator to review the entire document, which served to triangulate the data as well. An editor edited the dissertation as well, and she had questions of her own that I clarified in the document. Finally, for a couple of months



I worked with the writing center to complete the dissertation. The retired administrator and teacher in particular provided needed critiques that helped to clarify the results and findings. During the entire process from data collection to discovering themes and writing findings, I was constantly present to my personal bias. There was a concerted effort to be as unbiased as possible. The findings were written in narrative form, which completed the analysis section of the dissertation.

### **Counselor Lens and Conducting Interviews**

I was trained as a counselor. In my interactions with others, the counselor's lens is not separate from my perceptions. Words are thoughts and the participants stories speak to their perceptions. Being a counselor and counseling others has also made me keenly aware of and in touch with feelings, other peoples and mine. It is important for me to develop an immediate connection during counseling sessions. When speaking of the interviewee and interviewer relationships (Maxwell, 2005) stated that "conceptualizing your relationship in terms of 'rapport' is...problematic, because it represents a relationship by a single continuous variable, rather than emphasizing the nature of the relationship" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 83). During the session there was more than rapport there were many different emotions, stories, and ideas expressed.

Teachers in the study on average had about forty-five minutes to spend during the interview. A couple had less time than that. I needed to create a warm, safe atmosphere within the first minutes of the encounter. Therefore, I greeted teachers at the door with a warm smile. I thanked them at that point for agreeing to the interview. When they sat down, I explained the interview process briefly: the first section was covering demographics, and the second, six questions about a specific cross-cultural problem situation would be asked. This seemed to put most of the participants at ease. One of the teachers stated a couple of times, though, "you caught me off guard." However, she gave a thoughtful account when discussing some reservations about classroom problem solving situations.

Another way to create amicability was when I asked a question, I looked at them, saw them and "really" listened to "what they were saying and doing" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 67). I showed personal concern about the individual when I asked, about their daily practice i.e. walking, Tai Chi, yoga, self-cultivation, meditation, contemplation, or

other activities. Some of those who found it difficult to find time, I asked where they could find ten minutes for themselves during the day. I was genuinely interested because such activities reduce stress, and as teachers, it would be important to reduce stress in order to be present with students.

I also matched their moods and energy; I felt empathy for them. Whether they were sad, or laughed, I was present with that. There were a couple of women who felt ostracized from their suburban community because they did not fit the accepted standard of beauty. I understand these feelings, and I was there with their pain. One of the counselors' skills or abilities is to be able to ride the wave of the emotion for a moment with the client long enough to understand the depths and then pull out. It is like dipping your toe in a cold pool to check the temperature and snatching it back. This happened a number of times during each session. One has to be careful to never "dive right in head first." I think the teachers understood that I genuinely cared about them. Why? Because their life is inextricably tied with all of life, and helping them helps everybody.

Finally, at the end of the session I gave each a movie ticket. I had not mentioned this when I asked for volunteers; one of the participants said that if teachers had known this in advance, maybe more would have come. This too was a selection strategy; I only wanted people to interview who genuinely wanted to help. I believed they might be more forthright and assistive than those coming for a movie ticket.

### **Perspectives on Answers**

When asking the questions about demographics, especially about where they went to school and where they currently lived, I wanted to get a read on teacher comfort when answering. One of the complaints about white teachers is that they do not live in the community where they work. Not being familiar with the students' culture and lack of experience may contribute to the problem situations that they encounter on a daily basis in urban schools.

Two of the teachers appeared uncomfortable when I asked where they currently lived, because they had gone to school in urban districts. One said in a low voice "I'm back there." When the data was analyzed, the words that people spoke, how they were spoken, informed me about teacher self-efficacy. For example, during a pilot study about teacher problem solving behavior, the respondent said, "I can't do it all on my own, ...I'm

glad I had somebody on my side." This, for me, was a demonstration of a lack of self-efficacy. She said she could not do it alone. People who have self-efficacy set a goal and know they can accomplish their goal.

### **Summary**

Case study is the appropriate way to answer the research question dealing with problem solving behavior of white teachers working through relationship with black students in urban schools. This section illustrated what I did as it related to data collection and analysis. I discussed how the counselors lens influenced this process. The journey I found myself on was not the one I had planned. I contacted my former supervisor months before I conducted the field study and contacted several of my colleagues in advance.

For two weeks I wrote, phoned and visited people without results, and my time was getting short. I felt anxious. In the end, I got no results from the initial contacts made. Nearly every step during this journey had an unexpected twist, from conducting interviews in a district that I had no affiliation with, to teacher training, and subsequently interviewing black teachers. Organizing the data and creating systems was particularly challenging. Writing memos and notes was also difficult because my time was limited to a couple of days to conduct about eleven interviews. And there was little time left in the day to write observations. There was a tremendous amount of figuring out of these various systems in order to make sense of the process. I extended physically and psychologically beyond my comfort; I had to be flexible, a problem-solver, a strategist, and be ready when the opportunities arrived. A couple of times interviews had to be recorded "on the spot" given the "thick, rich" information that was shared.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Research Findings**

This study was conducted in an effort to understand white female middle-class American teachers cross-cultural self-reflective problem solving behavior with African American students in urban schools. A qualitative case study approach was selected for the study. A non-probability purposive sampling technique was utilized. Each participant was interviewed using an open ended semi-structured questioning technique. This approach allowed a qualitative researcher “to get at the inner experiences of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 12). Qualitative research recognizes “serendipity and discovery” (p.13) as important characteristics of the methodology. As a result the qualitative researcher is “unafraid to draw on their own experiences when analyzing materials, having rejected more traditional ideas of ‘objectivity’ and the danger of using personal experience” (p. 13).

The chapter includes the four emerging themes and the research findings generated from corresponding data. The broad themes are Teachers’ as Adolescents, Agency, Self-efficacy and Problem Solving, Relationship and Language, and concluding with Teachers’ Experiences and Benefits. Demographical information will be included in the first theme, Teacher Adolescence that contextualizes behavior and personal approaches to problem-solving cross-culturally. Individual experiences, stories may demonstrate how one participant differs from the next and might also show commonalities in experience and how their upbringing influenced their relationship with students.

Two different school districts are represented in the study. There were six teachers interviewed from district number one. A white female colleague conducted interviews with three teachers in district number two October, Lee and Pem. The second interviewer in district two placed greater emphasis on school experiences such as the “problem situations” and less on the early childhood development of the participants. Consequently, the early life experience during adolescence is sparse.

After several interviews were conducted with group number one, homogeneity in the participants’ responses became obvious. The assumption was that there might have

been a school-wide training program, because each participant used the same phrases for example, “you have to develop a relationship with the students.” It was decided that a new perspective outside of that demographic might be helpful to get a sense of the dynamics at play. Eddy, was the last of the school personnel to be interviewed at site number one, she brought a somewhat different frame of reference than the previous participants.

Eddy is an African-American teacher. As one of only a handful of black teachers on the site, she may be easily identified. She was not in the target population, and therefore offers an alternative view regarding that particular urban school situation. In the final section, Eddy shares her insights on white teachers’ relationships with black students rather than explicitly revealing her own relationships with them. What she does say may give the reader a different view of student teacher relationships in that school. The following section entitled Teachers’ as Adolescents examines the participants’ demographic information and provides a brief biographical sketch of each.

### **Theme 1: Teachers’ as Adolescents**

Following this brief introduction participants’ demographic information will be provided including their adolescent biographies, which is the first theme of the study. The teachers in this study, as adolescents, had a variety of experiences in their home, community and school. Some of these events and early expectations influenced their teaching philosophy, and interaction with urban students decades later. The impact that teachers and parents had on them, as youth, often informed their values, beliefs, perceptions, biases, presence and self-concept as students and as teachers. Early experiences, especially with people of color or diversity in general seemed to have had a positive influence on their relationships with the urban students they taught.

#### ***Luie***

Luie is a thirty-six-year-old white female. She is currently a Humanities teacher in a Mid-Western urban high school, and has been teaching for eleven years. The student population in her school is about 85% African-American. Also in attendance are white, Latinos and other students of color that comprise the remaining 15%.

Her childhood was spent living in a suburban community, while attending school in the inner city as part of a desegregation initiative in an urban school district during the late eighties and early nineties. Luie enjoyed her life while in attendance there, having taken a great interest in the variety and diversity that the city had to offer. Of her school, she said that there were “all different people, all different styles...it was pretty fun.” To explain further, she remarked, “I was always involved in stuff; all my friends lived down there. Comparing her suburban life to her urban experience, she asserts, “I loved it. It was so much better than the suburbs. I never fit in out there.”

Luie felt that she did not fit in her suburban community. She was a creative, artistic person and chose to attend an urban school that allowed her an opportunity to be creative and different. She appeared to be inquisitive, confident and a risk taker. Very few suburban whites elected to participate in the urban desegregation initiative in the city, where the majority of the student population was African-American.

Luie was expected to go to college “The biggest requirement for my dad...was that we’d be happy and productive members of our society,” she explained, “But, we could do whatever we wanted. I had to have A’s in school,” she noted, because if not she would lose privileges. Luie stated, that because she went to school in the city, she was not aware of the suburban community’s expectation of her. However, one idea that she did remember from her suburban community was that for some girls, “there was that subtle pressure to get your Mrs. when you go off to college...to be honest with you, we didn’t pay much attention to anyone in my suburban community.”

However, the expectation for girls and boys in high school seemed as if “there was some pressure that girls would be more [into the] humanities and boys would be more [interested in the] sciences.” She recalled, “girls that were involved in the science areas or mathematics tended to be talked about.” Luie’s dad was in the math and a science related field and she felt that she had an aptitude for the subject, “Math and science was easy for me.” Comments made by her classmates, particularly the female students about such girls, would include, “they [are] weird girls, weird girls doing that.”

Most of her classmates in the inner city were black students. And many of those blacks were girls who tended to be less confident in school (AAUW, 1992), which may be one of the reasons for the negative comments. She went to the city in the evenings,

where “my parents trusted me to come out...go to some coffee shops, and do all the urban stuff.” She seemed not to be afraid to go into the city during the day or at night. She had “fun.”

Luie’s experience in an urban environment allowed her a level of integration, understanding and comfort among the African-American community. She appeared to be confident and at ease with her self, her use of language, and incorporated urban vernacular in her linguistic style. She seemed not to demonstrate any awkwardness in speech or worry about “saying the wrong thing,” doing the kind of “wrong thing” that a less experienced person might. She showed signs of being self-efficacious. A deficit model of student behavior was not evident. Luie may have benefitted as a teacher from her interactions with strong black girls and boys in the inner city during her youth.

### ***Olivia***

Olivia is a forty-two years old white female. At the time of the interview she was a History teacher in the same district where she grew up. She had taught for 14 years. The demographics of the district began to change during the late eighties and early nineties, when the student population made “almost a complete mirror flip” she explained. It changed from a predominately white school district to a predominately African-American one. Latino students and a number of other different ethnic groups also entered the community.

In describing the high school curriculum, prior to the shift she said, “I wouldn’t call it tracking...they had split level classes. They [used to have the] accelerated programs [and] they had the gifted programs. You saw a lot more of that then than now.” Now, after the changes, she noted, “It seems like, even though we still have a gifted program, *we focus a lot more on remediation.*” In other words when it was a suburban school the curriculum was more challenging and became less so as the student population became blacker and browner.

She grew up in that suburban community and went to school in that area from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. She spoke of her parents’ commitment to her education thusly, “the bottom line [was], you were going to go to school. You went everyday, unless you were deathly ill...and you went on to college.” Her family had a long, proud tradition of “loyalty” to the district and to education. She currently lives in the same area.

Toward the end of her high school years, she attended school with blacks and with a number of other diverse ethnic youth as well. When blacks and minorities moved into the community most whites left the neighborhood for the new suburbs as they had repeatedly done in urban centers throughout the area. Siegel-Hawley (2011) stated “school district boundary lines—[are] powerful but invisible constructs that remain among the most fundamental barriers to equal educational opportunities” (p. 1). As the school became increasingly African-American, many of the advanced curriculum offerings were lost and a more remedial curriculum was instituted.

Speaking about her own family’s expectations about education, Olivia explained, “The bottom line [was] you were going to go to school. You went to school everyday, unless you were deathly ill.” Her parents allowed to participate in athletics and drama in high school, and she was expected to go to college. When talking about girls and boys in school,

It always seemed like they expected the girls to achieve more...looking at scores, looking at reading levels. They had accelerated programs...I can remember being broken up into advanced reading groups...Always seems like there were more females in a lot of the advanced reading” groups (Olivia).

Whether the disparity between verbal/reading or math/science differences between females and males is biological or purely social, Olivia’s accelerated reading classes reflected this divide (Orenstein, 1994). It appears that her family instilled in her a sense of loyalty to place and a stick-to-itiveness. This may point to a level of security, confidence and sense of self that allowed her to remain in her childhood neighborhood and teach the students of color.

Exposure to an increasingly multi-ethnic community may have given her a level of awareness and knowledge that helped her as a schoolteacher in an urban center. Olivia is the mother of several biological children who are bi-ethnic, a combination of Latino and white heritage. The family is also bi-cultural, celebrating both traditions. The level of personal affiliation and care that comes with having married a Latino man and having bi-ethnic children gives her a rare, intimate insight into what it means to live as a person of color in America. This exposure may be an asset for Olivia as a teacher living and working in an urban school milieu.



## *Vera*

Vera is a thirty-one-year-old white female. She worked in an urban school and acknowledged, “To be truthful, urban schools are where I feel more comfortable.” She had been teaching for eight years, her primary focus was with students who were “impaired” in some way.

The first part of Vera’s childhood was spent on military bases. Later she moved to a suburban American community. Her father had been stationed in the Middle East and in Germany. “On the base... there was a mixture of races, and we would go to different places.”

Being in the military, it’s just the mixture of all the cultures and, you know, a lot of... I remember every year we had a multicultural event where we would... I did China one year. Another year, I did Indian. I had a hard time with that one... India. But we [had] to experience and we had to research and experience and, it just... I think that broadened my... me not being like my grandparents (Vera).

Vera’s grand parents story will follow directly after this brief comment on food and a festive approach to learning about different cultures. Banks, (1996), Gay (2003) and other researchers caution against the “food and festive” approach to multi-cultural education. What may be unique in Vera’s case is that she also had a number of different cultural experiences first-hand, for an extended period. She interacted with many different groups on a deeper level than food and festivities.

Vera had the opportunity to meet different people from all over the world, “so it doesn’t matter to me” about their ethnicity. However, her family had a history of hue bias towards one group or another. She spoke of her grandparents’ bias and their use of the word “nigger,” but failed to see her parents’ bias towards Native Americans explained in the following quotation. However, she says that she personally breaks with family tradition and believes in the equality of all hue-man beings.

“You know, my best friend is African American. Now, I have grandparents who are very against [them] (small voice: they’re very racist)... I think...the military helped out a lot, because I didn’t have a chance of... my parents grew up in little towns in Wisconsin and there was a Native American population, but they had bad feelings towards them, so they didn’t...you know, it was mainly Caucasians. And my grandparents are racists, you know. I will (unint.) that they are. They use the words that I get on to them about it all the time. I hate that word (Vera).

During her adolescence she went to school in a mid-western affluent suburban district. It was difficult. In school Vera, experienced discriminatory treatment because

her family was not affluent and their income was less than many of the people in her suburban community. She explained, the school dynamics was dominated by, “the stuck up people and everything.” Cliques were the norm and she never felt comfortable nor did she fit in even though she said, “I went to a Caucasian high school.” The school culture alienated students who dressed differently; those whose appearance did not fit the standard of beauty, and students who were not wealthy. She spent a great deal of time alone in the library or with other students who were also discriminated against. Though the student population was white she and a number of others were considered “misfits.”

She was ostracized in school, but her parent still expected her to do well in school. And “The main expectation...was to go to college.” Her parents held traditional ideals about girls’ behavior.

I had two brothers. They were older, and they kinda set the expectations where...I wasn’t supposed to act like them [or] get in trouble like they were. I was to be the good child, that went to school [and] got good grades. I never went to the principal’s office, never got in trouble. I did my best to...My teachers expected toward the end of my high school career, when they learned you know, who I was, they learned me. And when I would speak out in class and they’d be like, “That’s not you. What are you doing?” (Vera).

The parental and school expectations she encountered reflect what Orenstein (1994) found in her research study of adolescent girls. Girls were expected to “be good,” to get good grades, not get in trouble and to keep quiet. However, Vera began to test the cultural limits through rebellion when she became involved with a new set of friends.

Um, the friends I was hangin’ out with... I switched to a different group and, we just, I don’t know, I followed them. [I felt] more free...I felt like I was kinda in a, well this phrase I use, kinda in a shell. I was, I did work, I went home, you know, I went to school. I didn’t do anything outside of it. Once I got in the group of friends that I currently have, I began to explore more; I had more freedom. I felt more, you know, well, they can say something and they don’t get in trouble (draws the word trouble out, voice rises, like a revelation). I can do that, too. (Laughs.) (Vera).

Banks (1996) asked his readers to grapple with the question, “Can one be both an insider and outsider of a group at the same time?” People belong to “many groups, how can we determine which group has primacy in the formulation of an individual’s perspective” (Banks, 1996, p. 53-54). Having been exposed to poly-cultures, Vera was able to recognize different groups of people, as her equal and determined that choosing one group may not be beneficial. Maybe she could choose them all and leave the question of insider or outsider later to be answered in every present moment, depending on whom she was with (Meijer, et al., 2011).

She may have been comfortable with a variety of people but she insisted that her “grandparents are racist...they use that word [nigger] that, I get on them about it all the time. I hate that word.” She seemed to have a particularly difficult time dealing with “the word nigger,” because her best friend, whom she loves and cares about, is black.

Another important experience that seemed to have influenced Vera, as a teen, was the freedom she found when exiting her shell and Middle-class boundaries that had once enveloped her. She found her voice and a sense of self when she broke from the “quiet girl” convention. This breaking away might have contributed in positive ways to her work in urban schools that expect women to speak up. Vera remarked, “To be truthful, ...urban schools are where I feel more comfortable.”

### *Emma*

Emma is a thirty-two-year-old white female who teaches science and technology, and has been a teacher for six years. She felt grateful to have the ability to help the students, and believed that helping is what she was “supposed to do.” She stated, “I enjoy the process of learning...I try to treat [my students] with respect...I try to be a safe person.” She said that her strong Christian faith helps her through the difficult moments of teaching.

Emma was home-schooled for four years by her mother before high school from grades three to seventh. Emma also attended a private school but she did not say how long she attended or when she entered, “I’ve had a kind of mixture of schools.” In that mid-western city it is entirely possible to live in a segregated neighborhood within the city and not have many or any children of color attending the neighborhood school. This may or may not have been the case when Emma entered school as a kindergartner. Initially she grew up in the city and moved to a rural/suburban area during her freshman year of high school. When she went to the public rural/suburban high school there was not much hue diversity. Consequently, she did not have any significant experience with the diversity of various ethnic groups found in urban populations during those years.

A high school education was important to her family, she explained. A high school diploma was enough, “I, my parents, came from a rural country background. And so, you know, they were good with their high school [diploma]...Uh, I’m the only one in my immediate family that has gone to college and gotten a degree.” She was a student

athlete during high school and played a team sport for the school. Of her parent's expectations for her own education, she recalled,

[They] just wanted me to do the best that I could do. Um, they really didn't pressure me to go on to college. But I just naturally wanted to go...and to do that. Uh, I'm the only one in my immediate family that has gone to college and gotten a degree. I... my parents came from a rural country background, and so you know they were good with their high school degree and so. They just expected me to do the best I could do and they supported me, whatever (Emma).

The expectations she felt while in high school were associated with sports. The girls had a good team. However, the boys' team was not as good, and the girls "were expected to really carry..." the school reputation. The fact that the girls' school sports team was actually expected to carry the school may have helped her to develop and understand agency and self-efficacy. In that case, girls were given a great responsibility to carry the schools' reputation in a particular sport. This level of expectation for girls may be rare, according to Orenstein, (1994). Having such a responsibility could have positively influenced her self-concept. Speaking about her ethnicity, she commented that there is quite a bit of adoption in her family, "so I don't know where the tree branches." Emma seems to have grown up in a predominately mono-cultural environment.

Emma may be able to relate to her urban students concerning educational choices because of her own family's educational achievements and perspectives. Many African American families also want their children to get a high school diploma. Some think about college for their children, while others carry the sentiments of Emma's family; they are "good with their high school degree." What was interesting about Emma as a participant was she had experienced another form of diversity in her home, growing up with two siblings that have disabilities. She had to confront, alongside them, some difficult social issues, discrimination that many people with disabilities deal with; in particular, the idea that difference equals deficit. Many Americans have not had this often-sobering experience of difference as deficit.

