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A NARRATIVE OF A TEACHER'S AWAKENING OF CONSCIOUSNESS:
LEARNING TO BECOME AN EFFECTIVE WITNESS

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This autoethnographical narrative chronicles the awakening and subsequent conscientization of a middle-class white female teacher through critical reflective praxis. Autoethnography, Liberation Theory and Critical Race Theory (CRT) are used in this study, allowing the researcher to become the focal point of the story. The narrative details the journey in retrospect, revealing the evolution of my conscientization. The research statements guiding this dissertation are as follows: this autoethnographical narrative details the peeling back of the awakening and critical consciousness developed by a white female teacher using Liberation Theory and aided by CRT and Care Ethic Theory as I interrogate each layer looking for insight into the complex construct of the inequities in education, with regard to white teachers and students of color. This study purposes bringing the care construct to teacher training to soften the existing violence caused by internalized racism in the classroom for both students of color and white teachers. This study illuminates the complexity of the Care Ethic construct while connecting the transformative journey of the researcher to the reader, yielding a better understanding of care in education and uncovering the common experiences of white middle-class teachers that shape the *in group* identity of all teachers.

The findings show that a teacher's identity is developed and shares many characteristics with the *in group* mentality. The identification of the *in group* mentality will pinpoint my cultural mis-education, which can provide a change in my identity, leading to a more equitable classroom. The findings will also provide a process and voice that may lead other teachers to

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uncover their hidden curriculum, allowing for an attitudinal shift as a catalyst for educational equity.

Keywords: hidden curriculum, discourse analysis, critical race theory, social justice, oppression, rebirth, epistemological curiosity, CRT pedagogy, culturally relevant pedagogy, care ethic, servant leadership, inner bigot, racism, liberation theory, white privilege, unfinishedness, identity development, reflective practice, social capital, critical consciousness, autoethnography.

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Chapter One: Introduction

If you are coming over to help me, don't bother. But if you're coming over because you think your liberation is bound up with mine, let's work together.

---Australian Aborigine Woman, Unnamed

Introduction

In this dissertation, I look to the past to find clarity and direction: I recount the events following a personal tragedy that led to my professional and personal awakening and my journey toward critical consciousness. Although I work to see this awakening and journey objectively, my narrative is nevertheless subjective. I have chosen to tell this story because it may help others in their efforts to free themselves and because it ultimately reveals the power of education—including self-education—to transform racists and bigots if only they will think, reflect, and remain open to all kinds of “others.” In keeping with the causes of my transformation, I use Paulo Freire’s liberation pedagogy—specifically his concepts of dialogue, praxis, conscientization, critical consciousness, and epistemological curiosity—to frame my story. Within this Freirean frame, I also use Noddings’ Care Ethic and Critical Race Theory to demonstrate how I worked through my own racism and bigotry in order to become more fully human. As I worked towards the process of developing critical consciousness, towards the process of becoming fully human, towards ridding myself of deeply engrained racism and bigotry, I embraced such civil rights activists as Septima Clark, Ella Baker, and Bayard Rustin as role models.

I begin this study by defining and explaining Freire's (1970) concepts of dialogue, praxis, conscientization, critical consciousness, and epistemological curiosity, positioning them within his liberation pedagogy. I also reference my use of Noddings' (1984) Care Ethic, connecting her ethic to Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2003; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995a) to reveal my development of critical consciousness. Next, I explain my context and the "knowledge," attitudes, and beliefs with which I entered classroom teaching and which I continued to espouse until I forced myself to create a vision, define goals for realizing that vision, and work through the process of realizing that vision following an event that shattered life as I knew it. Third, I recount the story of my liberation—my awakening and my journey to critical consciousness—using Freire, Noddings, and Critical Race Theory to illuminate the meaning and value of these processes. Finally, I posit that the use of Service Learning in teacher education and re-education will positively affect the achievement gap and help to eliminate the black-white, them-us dichotomy in education.

Background of Educational Reform

In twenty years of teaching I have experienced many paradigm swings in education: Bloom's taxonomy, critical thinking pedagogy, reading literacy across the disciplines, multicultural education, brain research, infusion of technology, character education, self-determination theory, understanding by design, standards-based teaching and grading, and high stakes testing. The packaged pedagogical programs have come and gone through my tenure, each one bringing promise of change, each one replaced by the next best program between two and three years after its implementation.

My experiences with the frequent and inevitable paradigm shifts have inspired me to reflect upon my personal experience and redefine the goals of education into three categories: Head, Heart and Hand. The Head relates to cognitive development, knowledge. The Heart is the affective or motivational dispositions, often seen as the mission statements of schools. The Hand is the behaviors or skill sets (Berkowitz, Althof, & Bier, 2012). In today's educational system, cognitive development (the Head) is at center stage. Quality education and academic achievement, unfortunately, are increasingly measured with high stakes tests, like the ACT, SAT, and subject-related end-of-course exams. With educational aims narrowly focused on high stakes testing, almost all 50 states have adopted the Common Core State Standards as a model for a successful school. Earlier, Paulo Freire had described this kind of educational system, with the emphasis on testing, as a banking model. He saw the teachers as distributors of knowledge and the students as vessels to be filled with knowledge, asked only to process and remember the script to perform well on tests. Freire explained that such an educational system lacks authentic dialogue, leaving the classroom void of critical thinking and development of curiosity (Freire, 1970, 1973).

The 2001 legislation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) highlighted the need for schools to create safe classrooms with well-prepared teachers in which students would achieve important learning goals. NCLB requires schools to close the achievement gap between groups of students and provide evidence that all students are receiving equal education. Out of NCLB legislation the Common Core State Standards were developed to assess schools' compliance. The Common Core State Standards provide consistency to educators. In a time of scrutiny this set of

expectations and guidelines is very appealing to schools that are primarily concerned with keeping accreditation and state funding. The standards provide a clear and measurable way to determine what students are learning. Educational institutions have also attempted to create standardized assessment to ensure all students are meeting these benchmark standards. The Common Core State Standards are tagged as the “first step in providing our young people with a high quality education” (CoreStandards.org).

