



Transforming Justice.
Transforming Teacher
Education.

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Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to outline a Restorative Teacher Education—that is, a method to prepare teachers to create and sustain opportunities for intellectual engagement for all children while fostering an inclusive classroom ethos. Arguing that teacher preparation must address Mass Incarceration and the systemic violence against Black and Brown bodies, the author recommends a three phase implementation process for a Restorative Teacher Education, including: 1) Creating a vision; 2) Developing strategic partnerships; and 3) Finding apprenticeship opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

In 2014, the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) released data on school discipline that was previously unavailable. A “Data Snapshot” not only revealed disturbing trends in Black students, English learners, and students with disabilities being disproportionately suspended and expelled but also highlighted racial disparities with police contact. According to OCR, “While Black students represent 16% of student enrollment, they represent 27% of students referred to law enforcement and 31% of students subjected to a school-related arrest (p. 1)” Black students and students with disabilities experience more “seclusion or involuntary confinement” in school, including being “physically restrained at school to immobilize them or reduce their ability to move freely.” In addition to being physically restrained, these same students are “restrained at school through the use of a mechanical device or equipment designed to restrict their freedom of movement” (2014, p. 1). Scholars and practitioners have referred to the infiltration of the criminal justice system in American public schools as the school-to-prison pipeline or the school/prison nexus (NAACP Legal Defense Fund, 2011; Meiners & Winn, 2010, Kim & Losen, 2012) while others have argued that the notion of “enclosures” more accurately describes a longstanding history of confinement for people of color in the context of the United States (Sojoyner, 2013).

Acknowledging the so-called school-to-prison pipeline, the U.S. Senate held a hearing on December 12, 2012 in which the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) acting administrator, Melodee Hanes, testified that “the minute a child steps foot into the juvenile justice system, their chances of becoming an adult offender go up 50 percent” and “their chances of completing their education, their chances of getting a good job, their chances in life in general diminish significantly.” School discipline issues have been the elephant in the room in teacher education—sometimes addressed in education law—but all too often relegated to the tragically named “classroom management” course. This paper describes a vision for preparing teachers to practice justice across disciplines by addressing the removal, isolation, and banishment of children and youth from classrooms and schools and the relationship between these punitive responses to Mass Incarceration explicitly in the preparation of teachers.

While some may wonder what a conversation about Mass Incarceration is doing in a nice place like this, I argue that it is imperative that teacher education engage in a paradigm shift in the way educators conceive of and respond to harm as offered by restorative justice theorists and practitioners that I discuss in this paper. More specifically, I am arguing for a Restorative Teacher Education—that is, a method to prepare teachers to create and sustain opportunities for intellectual engagement for all children while fostering an inclusive classroom ethos. In a Restorative Teacher Education, teacher educators create opportunities for aspiring teachers to develop a sociocritical literacy or a “historicizing literacy” (Gutierrez, 2008a, 2008b) in which they confront race, class, privilege, and oppression in their personal narratives and begin the ongoing work of understanding how these narratives impact their teaching philosophies, practices and—most importantly—their relationships with students. Additionally, a historicizing literacy allows preservice teachers to interrogate the aforementioned domains in English, Art, Music, Math, Science and Social Studies and investigate how their fields have attempted to address or ignore these issues. In a Restorative Teacher Education, preservice teachers across content areas engage in restorative justice practices not solely to disrupt zero-tolerance and punitive practices that exacerbate inequality in classroom and school settings but to also engage in a critical dialogue with each other as professionals, their students, and their students’ families about notions of citizenship, belonging, and worthiness that can impact teacher practice and student learning. This is a movement to make these issues central to [every] subject area methods courses.

WHAT IS A RESTORATIVE TEACHER EDUCATION AND WHO IS IT FOR?