Siblings with disabilities provided Emma with a model of resiliency that became a part of her personality. She appeared to have a tremendous amount of empathy for her students. Even though she may not have had much contact with people of color her family scenario offered her the opportunity to wrestle with difference and difficulty. Watching and helping her family members in their struggle made it easier to identify with

the urban students that struggle. Being a member in that unique family seemed to have assisted her in developing resiliency and self-efficacy that allowed her to dream beyond family expectations and graduate from college as noted by Bandura.

“Efficacious students are motivated to succeed; they set higher performance (e.g., grade) goals, expend more effort to reach those goals, and are more resilient when difficulties arise,” (Bandura as cited in, AWE 2008, p. 2).

### ***Paula***

Paula is a fifty-six-year old white female, who taught in the area of communications arts and accelerated courses in the humanities. At the time of the study she had been a teacher for fourteen years. Paula grew up in a small-town rural community and she was expected to go to college. In her rural high school she remembers an incident with a counselor that shaped her decisions as a teacher of urban students. “I remember taking computer science courses where I was discouraged, as a girl.”

Most girls in the school took Home Economics she explained, but “a heckle of my friends and I, we wanted to do something different, so we switched up,” [as a way] to stand out as a student, and be a little different than the next person.” That personal experience had a lasting influence on her attitude when advising urban students. Paula and a few friends took the computer science class anyway.

She recalled, “There were only three of us girls [there,] and the teacher start[ed] questioning, why it was so unbalanced. [All] three of us...had the same experience, where it [had been] recommended for us not to take [the class]...I think the computer science [teacher] was upset...we knew, visibly, that he was upset.” This happened during her senior year in high school. Paula did not remember much else in the way of different treatment of girls and boys until she thought about it a bit longer.

I don't think every class had that sentiment. It was just [for the] kind of exclusive, higher-level thinking, definitely math-science type class that, I think...we were discouraged. 'Cause of the traditional roles [the counselor ascribed] for girls and boys. In junior high, and even in high school, when you're doing electives...there was a heckle of my friends and I [who] wanted to do something different, so we switched it up. That was very nontraditional, 'cause most girls did home-ec and the boys did (unint.) shop (Paula).

When asked if there were repercussions faced by these girls, she said, “Um, well, I was always one of those good kids. I would do what you wanted. I wouldn’t make your life difficult as a teacher, I guess.” As a “good kid,” a girl who has been socialized in this way, according to Orenstein (1994) it is telling, that she did not “notice a huge difference.”

This may be part of the hidden curriculum (Orenstein, 1994; MacLeod, 2008) discussed in their books, where unwittingly these culturally scripted expectations and ways of behaving are passed on, from the teacher to student without either being aware. As a result, students are shaped in such a way that it is invisible to them, even as adults. The roles feel so unquestionably natural, comfortable, to the individual like a fish in water that it goes unnoticed for decades in as in Paula’s case, for more than a half-century.

However, Paula appeared to be a risk taker who “switched it up.” As a result, some part of her wanted to explore, to be free and independent from scripted roles. She said, “I think it was part of that trend and of wanting to stand out as a student, and be a little different than the person next to me. And so that was one of the ways I was able to do that.” She seemed to take pride in her risk taking behavior in junior high, and believed it gave her an advantage. “I did what most of the girls didn’t do. And we built some things in shop class that my girlfriends didn’t get to do.”

AWE (2008) also emphasized, “Self-efficacy beliefs are developed through the interpretation of performance outcomes” (p. 2). She appeared to be proud of what she had made. The spirit of wanting to be, and taking a chance, to be different may be an asset in teaching in urban schools. Difference, in this case risk-taking, was desired, and she benefited from the experience.

Paula has two bi-ethnic children, whose heritage and cultural groups includes both black and white American. In American marrying across ethnic groups is also a risk, especially with blacks. She worried about her son not having homework and his teacher not pushing him to do his potential. She felt comfortable with the urban youth population and spent summers touring other countries with them. When asked about taking time for herself or taking a break, especially during the summers she remarked, “I don’t feel like I’m in a job where I can just set it aside.” All of the activity spent

engaging with students does not feel like work, she asserted. “They make me laugh. I mean I genuinely enjoy hanging out with them.”

### *Erin*

Erin is a thirty-nine year old white female. She taught in the area of linguistics for the last nine years. She grew up in a “kind of rural and suburban” area. When asked about her parents’ and the schools’ expectations for girls, she stated that she had “never really thought about it.” After a moment she said,

Um, I think they both said “you can be all that you want to be in life.” And “sure, go ahead,” but they were like, you gotta do the dishes first. You know, you need to do that first before you go play that sport, or that basketball...And I don’t even know necessarily that that was my whole schools mentality [so much] as it was individual teachers’. You know, like some of the teachers pushed me more towards academics, whereas I wanted to do athletics (Erin).

She wanted to be more involved in athletics, and coaches would “literally tell [her] ‘when you gonna get your brother’s ability?’ Straight up?” The coaches measured her by her brother’s athletic abilities. But she said, “I wasn’t as athletic as my brother.” Some of her teachers did seem to know what else might interest Erin. She explained that, a few teachers in the school directed her more toward academics. She stated, “I had teachers who were like, ‘God you gotta read this book, you’ll love this book,’ you know, so it wasn’t necessarily...it was like they were saying, yes you can do what you want, but only if it’s in this area.”

She indicated that,

At home, it was kind of the same thing. Sure, you can try and (unint.) play soccer; don’t quit. You know, they always kinda made me doubt myself. So it was, I don’t know, to be really a strong individual (laughs) with those mixed messages, like that. Because my parents [were] like ‘sure, go ahead and do it.’ But I had the most chores, between me and my two brothers. You know, I don’t remember playing as much or doing as much as they did. You know, by the time it got around to my turn, my parents were always out of money (Erin).

Erin was the youngest child in the family. “It was like they were saying, yes you can do what you want, but only in this area.” However, instead of the mixed messages discouraging her, she insisted that they made her stronger. It appeared that she might have had some resentment about adults pushing her in directions that she did not want to go, and of their “mixed messages” that resulted in self-doubt. When it was her turn they were also “out of cash” which was frustrating for her.

However, her early experience of being out of cash was a benefit in the urban school where this is a real issue for some students and their families. Erin knew that the lack of money tended to limit opportunity. Some of her students experienced doing without regularly. The disappointment arising from that condition can leave an individual angry and resentful as Erin herself had felt. However, Erin believed that, for her, growing up in such conditions was, “I think...[it was a] asset, because I am a pretty strong-minded person.”

This kind of self-efficacy is probably an essential ingredient for success in teaching in an urban school setting. She also recognized the need to reflect on who she was “being” when she entered the classroom each day. Her upbringing and the difficulties had her to dig deep to find herself, which was her strength. She was aware that “[her] attitude really affects the class,” and her relationship with students. Many of the students and their parents called Erin’ the youths second mother. She cherished the sentiment. This is the black tradition of bringing others into a circle of high regard. If she had an “off day,” they would say “whoa, what’s wrong with you today?” At other times they brought her gifts, like mothers day cards to show their appreciation and that touched her heart, “I’m like oh my God, I’m crying. I’m a teacher I don’t cry.” (laughed)

### *October*

October is a fifty-six year old white female. She had been a teacher for more than twenty years. She taught in an alternative school setting while in an urban school district where, she acknowledged, “Until I understood, I wanted to change them. I had to change my attitude about many things.”

She grew up and went to a public high school in a suburban community. Both her mother and father were professionals. Her parents were traditional in their expectations of girls and boys. When asked about family and school expectations for girls, she said they were “to go to college.” She also stated, that girls were “...to get married” and there were certain jobs meant for women. “Women’s careers were teachers, nurses or secretaries.” However, she described herself as someone who did not identify with her assigned role.

I felt big and masculine. I was a tomboy and I liked it. I thought being feminine and helpless was stupid...in a different, sexist way, I thought I was better because I was more masculine. Men had more power and I felt that I was part of that power, because I was more masculine.



When asked about the treatment of boys and girls in her school she said,

As a student, I was unaware of teachers treating girls or boys differently. In grade school, the girls were smarter than the boys. I didn't feel like any of the boys were my equal.

She appeared to be a gifted athlete. An Olympic track and swim team wanted to train her, but her mother said no.

When I was quite young, several people wanted me to train for the Olympics, for track and swimming. Mom rejected the idea without any discussion. Being a kid I didn't think about it until I was 18. Then I was angry. So much of my not even thinking to question Mom's authority on these questions was part of my generation's way of thinking. We were of the authoritative structure, where adults ruled, no questions asked.

Orenstein (2008) would agree with her statement. Girls are taught to be silent and not to question authority figures.

October also thought that she might want to study law. Her dad's response discouraged her when she told him her plans.

I talked to Dad about going to law school (he was a law professor.) He condescendingly said. 'You not only have to love the law, you have to love studying.' I never confronted him about what he meant, but I didn't apply to law school and later questioned why I had let myself be influenced by him. His words were a slap in my face, and I simply complied rather than having a conversation about that.

The family traditional values would not allow for her brother to become a musician, as he wanted, but instead he had to become a professional like his father. Today he is passionate about his music and the instruments he plays.

Though she felt offended by her father's comments, she did not ask him to clarify and explain what he meant. While October tended to identify with what she termed "male masculinity," this identification did not extend to questioning her parents. She kept quiet. She may not have developed self-efficacy, critical thinking skills, and the ability to speak up for herself. Personal courage and a skills gap may have had an effect on her teaching in urban classrooms where she believed that the students needed to change to fit her ideal. She no longer teaches in the inner city, due to unresolved conflicts she experienced while there. However, she believed that the relationships she built with her students were important, particularly in, "bringing them examples of things they didn't know that they didn't know, [but] that they [would be] glad that they knew later on."

***Pem***

Pem is a sixty-one year old white female. She had been an educator for twenty-plus years. She grew up and attended school in a suburban neighborhood. Her parents' expectation for her life was "clearly, that I'd marry somebody and [so] I didn't need a college degree."

She was an art department supervisor and resource teacher in an urban middle school, where she taught three classes. "The rest of the time," she explained, "I was, you know, to be organizing and supporting the other teachers." She mentioned several times that she was the head of the department, and that the job was "a difficult situation," because she "had to coordinate a lot of stuff."

She enjoyed organizing and coordinating more than being involved with the people and had difficulty as a teacher in the inner city schools understanding the culture. She tried to make sense of the school environment, what went on there seemed to confuse her thoroughly. Pem complained about one of the teachers with whom she worked, "I mean, I had to do my job. And [I felt like] she was doing everything she could to sabotage me, from doing [it]." (laughed).

She believed the teacher in question did not like her because she was white, and explained, "It was obvious. It was like, well, she doesn't like any white women. (laughed). I'm lumped in with the bunch of them."

Pem is currently teaching in a suburban school district. She may have had difficulty because she was white in the urban school. Possibly in part due to her misinterpretation of her experiences that made her feel like a victim and created hostilities in the school. She believed that something was wrong with the inner city population, students, parents and some teachers. Presumptions based on inaccurate information may not have assisted her in understanding the environment. Years after she left the urban school she remained convinced that something was wrong with the people in that urban community. She seemed to be unwilling or unable to use self-reflection in order to determine whether she had contributed to her negative experience in the urban school.

***Lee***

Lee is a fifty-eight year old white female. Lee taught in the arts for thirty-two years. She said of the student population, "I think more than half were African-

American...maybe 40% Hispanic, uh, the other 10% might have been Asian, ...Caucasian, [and] from other countries like [those in] Africa, the Middle East.” What she liked most about teaching was “seeing that ‘ah! ha!,’ that light bulb experience, and the expressions of the students you’re teaching; when they understand a concept you’re teaching.”

She grew up in suburbia. Her parents expected her to go to college and have a career. They were interested in her college education and wanted all their children to “go into a field that we were interested in...Do something we enjoy doing.” In her home, she and her sister did jobs around the house with their mother, such as cooking, sewing and cleaning, while her brothers performed yard work and tinkering around in the garage with their dad. In this regard, the roles of females and males were traditional.

In school, she did not notice such a difference, although she believed that girls were more academically inclined than were boys. Boys seemed to be involved in sports more than girls. It appeared to her that boys had more behavioral problems and got more attention than girls. This idea was supported by Orenstein’s (1994) research. However, in her school, contrary to Orenstein’s (1994) findings, “girls volunteered to answer questions more, so they were called on more.”

An incident occurred with a student in the urban school where she taught that persuaded her to resign her position and retire. She was reprimanded as a result of the incident and was told not to touch the student again. Since what she taught the student included hands on corrections, she indicated, “that was the moment that...cemented in my mind, that...I...needed to leave, needed to retire.”

### ***Eddy***

Eddy is a middle-aged African-American woman. She was one of several black women interviewed. However, she was the only one that was formally taped and asked interview questions. Others were reluctant to participate. Eddy grew up in an urban community and currently lives outside of the city. She has taught for nearly fifteen years, and currently teaches an elective course. Teaching was a second career for her.

Eddy grew up in the urban core and her parents expected her to graduate from high school and go to college. In answer to the question, did she grow up middle-class, she stated,

You know, it is kind of...hard to say. I guess I was middle-class. Or maybe I was lower middle-class. I don't really know. I mean, we didn't have a lot of things. But, um, we were happy. I would say middle-class, but not the upper end of middle-class (Eddy).

Her parents divorced before she was ten-years-old. She thought her living conditions remained the same afterward, however as she talked, she became somewhat unsure of her earlier statement.

I would say, still, uh, my mother worked hard to try to make sure there wasn't a really big disruption. Um, and you know, I think I still have, maybe being so young, maybe I didn't realize it was a lesser quality. And you know, I remember. I think back now that there were nights that all we ate were, you know, like hotdogs and pork and beans. Or it was (unint.), hot meat sandwiches. I didn't think any thing about it then (Eddy).

### **Summary**

The Teacher as Adolescent included a variety of home and school experiences. School and families for the most part supported traditional ideas about male and female roles. There were a few exceptions like Emma on the sports team and her schools expectation for the girls' team to maintain their reputation. Vera asserted her independence and talked back in class when she made new friends and Paula took a computer science class instead of home economics. The entire group of girls however seemed to be within an acceptable norm for middle-class female behavior as Orenstein's (1994) study concluded.

### **Theme 2: Agency Self-efficacy and Problem Solving**

As adolescents the teachers seemed to follow the rules and roles in school and at home. For the most part life seemed comfortable and thus voiced no strong objections to cultural expectations. Males were usually in charge at home and school. If the girls had a concern with adults it was not often talked about, as October stated. Paula mentioned that she was not a student who made trouble for teachers.

For urban youth making trouble for teachers is not usually a goal. However, in the inner city many of the suburban rules and the roles do not work. Girls and women are vocal they "speak up" to adult males and female alike. The rules for behavior, and engagement, in urban areas have been reinterpreted to fit the milieu because struggle against the "problem of the color line" is the norm and that extends into the classrooms. Erin suggested that black students are not always the victims. She also claims that she

does not see color. There is a miss-match that can create problems for urban youth in the form of teacher denial of issues associated with discrimination against people of color. Students lived experiences demonstrate to them that color counts even in school whether the teacher is aware or not. Black teachers are resources that can help white teachers understand urban youth.

This can help white teachers see that difference is not a deficit. Collaboration with teachers of color may avert serious problems and repercussions for student behavior in the future. The teacher's ability to solve or manage problem situations is critical. Small issues like a student not bringing their pencil to class, talking back, or fighting, can escalate into major confrontations. Teachers have to be skilled at recognizing authentic problems and avoid unwittingly or unintentionally creating catastrophes (McIntosh, 2011). Michelle Alexander a civil rights advocate and lawyer interviewed by (Sokolower, 2012) said, "Instead of schools being a pipeline of opportunity, schools are feeding our prisons... Schools aren't meeting the needs of inner city kids" (p. 2).

Some teachers do not want to talk to youth about behavior, choice, detention and prison and many of them do not see their complicity in the situation either. Alexander believed that teachers should be "willing to take some risk...there is a lot of hesitancy to approach these issues [talk about prison] in the classroom out of fear that students will become emotional or angry" (p. 3).

Schools are a place for students to explore their minds, emotions, behaviors agency, and choices. Teachers must become comfortable in a cross-culture situation where expressing emotions and dealing with difficult topics are the norm. Schools are thought to be safe when the adults in them are safe and have self-knowledge that guides them in humanistic and wise ways (Brooks, 2011; Palmer, 1988). A historical, and cultural perspective may give teachers insight into student behavior, and perspectives by knowing their roots and have them not worry so much about "saying the wrong thing," as opposed to saying nothing at all. Banks (1996) believed that is "[b]ecause multiculturalists view perspective-taking as an essential part of creating authentic unity" (p. 51) in other words a school community.

Olivia's discussion illustrated her understanding of urban students and what it takes for her to solve problems and teach them,

Our kids are about [being] fair. You have to be respectful, you have to understand that it is mutual respect...and at the same time you have to be firm. You have to say 'these are the rules and this is how it's going to go.' You know, because, and they'll test you...I believe this. Nine out of ten of the kids, they're okay with it...it's that one percent, you know...(Olivia).

Having self-knowledge and being fair when solving problems is one way that teachers' can demonstrate care and self-efficacy. Teachers do not get an automatic "pass" in urban schools because students want to know about individual integrity first. As Olivia mentioned, she chose to be respectful and accepted mutual respect and fairness as a way to teach successfully in her room. She chose to be fair and firm and that worked in her classroom and demonstrated self-efficacy.

On the other hand Erin was self-efficacious in her assessment of her ability to set goals and accomplish them. What is important in the understanding "self-efficacy is the exercise of human agency" (Bandura, 1995, p. 2). For example, Erin disclosed, "When I set my mind to do something, it will get done." She recognized that she had a choice, which is personal agency, when setting goals. She further explained, "You gotta look at the different situations and stuff but... if I know I'm going to do this, I do it."

In considering what Erin and Olivia said about students and problem solving, Bandura (1995) acknowledged, "problem-solving skills require effective cognitive processing of information that contains many complexities, ambiguities and uncertainties" (p. 6). Not all of the participants were as explicit as Erin was about her ability to complete a task but many demonstrated their competence. Therefore, one could observe agency and self-efficacy through the participants' words and actions when they dealt with problem situations. A few participants seemed not have understood the complexities of situations that they face. This led to a possible inaccurate assessment and ineffective strategies to resolve the issues. Inaccurate analysis of a problem situation may color the teachers' experience of students in that environment, believing them to be hostile towards whites and possibly being afraid of them as Kohl (1994) suggests. If teachers are afraid of students, or are unfamiliar with the culture their judgment may be impaired when trying to solve a problem. Pem, a new teacher in the middle school, revealed,

[T]here were some boys that were, um, harassing some young girls. And I sorta stepped in...I told the boys to go where they were suppose to be. [O]ne of the boys was real belligerent...I, I touched his elbow...and he slammed me up against the lockers, (laughs) Whack! (Pem).

She came to the conclusion that “there was a rule or something that I didn’t understand when I first went into the inner city, that you don’t touch [a student.]” Her inexperience working with the community was evident or her interpretation of the problem might have been incorrect. For example, it could be as simple as angry people do not want to be touched and may become violent if they are. Posner (1973) believed that making an accurate assessment of the problematic situation is important. During the interview for this study, which was decades after the incident Pem held to her initial assessment, and belief of an inner city rule.

I work in all the mostly Caucasi..., see I have Indian, and I have Asian and I have some black children but, but those kids hug and touch me all the time, you know. It's not like you can't touch. But there was, there was a rule or something that I didn't understand when I first went into the inner city that you don't touch. Even a slight pat on the shoulders [to say] "you're doing a good job," it's like you don't, or whatever. It was like "Don't." Very much, hands off. Physically it wasn't, I wasn't to touch (Pem).

It was obvious that the decision that Pem made to touch the boy did not work for her and neither did her interpretation. The conclusion that Pem chose made it difficult for her to have an authentic relationship with students due to her fear of touching them. Given her belief she was unable to find another possible reason for the student’s violent behavior decades later. Her inaccurate assessment and lack of understanding led to avoidance behavior. According to AWE, (2008) for women, dealing with “the lack of self-efficacy potentially leads to avoidance” (p. 144) behaviors. Pem appears to have “slipped into uncritical talk that reified myths about children of color” (McIntyre, 1997, p. 45) and her “white talk” perpetuated that invention.

Self-efficacy is not necessarily a static position; it has a fluidity that is tested during many life situations and decisions (AWE, 2008). Being able to reflect on ones own actions and contribution to a problem is essential. However, some administrators who feared teacher abuse may have had this rule, which was often ignored. Today the “no touch” policy was put in place to prevent sexual abuse or the perception of it. However, teachers and students in the inner city schools touch each other, which is a natural behavior for hue-mans.