Although the NCLB legislation mentions safe classrooms and teacher preparedness, there is little educational focus or funding dedicated to the motivational dispositions (the Heart) or to the development and assessment of behaviors or skill sets (the Hand). Although every school around the nation has a mission statement directed at the overall development of the student as a competent member of our democracy, there is no active legislation or movement addressing these areas of the Heart and the Hand. There is concern regarding the struggles of today's youth, including their increased participation in high-risk behaviors, increased school violence, increases in bullying, increases in suicide ideation; however, education rhetoric is focused solely on academic achievement. Twenty-eight percent of teenagers reported feelings of sadness in 2012 and 20 percent in 1997; 29 percent reported issues with alcohol in 2012 and 1997, and 77 percent of students reported being the victim of bullying (Harris, 2009). Statistical trends show increases in many at-risk behaviors, leaving educators and parents to wonder what measures can be implemented to sustain significant decreases in overall high-risk behaviors in teenagers.

Education must realize two goals: (1) that children learn and become critically knowledgeable, and (2) that children develop into mature, productive, and ethical citizens

(Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2012). My experience of the school environment, unfortunately, has been a desolate professional development experience that emphasizes classroom management strategies and curriculum discussions. The lack of attention to the development of mature, productive, and ethical citizens has compelled me to address the social and emotional development of students in my classroom. Eventually this desire for teaching the whole student would culminate in my increased interest in Service Learning and ways this teaching strategy could be implemented to cultivate students' character and generate connectedness between students and the community.

Moral educators, civic educators, character educators, citizenship educators, social and emotional educators, multicultural educators and care educators have joined forces in an effort to address the goal of sustainable significant decreases in high-risk behaviors and sustainable significant increases in positive social and cultural sensitivity. *The Handbook of Prosocial Education* (Brown, Corrigan, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2012) was the product of a symposium held in 2007. Leaders from the above-mentioned fields worked to identify emergent themes in the affective or motivational disposition theories under the term *prosocial education*. The primary tenet of prosocial education is that "the [goals of academic achievement, character education, social emotional learning and school climate improvement] are united and indivisible" (Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2012, p. 4). Through subsequent symposiums and research, themes emerged, all under the category of nonacademic priorities, but listed in the mission statement of most educational institutions. The goal of the merger under the *prosocial* title, capturing emerging themes of the affective and motivational dispositions of youth development, would

give a collective power to transition these areas of the Heart and the Hand to a primary aim of successful schools (Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2012). The goal of identifying this responsibility of schools, to educate the whole child, brought to the forefront the need to change policy and practice in schools to create the safe classroom. The call is to give equal attention to all three areas of school reform (Head, Heart, and Hand) as called for in NCLB legislation. The current trend of educational reform is so narrowly focused on academic achievement, measured by high stakes testing, that the other areas of education have been cut out of the school day in the name of remediation and enrichment. The dangerous trend of a one-dimensional focus is being highlighted in data analysis as subgroup deficits across the nation are uncovered, revealing a growing achievement gap among white students and African American Students.

Definitions

Authentic Dialogue: According to Freire, dialogue is the naming of the world; naming the world allows, transforms, and humanizes the world. Authentic dialogue is an authentic encounter among people committed to naming the world and cannot happen without love. Such a dialogue is the combination of learning and acting and requires mutual trust among parties. Authentic dialogue requires critical thinking and is fundamental to education.

Banking Model: This current narrative style of teaching with the teacher as the narrator is void of communicating. Students are allowed to receive, store, and recall information, and therefore have a lack of creativity and transformation. Without inquiry and dialogue students cannot be truly human. In the banking model the teachers are the experts and the students know nothing; knowledge is a gift bestowed upon students; therefore the better the student in the banking

model, the less likely the student is to develop critical consciousness. These successful students thus adapt to the world as it is presented without question, perpetuating oppression.

Common Core State Standards: (<http://www.corestandards.org/>) This educational initiative in the United States details curriculum for K-12 students and seeks to establish consistent educational standards across the states as well as to ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to enter credit-bearing courses at college or enter the workforce. These standards are a guidebook for the banking model.

Cognitive Dissonance: A term used to indicate mental distress that comes from holding two opposing ideas, beliefs, or behaviors in the light of conflicting or new evidence.

Conscientization: This term refers to the process in which individuals and communities develop a critical understanding of their social reality through a combination of reflection and action, known as praxis (Freire, 1970).

Conscientizacao: A Portuguese term referring to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality (Freire, 1970).

Critical Consciousness: This idea refers to achieving an in-depth understanding of the world, and one's place in the world, allowing for the perception of and exposure to social and political contradictions and then taking action in one's life against the oppressive elements that are illuminated by that understanding.

Epistemological Curiosity: This is the desire to obtain new knowledge (concepts, ideas and facts) expected to stimulate intellectual interest or eliminate conditions of informational

deprivation. Epistemological curiosity appears to be maximally activated when individuals recognize opportunities to discover something completely new or when people lack information they are seeking. In the context of critical consciousness, epistemological curiosity is the desire to break down the myths of society and rename the world to achieve full humanization.

Epoch: This term incorporates a complex of ideas, concepts, hopes, doubts, values and challenges that take place when individuals are in dialectical interaction with their opposites, striving towards plenitude.

Liberation Pedagogy: Through the study of oppression and the awareness of one's place in the world one begins to expel the myths created by the oppressor and begins to perceive the world differently, ultimately seeing oneself as free and fully human.

Magical Consciousness: People experience themselves as completely unable to control the things that happen to them, and are unable to change their personal or socioeconomic situation.

Methodology of *Conscientizacao*: This type of methodology refers to the investigation of the generative theme contained in the minimum thematic universe (the generative themes in action) and thus introduces or begins to introduce women and men to a critical form of thinking about their world.

Naïve Consciousness: A person can distinguish between himself and the outside world. Life does not just happen to a person. There is a sense that things are within the reach of that person, yet some things are only attainable with someone else's help.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: This most recent iteration of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 is the major federal law authorizing federal spending on programs to

support K-12 schooling. Components include testing accountability, adequate yearly progress, highly qualified teachers, and annual school report cards for parents. The overarching goal is to improve educational equity for students from lower income families by providing federal funds to school districts serving poor students.