A Restorative Teacher Education sits at the intersection of restorative justice theory and education. At first glance, restorative justice is seemingly unrelated to education. Restorative justice is a victim-centered approach to harm that requires shifting the focus from punishment to the process of making wrongdoings right through peacemaking/keeping circles, Restorative Case Conferences (RCCs), and other methods that require face-to-face interactions between those who experienced harm and those who caused harm. Addressing wrongdoing—as opposed to crime—allows those who experienced harm to express their needs as well as get their needs met and those who caused harm to make things right while seeking to understand how their behavior impacts individuals and communities. Together these stakeholders participate in a consensus building process that has the potential to create boundary-crossing social networks that may not otherwise be possible. Like restorative justice, a Restorative Teacher Education is a paradigm shift or what I have referred to elsewhere as a shift in mindset to prepare teachers to take pedagogical stances that signal to students they are valued citizens who are worthy of a high quality education. These pedagogical stances that teachers can take can include but are not limited to a) a commitment to keep all students in the classroom or not depending on referrals or other personnel to remove children from classrooms; b) address salient issues that disrupt the lives of students and their families; c) use their curricular powers to select texts and experiences (writing assignments, projects, guest speakers, field trips) to address issues of racism, sexism, classism, and other domains of inequality and how they relate to their particular field. Restorative Teacher Education, preservice teachers are guided through a series of questions conducted in circles/rounds facilitated by a teacher educator or methods instructor, “Who are you?” “Why are you here?” “Why teach [English/Math/Social Studies/Science]?” and “Why now?” “If you could give a young person one seminal text from your field that influenced or influences you, what would it be and why?” and two questions posed by a colleague and restorative justice practitioner, Ananda Mirrili, “Who were you at your best as a student? Who were you at your worst as a student?” Ultimately a Restorative Teacher Education seeks to answer the looming question posed to composition scholar, Mary Rose O’Reilly, and her classmates at the height of the Vietnam War by their professor, Ihab Hassan, at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. Professor Hassan asked his students to grapple with, “How can we teach English in a way that people stop killing?” (O’Reilly, 1993). At this critical intersection in America’s relationship to its citizens, this question must be asked across disciplines (eg., How do we teach Math in a way that people stop killing? How do we teach Art and Music in a way that people stop killing? How do we teach Science in a way that people stop killing? How do we teach history/social studies in a way that people stop killing?).

WHY DO WE NEED TO DO THIS WORK?

In order to engage in this work, educational researchers, teacher educators, and teachers must demonstrate fidelity to restorative justice theory and engage historiographies of Black and Brown people in the context of the United States. Restorative justice is not a program or a “best practice;” restorative justice is a *paradigm shift* in the way in which Americans view harm. Three questions, “Who has been harmed?” “What are their needs?” and “Whose obligations are these?” guide restorative justice in criminal and juvenile justice contexts (Zehr, 2015). While restorative justice in the Western context was initially conceived as a challenge to people who defined themselves as Christians to revisit longstanding retributive responses to crime, it is now considered a viable option in court systems that are questioning the long term and negative impact of incarceration.¹ However, in educational contexts, the aforementioned questions can cause tensions as practitioners seek to understand how those who cause harm in school contexts have also experienced harm through the “education debt” or legacy of inferior education for Indigenous, Black, and Latino children (Ladson-Billings, 2006). According to Zehr (2015), the

¹ It is important to acknowledge that what the legal system refers to as “restorative justice” in the context of North America as well as countries like New Zealand, are practices that have been a part of Indigenous and Maori traditions respectively.

process of opening “a dialogue, an exploration in our communities and our societies about our assumptions and needs,” is a critical component of restorative justice. In this dialogue there must be particular attention to how a community defines justice, whether or not “established systems deliver justice,” and what changes, if any, are needed to how the larger community views, defines, and practices justice. (p. 230). Ultimately the restorative justice dialogue is an opportunity to define the values of a community and explore what matters. Stakeholders—that is people who are harmed, caused harm, (including?) representatives from their communities and their advocates—must be “genuine partners in the justice process” (Boyles-Watson & Pranis, 2012).

In the current climate of evidence-based practice, some restorative justice scholars argue that evidence only seems necessary for alternatives to punishment as opposed to evidence that demonstrates zero-tolerance policies such as suspensions and expulsions actually yield student achievement or engagement. The work of teacher education, then, must be about human lives or as Boyles-Watson and Pranis (2012) assert, “The question of values is more foundational than the question of what is effective.” Restorative justice, and thus a Restorative Teacher Education, is an invitation to move away from the question, *what works*, and toward the journey of *what is the work*. Establishing values is not easy work; however it is central to restorative justice theory. Once values are established, according to Pranis, the next step is to ask “Is a practice consistent with those values?” (Pranis in Boyles-Watson and Pranis, p. 267). I am arguing for teacher preparation programs to engage a restorative framework that begins with the difficult work of establishing values because I firmly believe that until then, there are no practices we can teach or that novice teachers can learn that will begin to address racial inequality and disparities in learning and engagement.