Olivia on the other hand seemed to have accurately assessed the problem situation that might lead to student success. She had known the student as a freshman and he was a junior in high school. They had a long and challenging relationship according to

Olivia. She appeared to have accurately understood the student's issues when she explained, he thought of himself as a gangster,

He had this self-image of himself of, you know, every picture he took, throwing up a gang sign, doing whatever. And I'm like, "Really? In your Hollister shirt, are you kidding me?" And um, you know, like through the years, he has been a work in progress (Olivia).

Olivia understood the student and his culture, and his sub-culture as gangster, which she called into question. She appeared comfortable with the words, phrases and problem analysis of the cross-cultural interaction and was unafraid to challenge the student's behavior. When talking about this student's school performance, she said, "He does nothing...I'm telling you, he's got a .89." One day, she decided to have a conversation with him about doing nothing, she explained,

Sometimes, I think you need to pull them aside and, and have the *heart discussion* with them. He was giving a girlfriend of mine fits this summer, at summer school. He had expectations for himself, as far as basketball. He's quite bright [and] his scores are off the chart. [Yet,] he does nothing. That's the mentality I can't understand. How do you come to school every day and do nothing? Um, and you know, we just sat there and I said, "You know, I'm just wondering why you keep coming up here. Because I really like you and you're really smart, but, but you know what you look like to me? You look like that guy, 40 my age, old, talking about 'shoulda, coulda, woulda, I could've played high school ball, I was gonna, I was going to college, I was doing...' [And then] seriously, all of a sudden, oh "my gosh," he won't leave my side. When they[students] came back [after the summer break] he met with the counselor and started looking at his classes try to get him back, by some miracle, to graduate on time. Which is going to be hard (Olivia).

His response to her heart to heart conversation was unexpected. Her language made contact and impacted such that the student wanted to graduate from high school. There could have been many conversations before but that one conversation in particular inspired him to change. What might have happened had she not challenged his behavior? She knew what to say and how to say it; in that case she said the "right" thing and he heard her heart. Gay (2000) explained, "Caring interpersonal relationships are characterized by patience, persistence, facilitation, validation, and empowerment for the participants" (p. 47).

Okay, he picked me for his advisor and I've got him for two classes. Today I've seen him three times...we spent the entire day together. Me and him, I, it is difficult let me tell you...[but] It's fine for me. You know I don't know, you know it only works with some. Some of them it doesn't work with. You know, I mean I don't know (Olivia).

Bandura asserted, "The stronger the sense of efficacy, the bolder people are in taking on



problematic situations that generate stress, and the greater their success in shaping them more to their liking” (1995, p. 9).

One of Emma’s black female students questioned her about why she was teaching in an urban school. The student was aware of the negative societal characterization of inner city youth. Emma’s self-knowledge allowed her the confidence to confront the situation openly and honestly, although her ideas about being colorblind, to hue and its meaning, may limit the teacher’s view of what a particular child might need, given their unique experience in a specific ethnic group living in this society.

[Y]ou know I, as a white teacher, uh, coming in, and she’d make comments like, “Coming in here, teaching all these crazy kids...” No, no, I don’t see it like that... my job is to teach, your job is to learn. And I don’t, don’t see that... I wouldn’t approach it as a race thing. The cultural thing doesn’t have anything to do with it (Emma).

Sleeter as cited by McIntyre (1997) said, “white teachers commonly insist that they are ‘color-blind’; that they see ‘children’ and do not see ‘race’” (p. 15-16). She questioned, “What does it mean to construct an interpretation of race that denies it” (McIntyre, 1997, p. 16). Emma explained,

I felt like my response was pretty immediate... I had thought through, you know, um, the teaching and why I wanted to teach.” She told the student, “[I]’m out here for you. And I’ll work with whatever’s here that I need to work with. Um, so it was really more of a sense of wanting to put her at ease (Emma).

Emma’s sincerity in helping the students was authentic and apparent. Her words matched her behavior. It may be important for Emma to rethink her position on colorblindness and her stance on ignoring culture because urban teaching is about color, and class. The position that she holds will not help her student succeed in a color conscious society. Unwittingly, whites may embrace the colorblind position because, “[they] are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative and average, and also ideal. So, when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow ‘them’ to be more like us” (McIntosh, 2011, p. 1).

Paula had a student who was constantly playing with electronic gadgets during class time.

He absolutely has no interest in what we’re doing in class. And he would much rather spend all of his time messing with his phone or his iPad, whatever electronic devise he’s got with him that day. I try to redirect him; he becomes very angry... it doesn’t matter how it’s said or done. I’m trying not to put the spotlight on him... I will tap him on the shoulder... If I am real subtle about things,

he'll put it away, but then ten minutes later, it's out again. He cares about his grade...because he needs it for graduation...so he's doing just enough. He thinks he's gonna be okay in the long run. I don't know if I have any outcome yet (Paula).

Paula was persistent with her requests for the student to put his electronics away but she struggled with what was fair for the student since the schools' policy about electronic devices was ambiguous. Paula and Olivia struggle with the same issue of what is fair and respectful to the student. I feel like "if I try to take his cell phone away, then why didn't I do it for the other four people that I said, 'Put your phone away.'" She further discussed teacher cell phone use, and parents calling students during class. Finally, the building policy had already been revised three times, and nobody had a clear sense of how to proceed. She said that that is "probably the number one frustration of a lot of colleagues." (laughs). She disclosed,

I'm genuinely concerned about him, overall...He's one of those kids you worry about. What's next for him? Like, where is he going to go? He doesn't have the skill set[s] that I would want him to have at this point (Paula).

As far as the resolution of the problem situation,

Um, I don't feel like anything's been resolve[d] to the point where I need [it] to [be.] But, beyond just the student I, I feel like I need to resolve issues around electronics better, too (Paula).

For Paula, it was important to be fair and not blame the student for the entire problem. She utilized self-reflection as viewing the problem situation from a number of vantage points. She recognized the ambiguity in the schools electronics policy. She related her efforts in helping this student to her own children.

She has a bi-ethnic son, and was concerned that his elementary school teacher may not insist that he pay attention in class. She was also worried that he was not given homework. She believed that it was an inner city problem not a "race" problem. She said of her children, "I guess that's one of my biggest frustration[s] is I don't want somebody not to push them."

Here again the teacher, the mother cannot understand how color would play a role in whether a teacher pushed her son to perform or not. Do teachers expect less from themselves and their students in urban schools? What happens to a middle-class white female teacher when she enters the inner city that makes her expectations for urban

students education any different from her expectations when teaching white students in suburbia? What kind of “urban thing” is it?

October demonstrated a sense of agency when she discussed a classroom incident. She was confident in her ability to deflect a direct question and “flipped it” back on the student. She explained while,

In a classroom introducing a topic, one of the young men said, “Why do we have to learn somethin’ like this?” And instead of being defensive, there are ways to kinda deflect the direct question. I had to keep going with what we were talking about. And then addressed him, and um, say, “You know, you know there are, there are things you wanna know something about. Education is knowing something about something.” And I turned it around to say, “I don’t want, that I was getting old and I don’t want people that are going to be in charge to be stupid.” And I’d just said, “We need an educated society.” I said, “You’ll need to know something when I’m old and you’re taking care of me.” And kinda flipped it, and tried to make it a little more relevant, for when they had jobs, what they needed to do. [I] turned it on to them, in terms of hoping that they would engage more in their education (October).

October appeared to have a sincere interest in her students and their education. She also demonstrated self-confidence in her approach to the problem situation. However she might have made an unwitting assumption about students’ future employment “taking care of me.” What did she mean, doctors or any number of nursing facility helpers? Is it possible that they could have a job other than taking care of people’s bodies in the future? Does she believe her students can be anything they choose?

October did recognize early on that she did not understand what to say, what to think, or how to behave in the urban setting. She wanted to be an effective teacher and wanted to help students. Consequently, she continued to challenge many of her preconceived ideas (West, 2000). As a result she went through a number of changes,

I had to change my attitude about many things. It was difficult...Initially, I had to get over feeling so sorry for them...I had to realize, quickly learn, to validate their circumstances without feeling horrible for them. Or feeling so sorry for them that I was ineffective...projecting my “oh poor kid, nobody should expect you to do anything,” and that’s not true...How could we make it better? (October).

She was up against a “steep learning curve,” and was trying to unlearn what she had once believed. These underlying assumptions about the students seem to become unearthed during conflict and as part of authentic interactive relationships. The bias such as the caretaking job may be a hidden bias (Orenstein, 1994; McIntosh, 2011) from her view, and so carries such a normalcy that she never recognized it as an issue. Her

statement could be interpreted in many ways, (Cupitt, 1998) however given her initial ideas about “oh poor kid, nobody should expect you to do anything,” one might wonder whether she thought about them becoming doctors. Sometimes, caring alone may not be enough, and feeling sorry for them does not help them. In fact they may view themselves as powerless victims. Teacher self-awareness, especially when working with different ethnic communities, is essential. Gay (2000) stated, “positive and negative teacher attitudes and expectations have profound effects on student achievement” (p. 46).

Lee’s classroom problem situation was with a young African-American girl who refused to follow directions.

Um, I had a, a, girl in my class who, uh, was, I would describe as “oppositional,” and she would refuse to follow directions. Uh, she would do, she, would almost, do everything she could do to do the opposite of what I asked her to do, or told her to do...And when that happened, when that would occur, uh, other students would notice and make comments. Then she would, uh, react to them in a number of different ways that were destructive to class, destructive to the teaching process and the learning process with the students (Lee).

Lee stated that whenever the students did not like what she [the girl] was doing, “they would make comments...or make fun of her. It would escalate...almost to a screaming match, between her and other kids, or her and me.” She tried a number of strategies,

I tried every strategy I could. I tried to ignore it, I tried to, um, catch her, you know... catch her doing what I asked her to do and, and reinforce that. Uh, I would put her in a, a, after a while I would isolate her from other children. You know, it started happening the closer she was to other kids, you know, the more, you know, comments would be thrown back and forth. And so I, I tried isolation, I tried time-out areas, I tried, you know, discussing the problem with, with the parent. Um, sending notes home, a number of different strategies (Lee).

Lee assessed the problems and developed a number of strategies to deal with the student and nothing seemed to work. She became frustrated with the student at one point.

I became very frustrated. And at one point, and the specific incident that I am thinking of occurred, uh when I just lost complete patience and, and (laughs), there were other students who were screaming at her, and she was screaming at them, and the only thing I felt I could do to defuse the situation was to, you know, take her by the wrist and, and lead her out of the room to another classroom teacher, another buddy teacher, and just remove her from the situation (Lee).

After the incident, the child went home and told the parent that the teacher had abused her during the problem situation.

I guess she went home and, and told her mother that I dragged her out of the room and manhandled her and, uh, I was, I, I ended up being called into the office with a conference [with] the mother and

my principal, and [I] was told not to put my hands on her again, and that that was inappropriate and, uh. That afternoon, um, after school, I was given a reprimand letter by my principal (Lee).

Lee said of the incident that she was,

Stunned; I was thrown off. I really didn't defend myself. Uh, I felt like afterwards, I should have and should have explained how I got to that frustration level where I did have to, you know, take her by the wrist and lead her out of my room. And I didn't (Lee).

Orenstein's (1994) idea concerning suburban girls being taught to be silent, and not to speak up for themselves, may have been at work during the teacher's conference. Lee was brought up in a traditional home which might not have encouraged girls to speak up for themselves. Being stunned, thrown off and afraid of possible reprisal might have shut her down as well. Lee seemed to be immobilized during that situation. Meijer, Korthagen and Vassalos (2011) discussed how teacher presence "means that the full awareness of the here-and-now, which is what presence is all about, encompasses and connects both the teacher's self – and his or her strengths – and the environment (p. 8). Being stunned is being present to the emotions, not taking into account the here-and now of others and the environment or being able to speak up. Lee appeared not to be able to find her footing in that situation to defend herself; something that she regretted.

She taught movement classes for children for many years. And she had never had any trouble touching children, correcting posture and steps, giving friendly pats on the back for a job well done. After thirty-two years of teaching she was told,

After the meeting with the mother and my principal, um, where the mother expressed that I was not to ever touch her again [even if she] refused to leave...the room. After the mother left, I was told by the principal, but my principal that he knew that she was trying to find a reason to bring a lawsuit against the district. And that I'd better be very careful what I did with this child or I would be the reason for the mother having a reason to bring a lawsuit against district. And he told me, "Just be very careful. Don't touch any of your students because it will be misconstrued (Lee).

Lee had touched her students for thirty years. Her case is different than Pem's case in that she had not had any problems touching children during those years. It was natural for her to do this. She was told not to touch in order to avoid a lawsuit. What was similar in Pem's case and Lee's situation was that the child was angry. If there is an unspoken rule it is not to touch people when they are angry unless that is your job.

Gay (2000) suggests building relationships in advance of problem situations.

That may fail also, and then call qualified people for assistance to deal with the situation. Once teachers lose patience, and use force as a compliance strategy they are no longer safe or in control of themselves. One incident in thirty-two years of teaching led this teacher to change the course of her life and retire. This teacher said that she was,

Very kinesthetic, you know. I don't want to say [a] touchy-feely person, but you know, I think sense of its touch; you can really connect with, with kids and need to at that age. And I thought I can't even lay a gentle loving hand on a, a student's shoulder, and uh, because it might be misconstrued. And that was the moment that I, I for me, cemented in my mind, that, I, I, I needed to, needed leave, needed to retire (Lee).

### **Summary**

In general, Lee appeared to have a sense of self-efficacy and presence, and also an idea about what it would take to be an effective teacher in relation to students. However, when Lee lost patience with the child that one incident changed her life. How each problem situation is managed can make a tremendous impact positive and negative on student and teacher behavior.

Throughout the interview process with white female teachers, there seemed to be an inability or unwillingness to deal with hue, or color which in truth lies somewhere beneath many problem situations in urban school. When Emma claimed not to see "race" when the girl confronted her about her choice to teach in the inner city with these crazy kids. Or when Pem touched the students elbow, and got hit she came to believe that students, teachers, and parents were prejudice because she was white. October believed that her whiteness and her complaints about the treatment of a number of girls got her dismissed from her job.

It has been interesting to note that a few of the teachers could see themselves as victims in urban schools due to their skin color (Hill, 2008). But no teacher recognized discrimination that students of color might have experienced in school as a result of bias directed towards them. The color blindness appears to exist when students make the claim. The conclusion might be that hue; "race" could be an important underlying factor during problem situations in urban schools for students and teachers.

### **Theme 3: Relationship and Language**

The teachers' choice of words is a willful act, in other words intentional. Words create worlds internal and external for them and their students. Teachers' language reveals their beliefs and their care and regard for students. Luie explained how keeping her cool and watching her language and "staying as polite as possible" when involved in

conflict situations with students, set the tone in the classroom for the year. It allowed students to see that she was safe and fair.

Luie asked one student to move to another seat because of his excessive talking. He refused to move. She told him to leave the classroom and he did not comply. The teacher informed the student that she would have him removed by security if he did not leave on his own; he said, "Do it." When she went to the intercom and called the office the student got up and walked out of the classroom before security arrived.

The teacher chose to call security rather than attempt to remove the student herself. Sometimes when children are small teachers overpower them as in Lee's case and the child often feels violated. However, when students are larger teachers tend to call administration. When entering the classroom on the following day the student sat where the teacher had asked him to sit the day before. She stated,

He's never moved out of that chair since. Just the fact [that] I wouldn't back down, I wouldn't get rude, and I wouldn't yell, I knew I had to stay calm [because] the whole class was watching. I knew I had to address it quickly, 'cause I'm taking away from their education. But in the end, I've never had another kid not move where I needed [him or her] to go in the classroom... Um, that was my first confrontation of the year with a student. And that's always the roughest, 'cause the whole class is watching to see what are you going to be like. If you back down, or you get rude, or you don't keep your cool, the whole year you gonna be fighting with kids (Luie).

She also discussed what she had really wanted to say,

I wanted to lose my cool. (laughs). I wanted to pull them (unint.) What the hell, this is my classroom. I said, "You need to move. You're being a disruption. Get your butt over there like you are supposed to." But I didn't. (laughs) Just take nice deep breaths (unint.). "You broke the agreement; you need to move where I tell you to in my classroom." And that's actually really helped me later on, because [there have] been numerous times when the class starts to talk, (unint.) and I say, "Have I ever been rude to you? Have I ever disrespected you?" "No, Ms. ...." "Then you need to give me the respect, and I need you quiet to listen to me." So... (laughs) (Luie).

It was not that the teacher was not angry clearly she was, but she used a strategy to help her to stay in control. Luie seemed to have done a considerable amount of self-reflection and analysis about her urban classroom. She understood the importance of her language, behavior and how that related to her relationship with students. She also appeared to have a high degree of self-control. "I figured out very quickly," Luie said, "that the kids really wanna know what they're going to get from you. They'll appreciate you more." She talked about sharing her authentic self with students, and contemplated their ability to adapt to her caustic personality.

I am, by nature, sarcastic, a kind of caustic person. The kids learned that really quickly, and then they learned that it's never personal. They start finding it funny, and by the end of the year, they're

doing what I want. But we're still able to get along. And I like that(Luie).

Luie seemed to take a great deal of care with her language, words and interactions with students, and self-knowledge especially during conflict situations. Luie appears to be “real” and authentic person with her students. She said, of her students, that she enjoyed them.

I love the kids. I, the interaction with them, I love talking to them. They frustrate the hell out of me. [But] they're kids and they're interesting. And you can make interesting (unint.) great relationship. I love being in the classroom, I really do. I've thought about moving on, and then (unint.) administrative degree, because I need the money, to be flatly honest. (unint.) [But] the idea of not teaching, everyday, (unint.) I won't go there. (Laughs) (Luie).

At the end of the interview, she talked about the lack of building critical thinking skills in American school children, and the effect that has on students. We are “losing some of the magic,”

I think that, as a whole, we're kinda shortchanging our kids. We're putting so much emphasis on measurable, quantifiable results, they're... we're losing some of the magic portions of education. And we're ending up with kids that are so spoon-fed, they've lost their critical thinking, the skill that is so vital when they get to college and when they get to the real world. With the way the economy is going, *I don't even know if preparing them for college is actually going to be the most important thing we can do for them anymore* (Luie).

Her last statement was important to note but there was no time to follow up on what she meant. What she enjoyed about her teaching style and her relationship with students was “I get to really start making them think. And that's why I like it.” Olivia commented that the,

relationship piece is the biggest thing. I mean, I sat in a Masters class, and these were educated people, and you were going through talking about your school, your demographics and what it's like. A lot of people have this stereotype and preconceived ideas about, “Oh you work at T.... Are you scared are, *you scared do you carry a gun?*” I am like, “Are you kidding me?” I mean I, I don't feel that way at all (Olivia).

Kohl (1994), McIntyre (1997) and Howard (1993) suggest that many urban teachers are afraid of their students. If teachers are afraid of their students it may be difficult to build caring relationships with them. Olivia thought that the teachers in her college class lacked inner city experience, and consequently accepted stereotypes about black youth.

On the other hand Olivia may have taken the opposite perspective of the teachers in her college classroom but she was still color-blind. However, being color-blind may not be helpful for students who are black, brown, red, yellow or white in urban schools.



I don't even think about this being an urban school. I don't think about, I mean, I've been here my whole life. (laughs) It doesn't even, they're all kids, it is the same; it's exactly (laughs) the same. It's a different building. I've got a different room, [but] nothing's changed. Kids are kids. I haven't seen one difference in the kids in fourteen years. It's always the same, you know, so we're all about, and you know the other thing, it's how to change it [toward] high expectations for academics and behavior (Olivia).

What appears obvious is that Olivia does have a good relationship with the particular student she profiled earlier. She described the student's intellect and behavior,

The young man, ...he tests off the charts. He did nothing [but] walk the halls for years. *Is that a system flaw? I don't know.* You know, but he is in the leadership class with me, and he does fantastic. You know, he's been down to the college center. He's met, you know, a variety of important people in the city. He's getting ready, you know, to take a trip. We're going to [a local] prison [where] we [will] have a panel of inmates that come out and talk to the kids. I mean, he's got scholarship potential [for] different things. You know, based on something besides his failures, he has the opportunity to be somebody different and have success and opportunity if he chooses (Olivia).

Even though the young man had test scores that were "off the charts" his grade point average was .89. Through the years she built a solid relationship with him. And due to a mutual trust and respect she could correct his behavior anywhere in the school building and he would comply.

You know what, the other day he was going through the security check in another friend of mine's line. I mean, nothing but attitude, "bro this" and "bro that." I asked him, "Who are you talking to? Why are you talking to her like that? What's wrong with you?" You know, I don't know, it only works with some. Some of them it doesn't work with (Olivia).