Praxis: The term refers to the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it.

Pedagogical: The systematic way of teaching.

Servant Leadership: A leadership philosophy in which the leader shares power and put the needs of others before his or her needs. This type of leader works to empower others to develop and perform at their own personal best level.

Witness: Witness is used to replace the word Ally. A witness is one who brings testimony and offers insight into a complex situation. A witness has an intellectual recollection but also a spiritual and emotional connection to the situation. A witness is often called to action: to testify and contribute to another's freedom.

Conceptual Framework: Theories Influencing My Path to Liberation

Paulo Freire

The current narrative style of teaching, with the teacher as the narrator and the students as vessels to be filled with knowledge delivered by the expert, is a fundamental tool of oppression. The teachers see the students as knowing nothing, reinforcing to the students that memorization

of the truth is intelligence as measured by standardized tests. Critical thinking skills and creativity and the power to transform are underdeveloped in the banking model of education. The banking model lacks authentic dialogue and communication, stripping students of their humanity. This banking model enables students to adapt to the world as it is without question, thus perpetuating the oppressive system in place.

Conscientization is the process in which individuals in community develop a critical understanding of their social reality through reflection and action, known as praxis (Freire, 1970). Freire identified three levels of consciousness: magical consciousness, naïve consciousness, and critical consciousness. One's magical consciousness takes life at face value without questioning or identifying systematic themes in the world. One's naïve consciousness identifies a social reality in which one's place in society is marginalized, making one's life more difficult than the lives of those in the dominant group, but does not identify a systematic pattern or deliberateness for the inequalities among races, genders, classes, etc. One's critical consciousness identifies systematic issues by actively engaging in Freire's concept of praxis—reflection plus action—in order to understand one's social reality. The process of authentic dialogue combined with action leads to liberation of individuals and groups who strive for critical consciousness (Freire, 1970). Epistemological curiosity is the desire to obtain new knowledge that is expected to stimulate thought and reflection. Persons who have the characteristic of epistemological curiosity would challenge why they know what they know and question why systems exist as they do and how those systems affect their reality (Freire, 1970).

For Freire, the process of conscientization was the ongoing journey through these three levels of consciousness with epistemological curiosity fueling and praxis navigating the way. Freire “tridimensionalizes time into the past, present and the future. [My] history, in function of [my] own creations, develops as a constant process of transformation within which epochal units materialize. These epochal units are not closed periods of time, static compartments within which people are confined” (Freire, 1970, p. 101). Freire defined an epoch as a melting pot of ideas, concepts, hopes, doubts, values, and challenges that come together with their opposites working toward full humanization. This awareness and interdependence of who we were, who we are, and who we are to become awakens one to critical consciousness with an attunement to feelings, emotions, thoughts, and experiences. The attunement allows deliberate choice to the person as he or she transforms from a dichotomized thought process to a liberated, humanized one.

Freire (1970) described human existence as unique in the non-static nature of our “meaningful thematics [which] are human aspirations, motives and objectives ... occurring [constantly]” (p. 107). He explained that one cannot understand the components individually, but that all aspects of our awareness of reality are alive within us and ever changing. Studying Paulo Freire helps one to weave together a number of strands of thinking about education and liberation: an emphasis on dialogue to foster respect and to place an emphasis on praxis, or action and reflection, that is informed and linked to core values, and an emphasis on naming the world, which identifies the need to develop critical consciousness. Together dialogue and praxis have the power to transform reality (Freire, 1970). Freire explained that a comingling of past and present define who we are; therefore, because I am a teacher, my past and present influence

my daily classroom practice, although I may remain unaware of the influences. This revelation allows me to adjust my focus from the student and his or her remediation to an internal re-education, permitting me to re-work my teacher identity with a goal of quieting my inner bigot.

Paulo Freire's Liberation Pedagogy will be used in two ways for this study. First, the concept of the banking model in education (Freire, 1970) will lay the groundwork for understanding the hidden curriculum that I bring into my classroom practice. Second, the levels of consciousness—magical, naïve, critical, and unfinished—will be used to peel back the layers of my liberation. The Care Ethic, CRT, and Ruiz's Four Agreements will serve as key components of my praxis that guided my journey to critical consciousness but now serve as meshing that wraps around my liberation.

Noddings

Accepting one's inner bigot (Schwarz, 2012) is uncomfortable and at times painful. Using philosopher of education Nel Noddings' Care Ethic, one can open the door to spiritual guidance and healing. Since a teacher teaches who he or she is, the interrogation of one's self is vital to the development of meta-cognitive and meta-emotional strategies that guide teachers through critical reflection (Noddings, 2004, 2012; Schwartz, 2012; Stets & Burke, 2000).

Noddings has implored contemporary educators to jump out of the educational conundrum of high stakes testing and compartmentalized teaching and to embrace care and love, calling educators to strive for human care, concern, and connection (the three Cs come from philosopher of education Jane Roland Martin) to generate an environment conducive for all students' learning (Noddings, 1988, 1995, 2006). Noddings has challenged educators to de-

compartmentalize and bring care to the forefront of education (Noddings, 1993, 2002, 2003b). When trust between the carer and the cared-for is broken, the teacher-student relationship in the current banking model and this breach in trust and lack of communication lead to an “unsafe environment” (Freire, 1970; Noddings, 2012). An unsafe environment is one in which the student feels threatened and becomes unable to take the risks necessary to learn. In a biracial classroom, the black student has been taught that white authority is dangerous, so the student would be scared, intimidated and unable to function in the learning environment. Initially, teachers are empowered by the good feeling associated with helping others. However, over time the good feeling lessens and the person giving care begins to need a particular reaction from the receiver. If the response does not fit the expectation, the person caring begins to lose the good feeling, and deeply embedded negative feelings emerge and start to gain strength and power (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1995, 2012). Any reinforcement of negative thoughts and feelings actually perpetuates deeply rooted inner bigotry. Thus, in this critical moment a mis-education or lack of cultural understanding backfires and causes a reinforcement of oppressive beliefs and attitudes to permeate within the teacher, creating an unsafe space for students of color (Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995b; Tatum, 1992, 1994; Woodson, 1933; Yosso, 2005). The aim of reflection is to foster caring relationships while serving the community competently; authentic dialogue can facilitate greater caring (Freire, 1973; Noddings, 1994; Tatum, 1994). Caring requires respectful listening and attunement to one's own perceptions and feelings that can be liberating (Tirozzi & Uro, 1997). Accepting and loving one's inner bigot can make way for

“education [to become] an act of social justice when seen as part of a larger democratic process dedicated to equality and equity in schools and in society” (Cipolle, 2010, p. 8).