While schools throughout this country are struggling with the aftermath of zero-tolerance policies, strategies, and approaches in responding to harm, it is difficult to establish consistent values and practices across districts. There are schools who employ School Resource Officers (SROs) and other schools without police presence that co-exist in the same school districts. Classroom teachers respond in myriad ways as well; there are some teachers who have more patience when students are talking during work time and others who require complete silence². There are teachers who find policies such as “not hats,” “no sagging jeans” and other rules regarding clothing a waste of time to enforce while others cannot focus on instruction unless they address these issues. I remember my first “professional development” session with high school teachers in the Southeast where I was charged with supporting teachers and administrators with creating and sustaining an inquiry-driven school community. I shared a video of youth poets exchanging original writing and providing peers with substantive feedback. After the video clip was complete, I eagerly awaited feedback from the teaching team until one teacher broke the silence, “Why were students allowed to wear hats?” Now that this teacher broke the silence, others asked questions like, “Why were students calling the teacher by his first name?” Not one teacher in that learning community could get past what my colleague and co-founder of the Power Writers, Joseph Ubiles, refers to as “costumes and props” worn or enacted by students in order to focus on the teaching and learning that was taking place. Trying not to let my ego get the best of me, I retreated to my lab—trying to understand what these teachers believed their work actually entailed. Duncan (2000) described these type of responses as “urban pedagogies” or ways in which school emphasize management or law and order as opposed to academic rigor thus “celling” Indigenous, Black, and Latino bodies.

Much of this, of course, depends on a school’s climate. To be sure, Skiba (2015) and his colleagues, for example, found that “behavior, student demographic, and school characteristics” all played a role in out-of school suspensions. However, school characteristics such as a “principal’s perspective on discipline” were “stronger predictions” of suspensions than the “severity of infraction or individual characteristics” in this study. Therefore a school can have a leader whose perspectives on race and class significantly influence his or her staff for better or for worse. In Skiba’s study, school staff described Black boys as being “lazy” and Black girls as

² A segment entitled: “*Is this working?*” which aired on This American Life on October 17, 2014 captures the nuances of this work and how teachers respond differently to particular disruptions.

“dramatic, aggressive, and loud.” This is not surprising given the history of the criminalization of Black people in the United States. In an analysis of “The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration,” Coates (2015) examines the omnipresence of the Moynihan Report (1965) and the ways in which it was used to pathologize Black families. Ultimately Coates argues that Mass Incarceration is “a problem of troublesome entanglements” and that efforts to reform the current system “pretend that it is possible to disentangle ourselves without significantly disturbing the other aspects of our lives, that one can extract the thread of Mass Incarceration from the larger tapestry of racist American policy” (p. 84). A Restorative Teacher Education seeks to disturb what is now known as methods or the teaching of a particular subject by asking teachers to interrogate their own beliefs, practices, and histories that shape their identities as a teacher and learner. In a Restorative Teacher Education, novice teachers engage in the very difficult work of historicizing their lives and learning how they can do this work with their students rather than seeing this work as separate and distinct from who they are and how they interact in the world. In the next section, I provide a pedagogical portrait from my work with preservice teachers and how I model and train teachers using a Restorative English Education process (Winn, 2013; Winn, 2015; Winn & Winn, 2015).

HOW DO I DO THIS?

As a teacher educator, I imagine daily what it is I would like for novice teachers to know to be able to address harm and wrongdoing in schools and boldly confront racism and the impact Mass Incarceration has on children. At the minimum, all novice teachers should be trained as restorative justice circle keeper facilitators. Circle keeper training provides teachers strategies for building consensus, setting up a value system and asking questions that seek to create and cultivate connections and communication. [“These strategies include doing... and ... and...” Is it pulling this too far afield to also say how it is that teacher educators would enable novices to learn how to do these things?] Circle keeper training provides a specific approach to relationships that is grounded in learning how to listen and learning how to speak in ways that I find can ground a classroom of individuals with various needs, experiences, ways of knowing, and being. In a Restorative Teacher Education, content area faculty would provide opportunities for novice teachers to practice circle keeping by using circles as part of the curriculum. Imagine this scenario in my methods class for Secondary English methods class:

*On December 4, 2014, my Secondary English Methods students arrived to our classroom to find all the chairs arranged in a circle. Prior to joining the circle, I encouraged them to nourish themselves with snacks I provided and conversation with peers. Once all of us were sitting I began reading one of my favorite children’s books, *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People’s Ears: A West African Folk Tale retold by Verna Aardema and Illustrated by Leo and Dianne Dillon*. In this story, a mosquito dares to tell a story to Iguana about seeing a farmer digging a yam “as big I am.” Iguana snaps at Mosquito, “What’s a mosquito compared to a yam?” before plugging his ears with two sticks in hopes to avoid anymore of Mosquito’s annoying stories. Unbeknownst to Iguana, his inability to hear causes a chain of reactions in which his peers in the forest find each other’s behavior so suspicious they begin to panic. Initially Python flees from Iguana because he is certain Iguana is plotting mischief against him due to Iguana’s uncharacteristic silence. Python’s fleeing consequently causes Rabbit, Crow, and Monkey to move rather quickly through the forest until Monkey lands on a compromised tree limb that falls on Mother Owl’s nest killing one of her owlets. When Mother Owl discovers one of her owlets has been killed she refuses to call the sun so that the day can come. The presiding king, Lion, wanted to get to the bottom of this and called in Monkey who blamed Crow who blamed Rabbit who blamed Python who blamed Iguana. When Iguana is discovered with sticks in his ears they are taken out and he explains that he did not mean to ignore his friend Python but was annoyed with Mosquito telling a story. Once the animals hear of the Mosquito’s story—which they characterize as a “lie,” they chant—“Punish the Mosquito” who hears this and gets away. When this same mosquito buzzed in someone’s ear, it is killed immediately indicating a particular justice has been served. After I read the story, I*

asked “Who is responsible for killing Mother Owl’s baby and why?” Some students thought it was fairly obvious that Monkey was responsible since the tree limb that killed the owlet broke when he landed on it. Many students, however, blamed Mosquito, who was an easy target. Seldom, if ever, does anyone have anything nice to say about a mosquito. Two students expressed the viewpoint that the entire community shared the responsibility of Owlet’s death. I used this story to illustrate the difficult work of restorative justice in schools and how this notion of justice is one that classroom and school communities must interrogate together. I also asked my students to imagine a school community where everyone assumed responsibility for student learning, created ways for students to take responsibility for their learning while consciously seeking to disrupt the ways in which Mass Incarceration seeps into classroom and school culture.

After this round we returned to the questions we asked ourselves during the first day of class, “Who are you? Why are you here? Why teach English? Why Now?” Once we returned from our break we broke the circle to learn more about the particulars of restorative justice, look at the “Data Snapshot” of school discipline from the Office for Civil Rights as well as a local report, *Race to Equity: A Baseline Report on the Racial Disparities in Dane County*, by the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families racial disparities in the areas of education, criminal justice, workforce, and healthcare among Black and White families. Students were encouraged to read other materials that I provided in a resource binder on their own time including Wayne Yang’s (2009) article “Discipline or Punish? Some Suggestions for School Policy and Teacher Practice” and two studies of restorative justice in schools including the Thelton E. Henderson Center for Social Justice at UC Berkeley’s School of Law “School-Based Restorative Justice as an Alternative to Zero-Tolerance Policies: Lessons from West Oakland” and the Alameda County Health Care Services Agency School Health Services Coalition’s “Restorative Justice: A Working Guide for our Schools.” We followed this with a discussion of “What else can we read? What else can we write? What else can we view? What else can we experience together in order to do this work?”

Students were invited to form three smaller circles with one volunteer facilitator to read and discuss three articles. Ned Blackhawk’s (2014) “Remember the Sand Creek Massacre” that discusses the forgotten scholarship about an attack on the Cheyenne and Arapaho people in 1864; Jacqueline Woodson’s article “The Pain of a Watermelon Joke” describing the hurtful experience of being confronted with a watermelon joke by someone she considered a colleague and friend as she prepared to accept the National Book Award, and Michelle Alexander’s “Telling My Son About Ferguson” describing the complexity that many Black parents are facing daily in how to talk about the police shootings and systemic violence against Black children with their children. These small groups read the articles—some opting to read aloud while others read silently—volunteer facilitators raised questions for everyone to respond to in rounds. Afterwards, we discussed how we could use these articles to introduce a theme or specific piece of literature we were teaching or planning to teach. Alas, we came back together in one large circle to share one sentence describing how we were feeling and I closed with Kamau Daaood’s poem, “Blakey’s Drumsticks,” about the power of sharing and exchanging knowledge and wisdom with the young. And, this was just the beginning.

WHAT IS THE WORK IN MAKING THIS WORK?