It is the language she used, the care she demonstrated through time that connected she and the youngster and her. It was clear that she was not afraid of him. Working with people "in relationship" has no set formula, Olivia explained. Teachers need to be able to relate to their students using their intuition, intelligence and wisdom. When discussing student achievement she said,

I think a relationship is the most important thing with *these* kids; building solid relationships. You know, they have things going on [but] this is not an excuse. I tell 'em this, "We all got problems. Hey you know they're going to turn my electricity off. We all got problems (Olivia).

Her humanity is evident when she revealed the issue that she was having with her electricity. Olivia seemed to be committed to this student's success, yet she was not prepared to admit that the school system or the teachers need to shoulder any of the blame for allowing students to walk the halls. Olivia was one person with a commitment and had been effective with one student.

However, drop out rates in the inner city reveal that half of the students fail. Kohl (1994) stated, “[S]tudents have no way to legitimately criticize the schooling they are subjected to...Not-learning is a healthy, though frequently dysfunctional, response to racism, sexism, and other forms of bias” (p. 29). He explained further, “It is uncomfortable to talk about the need to reject certain kinds of learning ...but without studying not-learning, we can get only a partial view of the complex decisions facing people as they choose values and decide upon actions” (p. 28).

Olivia emphasized that the dilemma in urban education is “how to change it [toward] high expectations for academics and behavior.” And high expectations have to do with teachers, students, parents, school administrators and government officials. Kohl (1994) suggests that teaching that comes “from the heart” must “connect with the teacher’s inner life and learning adventures” (p. 82).

Vera focused on apology as an important component of a good relationship with students. “My first year of teaching, I had a mentor who told me, you never apologize to a student. No matter what, you never apologize.” From that moment on, she decided not to be like her mentor teacher. Relationship matters and the language used when speaking with students is critical, especially when mistakes have been made,

If I do something wrong, I’m going to apologize. I expect that of my kids. You know, If they do something wrong they need to apologize. And through the years I had a lot of contemplation, [wondering] am I being respectful towards my students? Am I giving them choices, options, you know...” I say “sorry” if I do something wrong. ‘Cause everybody makes mistakes, and I let my students, and I will apologize, in front of the class. “I made a mistake when I was talking to M...and I just want you guys to hear me say ‘I’m sorry.’” and I expect that back of them (Vera).

The language of a sincere apology, when people harm others or make mistakes, is an important skill to have when working with urban youth. It opens a space for forgiveness and reconciliation and the ability to move forward,

‘Cause they know, “I’m sorry I shouldn’t have done it. “T hey get a little sick of it, but we always walk through and talk about what we could have done differently. Cause I always contemplate, what could I have done in this situation where I kind [of] got mad, so what could you guys have done different?” But it helps (Vera).

An apology may also signal the ability to be flexible, and not having to be “right” all of the time (Gollnick, Chinn, 2009; Cupitt, 1998). An apology can allow the parties in conflict to effectively deal with hurt feelings, to release their negative emotions, to put the situation behind them and to move forward. At the same time, an excessive and/or

insincere apology that is used merely as a tool of expediency to squash conflict or manipulation may harm relationships.

Instead of saying, “You need to follow my rules, this is how you do it. I don’t care (emphasis on care) how you’re feeling.” I mean, that’s not respecting them. So, its, I try to make it more of, kinda try to make it like a *family*. You know there’s give, and there’s take. You respect me I respect you. I give them options; I ask them, “What do you wanna do today. You know, do you want to do this do you want to do that?” (Vera).

Vera’s concept of family is supported by Kohl (1994) who emphasized that “Schools have to have a feeling of family and teachers have to be approachable if students are to open themselves up” (p. 83).

In contrast, Vera discussed an affluent district where she had previously taught. The feeling of family was extended to a number of wealthy students while other children were ridiculed for not having much money.

It was very, they were rich; the way it was put was “either you have a lot of money or you didn’t.” And, if you didn’t have money you are treated differently. It wasn’t like we were all the same; all here to be educated and to learn. Like, the teachers would treat the kids differently, and the kids would treat each other differently as well. I had one kid, and he had no running water [at home,] nothing. He would come in [to school,] and shower [here.] Then he’d come to my classroom and we’d wash his clothes. I’d have clothes for him to change into. And [the other] people just looked down on him. [But] he has no control over what his life is like. Why would you do that? Here in [an urban school] however, no. It’s shocked me beyond belief, [that] with these kids, they’re all the same. They [urban students] all love my kids. They treat ‘em with respect. They’re very decent towards them and toward each other (Vera).

Her surprise at the urban youths’ empathy and acceptance for her students seemed to be one factor that made her urban teaching experience rewarding. She had been ostracized as a child because her family was not wealthy. Kohl (1994) said, “My own teaching is shaped by my dreams as a child and my school experience. I can connect with my students through myself as a child. It is important for teachers to connect their work with children with their own childhood aspirations and dreams, as well as with their best and worst learning experiences” (p. 82). Both Vera and Paula tended to be keenly considerate of their students’ well-being in a particular way based on a negative incidents that happened to them during their own adolescents.

Paula enjoyed student achievement and her relationship with them. She laughed often and appeared to receive pleasure from the interactions.

I think it’s, uh, in itself gratifying when I see this happening, but I think one of the things I enjoy the most with achievement, specifically achievement, is when I see a student make connections that I didn’t have to feed them. Like, I’m not assisting them; like it came out of nowhere and

[they] made a connection to something we read, [to] something that we are doing now. And I get really excited and enthusiastic when I see that kind of stuff. But when I try to think [of the] big picture, [like] why do I come to school every day, why did I pick this career...I laugh every day. I know that there are days I hate hanging out with the kids. (laughs) and I'd rather be somewhere else. But on most days, big picture, I'm just very happy to be able to work with the kid; they make me laugh (Paula).

She seemed to have developed a sincere relationship with her students, and valued the mutual exchange. She explained,

I mean, I genuinely enjoy hanging out with them and getting to know them, you know. I'm thirty-[some], and feel like I'm kinda removed from their world. I'm the old person now, but it's just fun to learn new things from them, and to be able to bring new things to the table for them too. So, I just enjoy working with the kids (Paula).

The “computer science incident” in high school, where girls were not assigned to these classes continued to impact how she related to her students decades after that personal experience (Kohl, 1994).

I guess what I want most for them is, I want to see them [become] a success at whatever they're doing next. I don't pick their path for them. I don't want to pick, “college is right for you, but not for you.” It's kind of like the science class, the computer science class that I was telling you about. I don't want somebody telling me “this isn't for you (Paula).

She also recognized that her ability to connect and have relationships with boys was easier for her in class. Orenstein (1994) and the AAUW (1992) report cautioned that teachers ought to be conscious of their interaction with female students. It appeared that Paula was aware of her limitations in connecting with girls.

I kinda had, I think, between the boys and girls, I have a better time with boys. I have boys at home, too. I think that might be part of it. I think there's just a whole other approach I have to take with the girls (laughs). (unint.) I know, like, at this age, um, they don't have any problems with quick wit, [and will] say something back [to me] that they maybe will regret later on. Their emotions are all over the place. I've been a cheer leading coach forever, too, and all of that drama. I definitely feel like boys are a lot easier in class. I'm a little bit, hum, I know I'm better with boys, but I'm more conscious with what I do with girls. Because I know I'm not as good with [them.] (Paula).

In Paula's description of girls, describing “their emotions” as “all over the place, or the “drama that goes with girls,” tends to reaffirm the stereotypical ideas about girls that may find voice through the hidden curriculum (Orenstein, 1994) it may also negatively impact her relationship with girls. It also reflects society's view that women and girls are too emotional.

When talking about a conflict situation with a student centered on the students electronics use in her classroom Paula explained,

I'm trying to build a better relationship with him because I think that's the only (unint), I am going to be able to get to him (unint). And so, through either, like, conversations that I'm asking him, even as he is walking in the door, I comment about something he's got going on, or ask [a] question about his weekend or something like that. Just trying to get him to see that (small laugh) I'm not the bad guy. I'm not trying to make his life miserable, but trying to learn a little bit more about him... He's, like a typical (hesitation, break) boy in the class (unint.). Girls do those kind of things, too. (Laughs) (Paula).

What Paula said about “typical” boys mirrors her sentiment about girls. She caught herself, and very softly changed gears, “girls do those kind of things too.” In some sense, she appeared to harbor traditional ideas about girl and boy behavior that seemed to mirror that of her former counselor. Orenstein’s (1994) research spoke to the hidden curriculum and counter-productive messages that are sent to both girls and boys. What seemed to be different is that she was at times aware of her limiting statements and attempted to correct them during the interview.

In helping both girls and boys in the school, Paula mentioned a supportive systemic approach that teachers and school personnel instituted to help each other and care for students that created plans to address student issues.

One area that I haven't really mentioned is just that whole kinda support system the teachers have, too. And this is not like a big enough problem that I think I have to go to one of those counselors for, or have to take to the wellness group or advisement... we also have kids [who] they were singling out, kids that we know need special help. And now we can go about helping them (Paula).

Erin’s initial attempt in creating relationship with students was not entirely successful. She explained how she first tried to be “nice” to the students.

From the first time, for the first couple of years, um... I was all brand-new teaching, you know, of course. But I was a little bit older. I think that helped me in this setting, but I still didn't know what I could say [or] what I could [not] say. I tried to be, oh, nice and tried to be, you know, this and that and the other—*what my ideal of what a teacher was, what I had known in my high school and college*, you know. I quickly realized, um, no (laugh). They saw right through that, right through it, you know (Erin).

She did not want to say the wrong thing. She was unsure of what she could and could not say (McIntyre, 1997). Erin had to confront her philosophical ideas and untested beliefs about the meaning of equality when working in the urban school. What caused the hesitancy in not knowing what words to use or maybe not being whom she thought she was?

Um, to be honest, I had always thought of myself as a very “open” individual, just because of the way I was raised, and everyone is equal. You know, this and that, but I find myself [thinking], “God, can I say the word ‘black’?” (laughs) You know, without them getting mad. I didn't know what type of jargon to use. What exactly I could say, couldn't say, and gosh [if] I say this, I don't want them think I'm prejudiced, or this or that, because I'm not. You know, the farthest thing from it. So in that way I learned [for] myself a lot better. You know, because wow, I guess I wasn't what I thought I was (Erin).

Erin had real-life experience with black youths that caused her to question her notion of who she was, and her philosophical beliefs about equality. Through self-reflection and her changing relationship with students in the classroom, she was able to know herself better. Doing so benefited both Erin, and her students (Palmer, 1998a).

To accurately assess her reactions to students, she often “steps back,” reflects and examines (Korthagen, 2005) her responses to the situation. She believes as Vera did that it is important to apologize in a to student/ teacher relationship when harm has been done.

I have learned myself, in the fact of when I get overwhelmed, and I go, “okay I need to step back. This is what this kid did, and it didn't really warrant my reaction.” It was my reaction, or I did it. You know, I'm pretty reflective on a daily basis. And you know, when I know I [have been] wrong, I do go back and I say, “Hey, sorry for my behavior. I could have approached you a lot differently.” In the urban setting, I think that's important, you know, because our kids, most of—I'm not saying all of—they, are raised in a defensive way. “Oh you're out to get me, *I'm always the victim.*” You know, [they] need to realize that it's not always like that. You, you have to (sigh), you know, motivate yourself. You have to know when you, yourself have done wrong, that you don't always do the right thing, all the time. You know, you really don't, no matter your age, whatever, really. I think that takes me a lot farther with kids, too. Cause they're like, “Wow, she just apologized to us (laughs) (Erin).

Erin seemed to recognize that she made mistakes and needed to apologize to students for them. She realized that when she made a mistake that an apology was necessary to support the relationship. Sometimes students may view these mistakes as teacher bias. Students could be mistaken on the other hand, Erin may not be aware of her personal bias as a number of studies in this dissertation suggest. Student reality seemed to have been explained away by some teachers as it related to color in this study. Students in urban America have been victimized. It has been noted that whites believe that there is very little discrimination against blacks and Erin's view might reflect this idea.

When Erin said “You know, because our kids, most of—I'm not saying all of them— are raised in a defensive way. Oh you're out to get me, I'm always the victim. You know, need to realize that it's not always like that.” Students may or may not be raised in a defensive way as Erin suggest, it could be that experience teaches them to respond in such a way.

Erin is correct, in her victim analogy students must be taught the difference between victims and victimization. It may be difficult for students to realize that Erin wanted to help them while many who look like her have hurt them (Kohl, 1994). Blacks fill the various socio-economic ranks as do whites and have diverse life styles. What follows is a deficit model of the poor black single-parent home, a textbook example of white talk.

I recognize our kids, *they are not taught that at home*. A lot of our kids come from single-parent homes, you know, [with] parents always working. So they have to deal with stuff by themselves. And so I, I feel that's a large part of my job; not just teaching (Erin).

This view might be described as a “difference as deficit” model. Erin appears to have a number of deficit ideas about students, but she also seems to be committed to help students succeed given her current knowledge and experience.

Are urban students “always the victim?” Kohl (1994) asserted “Poor people have to not-learn despair if they are to survive” (p. 28). Can students trust the system and teachers who populate the system to treat them as equal? October’s relationship with her students, in the beginning, was challenging. Trust had to be developed.

What I found most difficult in the classroom, when I worked with, uh, inner city kids...is they had to trust me. They had to figure out who I was and why I was there. Inevitably, and class would start, [they’d ask,] “Why are you teaching here? Weren’t you good enough to teach out in the suburbs?” I mean, they would challenge me as a person (October).

Students challenged the material she chose to present to them as well, wanting to understand its relevancy to their lives. Dewey’s (1964) work often questioned the relevancy of what students were learning in school. The questions that the student asked about the lessons seemed to corroborate his concerns.

And again, the approach was to back up and to have to stay authentically me, and I would try to break the tension that that caused, with either humor or music, or something visual that they saw me relating to effectively, like a movie. I would have to, have to preface it and say, “Oh we’re gonna watch a movie. Even then, they would challenge me because I would show movies such as *Glory* or, um, *Amistad*. “Why you always showing us movies about black people being oppressed?” The biggest challenge, ah, was being authentic, for them to listen to me. And that just took time to develop...(October).

In this case students did not want to view movies that depicted them as slaves and victims as Diop (1974) points out. Movies like *Amistad* and *Glory* not only show black oppression, dealing with slavery, they demonstrate white brutality. Understanding history and its underlying social conditions is paramount to imparting an understanding

of it to youth. However, urban teachers should select educational materials thoughtfully. Kohl (1994) asserted, “Textbooks [and film] destroy black people’s identity by starting from slavery, rather than from Africa *prior to* slavery. [They are] centered on the perceptions and narratives of slave masters, not the people who were [their] victims” (p.110). Who were these people, anyway? [W]ere they [just] slaves? Or were they carpenters, kings, weavers, farmers, etc., who were sold into slavery? Whose perspective do we want our children to take?

Biographies are important genera to illustrate how individuals struggled and thrived October explained, later, that the students’ questions did make her look closer at why she’d chosen to teach a particular lesson.

I felt challenged, and initially defensive. And then, I felt very responsible for coming up with a reason to have them learn something. Why *was* I teaching them that? And resolving it by building relationship and not dismissing [the issue,] not letting it go, not walking away from it saying, “I don’t care.” I think that the biggest resolve that I had [to go through] every day was that I cared more, and I cared enough, to find resources and ways to teach as best I could (October).

As she continued to make changes in her attitude and curriculum, October was able to establish a rapport with her students.

I felt great about it, because, um, I worked hard for them to accept me. Even though *I didn’t, they did not* think I could relate to them at all, [and so] I worked really hard for them to, um, to accept, and, um, it felt great to be able to laugh with them, to be able to hear their stories [and] share with them and have them, ah, want to continue the relationship. “Miss..., Miss, let me tell you what I read today (October).

Eddy a black female teacher discussed her observation of relationship between white teachers and black students. She believed teachers who cared about students were willing to push them towards excellence. In this respect both Eddy and Paula believed that teachers needed to challenge students who were under performing. She thought that many teachers did not believe that black students could succeed. Teachers’ assumptions and expectations of their students’ abilities may make the difference in their success. Gay’s (2000) idea about teachers’ high expectations for students is to assure them, “I have faith in your ability to learn, I care about the quality of your learning, and I commit myself to making sure that you will learn” (p. 45).

It disturbs me, on some level, that I don’t believe the average demographic of teachers is serving our population of students well. I don’t believe that they understand them well enough to believe that they can achieve; that if they’re pushed, they will. And they allowed them to, uh, work on the lower level, um, believing that that’s the best they can do. I just don’t believe that they’re serving this population well (Eddy).



The students may think it is cool that they do not have to work hard in some teachers' classes, she noted.

I think that, you know, right now the kids think, "That's a cool teacher. We don't hardly do anything." Or, "We're going to class and everybody has got an A," and you know. I feel like a lot of black teachers in the building, you know, we are the ones that say, "*No, do it over. No you can do better than this.*" What is this? No, you know better than this. You need to write better, you know." They end up thinking that we are just being hard on them. I'm an electives teacher and I hear them saying that my class is harder than their English class, or their math class, because I give too much work. Or I expect too much from the, you know. I know that can kill my numbers for my classes. You know, I can make it a nice fluffy fun class. But I feel like, if you don't have the skills to write effectively, to speak properly, to even use the computer to gather information, then you're not being prepared for what you're gonna need to do when you leave here (Eddy).

She prepared students psychologically for college and assisted them with skill development to succeed.

I told them, you know, "I'm being kind when I tell you that you need to rethink your word choice, proof read your work before you give it to me." I said, "You're going to go to college next year [and] your professor is not going to be that nice." I look at some of their writing and I am thinking, "You're a senior? And no one has talked to you about this before? Why is that? How did you get this far, writing this way?" You know, I, I don't understand how that was allowed to happen. And that's very disturbing. So no, I don't think that the majority of teachers in the building, or maybe it's not just in the building, are really serving this population well (Eddy).

She believed that the quiet students were thought of as "throwaway kids," and this comprises the majority of students who are "forgotten and drop away." These were the student dropouts. Eddy had a passion for wanting to help students to succeed. She pushed them and challenged them and felt disturbed by other teachers who let them sit and "do nothing."

I believe a lot of them are just viewed as "throw away kids," because they are not behavioral problems. They're the ones that come into your class and they don't do anything. I mean, they don't turn in anything, they don't get any work done, and nobody calls home about them. Nobody talks to the kid about them. They're just basically forgotten. I see that; that's a lot of our kids. The behavior [problem] ones you see, [they're] the most difficult [students], but that's not a lot of them. They more invisible ones [are the ones] that have been forgotten and drop away (Eddy).

## Summary

The "throw away kids" may be the kind of students that Kohl (1997) spoke of, who refused to learn for a number of complex reasons. Teachers interviewed in the study seemed to be concerned about their relationship with students. Many had personal strategies that allowed them to control themselves during uncomfortable exchanges with students. The teachers in this study who work in urban schools have entered the struggle, and pain of the problem of the "color-line," whether they see skin color or not.

Life in the city can be uncomfortable for those who live there and for those who enter. The teachers who want to gain student trust must be aware that there is a struggle between their black students perceptions of white Americans and their position in that system.

#### **Theme 4: Experience and Benefits**

Olivia said it was a lot of work dealing with the student that she spent three hours a day with. She also emphasized that it was important for her to remain calm and respectful when addressing problem situations with students in her classroom. On the other hand Lee admitted that she lost patience and was reprimanded and told not to touch her student again. She apparently up until that time had success in her urban school. Unfortunately in that situation she reacted rather than responded and the problem was expanded. Luie wanted to tell the student who would not move to “get your butt over here like you are suppose to” and sit down, which she did not say. Self-reflection in that present moment gave Luie a choice to respond rather than react negatively to the situation that might have caused further problems.

Self-reflection can be thought of as a part of self-care and a benefit in that it helps the teacher to become aware of themselves, and possible underlying issues that may help them to solve classroom problem situations in constructive and instructive ways. Self-reflection is a tool that can educate the minds of individuals to the reality of a situation. Equally as important is a physical education for the body, a practice. Some teachers in the study used exercise, and prayer to help them relax and given their responsibilities at home and at school, clearly some did not get enough rest. Exercise according to some of the participants helped them reduce stress, which was beneficial to their wellbeing. Some however were involved in somewhat regular self-care. Luie had a meditation practice that had been difficult for her to maintain daily. She practices a few times a week.

Um, I mean, I'm crappy about getting to it daily, but I do meditate...I meditate [in] the Eastern style. My husband is a Buddhist. It's just mainly a chance to be quiet and to settle everything down for a while. I have two kids... I try to get to do my yoga, but physically I'm so tired. I know I'd feel good if I did it... [but] I only get five hours of sleep (Luie).