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT), which emerged from the critical legal studies movement of the 1970s, is an analytical lens used to develop a critical consciousness around the inequities of institutional and systemic power along racial lines. The following are tenets of CRT: (1) the permanence of racism, (2) counter narratives and the centrality of personal experience, (3) interest convergence, and (4) the critique of liberalism.

CRT proclaims that racism is permanent and ever present in our culture, a systemic practice and policy creating our norm. Ladson-Billings (1995a) speaks about the permanence of racism recognized not in the big happenings, like lynchings from the slave era or the more recent events involving Michael Brown, Travon Martin, and Rodney King, but in the thousand daily cuts, daily micro-aggressions and racial stress. The dominant culture focuses on the absence of overt violence and touts progress and equality, giving merit to the argument that slavery is over, lynchings have ceased, and schools are integrated—therefore racism is gone. However, the disparity in education, opportunity, and employment and the fact of lopsided imprisonment all reveal the permanence of racism.

White hegemony generates a narrative that perpetuates many theoretical ideologies promoting the thinking that racism is diminishing. The *cultural deficit* perspective holds that negative social symptoms, like poverty, are due to a group's race or cultural values. The dominant narrative, from the perspective of the white male, scripts the social and legal language,

the practice and policy we adhere to today. CRT challenges everyone to create and listen to counter narratives that will dismantle white hegemony. Counter narratives are detailed recounts of marginalized or oppressed individuals' stories that give a voice to those who otherwise would not have one and detail contradiction to widely accepted beliefs. Counter narratives do not necessarily discredit beliefs but can offer a different way of thinking about a particular topic. Counter narratives pave the way to questioning the historical script of meritocracy, colorblindness or assimilation and allow a new narrative to emerge. Historically the law has encoded a norm, passed down from generation to generation through family and school, creating both institutional and structural racism that is masked so well that racism appears to have been eliminated. The combination of counter narrative and the critical study of the historical perspective that created the dominant group narrative may generate praxis, the combination of theory and action, which will result in empathy and allyship.

The next tenet, interest convergence, suggests that policy and practice changes will only be supported if they converge with the general interests of whites (Bell, 1995). Interest convergence also explains the permanence of racism: as long as racism is beneficial to whites, it will remain protected in the system. The final tenet, critique of liberalism, takes into consideration such concepts as color blindness, the notion that one does not see color and treats all people the same. Color blindness is a common theme in the discourse of white middle-class female teachers. Color blindness is dangerous because it perpetuates the theory of meritocracy, the bootstrap mentality that if the students of color work harder they will achieve, just as the white students do. This thinking provides the context in which educators encourage students

(through the context) to assimilate, to peel away their cultures and discard their social capital. Meritocracy does not work, as evidenced by the sustainability of the achievement gap. The permanence of racism (Bell, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2006) guarantees that educational reform and systemic change are unlikely to succeed. It is the job of the teacher, staff, and community to foster humanity, to cultivate and develop critical consciousness individually and in community to dismantle racism. Critical race theorist Gloria Ladson-Billings encouraged everyone to fight, not to win but to join the daily struggle (Ladson-Billings, 1999, 2003; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Ruiz

Don Miguel Ruiz described our perception of reality as a personal dream that he called domestication. This dream or domestication occurs when we “learn how to behave in society: what to believe and what not to believe; what is acceptable and what is not acceptable; what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong” (Ruiz, 1997)—all the knowledge, rules and concepts that detail how we behave in the world. Ruiz stated that as children we believe what adults say and we enter into agreements without question, as explained in Paulo Freire’s banking model. We never have the opportunity to choose what we believe, but by storing the knowledge deposited by adults we enter into this contract of agreements, which Ruiz called the domestication of humans; Freire would call it oppression.

The domestication is so strong that at a certain point in our lives we no longer need anyone to domesticate us. As Carter Woodson (1933) stated,

If you can control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his action.

When you determine what a man shall think you do not have to concern yourself about what he will do. If you make a man feel that he is inferior, you do not have to compel him to accept an inferior status, for he will seek it himself. If you make a man think that he is justly an outcast, you do not have to order him to the back door. He will go without being told; and if there is no back door, his very nature will demand one. (p. 82)

Freire's magical consciousness and Ruiz's dream state (domesticated state) followed the premise that Woodson set out, that once we are taught our place in the world we will make ourselves fit, no matter how tight or uncomfortable. Ruiz (1997) explained that this belief system acts like a "book of law that rules our mind" (p. 9). Going against our belief system brings feelings of fear, doubt and shame. Therefore, when we see injustice, we explain it away because that is just the way the world is, filled with human suffering and injustice. In addition to explaining away suffering, we have also created an image of perfection in order to be considered good enough. If we achieve perfection, then suffering and injustice will be reserved for others. However, striving for perfection, which is a non-real, unattainable image, is a Sisyphean task. Along the way we may encounter personal tragedy or injustice or come to the realization that we are not perfect and that we are not good enough. Often what comes next is self-abusive behaviors or numbing behaviors to help alleviate the fear and pain. These many agreements are our reality "that make[s] us suffer, that make[s] us fail in life" (Ruiz, 1997, p. 21). The spark that leads to an awakening can be a personal tragedy, a loss of power, burnout, hopelessness, or an unfair event.

The awakening leads to a powerful awareness and commitment to change. Ruiz claimed that following what he called the Four Agreements would allow us to let go of the domestication and embrace who we really are. The Four Agreements are as follows: (1) be impeccable with your word, (2) don't take anything personally, (3) don't make assumptions, and (4) always do your best. Following the Four Agreements is a path to freedom (Ruiz, 1997).