I am proposing three phases to implementing this work: 1) Creating a vision; 2) Developing strategic partnerships; and 3) Finding apprenticeship opportunities (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Three Phases of Restorative Teacher Education Implementation



First, teacher preparation programs will need to create a succinct vision across programs focused on the humanity of children and practicing justice. A commitment to engage in readings that define this moment of Mass Incarceration, the criminalization of Black people and the impact that living in a carceral state has on teaching and learning. Everyone has experienced harm from this whether it is something as obvious as having an incarcerated child, parent, or partner while others experience this harm in the ways in which they implicitly or explicitly contribute to racism, bias, and/or viewing particular people through a lens of criminality. There must be seminal reading experiences including, but not limited to Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*; Ta-Nehisi Coates *Between the World and Me* as well as his article in *The Atlantic* entitled "The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration," Fania Davis' article in *Yes! Magazine* "This Country Needs a Truth and Reconciliation Process on Violence Against African Americans—Right Now." There must be witnessing experiences such as looking together at the photography of Richard Ross in his collections *Girls in Justice* and *Juvenile in Justice*. I brought the latter to the University of Wisconsin, Madison and displayed the photos in a gallery in one of the School of Education buildings. Richard Ross also visited campus and gave a talk that coincided with the Secondary English Methods classes that was well attended by community members, educators, as well as university students and faculty. There must be viewing experiences; for example faculty could watch documentaries such as *Central Park Five*; Rhodessa Jones's work with The Medea Project, Theater for Incarcerated Women and Eve Ensler's writing workshop for incarcerated women in the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility which is the focus of a documentary entitled *What I want my words to do to you*. There must be engagement of policy reports and briefs that look at issues of inequality both nationally and locally. It may be possible to do this using a collective impact approach that prioritizes creating a "common agenda" (Kania & Kramer, Winter 2011) but there has to be a process whereby all parties can define their purpose and values. Somehow, teacher educators must signal to the next generation of educators that subject matter or disciplines do not matter as much as the human lives teachers will impact throughout their careers.

In the second phase of implementation, teacher preparation programs would develop strategic partnerships between community institutions that practice restorative justice and Schools of Education. Ideally, teacher preparation programs would utilize restorative justice practitioners who are knowledgeable about local issues while also seeking leading practitioners who train people who work in various contexts. The role of a restorative justice trainer—to borrow the language of restorative justice attorney Sujatha Baliga—is to be a “paradigm shift communicator.” In sum, their work is to introduce restorative justice processes such as the circle process in authentic ways through apprenticeship, guided participation, and participatory appropriation not unlike what Rogoff (1995) conceptualized as three planes of sociocultural activity. There are some limitations to relying on these partnerships. Some cities will have more of a critical mass of people engaged in this work, which could make it more difficult to implement this plan coherently across teacher preparation programs. To be sure, I spent 2015 with the Restorative Justice program at Impact Justice in Oakland, California as they worked with many different constituents including individual families who experienced harm, schools, court systems, jails, prisons, and with police officer to underscore the commitment restorative justice has to transform the ways in which we view harm and the impact harm has on relationships. In cities like Oakland, California there are several organizations who do this work well such as Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth (RJOY), Community Works West (CWW), Restorative Justice Training Institute (RJTI), Circle Up Ed, and Impact Justice who have trained many of the trainers in the East Bay. Catholic Charities in the East Bay partners with West Contra Costa County School District to provide restorative justice training that includes trauma-informed practices to teachers in Richmond schools. Collaborations with attorneys or people with legal backgrounds, youth workers, and educators engaged in restorative justice work in multiple contexts would be ideal. However, cities that do not have access to local organizations who do this work can partner with practitioners from other cities and regions who often offer training and will travel to provide training. There may be contexts in which seeking a restorative justice practitioner outside the community if there are particular tensions and need someone who is neutral.

The third phase of implementation would involve fostering apprenticeship opportunities in schools and in out-of-school spaces. Ideally, prospective Cooperating Teachers (CTs) could learn alongside student teachers similar to June Jordan’s Poetry for the People (P4P) experience in which undergraduates at the University of California, Berkeley took a three semester class with an established poet/writer in which they learned the mechanics of writing poetry, explicating poetry, providing feedback, publishing anthologies, and staging public readings with classroom teachers in the Bay Area. STPs, then worked with classroom teachers not merely as guests but to show them how to sustain these practices on their own (Jocson, 2005). A big tension in a Restorative Teacher Education model, and one that I grapple with as a teacher educator, is preservice and novice teachers often feel torn by the teaching they want to do and the teaching they encounter in their student teaching placements. The work that I am proposing is not being done consistently enough across classrooms or schools in order to provide high quality placements for novice teachers who are learning their craft. When this work is being done it has been mandated without proper training and ongoing support. Most educators can agree that the disparities in punishment and suspensions are egregious but are not able to align their values with an effective action.