Luie suggest that teachers who have a daily practice of self-care reduce stress and feel better. A relaxed teacher creates a calm atmosphere that benefits student learning, as

the teacher sets the tone. According to Luie if she did yoga she would feel better. But, she was too tired, and one factor that may increase stress is not getting enough sleep.

Luie benefited from working with urban students when she said,

I never thought I would say that... I'm definitely not interested in being an elementary school teacher; too much snot. I love the kids. [older students] the interaction with them, I love talking with them. They frustrate the hell out of me [but] they're kids and they're interesting. And you can make interesting (unint.) great feedback relationship. I love being in the classroom (Luie).

Luie described intangible intrinsic rewards, the benefits that she received from teaching urban students, as added value for her life. This has been important enough that she refused to leave. She thought about going into school administration, which would pay more, but “the idea of not teaching, everyday (unint.) I won't go there.” (Laughs).

Another benefit was that the students accepted her, just as she was. “I am by nature sarcastic, a kind of caustic person. The kids learned that really quickly and that it's never personal.” Consequently, she could express herself authentically, and be herself at school. She especially enjoyed teaching advanced students, helping them develop critical thinking skills.

Luie's enjoyment working with students” may be derived from an inexplicable connection found amid authentic relationships with them—and the ability to be her authentic self in the process.

Olivia has a large family and she is a single mom. Between family and work, she could not find any significant amount of time for self-care.

I work full-time, and it's just me. So, I don't really have time for any of that. Now you know I like to have the radio off and things, when I come to work, to kind of think about what my day is going to be. Kind of, you know, I have different times of day where I can think without noise. Because it's twenty-four-seven, from the moment I get up in the morning, all day long here at school [and] into the evening to my home, you know. It never ends (Olivia).

During her drive time to work, Luie has a moment to think, and late at night she has another. She was asked about her energy level, given all of her activities.

In the evening, um, after everybody goes to sleep. I kind of sit and relax...until I fall asleep sometimes, or find something on TV. It could be ten minutes. Most of the time, I am thinking on the way to work. I drive to work it's kind of my only time where I can think about “what did I do yesterday,” [and] “what am I going to do today.” Making the never-ending lists in my head and on paper, you know... I'm forty-two, I'm overweight (laughs), and I have no time to myself. I don't feel like I have a lot of energy. No, (laughs long)... I did have a Sunday a couple of weeks ago that everybody was gone. That was great. I didn't take my pajamas off for hours. But I don't know, I haven't figured out how to get more time. And I haven't figured out how to get more money (Olivia).

When discussing problem situations that turn out “right,” Olivia was happy. She was more sober, on the other hand, when talking about those situations that do not work out well.

I mean, with any, I mean it doesn't always work. All I can say is, you are always happy when the outcome results in you solving problem with kids, whether it be academically, behaviorally, or whatever, you're happy if outcomes go right. And they turn around, they graduate on time or any of those things. But, at the same time, I got kids that didn't survive high school. They didn't survive life. Either homicide suicide, um, you know a variety of things. I have had many of those, kids that were really close to me, that I tried to kind of take, so sometimes you get lucky. They make it, they come back, they turn into different people. [But] then sometimes you do everything and then they still I (unint.) how long (unint.) can help...(Olivia).

She recognized the difficult reality of some of her students' lives, especially for those who did not “survive life.” These experiences may have enabled Olivia to truly realize the impact that she had as a teacher on the lives of her students. She seemed to work long hours with her own children and her students. She appeared not to have enough time to reflect on or think about what benefits she received from working with the students. However, what was evident, always, was her commitment to them as individuals.

Emma's self-care practice comprises prayer and reading the Bible. It gave her an opportunity to reflect and decide how to deal with life situations. The time also allowed her space to step back, to gain a clear perspective and understand the nature of the problem (Posner, 1973).

I'm a Christian so I do study the Bible. I pray, and so that's my time of reflection and, you know, processing for the... I think it helps me see, kind of a little bit of problem solving. You know if it is a situation I'm really stressed over, that I can take me, I can step back from it and look at it, you know, out of the situation. It kinda helps me process what's going on. You know, as a Christian, I believe God hears my prayers. And it helps me, you know, to deal with whatever situation I happen to be in (Emma).

Emma believed that God helps her through intervention and helps her to understand the daily challenges of life. This gave her comfort, and she never felt alone.

It helps me, you know, to deal with whatever situation I happen to be in. Uh, either through his intervention or through helping me think through, you know, what's going on. So that's, uh, important for me, spiritually... it definitely is a stress reliever to know that God is there, he cares and he can help me, through what ever happens to come my way. So it definitely, definitely helps (Emma).

Even though she recognized her supportive colleagues, it was often just she and the student alone, dealing with the conflict. In that moment, she sought spiritual support.

I have that spiritual support, that when I'm confronted with a situation [that] is escalating and things like that, that I'm not alone in it. You know, I feel like (unint.) you're not alone in it, and all the teachers are very supportive. You know, and so we support one another that way. But when you're in that situation, yes, I think it really does help (Emma).

She thought that through experiencing the conflict, she has benefited by “personally growing” from it. Emma enjoyed the process of learning and watching the “kids’ little light bulbs coming on” and making connections on their own with previous lessons. Another benefit she recognized was the importance of caring and relationship at a fundamental level, as integral to teaching and learning for both her and her students. She compared the rural school that she taught at before with the benefit of teaching in urban school,

It's different between the two. *I think here, I have really felt more like a teacher.* I mean, I mean I feel like I have benefited more kids and I think, you know, I've gotten more benefit out of it too. I think what has happened here with me and the students, and the classes and being in this school has really helped me. I really felt like a teacher. I felt like there was a need. I've been able to come and help the kids with the need. *And actually do what I came in the teaching[field] to be able to do.* So I, I really, it hasn't been easy. I mean you know, to be honest with you, hasn't been easy, but I really feel like at the end, at the end of the day, at the end of the school year, I (unint.) have done something so much more than the school I was at before. I think it does come down to relationships and caring (Emma).

This conversation may demonstrate that she developed an understanding of what care and relationship means in her present school. Through the urban core experience, she may have discovered that relationships outside the family unit had their own rewards. When talking about her urban school, she said it was hard, yet it seemed to her ‘at the end of the day’ it was “good.” She appeared to do her work with passion, which may speak to agency and self-efficacy.

Erin liked to do yoga when she has time, however she had not done it since August; it was October at the time of the interview. She did have a unique way of taking time out to think,

Well I do and, you know honestly, this is going to sound... watch TV. I will watch TV and think about okay what can I do better on that. What can I do, or I won't think about anything at all. And that helps decompress me. You know, get rid of the, in a way it's almost a meditation... I'm just looking at, not really watching, not really paying attention. I am but I'm not because you know I'm just like, you know saying prayers (Erin).

She also has a prayer life and she says her prayers before bed.

I have a prayer book. I do have a prayer book. And you know before I read like, I kind of go through my brain, Ok, why, what is a reasoning for me praying today, what is it at this moment... or, if I

know a kid's going through a tough time. So I kinda meditate beforehand. And that helps me really center myself on the prayer and what I, I... sometimes I have some of the short prayers memorized. And I'm just like, and I'll say them on my way to work, or something as I'm driving. And I'm like, you are gonna have a good day (her voice rises, a sing song, as if she is talking to a child) and everybody's happy (voice rises.) (Laughs) (Erin).

She explained that she does not like all of her job, “can't really say that I love it all. cause there are some things that I'm like awh, man.” For the most part she feels a satisfaction when she has helped a student. When Erin received a mother's day card from students she recognized that the students valued their relationship with her. “I mean it is, is just amazing. Students trust her,

They know the teachers that are here just for paycheck. You know they don't really care they don't really... You know they trust me to do the right thing. And they believe I would do the right thing and so I think that's, you know. *I talk to them like they're people you know some teachers don't, there's a like this is my classroom and you do what I say* (Erin).

### **Summary**

Erin said that she “talk[ed] to the students like they're people ...some teachers don't.” Though Erin did not mention the color line she may be raising the point by inference, that some teachers did not treat students like people. The statement was ambiguous. A fundamental question for teachers who work in urban schools to answer would be, are the students they teach people just like them and if they are not people like them what are they?

Teaching in the urban core for Erin and the others was intrinsically valuable especially in their relationships with students. Some had fun. It appears that Erin, Vera, and Emma felt an emotional satisfaction and belonging. The mothers' day card Erin received was especially touching.

When asked if she had a daily practice, Lee's self-care includes several approaches. “Um yes, it's a combination of yoga I would say, and uh exercise and meditation.” Most teachers had some way to deal with stress. A couple of teachers worked long hours at home and school and they had no real time for self-care. Self-care like self-knowledge may be essential ingredients for student and teacher success in urban schools.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Analysis And Discussion**

#### **Introduction**

The aim of chapter five is to analyze and explore the interview data in order to address the two main research questions. This chapter further endeavors to explain and analyze significant issues that arose from the interviews and discuss a number of themes in their relationship to the literature. The first research question was how do white female middle-class teachers' upbringing, cultural beliefs, behaviors, bias, self-knowledge, perceptions, problem-solving skills, and language impact their relationships with students? Question two was, how does culture influence teachers' self-reflective problem-solving behavior and what impact does it have on self-efficacy and their relationship with students? The analysis was based on face-to-face taped interviews with ten urban teachers; nine were white females and one black female.

#### **Overarching Themes**

The broad themes include teachers' adolescent experiences; agency, self-efficacy and problem solving; language and relationship; as well as teachers' self-care and benefits. This chapter intends to analyze, compare, and contrast these four themes in the context of the literature and the teaching staff of both districts. This chapter attempted to demonstrate how the dissertation might fill gaps in the literature regarding urban schools and the cultural influence on teacher self-reflective problem solving behavior in relationship with black students as well as address the limits of the research. Also included will be a framework designed to help understand the mindset of teachers and how self-knowledge and proper action is vital to school reform. Knowledge is essential for internal transformation that might result in an external metamorphosis of the school environment. The re-birth may create the possibility for student and teacher educational success when the individual selves and the aims of the institution are in harmony with the mission of education, individual freedom (Freire, 2010).

**Question 1: How do white female middle-class teachers' upbringing, cultural beliefs, behaviors, bias, self-knowledge, perceptions, problem-solving skills, and (words) language impacts their relationships with students?**

This first question deals with many intangibles that have to do with mental phenomena of the participants. These ideas, maybe thought of as separate, but will for the most part be discussed as components of the entire web. Nothing truly exists in isolation. School culture will also be examined as part of the web due to the significant difference that it seemed to have made when teachers from the two districts solved problem with students. The words that each group of teachers said they used when talking to students was important during the problem solving process.

Cupitt (1998) stated that our thoughts and beliefs are mediated by our words, and words make us who we are. Hill (2008) pointed out that the language that is spoken especially about blacks and other people of color by whites includes silence between the words that captures the true essence of the message and often refers to some mutually held perception or belief that the listener will fill in. Deficit language towards black children causes them harm according to (Gay, 2007; Delpit, 2006; Kohl, 1994; & McIntyre, 1997).

Words are things. They create worlds in which people live (Cupitt, 1998). The intention here is to investigate words, and references that participants used as a representation of what they believe about themselves, and who they believe their students were. Out of such reasoning, teachers chose to take certain actions when problem solving that seemed to be influenced by childhood and earlier experiences. The silence between the words, and subsequent meaning would be difficult to articulate and will not be a prominent feature in this discussion. During the interview process teachers explained how they handled (teacher behavior) a problem situation with a black student which often included how they mentally, emotionally, and physically processed the event and what they did to resolve the problem. Several participants were unable to reach a resolution of the problem situation with the student at the time of the interview.



## **Words Mediate Thought**

Much of the literature mentioned teachers' language and words as positively or negatively affecting student performance and self-concept (Gay 2000, Delpit 2006, Kohl 1994, and Orenstein 1994). Words are what people use to communicate with each other and with themselves, self-talk. People talk to themselves continuously, often involving random unstructured thinking, thoughts. Certainly gesture, silence and inflection also play a major role in communication.

Words as belief and as a creative force will be the focus. Words spring out of what appears to be a void like magic; the words are available when one needs them. Culpit (1998) stated that words tell us who we are. They are the medium through which thoughts are conveyed. Words are the very foundation of our belief system and become the veils of identity that new arrivals are born under. For example, words tell women who they are and what is expected of them in this society. The gender veil of inequality remains in place in society today. Once the gender is determined at birth the child's place is affixed to a specific role, on that day the veil in peoples cultural mind about that baby covers them all.

As a professional counselor I work nearly exclusively with the client's words as a mirror that reveals their psychological state of mind; in other words, they are a window to individual belief systems about the self and the world. Their words, and beliefs create a vision of the world in which they live based on "who the society, the world says they are." For example, American society says white skin deserve more privileges. Their utterances make it possible to see and scout out thoughts, ideas and behaviors that may interfere with their desired outcome in a given situation. The goal is to modify ineffectual thoughts, and words that influence relationships with students. Unwittingly, people often say words and create situations that they do not want instead of what they do want. Much of the confusion can be attributed to the shadow, the part of themselves that they rejected, the identity that is hidden from the person (Campbell, 1971).

Through words the teachers in the study also described their thoughts, behaviors, feelings, self-appreciation and struggles. This investigation dares to use the teachers' own words and move behind the words to analyze, discuss and extrapolate what those words might mean in the context of their experiences. The mind and its exploration is

not an exact science; counselors or mind workers are artists. They try to understand the connections and meaning between the actual experiences through what people say about their experience (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Qualitative analysis then is an appropriate method for excavating such intangibles that an algorithm or an untrained mind might not capture. In this case, the researcher's mind as a trained, experienced counselor in education is the instrument, the tool of analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

As the instrument however, the lens through which I view other people's words is also colored by my own upbringing, experiences, cultural designation, and belief; that is a limitation of the study. The data is analyzed through the filtered lens of the researcher. Still no one can get away from themselves their cultural beliefs, experience and perceptions, either through words or thought during data analysis.

In this case, the claim of complete objectivity (denial) of these phenomena might thwart the process of discovery and conscious analysis of the data. As a researcher I continue to be conscious of my personal bias and continue to strip away the film on my personal lens, a lifting and tossing away of the veils. To further deal with such bias triangulation, with the help of a black participant and a white interviewer was utilized to corroborate the analysis, findings and conclusions. The strength of the study is that I have been a teacher and I am a female hue-man being raised in America with many of the experiences that the participants have dealt with personally and professionally.

Nevertheless, words that the teachers speak may have a number of possible interpretations, just as does the silence, and inferences. That is what makes the first question knotty. It is the very knottiness; the ambiguities that make the questions important, primarily because of the slippery nature of words, mind, personal beliefs, denials and cultural influences that need to be ascertained and investigated. In schools the knottiness and slipperiness of words has allowed denial in particular of color and gender bias while at the same time officials evade engagement and responsibility especially in cross-cultural, cross-gender, intra-gender conflict situations. Consequently, any resolution or any significant headway into these matters has been impeded because of a refusal to acknowledge the situations. Many who benefit the most from not seeing say there is no problem just problem people (West, 2000). Students and teachers in urban centers are in crisis and the subject must be broached no matter how knotty, or slippery,

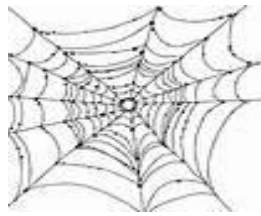
the words or concepts in order to begin to excavate the root of the problem and decide what can be done to resolve the failure of urban schools.

### **Upbringing Cultural Beliefs and Self-knowledge**

Teachers' response or reaction to problem situations is partly due to experiences in early life, their thoughts, perceptions, and cultural beliefs. Culture is used here in a broad sense including, such as a home, community, school, athletic, and social, a few examples of different cultures that individuals belong to simultaneously, all of which exert some sort of influence, pressure and a personal assignment to the individual (Cupitt, 1998).

In adult life, other influences that may have affected the teacher problem solving approach where student behavior, student's parents and school policy among other phenomena that seemed to be part of the spider web that undergirded and informed different strategies the individual chose to use in the classroom. In other words what the teacher believed, the school and American culture, their personal lens informed their behavior (action taken), problem analysis and problem resolution (Posner, 1973; Delpit, 2006).

The spider web metaphor has been utilized throughout this dissertation to explain and examine the interconnection of psychological, cultural, family, experience and social relationships that influence the thoughts and behaviors of the teachers in the study. Picture a spider web, and the teacher or student sits at the center. Imagine their parents' home, school, culture, history, media, experiences as adolescents, and an infinite number of influences and experiences encircle the individual on their particular web of life. If one could grab the center of that spider web where the individual sits, imagine two fingers pulling that center nearly vertically in the air while the rest of the web drapes beneath them. Sometimes events collapsed into another. Many times what happened to individuals in childhood survives as a feeling without words that creates distress. Murky. The person eventually sits at the pinnacle, on top of all that has happened to them. If the individual was able to move through childhood, adolescence, young adulthood on into adulthood without a number of unresolved issues, they were fortunate.



Like most people however there are many unresolved issues. For example, October was angry with her mother who refused to let her train for an Olympic swim team when she was a child. As a young adult when she told her dad that she wanted to be a lawyer, he let her know through words and inference that he did not believe that she could be a lawyer. She remained angry at the time of the interview decades after the incident.

Pem believed that there was a “don’t touch” rule in urban schools that she did not understand when the student hit her after she touched his elbow when trying to break up a student-to-student verbal altercation. Though she was years beyond the experience, she had a vivid recall of the incident and appeared to still be in confusion. Pem also remembered that it took three years for the black drama teacher who “disliked white women” to trust her; she believed it was because she was white.

The wealthy “good looking” students did not embrace Vera in her suburban high school. Vera’s grandmother called black people “niggers” now and in the past, and it remained a source of distress that Vera wrestled with as her best friend is black (Cupitt, 1998). All of these issues can be thought of as unresolved painful situations that become one of an infinite number of lenses stacked one on top of another throughout life, like the vertical web that obscures and distorts ones vision. Some of the issues may be forgotten, and sometimes that material might reside in the psyche as the shadow that can be emotionally heavy and charged (Campbell, 1971). Unresolved issues forgotten or remembered often find their way into the shadows and can create unwitting bias towards others through the hidden curriculum (Campbell, 1971; Orenstein, 1994). Nevertheless, the teachers were able to clearly recall these past experiences, some felt pain and in some cases anger and resentment remained. It may be productive to revisit October’s case

further to illustrate how one might interpret her specific utterances through a counselor's lens. An analysis of her words might demonstrate the lasting effects of a couple of unresolved cultural filial problem situations she encountered as a child. October as a youth believed that she was both strong and smarter than males and not weak like females. Probably her devaluation of girls was her response to social cultural constructs, the gender veil that made girls feel weak and second-class (Orenstein, 1994).

There seemed to be confusion as to how to reposition herself in the hierarchy in society where girls were assigned a weak role; she favored the role of boys who were thought to be strong (Orenstein, 1994). This could have been a young girl's way to reject the social system that pigeonholed her. However, whenever one elevates oneself above another and rejects the self, it is, according to Palmer (1998), a lack of self-knowledge and self-appreciation. Perhaps she did not want to assume the traditionally subservient female role in society, and she rejected it and in so doing rejected herself. Maybe at that time she rejected her femaleness as it had been prescribed, and the option left in a young girl's mind was to identify and appreciate her masculine self.

I felt big and masculine. I was a tomboy and I liked it. I thought being feminine and helpless was stupid...in a different, sexist way, I thought I was better because I was more masculine. Men had more power and I felt that I was part of that power, because I was more masculine. (October)

Kohl (1994) would understand and support her response to oppression, just as he appreciated black children's oppositional response to educational systems that viewed them through a deficit model, but he would also recognize that the response in the long run would be unproductive. In October's case, the thoughts, her mind exposed by words can be scouted out for thought processes, interpretations, and perceptions that did not serve her well and began to develop new "strong stories" that supported her female self.

Though she was older, she appeared to continue to fight against her father's ideas and beliefs about femaleness during the interview. Her upbringing in her parents home had a profound effect on her self-esteem as a girl, and it seemed to linger on into adulthood. Her father did not believe that she had the discipline or the love of studying to be a lawyer. There are parallels between October's story and Luie's experience with the school counselor who believed girls did not have the aptitude for computers; they were both at a deficit as defined by a dominant male figure in their young lives.

He condescendingly said. 'You not only have to love the law, you have to love studying.' I never confronted him about what he meant, but I didn't apply to law school and later questioned why I had let myself be influenced by him. His words were a slap in my face, and I simply complied rather than having a conversation about that. (October)

October found herself speechless in the face of her father's hurtful comments. Emotionally it felt like a slap in the face. Scouting out the meaning of such utterances is an art. Another way to view the utterance is on face value, and a common assumption might be that she felt good about herself physically and intellectually as a child. The second example from her perspective, in other words her interpretation of the situation, seemed to be final enough to abandon her desire.