For me, the Four Agreements served as a methodology to uncover my hidden curriculum. The Four Agreements served to peel back the layers of my belief system following a personal tragedy, opening my eyes to the vast flaws in my internal compass that had previously directed my life. Although care was the primary virtue driving my teaching career, I discovered a huge deficit in my thinking and life choices. This revelation brought me to a desire to change, but left me feeling alone, full of fear and frozen. I began to embrace the notion of teaching prosocial behaviors in my classroom, but I lacked the knowledge and confidence to put the theory into practice.

The nature of this dissertation is one of personal experience, connecting my personal narrative to the wider culture of middle class white teachers. An autoethnographic method has been chosen in hopes of connecting my story to the wider political and social meanings, understandings and practices in education. The purpose of this autoethnographical study is twofold: to tell my story and to analyze my story using Liberation Theory. A unique quality of autoethnography is that the researcher lives the story and later analyzes the lived events. During the lived experience I was exposed to the Four Agreements as well as to Spiritual Leadership Theory, Care Ethic Theory, CRT, and Shame Theory. The exposure altered my journey. This

autoethnography will detail the influences of these theories using the lens of Liberation Theory as my transformation unfolds. During my detailed recounting, I hope to excavate what I perceive as a deficit in my caring relationship with students. The development of “deeper self-knowledge about [my] racial and cultural identity, and how racism has shaped [my] identity” (Howard, 2003, p. 199) has led to an investigation of my thinking and practice to uncover significant deficits in my teacher identity and core belief system. Through a critical self-reflection I reveal my own prejudice and mis-education that inhibited me from successfully caring for all students (Noddings, 2012; Woodson, 1933).

This autoethnographical approach allows me to speak “inside out” and to uncover the critical moments of awareness that have led to a change in my belief system and my practice. This study allows critical self-reflection and an investigation into my identity transformation (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Freire, 1970). Retracing my steps through a process of critical self-interrogation allows me to really examine my thinking and growth, pinpointing key moments in time that shaped my identity deconstruction and reconstruction in development of my critical consciousness (Freire, 1970, 1998).

Purpose of Study/Research Statements

The purpose of this study is to tell my story, detailing the peeling back of the layers of the culture of a white middle-class female teacher using CRT as I interrogate each layer, looking for insight into the complex construct of the Care Ethic. I aim to analyze my story in hopes of uncovering a social science model that may illuminate a missing element of Care Ethic Theory,

which will soften the existing violence caused by internalized racism in the educational system. I aim to uncover emergent themes among the core beliefs and shared discourse of white middle-class female teachers. Peeling back the layers of my unconscious biases lurking beneath the surface (my inner bigot) will uncover unconscious attitudes that may surface when my conscious mind is occupied or overworked. This journey will uncover my growing awareness of my privilege and my place in the world as an oppressor. I have chosen an autoethnographic study in hopes of connecting the reader and author in a shared experience.

The research statements guiding this dissertation are as follows: This autoethnographical narrative details the peeling back of the layers of critical consciousness development as presented in Liberation Theory and the layers of the social identity construction of a white female teacher using CRT as I interrogate each layer, looking for insight into the complex construct of the Care Ethic between white teachers and African American students. This study proposes bringing critical consciousness and the care construct to teacher training to soften the existing violence caused by internalized racism in the classroom both for students of color and for white teachers. The study aims to illuminate the complexity of the Care Ethic construct while connecting the liberation of the researcher to the reader, yielding a better understanding of care in education and uncovering the common experiences of white middle-class teachers that shape the *in-group* identity of all teachers.

This study will investigate the impact of a teacher's identity development, teacher discourse and *in-group* teacher culture (Chang, 2008) on student learning. The identification of the *in-group* mentality may lead to an understanding of my cultural mis-education, which I hope

will provide a change in my identity, leading to a more equitable classroom. Another goal of this study is to provide a process and a voice that may lead other teachers to uncover their hidden curriculum, allowing for an attitudinal shift as a catalyst for educational equity.

Procedures

This study is an autoethnography that intertwines research with my personal narrative (Reed-Danahay, 1997). The dialogue offers opportunity for self-analysis through expression of my own perceptions and feelings as well as development of respectful listening, which leads to successful transformation at three levels: self, community, and culture (Clark, 1990; Tirozzi & Uro, 1997). In this narrative autoethnography I will take on the difficult and dangerous task of questioning my own background, making myself aware of the prejudice and multi-dimensional system of privilege that make up my life. The critical self-interrogation is useful in identifying societal norms and the impact those norms have on the personal and professional make up of my teacher identity (Howard, 2003). My personal experience will comprise the data: lived experiences, emotional responses and personal reflections. I will critically examine my personal experience, searching for cultural meanings of lived events with a critical self-reflection, hoping to reveal the cultural undertones that make up the in-group identity of white middle-class female teachers.

Upon conclusion of a through self-examination through this autoethnographical method, I hope to uncover an understanding of the cultural undertones present in my thinking, leading to a deeper appreciation of self and others. Autoethnographical research is a relatively new qualitative method of study, which is gaining popularity in the humanities. This

autoethnographical study might lead to sustainable personal transformation for the researcher and also, because of the connection between researcher and reader, to personal transformation in the reader (Chang, 2008), which was one of my reasons for choosing this method.

According to Chang (2008), the benefits of autoethnography include the following: “(1) it offers a research method friendly to researchers and readers; (2) it enhances cultural understanding of self and others; and (3) it has a potential to transform self and others toward the cross-cultural coalition building” (p. 11). The researcher can gain an understanding of her meta-emotional state, why she reacts a certain way or has an emotional response, learning what her triggers are. The researcher can also break down fears and other barriers through learning and interacting among others, expanding her personal knowledge and allowing for healing to occur. The increased cultural understanding of self and the way one fits into the melting pot can lead to a development of “cross cultural sensitivity” (Chang, 2008) and can teach one appropriate cultural responses (Foster, 2005). For example, in my experience, when I corrected the behavior of an African American student, the student would shut down or look angry or would often appear to ignore me, when I expected the student to acknowledge my request and comply. This response would cause me to feel angry, breaking my ability to care for the student of color, reinforcing the breach of trust and ultimately creating space that was unsafe for that student in my classroom. In retrospect, this is an example of my inner bigot surfacing in the classroom. Peeling back the layers of my core belief system will eventually lead to strategies for recognizing and controlling my inner bigot.