It is important to emphasize that teachers are not to blame for this; restorative justice is currently being applied hastily to “triage acute pain”—as one educator explained to me in a restorative justice circle keeper training in Northern California—as opposed to using restorative justice to foster and sustain community, citizenship and belonging. For example, restorative justice circle processes are often used in place of suspensions which, in many regards can be good; however, restorative justice theorists and practitioners would like to see schools use restorative justice circle processes to build and sustain relationships in hopes to preempt conflict. Restorative justice circle keeper facilitation training is at minimum a three- day commitment and training, in best cases, should continue throughout a practitioner’s career.

In closing, I would like for you to imagine this scenario for a novice teacher science teacher practicing Restorative Teacher Education:

It is the first day of a novice teacher’s 10th grade science class. As students enter they notice the desks are pre-arranged in a circle. There are no handouts or a recitation of rules on

this first day. Every student is asked to take a seat in the circle with the teacher to take turns sharing names, preferred gender pronouns, and stating why they are there. Some will say they are there because they “have to be,” while others may have an enlightened manifesto on their presence and, yet, others may pass. Using a sea shell she kept from a mother/daughter trip and feeling anxious about sharing something personal, the novice teachers explains that the sea shell will serve as a talking piece providing opportunities to talk and opportunities to listen. Those who pass the first time may say something the next time after hearing their peers share. After this initial introduction everyone in the circle receives a 5x7 card and is asked to record three words that best capture values they desire or need in place to be an engaged member of a community. They are then asked to prioritize one of these three values and discuss as much or as little about it during another round. Once each participant has had a turn the teacher/facilitator notices that “respect” is chosen by half the students. The teacher invites everyone to respond to “What does respect sound like, look like, and feel like?” so the class can learn what respect means to each individual who selected this value. These cards are placed in the center of the circle and the values, and further brainstorming of particular values, become a part of the institutional memory of the classroom.

*In the next class session, students meet again in the circle. Students are invited to read Rebecca Skloot’s recent OpEd piece in the New York Times (December 30, 2015), “Your cells. Their research. Your permission?” in anticipation of reading *The Immortal life of Henrietta Lack*. After reading the article, students take turns responding to questions such as “What is confidentiality?” “What role does confidentiality play in science?” and “Who should science research serve?” After the first week, the teacher and students agree to meet in circle once a week. They have chosen Wednesday because it is the middle of the week and they agree it is a good time to check in and do a community reading that is relevant to their thinking and learning. By the second semester the teacher asks students to select articles and facilitate Wednesday circles but she always has a batch of back up articles just in case¹.*

DISCUSSION

While this is hard work, I have to believe it is possible given the current climate of violence throughout our country and our world. And while I struggle with models of this work in progress for the pre-service teachers I work with I refuse to disengage from this journey. As I do this work I often think about a quote that appears in my earlier work from a musician and poet, Gabriella Ballard, from my ethnography of participatory literacy communities and, more specifically Black owned and operated bookstores and coffee houses that doubled as cultural and literary institutions in Northern California (Fisher, 2005, 2007, 2009). Ms. Ballard, who frequently participated at the Jahva House Speak Easy Open Mic in Oakland, California shared her experience growing up in New Orleans, Louisiana and specifically her time at an African/African American-centered school, Ahidiana, co-founded by poet, writer, and teacher Kalamu ya Salaam. Ballard asserted, “...some people argue that the school prepared us for a world that doesn’t exist. I don’t agree with that. I feel that the school created [or] prepared us to create the world that we wanted to exist because what other reason are we teaching anyway?” (Ballard in Fisher, 2009, p. 112).

Confronting race, racism and racial disparities is hard work both in both in and out of schools yet classrooms are one of the few places where students and teachers have space and time to disrupt inequality and begin this important work.

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ⁱ In this imagined science classroom the teacher is ensuring all students have an opportunity to engage in intellectual conversation. Community readings ensure students are getting information and experiences that extend the ideas in assigned reading and purposefully does not punish those who have not read or have yet to complete reading. The teacher in this scene scaffolds the selection of texts and the open-ended questions related to the text and the themes in class in order to set the stage for students to do the same.