Each interpretation must be put in context and a number of different concepts, situations, experiences and words will be included in the complex spider web, the knotty associations to construct a plausible analysis of the statements. Because people's responses are individual, a tug on one web string can cause people to react to situations in an infinite number of ways. October decided to embrace her masculine self, and reject the feminine. Many people reject parts of themselves: thoughts, behavior, ears, noses, lips, skin color, weight, stuttering, physical disabilities, and being short or too tall for men and women. People put others down according to Palmer (1988) when they do not know themselves. Rejecting part of the self might be thought of as not knowing the self. If one knew the self, one would love the self. When one knows the self, there is an acceptance of self and others, and no need to denigrate either (Palmer, 1988).

Finally, when October was a teacher in an urban court-ordered alternative school, she was dismissed from her job because of her complaint about a male staff member's excessive use of force while subduing a female student as well as other such issues.

The youth workers were extremely rough. And, uh verbally abusive to the kids. And one of the white girls said something back to one of the male staff and he ended up having her in (cleared her throat) a choke hold. (October)

The incident involved cross-cultural individuals a black male and a white female, which brings up different knotty and slippery complex issues that strain the threads of the web. It was interesting that on more than one occasion male strength over female vulnerability and weakness was a theme that caused October to have conflict with school administrators. Decades later, could this sensitivity be related to her experiences as a child?

The following illustrations will demonstrate how problem situations were turned

into experience that the white girls acquired as wisdom that could later be used in when teaching urban students. Wisdom includes experience, knowledge and decisions that are just. When Paula was in high school she resolved her male counselor's bias against girls and computers and explained the situation.

It was just kind of exclusive higher-level thinking, definitely math science type class, that, I think that was why we were discouraged. Cause of the traditional roles he had for girls and boys. (Paula)

She took the computer and shop classes anyway. She felt good about herself, special. When she became a teacher, she vowed not to tell students what they could and could not do or what they were capable of doing.

I guess what I want most for them is I want to see them a success at whatever their doing next. I don't pick their path for them. I don't want to pick college is right for you and but not for you. It's kind of like the science class, the computer science class that I was telling you about. I don't want somebody telling me this isn't for you. (Paula)

Emma used prayer to resolve problem situations and believed that a God answered her prayers even as a young girl. She utilized prayer in her adult life to help her deal with problem situations in her classroom.

I think it helps me see, kind of a little bit of problem solving. You know if it is a situation I'm really stressed over, that I can, take me, I can step back from it and look at it you know out of the situation, and kinda helps me process what's going on. You know, as a Christian I believe, you know, God hears my prayers. And it helps me, you know, to deal with whatever situation I happen to be in, uh, either through his intervention or through helping me think through, you know what's going on. So that's, uh, important for me spiritually. (Emma)

Erin got mixed messages about what girls and boys could do, "It was like they were saying, 'yes you can do what you want, but only in this area'." After her brothers finished their sport activities, it was her turn to participate in sports, but her parents always ran out of cash. The messages made her initially have self-doubt. As an adult however Erin said, of those experiences "I think...[it was an] asset, because I am a pretty strong-minded person."

Neither Luie nor Vera fit in middle-class society "Unfortunately, [Vera said] it was all about looks in high school... It wasn't like we were all the same. We're all here to be educated and to learn" and both developed friendships later with people from different ethnic groups. Vera, after compliance in her high school as a teenager, transformed and took on a more defiant tone with her teachers. She said,

My teachers expected towards the end of my high school career, when they learned you know, who I was, they learned me. And when I would speak out in class and they'd be like that's not you. What are you doing? (Vera)

She removed her veil of silence. One of Vera's first teaching experiences was in a suburban district that seemed to reflect her experience as a teen feeling isolated and not belonging.

It was very, they were rich they just, the people just, the way it was put was either you have a lot of money or you didn't. And, if you didn't have money you are treated differently. It wasn't like we were all the same. We're all here to be educated and to learn... the teachers would treat the kids different. And the kids would treat each other different... And, if you didn't have money, you are treated differently. (Vera)

When talking about the urban school where she was currently teaching she said of the students,

I, it shocked me beyond belief; with these kids they're all the same. They all love my kids. They treat 'em with respect. They're very decent towards them and towards each other. Um, you know their differences between them. (Vera)

Belonging as a high school student appeared to be a theme of importance in Vera's early life. It was also an important theme for her as a teacher. She chose those students who were most vulnerable in schools to teach and care for. She was appreciative of the urban students' treatment of her students with disabilities. Vera mentioned that she enjoyed teaching in the urban school district; it was a better fit for her. It is obvious that the theme of being accepted by others has endured throughout her experience as an adolescent on into adulthood. In a sense she overcame her isolation in class as a youth by "hanging out" with a different crowd. As a teacher in the inner city she feels comfortable, but continues to advocate for acceptance for her students with disabilities.

For the group of teachers who as students turned adversity into an advantage, agency and self-efficacy was key, which was an essential part of how they dealt with and overcame problem situations. What they dealt with as children and teens seemed to be a theme in their adult life as teachers. The study suggests that early childhood and adolescent experiences in these cases did impact the urban teachers in a number of different ways.

For some of the teachers, like Erin the choices they made early on caused them to feel strong, like Erin, while others continue to suffer with the issues as in October's case,



decades after the incident and years after the parent has died. For the second group, what is left can be thought of as emotional baggage. Most people spend a lifetime dealing with the repercussion of early experiences. Either way, a positive resolution or not, the same theme had a tendency to appear in later adult life in some form or another for many of the teachers.

Pem, October, and Vera remain upset about early life and later life experiences that cause them pain. These unresolved experiences are the baggage that counselors speak about that many continued to lug around into adulthood and old age. These three teachers could have dealt with the problems in productive ways and let them go if they had wanted to or if they knew how. Others like Paula, Erin and Vera in particular with a different issue were able to turn their difficult childhood problem situations into an experience that would help them as teachers. Vera resolved part of her need to belong to the popular group by choosing friends from a more vocal crowd that made her feel stronger when she spoke up.

These illustrations demonstrate that what happened in childhood, and cultural influences around gender did seem to have an effect on teacher perception, belief, bias and how they resolved problems situations with students in urban schools. The previous examples revealed how adult cultural expectations of young middle-class white females who became urban teachers might harm their self-appreciation depending on how the youth handled the situation. October recognized that society favored boys. For her, weak was stupid, and being a tomboy was her alternative. Research suggests according to Tuan (1979) “upbringing of course, has a great impact on a child’s perception” (p. 21). As a child she made a choice, (agency) not be weak, but her path to masculinity and self-efficacy in that area was unrealized. She was a girl. Gender inequity in this case caused the child to reject herself.

These kinds of personal issues and many more dealing with gender, skin color and other situations may cloud the vision of the educator and the student in urban school if unresolved. It is clear that some cultural influences negatively affected the teachers as youth. While Paula, Emma, Erin, Luie, had difficult experiences, each chose and understood how to resolve them. What remained after the resolution was a lesson to live by that made them stronger, as Erin asserted, which is a demonstration of self-efficacy.

The resolved experiences made a clearing in the teachers' minds and became stepping-stones that allowed them to make different choices when they became teachers. Each mounted a new lens and threw off a veil to view her students and future problem situations more clearly.

Rogers' (2009) emphasis on teachers confronting their personal issues about "race and gender" especially when teaching cross-culturally is critical. The accumulation of unresolved issues around "race and gender" might make clear thinking in urban classrooms difficult. Clear thinking and wisdom can materialize when negative thoughts and experiences are handled in constructive and self-affirming ways.

Finally, in summarizing the analysis and findings, several of the teachers in this study, during their prior adolescence experience, correlated with Orenstein's (1994) research findings and the AAUW (1991) report "How schools shortchange girls." They assumed a traditional female gender role. However, Emma appeared to have a different expectation about school, at least during her experience as the girl athlete whose team was expected to carry her school's reputation when the boys' team was losing.

In general, the teachers grew up with traditional gender roles. Paula and Luie, however took risks that were outside of cultural expectations. Paula volunteered to be part of the local desegregation initiative and attended school in an urban district. Luie, meanwhile, took a chance to enroll in computer classes that were thought to be, at least by her counselor, for males only. October, Pem and Lee, teachers in the second district, appeared to have had similar suburban experiences as the teachers in the first district, having been expected to be quiet and compliant, without question. This study demonstrated how a teacher's cultural upbringing, perception and self-knowledge influences her decision-making process and relationship with students.

### **Perception, Eye Contact and Invisibility**

This section seeks to demonstrate how social influence such as eye contact in the school milieu weaves its web in a number of intricate directions that results in specific behaviors that affect teachers' and students' perceptions. The intention is to show how society and school are one, using earlier entries to illustrate how it might be an influence. As youth, a few teachers were able to identify and confront gender inequities in their

school. None were able or willing to confront parents who represented society outside of school. Many of these adolescents were like a fish in water, that was how it was, and there was no reason to question parents or community perceptions. Making eye contact with people outside of ones own ethnic group especially with black people is an unspoken but practiced behavior in much of white America.

Can a teacher who does not confront gender inequality confront the problems of living on the color line and advocating for minority and poor students hue-man rights? The right to a “good education.” Denial of the problem situation of hue has been an often-unconscious strategy favored by many Americans that renders the problem of the color line invisible (McIntyre, 1997). Several of the participants believed that color did not matter. When speaking of hue, people of color cannot deny that discrimination exists for them; it is the norm and needs to be addressed in school (Hill, 2008; McIntyre, 1997). Color matters. It would be great if it did not.

The invisibility factor is a mechanism commonly favored in cross-cultural “exchanges” in America society. The AAUW (1991) mentioned that white teachers ignored black girls more often than they did white girls, even though blacks attempted to make contact with them more often. In conversation with several black female teachers in school district number one of this study they complained that the white teachers acted as if they were invisible. Both black girls and black women according to the research (AAUW, 1991) agree that white teachers often ignored black females in school rendering them invisible. The same invisibility is common in society.

Invisibility may be assumed to mean that if one does not look at the other, they are in fact not there, a self-deception. What makes the strategy interesting is that the individual has to see the other person initially in order to pretend not to see them. What does this behavior really mean? The invisible treatment demonstrates that not only are words slippery, but thoughts and behaviors are also knotty to interpret. It may be that, according to Tuan (1979) “the greatest single threat in the city is other people” (p. 9). The fear of people of color, the loss of resources and privilege, may be at the root of the problem in urban schools. These concerns seem to be reflected in society as a whole (Hill, 2008; McIntyre, 1997; Kohl 1994; Howard, 1993, Adler 2008). Gollnick and Chinn (2009) stated “A crucial fact in understanding racism is that many whites see

themselves as better than persons of color, and as a result exercise their power to prevent people of color from securing prestige, power, and privilege held by them” (p. 63). Cupitt (1998) discussed the Anglo Saxon resistance to the notion of *the* world, as opposed to *our* world; there is a huge difference.

Culturally, many native-born Americans are taught to make eye contact when one talks to people. Is the opposite true in schools? If one does not make eye contact, one does not have to speak and what about “character”? What would it take, what kind of person could rise above the culture and unveil their eyes and make contact? What type of person would embark on a journey inward, a renewal of the mind to transform their vision of self to see others? The process can simply begin by white middle class teachers and black teachers or any colleague of color looking into the other’s eyes, and saying “good morning.” That simple act would be revolutionary for some individuals in urban schools and in society.

Saying good morning may seem to be much ado about nothing. Yet it has everything to do with everything as it relates to “getting along” and working together. Looking at the other is the first step in humanizing the other; the sentiment is “they are like me.” “They are like me” would be a huge chasm to span since so much in the social hierarchy is invested in “personal status” and one’s position on the ladder as being better or worse. Tuan (1979) explained “Many groups limit the term ‘people’ to their own members and suggest that other beings are ‘raw’ animal-like, not fully human” (p. 27). The custom of not making eye contact in private and public spaces has been in place for centuries, and at one point physically enforced. Might this also be a possible reason for the teachers’ refusal to acknowledge and make eye contact with black teachers in district number one? Habit.

Black and brown people are not the only people who suffer from systematic discrimination in America. Women earn less money for doing the same job as their male counterpart. They do not have the prestige and are not allowed in significant numbers in the spaces where power and influence are exercised. There is little eye contact that includes equal access to women in the American power structure. Women find that the media and much of society portray them in negative ways as body parts. Often they are pictured with their hands over or in their mouths, to “be quiet.” Black women are pictured as exotic animals similar to Tuan’s (1979).

Some males are also excluded from the places of power not seen because they do not fit the standard physically, financially, socially, influentially, and the like, and like women, they too are denied access to their fair share. Many do not discover the mismatch until much later between the ages of 45 and 54 years old; at that point, thousands lose hope and kill themselves.

America ought to make eye contact with urban students, women, poor people, and disenfranchised men of all hues. If each individual took the initiative to make eye contact with themselves first to find out “who they really are,” it would be much easier to face a person from a different ethnic group and look them in the eye (Palmer, 1998). Progress will be made in school and in society if we join together.

In the current school culture of both districts in which interviews took place, it was difficult for teachers to develop collaborative relationships cross-culturally to help students when the individual and cultural eye looked the other way. Personal agency and self-efficacy are essential at this juncture in society and in school to engage and reconcile differences for the “common good.” If school is to be a safe haven for children and provide an environment contrary to the one found in the general society, a different mode of operation has to be established by the individual.

### **Introduction to School Culture**

When comparing teachers within the two school districts included in this study, important influences that differ for the individual, the school culture, the district, and teacher training will be examined. The spider web metaphor explains how the school, the district, and teacher training affect the different cultures at the school level. In this case the individual, the district, schools, and training sit at the center, or the hub, of interlocking strands, and the action at the center pulls on one thread, and another tightens or loosens up depending on one's perspective.

Luie, Olivia, Vera, Emma, Paula, Erin and Eddy all taught in the same school district, number one and were given professional development in Payne's (2005) approach. October, Pem and Lee taught in the second district, district number two. The first group worked in a school district (1) that was transitioning from a suburban to an urban demographic over the past twenty years and they spoke optimistically about

educating the youth they served. The experiences and repercussions for those teachers in district number two seem to be pessimistic for a couple of the teachers and much of the focus in their interviews was about how they felt and what happened to them.

District number one was relatively stable, and the school staff: systems operations, funding, facilities, and curriculum, remained fairly constant. Many of the teachers had a support network among their colleagues that was of benefit to them. However, teachers in the second district experienced a great deal of school and district-level instability. White flight from the urban core left the district without a funding base that created fiscal insecurity.

There were a number of different superintendents during the past thirty years who introduced radical new programs and policies with little continuity from one year to the next that negatively affected the students' and teachers' population. There appeared to be a great deal of politics and cronyism involved at the school and district levels. Fear and insecurity in the second district often ruled individual behavior in schools and the district, particularly related to job security and teacher accountability; consequently, teachers felt unsupported, and the students suffered a concern raised in Gay's (2000) work.

### **School District Number One Payne Training**

The first group of teachers participated in school-wide training several years before the study using Ruby Payne's book *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (2005). The milieu was then saturated with her concepts, especially the significance of "relationship," "choice" and "model respect" for student and numerous other phrases that teachers uttered during the interview process. The teachers seemed to be focused on students and how to educate them. In Payne's (2005) book chapter on "creating relationships," she explained, "The key to achievement for students from poverty is in creating relationships with them" (2005, p. 108). Despite the positive aspects of her work (Bomer et al., 2008) argues that "Payne's claims are misleading and inaccurate: Payne's text paints a portrait of economically disadvantaged people, a portrait many teachers are using to inform their relationships with students" (p. 2), suggesting that poor students are deficient. They may not be educationally or culturally competent and "a consequence of low teacher expectations is that poor students are more likely to be directed to lower

learning tracks or lower ability" (p. 1). Olivia in district number one noticed a change in the curriculum when the black and brown students entered the district that might support Bomer's (2008) claim when she observed,

People have this preconceived ideas that our kids are low achieving, not always the truth...It seems like, even though we still have a gifted program, *we focus a lot more on remediation.*

Teachers have to know about their hidden curriculum which signals to the students where they fit in the hierarchy (Orenstein, 1994) as noted by Gay (2000), "How teachers talked to students interfered more with their academic engagement than the topics being discussed" (p. 56).

Payne's analysis seemed to assert that poverty is the reason why students need relationships with teachers. However, she does not recognize that these students come from a communal culture, where relationships are essential. She appears to lack any real awareness of African and African American history, particularly regarding the roots of black culture founded in an African matrilineal framework (Diop, 1974), which is communal and social, rather than individualistic. Her assertions seemed to suggest that a female-headed household is a deficit model of family. The facts are this is the model in many urban families and ought to be respected, as is the patriarchy model. Diop's (1974) research suggests that in Africa's "regions where the matriarchal system has not been altered by external influences (Islam, etc.), it is women who transmit political rights. This derives from the general idea that heredity is effective only matrilineally" (p. 143).

### **School District Number Two**

The second urban school district had been unstable for many years, and had a significant number of superintendent turnovers. The instability and lack of policy continuity may have increased teacher fear while also interrupting students' education. The school's accreditation and teachers' jobs were under constant threat. Consequently, teacher attitudes may have been negatively affected by the instability in the district, fear and a possible lack of support that the participants voiced. With every new superintendent, a new school initiative was adopted that increased the level of uncertainty, frustration and imbalance. For the last fifty years or more, the district had been predominately African-American. District instability, entrenched poverty which is often found in the urban core after desegregation, failing schools and financial shortfalls,

left many constituents feeling hopeless. Kohl (1994) explained, "Teaching in the absence of hope is a burden that can demoralize even the most caring and energetic person" (p. 86).

Two of the women in the second district also had a significant learning curve to manage that appeared to cause a great deal of angst. October seemed to have made some gains by the end of her tenure in the district, Pem, made progress as well with the drama teacher. However, she remained confused about, for example, the perceptions about "touch" and "don't touch" as understood in the urban school. She appeared not to understand why it took so long for her to develop a relationship of trust with the drama teacher.

In general, it might have been that October and Pem found it somewhat difficult to be "present" in the environment when students confronted them because they lacked urban cultural experience. October mentioned that she was not as defensive as she had first been when students questioned her. Sometimes the teachers had difficulty understanding the root cause of some of the problems that they faced with their students. If an individual could change lenses, perception, while viewing a problem from a cross-cultural perspective, from the other person's point of view, it might have been seen more clearly (Posner, 1973).

October felt "so sorry" for the students, and yet she recognized that her attitude was not much help to them. She also said that she initially wanted to change them-maybe to be like her-although she later discarded that idea. (Kohl, 1994) confirmed this concept in his book that teachers often want children in urban schools to be like them.

However, October did say that after a while, she did not react defensively when students challenged why she was teaching them certain lessons. She was able to get to the place where she could empathize with the students' issues but insisted that they do their work. By the end of October's tenure in the district, she was able to have "fun talking" with the students. She believed that it helped her to stay young.

In Pem's case, "other people" always seemed to be the problem. She seemed unable or unwilling to reflect on her contributions to the problem situations. Two teachers in group two spent more time discussing how they felt as opposed to making much mention about how the students felt. This emphasis may have been due to the interviewer's emphasis on individual experience. This data provided important material



for discussion in the dissertation. The research suggests that if an individual was not prepared or knowledgeable about the culture, a significant amount of time had to be spent in reflection on oneself and one's own behavior. That may have left less time to think about student needs.

Two of the participants in district two were able to take responsibility for their behavior and make decisions accordingly. The other tended to blame others and not recognize her involvement in the situations. The stress of being a teacher in a failing school district coupled with not understanding the population and personal unresolved issues might have contributed to the difficult experiences expressed by two of the teachers.

### **Summary**

In comparing teachers' over all attitudes, teachers in the first district seemed to positively, optimistically and energetically focus on students' behavior and academics. One or two of the teachers in group one revealed unflattering stories about themselves. They were able to demonstrate effective and honest self-reflection. All three women in the second group revealed very personal material that provided rich data for the study. A white peer also interviewed the second group of women; which could explain the candor. In the second group, there was more focus on the teacher, what she felt and how she was treated, with less consideration about students and their needs (Korthagen, 2005) possibly due to the deep learning curve.

Nevertheless, when teachers' needs and fears in school become the primary focus, it may be difficult for the students' needs to be met. McIntyre (1977) discussed the pre-service teachers' inability to feel empathy for and deal successfully with the problems faced by students of color. A couple of the educators in district two seemed unprepared to teach urban students initially, when compared to those in the first district who had a plan to effectively deal with problem resolutions and cultivating a relationships with students.