Organization of the Study

The Review of Literature section of this study will contain information detailing multiple theories as well as research that I completed during my lived experience. There is a duality in writing an autoethnography, the lived experience and the reflection and analysis of that experience. The Review of Literature section contains literature that shaped my journey, detailed in Chapter Four, as well as literature and theories that are used to analyze and dissect my journey in Chapter Five. At times there is overlap between the lived experience and the reflection process; however the delicate balance does create some challenges in separating the story from the analysis. Chapter Three details the methods and procedures used in the study, sorting through the struggle of separating lived research and analysis. Following the Methods and Procedure section I will dedicate a chapter to telling my story as a narrative. This chapter will serve as a data section that will also be called upon in the subsequent analysis section. The Analysis section will use Paulo Freire's Liberation Theory as the frame. I will choose special epiphanies paired with research and reflection to spiral through the levels of consciousness described by Freire, as follows:

Awareness of Magical Consciousness: Magical Consciousness is an acceptance of one's place in the world, unquestioningly, not conscious of socioeconomic contradictions, not conscious of marginalization, not conscious of privilege.

Naïve Consciousness: Identification of one's problems, struggles or advantages from an individualistic lens, unaware of social systems that create oppression and privilege. Problems and privilege are viewed as coincidence rather than systemic.

Critical Consciousness: Identification of systematic oppression, marginalization, and privilege and acceptance of the existence of these systems. Critical Consciousness involves making connections with socioeconomic contradictions and using counter narratives to unveil a reality that exposes the contradictions (Freire, 1970).

Unfinishedness: Later in his work Freire embraces the idea that we are all on a continuing journey as we embrace our need for growth and we make a lifelong commitment to do the work.

The final chapter of the dissertation will pull together the analysis with a goal of uncovering a social science model that may illuminate a missing element of Care Ethic Theory, which will soften the existing violence caused by internalized racism in the classroom both for students of color and for white teachers (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Noddings, 2012). I hope to uncover emergent themes among core beliefs and the shared discourse of white middle-class female teachers. Peeling back the layers of mis-education will reveal my racism and inner bigot that made up my domestication (Ruiz, 1997). This narrative serves to reveal contradictions that may lead to the deconstruction of my racism and inner bigot, which will allow me to become more fully human in my pursuit of an authentic, purposeful life.

Limitations/Concerns/Delimitations

Limitations are influences that the researcher cannot control, the shortcomings, conditions or influences that place restrictions on methodology and conclusions. My credibility could be questioned since the memory is fallible, especially in times of great stress. Will the epiphany moments be genuine or appear manufactured? Will the narrative be perceived as too

emotional, lacking rigor? The majority of the data will come from memory, personal reflection, and journals. Chang (2008) stated that autoethnography can self-transform across cultural boundaries but can have little social impact if the study is too rooted in personal story and lacks cultural support.

Another concern is the arrogance of my white privilege to situate myself as an ally. A person cannot declare that he or she is an ally. I will use Ruiz's Four Agreements as a filter or lens to interrogate and critically reflect on my self-conversations and my emotional responses to various interactions. An exploration of critical teacher reflection will be used to interpret the potential effect of teacher identity construction and changes in practice that may lead to culturally relevant pedagogy. However, the implications of how the changes will affect student success will not be measured. Nor will the scope of this study's reach be measured to determine if the classroom space will become safer for students of color. Using the tenets of Critical Race Theory may reveal a shared discourse among white female teachers that disrupts the ability to care for students of color because of a learned fear, but this study will not determine the effects of that revelation on the classroom space for students and teacher. Further study will be needed to construct pedagogical practices that have long-term positive effects on student experience and success.

Delimitations are choices made by the researcher that should be mentioned. I considered interviewing students, former students, and colleagues to gauge the reality of the research's perceived changes. However, the power structure between student and teacher would silence the students even after graduation (Palmer, 1998). The nature of white privilege and discussion of

race and culture in school create a barrier that would not allow for authentic dialogue. In this situation neither the students nor the colleagues would be in a position to offer truthful commentary in a safe manner. Although I will be discussing meta-cognitive and meta-emotive concepts, I will not be reviewing the literature because the topic is too large for the scope of this study. The notion of thinking about my thinking and understanding my emotional response will be discussed using Care Ethic, Shame Theory and the Four Agreements.

Summary

This autoethnographical narrative details the development of my personal identity and teacher identity during the course of my life and the subsequent changes in my life and practice. My story recreates the awaking and transformation of identity and awareness of learned prejudice using my memory, reflective journaling, and self-identified epiphanies. The purpose of this study is to tell my story, analyze the events, and reveal a model that may illuminate a hidden curriculum shared by white middle-class female teachers uncovering the hidden bigot that can create breaches in trust between teacher and student. Through my story I unravel my mis-education and misplacement as an ally, as a successful teacher of students of color, which may serve as a guide to other teachers like me who are seeking to develop a culturally relevant pedagogy (Howard, 2003). Using Liberation Theory, I track my development of consciousness. Both my faith, which was developed in the Catholic teachings and resurfaced with my exploration of Care Ethic, and my racism, revealed by CRT, are explored in this study. Through critical self-analysis, I unravel my prejudice learned in childhood and my mis-education, which led to my domestication. My literature review explores studies in the areas of Liberation Theory,

spiritual leadership development, the Four Agreements, CRT, Shame Theory, and Care Ethic Theory. I chose the format of narrative autoethnography with a goal of relating my journey to the reader in a personal way that may lead to a shared transformational moment.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Introduction

The feminist approach and Care Ethic are central in teacher education as the current demographic of teachers in the United States is 80 percent white middle-class female. The homogeneous nature of U.S. teachers as a group creates a culture within the profession with a strong social identity and discourse stemming from the common lived experience of white middle-class female teachers (Creswell, 2013; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1996, 2002, 2006, 2012; Ruiz, 1997; Stets & Burke, 2000; Yosso 2005). Common to all white female teachers is a notion of hope. Hope is a function of struggle with the belief that things will be better for all with a quality and equitable education (Freire, 2004). The struggle involves an experience with adversity and tenacity that leads to personal growth and achievement. Hope is a thought process, a triad of goals, agency, and pathways. In education, hope is learned and plays out in goal setting, in well-rounded coursework, and in perseverance in navigating the educational system (Curry, Snyder, Cook, Ruby, & Rehm, 1997).