### **Fear As a Disease**

The fear of the other is a disease that plagues hue-man kind. What can teachers do to deal with personal fears? It is not only other people from different ethnic groups

that individuals fear, but also they fear people who live in their own homes, as Faye Wattleton, (2012) the former director of Planned Parenthood, revealed in her study. The survey revealed that 92 percent of the women in her study feared domestic violence and sexual assault. Tuan (1979) suggests “People are our greatest source of security, but also the most common cause of our fear” (p.8). Is the fear of black people rational? Some fears are rational, and some are not. Whatever the case, “fear is in the mind” (p. 6) and must be resolved in the mind. Tuan (1979) said, “Imagination adds immeasurably to the kind and intensity of fear in the human world” (p. 6).

Hill (2008) suggests that many white fears are irrational emotions, based on a media and cultural driven “boogieman” scenario that, in fact, is a groundless discourse, but effective in maintaining fear between people. Myers’s research indicated “Whites are disturbed when blacks congregate together in public, when they display self-confidence or pride, when they seem to usurp resources. This data allow us to see the ways in which whites construct blacks as threatening and undeserving of resources and self-confidence, because they conceptualize blacks in a very narrow way”(Myers, 2003, p. 143).

The first of a couple of essential questions for urban teachers to ask themselves is, “What am I really afraid of? What overwhelming evidence do I have to justify my fear of black people or people of color? Chapter six will provide some suggestions on how to get started with self-discovery.

Delpit (2006), Kohl (1994), and Howard (1993) illustrated how fear of black students negatively impacts teacher student relationships. Delpit (2006) and Kohl (1994) presented examples of teacher decisions and problem-solving situations that were impaired based on fear and excessive punitive measures meted out to black and brown students. Lakshimi (2012), Witt (2007), and Marbel (2012) concur.

If that same question were asked of black people, "what evidence do black people have of being harmed by white individuals and dominant cultural institutions?", the evidence is plentiful. This dissertations has cited a number of solid examples of unfair treatment by institutions and individuals against massive numbers of brown and black people: excessive imprisonment for black and brown people termed The New Jim Crow, deficient education, excessive black and brown student suspension and expulsion, unfair wage practices, and unequal access to fair loans, the town square, and various goods and services.

Women also suffer from the disease of fear, as do men. Women as girls fear (Orenstein, 1994) not being liked, not being pretty enough, skinny enough, and not wanting to appear too smart. Many lack self-confidence (AAUW, 1991). Women feel afraid in their homes, on the streets, and in their classrooms with urban students of color (Wattleton, 2012; Kohl, 1994; McIntyre, 1997). Many are afraid to speak up for themselves, and some curtail their aspirations and dream small.

Men are afraid that they are not masculine enough, that showing emotions is girly and gay (Way, 2011; Brooks, 2011). They are afraid of the changes in their body as they grow older (Dan Fields, 2013). Men are afraid of other men and women (Tuan, 1979). Many are scared that their wife will divorce them. If that happens, they often have not developed a support network of friends to support them through the difficulty and may do self-harm as a result (Fields, 2013). Some fear that they may not achieve the American dream and become wealthy.

### **Agency, Self-efficacy and Problem Solving**

Agency and self-efficacy were demonstrated in how teachers went about solving problems with their students. When Lee, in the second group, lost patience with that little girl and was told not to touch her, she decided to quit teaching. In this case, she was frustrated and, in her mind, had run out of options, and she took the child by the wrist and removed her by force.

There is an element of confidence that often goes hand in hand with achieving a goal that may be innate or that can be developed. For Emma, calmness may derive from self-care, as well as other practices that support her. She described her problem solving strategy by saying,

I'm a Christian so I do study the Bible. I pray and so that's my time of reflection and you know processing... you know that God's there, he cares and he can help me through what ever happens, to come my way. So it definitely, definitely helps. (Emma)

Manifesting self-efficacy is not about forcing people to do something against their will, especially when one is angry. Vera's strategy for solving a problem situation in her room was behaving like a family. She stated,

I let my students, and I will apologize in front of the class. I made a mistake when I was talking to M...and I just want you guys to hear me say I'm sorry and I expect that back of them. And it's to the point now point where if they do something I look at them and I ask them should've done that? No I'm sorry. I mean I don't even need to say maybe you need

to apologize. Cause they know, I'm sorry I shouldn't have done it. And we always, they get a little sick of it but we always walk through and talk about what we could have done differently. (Vera)

Teachers said that they were careful not to yell, to be polite, (Luie) to apologize, to give students choices and to demonstrate respect for students during conflict situations. These were some of the strategies that were gained from their school training. Apology was a strategy that may not have been part of the training, but Vera found it useful in solving conflict.

What is self-efficacy? It is the "belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Henson, 2001, p. 3). The research indicated that many white girls' self-esteem and self-confidence had been compromised during adolescence (AAUW, 1991).

Though October was self-efficacious in her attempts to resist the weak versus strong designations for girls and boys while growing up, her case demonstrated how fighting against the system did not necessarily produce success. When she became college age, she told her dad that she wanted to be a lawyer. He said that she would have to love studying and be disciplined; she capitulated. She believed that he was telling her that he did not think she could be a lawyer because she was undisciplined and possibly not intelligent enough.

She was a physically strong girl when she matured, but she had been influenced by the power structure, and the message about girls was internalized without her knowledge. Her exterior may have appeared strong, but her insides were unable to withstand her family and social upbringing. Her belief in herself was not a match for her father's comments and lack of support. She was angry that she never asked him exactly what he meant. She said nothing to him about her anger.

What is important to remember is "self-efficacy beliefs influence our choices, our effort, our persistence when facing adversity and our emotions" (Henson 2001, p. 3). October remained quiet and was unable to speak up for herself even after she identified with her masculinity.

## **Summary**

Some of the teachers in school district number one had a strategy for dealing with problem situations as has been illustrated throughout the dissertation. They had a plan and they executed it to achieved desired results. Even though the teachers were not always successful, they persisted. One of the teachers in district number two was a confident teacher and did not expressed difficulty except for the one event that led to her to retire. The other struggled to understand the urban environment, and conditions, which may have made it difficult for them to demonstrate self-efficacy consistently.

## **Relationship**

Teacher engagement with students was surely influenced by teachers' earlier and later life experiences among urban populations. It was obvious that those who went to urban schools, lived on military bases or who had children that were bi-ethnic, as well as teachers who had lived and worked closely with people of color shared a level of intimacy with students, a humanistic perception as Brooks (2001) describes it that other less experienced teachers may not have possessed. Teaching urban students requires more than a sense of "duty" or what one is "supposed to do;" rather, it is about being authentic in relationships with students. Luie, who went to an urban school as an adolescent, said, "I enjoy kids." Olivia, who has bi-ethnic children, said, "kids are kids." This could be misinterpreted and, given her experience, her statement may be valid.

Teachers such as these may posses a level of insider-information that others may lack. A lot may have to do with being able to embrace both the intellectual and emotional part of oneself and recognizing the equality of people as (Brooks, 2011) suggests. Empathy for others is an important quality that greatly facilitates authenticity in relationships. By getting in touch with the self, the intellect and emotions, several teachers felt more committed to helping their students. However, there were a number of instances of "white talk," where a teacher would make broad assumptions about students' lack of home support, one of Payne's ideas that mislead teachers.

Emma explained that students maybe not have a supportive home; however, she revised her statement to say that some did.

Well I guess I feel like in the culture of the school, between the students themselves, and a little bit at home that there may not be that support. And maybe that's just an assumption on my part. Um some the students have very supportive and very caring parents and some of them do not, that's the same everywhere. Uh, but I would rather (over care) and (unint.) I need to give them more than under, and end up skipping some of the kids. And the relationship is very important and I found that out my first year here. Was that, you build a relate... You know and everybody else says it too. You know all, all the teachers I hear talk about, gotta good relationship with the kids. Because if you don't have a relationship with the kids, you really don't want to work with you. (Emma)

The teachers were also committed to "being fair," and to apologizing when they made mistakes. The "heart talk" Olivia had with her student that had a .89 grade point average demonstrated her dedication to the child. This represented a great deal of teacher self-efficacy that in turn seemed to encourage the student's own self-efficacy to finish school and graduate (Henson, 2001). The commitment that teacher and student shared for the student's graduation goal seemed to reinforce their relationship.

Urban students and teachers struggle to realize success due to a plethora of issues. The urban world they live in sets low expectations for students and teachers. Teachers and students must learn more about themselves and each other. Cupitt (1998) said, "There is no final truth, either about ourselves or about anything else" (p. 41). What this means is that people who recognize their own agency can decide to think a different thought and thus create a new world for themselves and others. Self-knowledge is an initial step to that creation.

Cross-cultural communication does not have to be a struggle. Teachers can make up different "stories" about the children they teach, which in turn may help create happier teachers and happier students while developing relationships that work. Similarly, urban children can make up different "stories" about their white teachers. It is incumbent upon the teacher to begin the process, in any case; to understand her own thoughts and the language she uses so she can teach students with a new story in mind. Belief about self and others, according to Bandura, is more telling about achievement than was past behavior.

Emotions also play a big part in student and teacher relationship and school success. Brooks (2011) mentioned that people are more comfortable with that which is

quantifiable and measurable. While a broad range of emotion seems to make Americans uncomfortable, "a deeper, richer view" (p. 1) appears to be emerging. Emotions are integral to relationships with other human beings. Brooks (2011) suggested that when the emotional and intellectual merge, "It'll change how we see ourselves;" (p. 3) [in fact] "we are trapped within this amputated view of human nature" (p. 1). It can be a challenge to experience exuberance in life and in urban schools when one's view of human nature is amputated. Gay (2000), citing Goodman, stated that classrooms "lacked exuberance, joy, [and] laughter" (p. 56). School can be fun.

Relationships are often established through language and behavior. Pem, exasperated, said it "took three years for the drama teacher to trust me." Trust is also what relationships are built on, and teacher temperament in stressful situations informs the student whether the teacher is a safe person.

Staying in control of oneself ultimately assists during problem situations as Olivia and others mentioned. It might be important for teachers and students to control their thoughts and behavior so an optimal learning environment and positive relationship can be created and conflicts can be tamed. What is meant by control their thoughts? Make certain that the narratives, the stories, they make up are an accurate depiction of what is happening now. Belief determines future behavior, as Bandura (1995) reminds.

Vera was able to train herself to not be like her parents or grandparents who had bias against different ethnic groups. She was open to embracing a different narrative, telling a different story about the two groups of people. Language has power and influence over people; "words can create and destroy us" (Cupitt, 1998, p. 11). That is why language and words are important to understanding and relationship. If people understand the ramifications of their words, they may see the need to control their words, minds, and thoughts.

When Emma, a new teacher who may not have had Payne's training, explained, it's about caring and relationship, "everybody says it;" she embraced the school narrative that it is about relationship, that is the stated goal for student success in that environment. On the other hand, if people feel hopeless (Kohl, 1994), it can be difficult for an optimistic person to maintain perspective and create positive relationships.

It is the quality of the mind, emotions and behavior of the students, teachers and school personnel that can create an environment where positive student-teacher relationships can flourish, and joy could become an important addition in the urban milieu.

### **Self-care and Benefits**

Some of the teachers interviewed were involved in exercise activities, such as walking with family and pets, as a means of self-care. Several participants incorporated prayer as a significant practice. One teacher was involved in Eastern meditation and yoga for this purpose, while another utilized either a period of silence while driving to work in the morning, or later turning on the TV in order to “space out.”

The benefit of staying in control of oneself during conflict situations was illustrated by several participants in their description of how they dealt with the issue. Stress release by way of a practice may benefit teachers during a conflict situation with students. The teachers recognized the benefits of being involved in a practice to reduce stress and fear, and using self-reflection as a means to deal with problem situations. One teacher said she needed to “step back” from the situation and breathe. Stepping back and breathing is a simple example of self-care. It may be important for teachers to find time during each day to take care of their own overall intellectual and emotional needs. According to some of the teachers, this helped them to think about the day and to look at their own behavior to see if their response to a problem situation warrants a particular reaction.

I'd say my biggest reflective practice is that I do have friends that are teachers. I'm not kidding we talk all the time when we are out. I mean we'll sit there and talk about curriculum and talk about kids...but the problem was you know, how do I get through to this kid, she's asking for help but how does she still get the respect that she needs? (Olivia)

A few teachers mentioned that colleagues were their system of support during the day. One of the benefits that Emma received while teaching inner city youth was that she really felt “more like a teacher.” There was a sense of fulfillment found in engaging her life's mission. October, meanwhile, mentioned that she “felt young” and on the edge of what was new, in terms of youth culture. Others enjoyed talking and having fun with the



students. Several felt special satisfaction when students understood what they had taught, described as a “light bulb moment.” Few were able to fully articulate their satisfaction, but they did enjoy their students' success. Emotions cannot always be described; what is important is that they are felt, and for those teachers, it was good.

An overall benefit appeared to be that teachers' concept of relationships was broadened, getting in touch with a range of emotions and feelings, some positive, others negative. In the cross-cultural situation, teachers stretched themselves to find success that benefited students. Many expressed authentic caring for students who were not part of their own ethnic group. Emma and Olivia experienced what it meant to be committed to do what it took to help the students to be successful. Teachers were able to explore relationships with urban students where new perceptions in some cases lead to the melting away of teacher bias or fear that relieved stress and led to a few teachers having fun. Self-care can include having fun and laughing.

**Question 2: How does culture influence teachers' self-reflective problem-solving behavior and what impact does it have on self-efficacy and their relationship with students?**

**Self-reflection**

Teachers' hidden curriculum, the lack of self-knowledge, and fear of students of color may be pulling threads that contribute to the student dropout rate in urban districts. Researchers (Sokolower, 2012; Hill, 2008; Delpit, 2006; McIntyre, 1997; Kohl, 1994; & Howard; 2006) suggest that fear may be a driving force that contributes to the inequitable treatment of students of color. Teachers might want to engage in self-reflection in order to understand what frightens them, so they do not make unwitting decisions that harm students. Sokolower (2012), charges, “Instead of schools being a pipeline of opportunity, schools are feeding our prisons... Schools aren't meeting the needs of inner city kids” (p. 2).

A fundamental question for urban educators to reflect upon might be, are the students “‘raw’ animal-like, not fully human” (Tuan, p. 27)? Or are the students “people just like me,” deserving of the humane treatment that one extends to any fellow hue-man being? The answer to that question will determine how the teacher will and does teach her students. This again is the belief that Bandura (1995) championed as a better

predictor of future behavior than earlier acts.

What is obvious in society and in the dissertation is that African Americans are not the only people who have been labeled as “deficit people” in America. Native Americans, Latinos, Asians, poor whites, women, gays and lesbians, and people with disabilities are also labeled. When teachers are in touch with positive thoughts about the fundamental nature of their students, that can set the tone for an effective student and teacher relationship. October, Olivia and other participants noted that their own attitude impacted students' attitudes. In fact, urban students tended to experience more academic success when their teacher had a positive attitude towards them (Gay, 2000).

Though teachers were clearly focused on relationship with students in district one, Eddy, the African American teacher, believed that some of the teachers in this study were not serving the students well. According to Gay (2000) "Many teachers profess to believe that all students can learn, but [yet] they do not expect some of them to do so. Therefore, they allow students to sit in their classes daily without insisting on and assisting their engagement in the instructional process" (p. 57). Paula, one of the participants, was concerned about her bi-ethnic son not being pushed to perform in school. Eddy also believed that most of urban school dropouts came from this group of disengaged students. Teachers must be encouraged to reflect on these knotty, slippery issues, and many more, when teaching cross-culturally. Not seeing the issues or addressing the very real problems that students of color face does not equip them with what they need to “make it” in American society. Eddy's perceptions of teachers in her building may be an important element in understanding student teacher relationship and student success.

## **Summary**

Research has shown that students who drop out of school have an increased chance of ending up in jail. Olivia spoke of the snowballing effect at the school when students get into trouble and how it affects their academics and their life. With regret, she said, not only did some students not make it through school, some never made it through life. Teachers and the choices they make do have a tremendous effect upon students' lives inside and outside of school. Olivia said of her successes, “Sometimes

you get lucky. They make it; they come back; they turn into different people.”

When self-reflection is effective, intelligence and emotion combines in balanced ways that demonstrate that people are "deeply interpenetrated with one another" (Brooks, 2011, p. 2). From this realization, caring relationships are possible with self and others. Self-reflection allows one to know the self that in turn allows one to know others.

### **Self-efficacy**

There are many other kinds of life experiences that can prepare teachers to go into a community that has suffered a great deal of pain within the larger society. Caring and empathetic teachers are generally not afraid to share themselves with different ethnic communities and different cultural groups. They are often highly self-efficacious people, especially if they work well within urban American schools. What's important is for one individual to be able to identify with what another person may be feeling. Life events such as a long-term personal illness or the illness or death of a loved one whom the individual had to care for, personal struggles with poverty, addictions, and emotional struggles can also prepare a teacher for this kind of circumstance. Even something monumental as climbing Mount Everest may provide enough of an emotional experience of adversity that could translate in relatedness with different ethnic peoples and cultural groups. It is important to use the experiences of life to help oneself overcome personal limitations.

In some white communities, people isolate themselves to the extent that they become "overwhelmed" (McIntyre, 1997, p. 60) having to deal with issues surrounding "hue," especially between themselves and black people. The teachers in McIntyre's research displayed intense avoidance and denial behaviors when talking about discrimination, especially as to how they themselves might fit into the equation. McIntosh (2011), in her examples on the "daily effects of white privilege" list, gives as number one, "I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time" (p. 2). For many white teachers growing up in suburban America, this has kept them isolated, with the lack of authentic experience among the population they teach. Being confronted with such issues for the first time as an adult can be overwhelming. Number 32 on McIntosh's (2011) list is, "My culture has little fear about ignoring the

perspectives and powers of people of other races" (p. 2). People of color cannot afford to ignore the perspectives or fears of white people or white culture. They must learn how to deal with and manage white fears as an integral part of their own reality as they navigate personal success in this society.

Finally, self-efficacy is often achieved through a belief in one's ability to achieve a goal. Culture created the white teacher and the urban student; they represent cultural definitions strapped with particular identities. Nevertheless, there are an infinite number of definitions that the teachers can choose from to define "who they are" that do not have to fit with the script for female white-skinned people or for that matter black skinned people. Self-efficacious people often attempt to re-script themselves throughout life to attain goals that others could not dreamed of for them.

## **Conclusion**

The two primary research questions were analyzed and discussed based on the interview information collected from nine white middle-class teachers and one African American teacher working with black students in urban schools. The African American teacher provided a perspective that was not shared by the nine white participants but was important to the study. The data was collected in face-to-face sessions dealing with teacher cross-cultural problem solving strategies. The findings were largely in keeping with the literature.

The findings illustrated the complexity of conducting a cross-cultural research study where each individual in the study had different, personal, cultural and professional experiences. Another aspect of this complexity was that each individual dealt with similar problem situations in early life in unpredictable ways, for example, October embracing her masculine self.

Culture and how it might affect an individual was illustrated through the metaphor of the spider web. Culture itself is multi-layered and subjective. It is a given that urban students and teachers live in different communities for the most part and view the world through their particular lenses. The findings are not comprehensive or absolute because there are so many variables to consider in human thought and behavior.

The words in the culture define the person (Cupitt, 1998), who in turn influences belief that can be a predictor of future behavior (Bandura, 1995). Urban school culture

seemed to use words of deficit to describe students. Words are thoughts that create a reality. School reform will ultimately take place in the mind by thinking in new and innovative ways and employing conscious language and behavior. To begin, it may be worthwhile for teachers, administrators, and politicians to begin to create new stories in order to create new experiences for themselves and their students. Mind reform can facilitate positive self-regard that enhances student and teacher relationships. When people have high self-esteem, they tend to have more self-confidence (AAUW, 1991). This dissertation may point to a different way of viewing student-teacher relationships at the level of thought, which is where relationship begins. Many of the old views have to be released to allow space for the new mind.

The dissertation endeavored to reveal the intimate connections between society and school. The two are seamless mindscapes of hue-man thought and behavior creating the world in which people live inside and outside of school. Any number of obstacles, internal and external, might interfere with positive teacher-student relationships, such as cultural restraints, upbringing, personal bias, belief, perceptions, class, and gender (Korthagen, 2005).

Finally, a rebirth of passionate expansive thought and new ideas can create a school environment where people flourish. Changing one's mind can be an avenue to personal freedom that can transform the individual and his or her environment. It may become clear that a passion-driven "Education [is a] practice of freedom" (Freire, 2010, p. 81).

### **Research Limitations**

There were a number of limitations in the study. A significant limitation was my own role as a qualitative researcher. As the research tool, the data was analyzed through the web of my experiences. I am a trained counselor who has practiced the art for many years with hundreds of students and educators, yet that does not preclude me from personal bias. Hue-man. However, I am in continual self-reflection eliminating the personal bias that I recognize in order to focus my lens and see more clearly.