Liberation Theory

There are three areas of Paulo Freire's Liberation Theory used as focal points for this study: awakening, critical conscientization, and epistemological curiosity. In addition, Freire's concepts of the gnostic cycle and the tiering system have led to organizational flow charts that will be useful in following this autoethnographical study. An awakening or awareness of our place in the world is necessary to start the journey but is not a single moment in time. In his early work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1973),

Freire described levels of consciousness that lead to one's understanding of oppression and marginalization. The awakening prompts questioning and curiosity that lead to a deeper understanding of oppression and one's place in society. Critical conscientization is the process by which people achieve this deepened awareness both of sociocultural reality that shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality. Freire stated that we begin in a magical reality, unaware of our place in society. We attend school or work in an unquestioning manner, unaware of social, political or cultural policies and practices that may be influencing our lives. An awakening occurs that will propel us into questioning and seeking answers that reveal social, political and/or cultural practices that shape our current situation. Freire used a gnostic cycle to demonstrate how one would change, grow, and develop a curiosity that would in turn lead to another awakening or deeper understanding. Freire described a fluctuating cycle of change in which awareness comes in and out of focus, bouncing from magical to naïve to critical consciousness. The cycle of change is a development of critical consciousness that is ignited by epistemological curiosity (asking how and why you know what you know) and fueled by praxis (action and reflection). In later works, *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1994) and *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage* (1998), Freire embraced the idea of unfinishedness, which he says is essential to our human condition. This final phase of development, unfinishedness, is an understanding that the construction of our ideals and our understanding of the world may be changed and transformed through education, thereby leaving all humans in an unfinished state. Freire seemed to embrace a profound hope later in his work that oppression and marginalization are not permanent and can be chipped away

through education with the goal of conscientization. Freire, like Snyder, believed in hope, not as a lofty emotion but as a structure of thinking that can be learned. Hope is a byproduct of the authentic relationship between teacher and student when the power position is relinquished and the teacher works side by side with the student, who is fully engaged in learning. Freire ultimately concluded that epistemological curiosity, the desire for knowledge that motivates individuals to learn new ideas, to eliminate gaps and to solve problems, leads us to accept and appreciate our unfinishedness and continue to grow and develop. In addition to epistemological curiosity, meta-cognition, meta-emotion, typical intellectual engagement and openness for new ideas all play a role in continued growth and development.

Unfinishedness, the ability to continue to grow and develop, is fostered in education. Knowing that there is more to learn, becoming aware that things can change, creates hope for the future. As a call for change, Freire suggested a removal of the power structure between teachers and learners (Freire, 1970, 1998). The educational reform would call for teachers to look to their past, present, and future to identify their epochal units that may materialize. As teachers continue their education, they awaken to a critical consciousness with an attunement to their inner bigot and how that plays out in their practice. The attunement allows deliberate choice to the person as he or she transforms from a dichotomized thought process to a liberated, humanized one.

As a teacher, my past and present influence my daily classroom practice. Awareness of these influences allows me to adjust my focus from the student and his or her remediation to an

internal re-education, allowing me to work and re-work my teacher identity with a goal of quieting my inner bigot and creating a safe space for all students to thrive.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire described the current educational system using a banking metaphor. The teachers are the experts who hold the truth; the students are naïve empty vessels that are to acquire the knowledge from the experts in an unquestioning way. Freire's banking model proposes that knowledge is deposited into the students. Therefore the students are viewed as knowing nothing. This model creates a separation between teacher and student that results in a one-way transference of knowledge. Freire went on to explain that this model of education works to maintain the current system of oppression because the students are rewarded for memorizing and regurgitating facts and truths delegated as intelligence by the system of education. Free thought, questioning, and creativity are not rewarded and thus not present in the students.

In *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1973) and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Paulo Freire challenged the banking model of education as an ineffective strategy and a fundamental aspect of oppression. Freire implored schools and educators to work on authentic dialogue between teacher and student, putting teachers in the crux of learning side by side with their students. The call for teachers to expose themselves as vulnerable individuals alongside their students brings layers of hidden curriculum into the discussion.

The Culture of Teachers

Exploring the common discourse and experience of white middle-class women will reveal a cultural norm that I propose as a hidden curriculum that plays a major role in teacher

practice. In *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*, Ruth Frankenberg (1993) interviewed thirty women on how race shaped their lives. She researched the significance of race in white women's lives with the hope of uncovering the white women's perceptions of the significance of race in the social structure as a whole. She also discussed with the women their perceived environments, and detailed specific discourses on race and culture and the interconnectedness of whiteness as an experience for white women.

In *Why Race and Culture Matter in Schools: Closing the Achievement Gap in America's Classrooms*, Tyrone C. Howard (2010) explored why an analysis and understanding of race is critical in school reform. Howard offered a strong argument for a culturally relevant pedagogy using critical teacher reflection. He described the growing diversity of the student population and the consistency in the white teacher population and identified a disconnect that is of growing concern (Howard, 2003, 2010). The identity of the white teacher can be explored through the common discourse found across the nation. The outcome of the hidden curriculum shows up as the sustainability of the Academic Achievement Gap.

Accepting one's inner bigot is uncomfortable and at times painful. Using philosopher of education Nel Noddings' Care Ethic, one can open the door to spiritual guidance and healing. White middle-class educators share a common desire to help people, often responding that they want to make a difference. The common purpose of these teachers is one of savior, through love and care. The position of savior comes from a sometimes unconscious belief that whites are superior to people of color, leading to an understanding that one's inner bigot is in the forefront of creating the discourse for the middle-class white female teacher. The savior mentality also

puts the white teacher in a position of power in the classroom, perpetuating the banking model. This savior mentality also supports myths of meritocracy, color blindness and boot-strap mentality. These myths seem to materialize as remediation programs, low track courses, extra help sessions and incorrect placement of blame of failure onto the student and the family.