As an African American female and a former teacher interviewing white female teachers the interviewees undoubtedly wondered whether I was an outsider, insider or

both. Their perception of my “positionality” probably influenced the kinds of responses and information they shared with me. My white colleague who interviewed white teachers elicited rich information from the participants who “told on themselves.” In other words they revealed sensitive inner struggles that may not have been flattering, but were definitely honest and important to the research study. Only a couple of the participants in district number one spoke to me about deep personal fears, regrets, and struggles. When participants self-report, sometimes only certain materials are shared that place the person in a favorable light.

Another limitation was that seven out of ten teacher participants had school wide training and were conscious of a particular strategy of how to treat urban students. For teachers unfamiliar with urban settings, the training seemed to be an advantage but in the long run, the training can be harmful given the deficit model it espoused. School district number two did not have such training. The literature (Gay, 2000; McIntyre, 1997; Howard, 2006) suggests that inner-city teacher may not have had effective training that supported student needs. The school in district one was an outlier, an anomaly, and may not have been representative of most urban schools. The dissertation is not intended to represent all urban districts in America; it represents a few individual teachers perspectives in the mid-west in two separate districts.

### **Research Implications and Recommendations for Practice**

The research study provided valuable information that might be useful for teachers in cross-cultural urban school environments. The idea of school reform as “a changed mind” is applicable to any teacher who wants to have an experience in urban school that could be extraordinary. The dissertation focused primarily on teacher thought and perceptions. For decades the quality of education in inner city schools and the drop-out rate have been explained in simplistic terms, deficient students. Students and teachers both have problems and mental limitations (West, 2000). Many of those limitations are socially constructed (Cupitt, 1998). This dissertation strove to include a number of important social influences that contextualize the perception of teachers and students in urban schools, broadening perceptions of teachers concerning the cultural influence on their own thoughts, beliefs and behaviors and providing a different lens

through which to view themselves and students in the classroom. Maybe the new lens would allow teachers in their day-to-day practice and micro-interaction with students to make different choices that could benefit the student constructively when problem solving. The following recommendations and implications for practice were gleaned from the study.

- 1) Practical and social experiences of urban culture that a teacher has prior to employment in an inner city school tended to positively influence teacher perceptions of self and students.
- 2) Cultural, scripts influence outcomes. Teachers who are aware of the script and words can help students to redefine themselves.
- 3) Teachers need to provide classrooms that are safe secure places physically, emotionally and psychologically for urban students feel accepted. Many urban students do not feel accepted by their teachers.
- 4) Binary thinking and wanting the students to change and “be like me” is counter productive. Encourage self-reflection and contextualize issues or problem situations with students, help them generate strategies. When students participate they are more likely to work achieve their goals and feel good about their accomplishment, which builds self-esteem.
- 5) Teacher must be commitment to educate their students', no matter what, is necessary. Put on the students' shoes, empathize with them and figure out what it will take for them to achieve their educational goals.
- 6) Teachers in cross-cultural schools can move towards perceptual change and transformation and see others through an expanded lens. Investigate root causes of issues and do not accept the cultural scripts. Create new stories that assist the educational process.
- 7) Teachers in cross-cultural settings can begin to question what they have been taught about themselves and people in different ethnic and cultural groups to determine if what they believe is a help or a hindrance in urban schools.
- 8) Urban white middle-class teachers must advocate for themselves and their students if change is to happen.
- 9) Teachers must make a self-assessment and take responsibility for behavior that includes words, thoughts and acts, in order to develop clarity when problem solving with students, thus limiting projection and shadow material.
- 10) Teacher fear, uncontrolled anger, and defensiveness create an unsafe environment for students.

- 11) The teacher can create a safe environment for urban students providing a sanctuary from the negative treatment in the broader culture.
- 12) It would be a significant transformation in urban school culture if faculty and staff members embraced whomever was in the school as their own, and let that sentiment extend further to the community. School environment is critical to student educational success.
- 13) Belief (thought) is everything. Create alternative supportive stories about urban students, staff and community that emphasize the equality of all people.
- 14) Identify and assess the benefits of teaching in urban schools for self and the students. Celebrate!
- 15) Building relationships with students should not be thought of as a tool or strategy; rather, it is an honest exchange between people that promotes personal growth for both.
- 16) There is a difference between patronizing students and helping them to heal. What one is supposed or ought to do is one thing; wanting to serve and being grateful to serve is something else altogether.
- 17) It is important to know the history of the people and the cultural nuances of word, gesture and behavior.
- 18) Many things are not personal, though they may appear to be given one's development and experiences; be more objective.
- 19) Bias, thought, and behavior are not a secret; they are displayed on one's exterior through subtle facial and physical reactions.
- 20) Self-respect is manifested in respect for others.
- 21) Students are teaching teachers as much as teachers are teaching students.
- 22) Greet teachers and students; be honestly congenial during the course of the day.
- 23) Commit to personal transformation.
- 24) Have empathy for students and others.
- 25) The teacher may need to take a student aside and have a heart to heart conversation.
- 26) Make education fun.

### **Recommendations for Future Study**

Future researchers could increase the number of participants as well as include more teachers of color and male teachers, which might be a representative sample of school staff. Perhaps the research could be conducted in an urban school district that was more representative of inner city schools than district number one in this study. It



was an outlier, given that there was an important buy-in by teachers of the training they received as a faculty that guided their problem solving strategies.

In the future, teacher observation should be included to determine if what was said in the interview is congruent with practice inside of the classroom. Students should also be included as participants to triangulate the research data, to determine if their perceptions were in agreement with teacher observations. If the interviewer could establish a trusting relationship with teachers over time and take an in-depth look at teacher mindscapes, it may yield important findings for teacher personal training, cultural, and educational training in general.

Finally, a group of teacher volunteers from a traditionally entrenched urban district like number two in this study could be trained on self-reflection and cultural influences on teacher problem solving behavior. One might determine if training and teacher buy-in makes a significant difference in educational outcomes and school climate. Though districts and people are different, there are many commonalities in culture, perception, belief, thought, and behavior of Americans. The human commonalities in thought and behavior could be established, and training can target and address lesser strengths and non-productive thought processes of participants. Much more research needs to focus on the teacher as a conductor for social change.

## Chapter 6

### Introduction to Transformation

Frustrated  
Feel like cryin'  
don't know why  
feel like running till  
the sun goes down  
feel like screaming my  
insides out  
to let the world know what  
it's all about  
if I  
only knew.

Bonnie Lynn Tolson

The world would be a different place if we only knew. Education, formal and informal, is a way to know more about other people, the world and ourselves. It is a way to reduce the fear of the self and “others” (Tuan, 1979). Emotions like fear are human experiences (Way, 2011) whether one is red, yellow, brown, black or white. It is believed that thought creates emotion, and the words of others create who we are, according to Cupitt (1998). When thoughts are transformed, new words appear and the old programming disappears. Commitment to the process of change is primary.

For eons being frustrated was an emotion that has propelled individuals into action, and they gathered the information necessary to alleviate mental suffering, physical hardships and express their creativity in the process. And many have not. This introduction offers a different lens through which to view urban education. It is a community lens that may provide another picture for teachers of urban dwellers, one woman's voice, “in her own words.” When urban teachers as a whole acknowledge the positive attributes of youth, the students might see that in themselves and be able to create a life they could have never dreamed of.

Helen was a single black mother in her late seventies born in the 1930's when water fountains and public facilities were segregated. When asked about the education of her large family she said,

I thought education was especially something that should be acquired by everyone especially black people. That way they are able to get better paying jobs. (Helen)

She had three children who earned master's degrees, and she never thought they would go so far. Helen marveled,

I was encouraging them to go [to college], I wanted each one of them to go to college. They all did go. [And] They excelled all of them [more than] anything that ever crossed my mind. (Helen)

She worked two and three jobs while the children were growing up. She said that she was never on welfare. Of her own education, she explained,

[I] Went as far as the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Then I went down uh town to the federal building they had a program down there and that's where I got my GED. I was going at night after work, and I'd go down there and stay for maybe three or four hours, but I got my GED. (Helen)

She went to several technical training schools to improve her skills and chances for a better job,

I ...for a year [I went] to school for ... well physical therapy...dental technician [was all they had open]. [After finishing the dental technician program she realized that she would not get a job in the lab promised because], white people, mostly men [were employed] and being a black person there was no way that I could get into a job at that facility, no kinda way. (Helen)

Next,

I went up town in Kansas and I took typing but I never did get a job, typing and short hand. Yes sir, both of them. (Helen)

She also studied medical records terminology. She hungered for education to better herself, and she worked hard all of her life. Her courage and persistence in educating herself never translated into more money for her and her family as the women and wealth section reported. Finally, she took an English course at the community college with one of her children just for fun,

To me learning was very important, but I didn't have the time or the money or the energy to do too much schooling because the kids were still there. (Helen)

There are tens of thousands of Helens in the inner city who struggle to educate their children and themselves. Helens come in a variety of hues, dispositions and personal challenges as others outside of the city. The common myth in urban schools is that mothers and fathers do not care about their children's education, and there is not support in the home, as voiced by Emma, one of the interviewees. Consequently, the

parents and the community are rarely consulted about the education of their children and how urban schools can graduate them.

When urban educators begin to think about the motivations of students and parents in urban centers, think about Helen and what she tried to do for herself and her family. She worked decades for long hours with little money to show for it. When her children went to college, she could not help them. There was no accumulated property or wealth to pass on to her children, as is often the case in more affluent neighborhoods. Many urban children are at a disadvantage economically because there is often no wealth to inherit.

For teachers who see the need for personal transformation, Helen and her striving provides a different lens through which to begin to view black students and their parents in urban centers. Life is difficult. For some it is exceedingly hard. One may assume that as long as there have been homo sapiens on the planet, there has been individual mental and emotional conflict, and negative, persistent, troublesome thoughts that caused pain. Some of the negative thoughts are about other people, but many of them are worry and self-depreciating thoughts about the self.

A variety of practitioners in the East and the West through the ages have sought to help people relieve their mental anguish. In the West, Aaron Beck in 1960 formalized a technique called Cognitive Therapy and used a method he termed "reframing" as a way to help his patients. Reframing basically is to think about the situation differently. Make up a new plausible story about what happened. Continual negative thoughts lead to mental confusion. *Lucid* thought techniques, thinking clearly and removing "mind rubbish" relieves mental and emotional pain. A brief explanation of the process of reframing and other useful techniques will be explored.

### **Negative Beliefs**

What is a negative thought? Negative beliefs and troubling thoughts about self and others create mental anguish and drain energy. An example of a negative thought is "I can never do anything right," "just not smart enough to make a difference," or "these kids just can't learn." Such beliefs often make it difficult for individuals to be confident enough to start or finish tasks.

When the negative thought is about another person, it may limit the teacher's persistence in helping a child learn. The beliefs are personal limitations that reside in the mind, in thought. Negative thoughts not only diminish the individual's idea about self and what they can accomplish, they often similarly devalue others (Palmer, 1998). People transform their life and their experiences through the transformation of their mind, and eventually, behavior follows. And vice versa can be true, change behavior and the mind follows.

The fear of taking the initial steps towards personal transformation can be scary. Common fears are "how will the new change affect my life?" Secondly, how will family, friends and colleagues respond to the changes? It all seems rather threatening to the personal and cultural status quo. Sometimes people believe that to maintain the status quo is good enough even though they continue to struggle mentally, emotionally and sometimes physically, as has been demonstrated with the various crises that groups experience in this dissertation.

### **Positive Steps Towards Change**

Following is a brief description of the cost of negative thoughts, how certain beliefs affect behavior, and what it takes to change. Commitment to change is primary. Conflict with self and others can be an uncomfortable situation, but the difficulty is often a primary catalyst or avenue for positive change.

The first step towards positive transformation is that the person must make a conscious commitment to change. Without such determination and self-efficacy, change may not be realized. Know that change is possible for any person who wants to change. Next, decide what needs to change. If an individual continues to be involved in conflict with one person or a number of people around the same topic, idea, dynamic, for example, an accusation of inflexibility, that persistent "position" might be an area ripe for investigation through self-reflection. An initial question that a person may ask himself or herself is, "is it true?" Am I inflexible? Has anyone else mentioned that before?

If the individual is not sure, he or she can begin by digging up the artifact through self-reflection and realize that there may be some legitimate concerns about oneself brought by another. The process is one of "truth" finding, but the individuals find that for

themselves (West, 2000). Use questions as tools to begin the self-reflection search. What happened to create the situation? What was my role and contribution in the conflict? What did they say that prompted me to respond to them with such a strong reaction? What did I believe they meant when they said that? Is the story that I made up about them true? Did I make this story up myself or was it handed to me from my culture, home, or school environment? How did I handle the situation? Was my reaction based on the story I told myself about them? For example, “they are trying to make me look bad in front of my colleagues by saying that I am inflexible.” Maybe.

### **Storytellers**

People are storytellers. The stories are made up extremely fast, and are automatic to the extent that they usually go unnoticed. A number of these stories are narratives of bias. Some stories exist in society and may be expressed as a negative, visceral feeling. The belief behind the feeling is accepted as true; thus the unquestioned reaction that the other person is not like me is thought to be a “normal” response (Tuan, 1979). Individual responses and behaviors generally evolve naturally based on the stories each person accepts and the ones they make up about other people and situations. As children, many stories are absorbed without conscious knowledge, and it is like being a fish in water (Howard, 2006). For a fish to know that they are in water, self-reflection and deep thinking are required to understand first, one's position, and then examine the reactions to self and others under different circumstances.

Conflict between the self and other people clue the individual to problem situations. After a conflict situation occurs, unearth the story, what you said and what was said to you about the incident that affected your thoughts, feelings and behavior. How did it affect the other person? That can shed some light on your response. Why was I so angry? Is it a deeper issue that is a long-standing insecurity? Did I feel disrespected? How did I feel about what they said?

There may also be concerns that the other person's complaint had no merit; discard it, but not before it is inspected. Negative feelings, such as depression, sadness, and anger signal that something needs to be addressed and changed. Transformational work is done internally, but on occasion there are times to speak up, talk to others about

thoughts and feelings. A word of caution: there is a balance that ought to be maintained during deep thinking. People find themselves on a wheel in a feedback loop, and they do not know how to get out of it. Take a break and think about something else, like how to serve others. That can get one out of oneself and look outward to avoid total self-absorption or destructive behaviors. Serving and self-reflection can be done simultaneously, back and forth, in and out. It would be important to use every situation in life, positive or negative for self-development. Reflection is one tool for self-discovery and transformation.

### **Buried Bones of Belief**

Some beliefs are buried so deep that people are not aware of them. Many buried bones of belief are hidden from the individual's consciousness, the unwitting behavior (the hidden curriculum) one of the effects discussed in Orenstein's (1994) study. The beliefs have to be unearthed so they will no longer unconsciously influence agency. Conflict will point the way to the issue. Sometimes it is believed that the other person is, and has the issue. That may be true, but because one has been included, there is more than likely something in it for you. It could be as simple as recognizing the problem as the other person's, especially if you have a long history of wanting people to like you.

It is important not to discard it early, an easy toss, and not deal with the issue that may be a situation you need to address. Many of the subjects people do not want to talk about are the problems on the color line. Denial, color blindness, gender, and class bias are rampant in this society. It has also been seen throughout the dissertation that color matters in how people were treated such as the Bank of America loan scandal and the school in Arkansas. The cost of not seeing, turning away, not talking about problems in social institutions is evident, whether in the home, the political arena, the justice system, religious institutions, schools, or the country as a whole.

### **Detective Work**

Problems can be revealed in a number of ways. One way is to listen to other people and what they say about you. One does not have to agree, but there may be a seed of truth that can be gleaned from a possible unpleasant conversation. Secondly, if one has a strong fear or aversion about something or someone, that may be an area for

investigation. Thirdly, if there are troubling distressful thoughts that plague, one try and understand them. Fourth, if something happened to you and you have been “pushing it out of your mind” for years, look at it. See what it has to offer to forward personal growth. Personal growth and baggage reduction generally leads to lucid thinking, feeling and seeing. Being quiet and listening to the self is also an effective way to unearth issues. Often much of life becomes enjoyable and the ability to find humor in difficult circumstances, to lighten up, can be a bonus. Transformation takes time. It does not happen immediately; that is why commitment and perseverance are critical.

When one is able to accept the part of themselves that they once rejected (Palmer, 1998), there is always a gift in the shadow and projected material for the individual. Finally, when one has reflected on these items, just being willing to look at them begins the transformation process. Through the looking, one will come to know the appropriate next step. During this process one might discover things that have to be forgiven of oneself and others. Forgiveness is first and foremost releasing you from the harm done, so you can move forward. Turning yourself “loose” from the negative affects of what another has done to you is a gift to yourself. The more the individual is free of negative thoughts, revenge and fear, the more energetic, youthful, creative and expansive she or he becomes.

### **Thought Exchange**

How do you exchange one thought for another that is in harmony with the self. Many thoughts come and go as if they were vapors. Every thought is not based on a belief; some are random. Sometimes the random thoughts are entirely absurd, even shocking. One might ask, “Where did that thought come from?”

The thoughts that will be explored are not the vaporous ones, rather the ones that have solidified into beliefs, known or unknown, the beliefs that do not serve the individual or others. Sometimes the bones of belief are buried deep so that they are not obvious to the individual; in fact they are often hidden (McIntosh, 1988). Again, the clues or revelation may come as a result of confrontations or conflict with another person. Having a conflict with another person, a student, for example, is an opportunity to think deeply and co-create something positive with another. Individually, one may brainstorm



and begin digging, inspecting those artifacts; the quarrying, the questions are part of the self-reflective process (West, 2000).

### **Create New Stories**

After the brainstorming and also being quiet to see if an idea comes to mind, how do teachers, students, families, and administrators transform negative beliefs? Transformation and change start when people begin to create new stories about themselves and others. Some stories (beliefs) benefit the individual while simultaneously disadvantaging others. Consequently, the first step is to recognize the need to change the old negative stories and old paradigms about self and others. This can be a difficult part of the change process. Many of the old thoughts, ideas and beliefs have been an integral part of the person's experience since childhood. These ideas and beliefs are familiar, normal, and provide a place to stand, a foundation. Beliefs influence and define individual identity. Consequently, the fear of changing a belief may threaten identity; it can threaten who that person knows herself or himself to be.

However, it may be important to understand that how one relates to self and others may not be authentic, and it may not be working in that the individual may feel constrained, afraid, and not fully alive (McIntyre, 1997). Many people go about interacting with others and themselves in ways that they believe they “should act,” rather than being, authentic and spontaneous. Authenticity has nothing to do with how one “thinks one ought to be;” that is a great deal of work. It is just being (Cupitt, 1998).

Fear stops many people from being fully expressed and authentic. Quite often people are unaware that they are afraid, unexpressed and unhappy, and sometimes they unconsciously avoid what they fear. If the individual were present to life in each moment, the person would be aware of their thoughts, emotions, fears and behaviors (Korthagen, 2005) and could freely choose.

There are some mental fears, reactions to situations or other people that are based purely on thoughts rather than on actual experiences where people rush to avoid the encounter physically or may visually divert their eyes to keep from making contact (Tuan, 1979). One of the black teachers in the first school felt she was invisible to her white colleagues who did not look at or speak to her. Individuals stories about a situation

determines one's experience of the situation. Personal perception is all there is during conflict. The black teachers had a story and the white teachers had a story; there is no right or wrong here. The question might be, does the behavior create a peaceful, supportive, collaborative environment for teaching urban youth? If that is the goal, then does that behavior work towards the end result? Speaking to one another is basic to creating a positive school environment and relating one human being to another. Urban schools work when relationships work.

## **Summary**

People experience mental and emotional pain. The pain is most often brought about by negative thoughts and beliefs that do not serve the individual or the community. West (2000) argued that there are no problem people, but people with problems. Teachers, students, administrators, and others associated with the educational system must acknowledge their individual problems, bias, fear, anger and other negative emotions. The problems in schools are not black or white but a complex network of intricate, dynamic threads interwoven, creating a failing system in urban America. The solutions will be a matter of gray, a combination of black, white and other ethnic groups collaborating, recognizing their human fragilities, being compassionate towards self and others while learning how to think and behave in new ways.

Unproductive thoughts, beliefs and stories can be transformed once they are recognized. Some thoughts are conscious while others are buried below the surface creating a path that may be contrary to the conscious desires of the individual. Self-reflection is one of many techniques to unveil thoughts that interfere with positive relationships with self and others. Lucid thought processes allow the opportunity for better problem solving and productive story making. Thinking clearly, creating plausible stories, forgiving and loving self and others play significant roles in transforming thoughts, beliefs and behavior. Many problems stem from how and what we think, not who we are. Einstein (2013) argued, "We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them."

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