Initially, teachers are empowered by their desire to make a difference in all children's lives. However, over time success is elusive; teachers become tired and begin to buy into the myth that students of color will underachieve because of lack of parental support, poor early education, missing skills, lack of motivation. The teacher will begin to embrace the need for saving students of color through soft money programs and remediation. This buy-in creates a divide in the classroom, wherein many students of color are viewed as less able learners who are not college bound. As the expectations drop, the inequity of education widens. For the teacher, the positive feeling of saving the students lessens and the teacher begins to lose hope. The positive interactions start to decrease, and the deeply embedded negative feelings emerge, gaining strength and power (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1995, 2012).

This litany of oppressive beliefs and attitudes is what I call the hidden curriculum. Most teachers are not consciously aware of the core beliefs that influence their daily practice, their decisions and their emotional responses. The fundamental teachings of one's childhood are often so deeply rooted that it takes a deliberate reflective thought process to reveal them. This critical reflection will unpack triggers, reactions, and visceral responses, allowing teachers to recognize moments that lead to a breach in student-teacher relationships. In time teachers will be able to recognize early enough to change their reactions and practice, ultimately creating a learning

environment that is equitable. Malcom Knowles (1973) stated that adults are self-directed learners who have a unique lens developed by their own personal experience. He went on to posit that adults need to learn results from their desire to face the challenges they have encountered in their lives. Unless we acknowledge that personal growth and development come from within and more importantly from a desire to face challenges we have encountered in our own lives, it may be argued that white middle-class teachers cannot grow or develop in the area of internalized racism within the educational system without direct experience or counter narratives that will lead to a development of compassion and desire for personal change.

Costa and Garmston (1994) stated that changing an inner thought process is a prerequisite to improving overt behaviors that will enhance student learning. They called for an “understanding of the diverse stages [of intellectual, social, moral, and ego] in which each staff member is currently operating, to assist people in understanding their own and others’ differences and stages of development; to accept staff members at their present moral, social, cognitive and ego state; and to act in a nonjudgmental manner” (Costa & Garmston, 1994, p.7). This complex and diverse system of thinking affects the interaction and reaction of the teacher with his/her students, leading to a learning environment that is based upon the teachers’ background and belief system (Freire, 1970; Noddings, 1984). According to Costa and Garmston (1994), “Research has demonstrated that a teacher possessing higher conceptual levels is more adaptive in teaching styles. Such a teacher is apt to differentiate instruction and change in the course of instruction to meet learner needs, resulting in greater student achievement” (p.6). For teachers with higher conceptual levels, an understanding of the internalized racism in the

educational system could foster the development of understanding and an appreciation of diversity, leading teachers to act and react with more compassion and creating a safer learning environment. This development of compassion could empower teachers to have open, honest communication leading to authentic dialogue and higher student achievement (Freire, 1970, 1973).

A reflective teacher examines the cognitive and emotional processes engaged in during decision making and interaction. The teacher uses the reflective thought process to examine outcomes, analyze situations, and play out scenarios in order to make correct decisions (Costa & Garmston, 1994; Noddings, 2012; Schon, 1996). A major contribution of Donald Schon was the notion of reflection in action and reflection on action. Reflection in action can be explained as one thinking on her feet or the process that allows for quick decisions made on the fly based upon the information available. Reflection on action is the process of looking back over situations as they unfolded, using hindsight to determine if an action was successful or not. Timothy Reagan (1993) expanded the theory by adding reflection for action. Reflection for action is when "[w]e undertake reflection, not so much to revisit the past or to become aware of the metacognitive process one is experiencing (both noble reasons in themselves), but to guide future action (the more practical purpose)" (p.190).

Peggy McIntosh (1988) described her self-interrogation using a reflective process. She explained that her reflections on her work in women's studies led her to discover her own inner bigot. This "aha moment" led her to a deliberate and continual reprogramming of her "internal software." She described this reprogramming of her software to be ongoing and continual efforts

to interrogate her thought process within interactions with people of color. Her interrogation is unique because she detailed the complex relationship between intellectual, social, moral and ego in the context of her awareness of her own racism. Peggy McIntosh's insights posit an empowerment when one becomes critically aware of the explicit construction of the ideas or concepts needed to understand a system like internalized racism. Her awareness of her own racism led to a desire to change at the individual level and ultimately to become a change agent. She described her commitment to using her white privilege as capital to address the inequities in the world.

Exploring Cultural Reform in Education

The absence of African Americans in the teacher population has created a deficit in the culture and discourse of white teachers, contributing to the marginalization of African American students academically, socially, and spiritually. The hidden curriculum in the school system and the internalized fear common in the lived experience of white middle-class female teachers create a disconnect in the caring relationship between the teacher and the African American student. This existence of fear disrupts the mutual exchange needed to move white teachers to a position of servant leaders. When a teacher prompts a student, the teacher expects a response from the student "that shows that the caring has been received, recognized" (Noddings, 2012, p. 2). Frequently, white teachers will misunderstand a response from an African American student, perceiving it as angry or insubordinate, which breaks the caring relationship. This disruption in the caring relationship creates a non-safe space for African American students (Gilligan, 1982;

Ladson-Billings & Tate 1995; Noddings, 1984, 1996, 2002, 2006, 2012; Hooks, 2000; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tatum, 1992; Yosso, 2005).

Critical Teacher Reflection

The art of teaching is developed and mastered through reflective practice. Transformative moments occur when a teacher learns to understand her own thinking, feeling, and action. Critical self-interrogation allows a teacher to peel back the layers of her own mis-education about African American students, and learn to modify emotional responses to unexpected behaviors that lead to a deficit in caring between teacher and student (Baker, 1972; Charron, 2009; Clark, 1990; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Noddings 2012; Stets & Burke 2000; Tatum 1992; Watt 2007; Woodson, 1933; Yosso, 2005).

Dr. Don Miguel Ruiz's Four Agreements and Dr. Brene Brown's Shame Research will be used as a lens to unpack my journey of thinking about and understanding my emotional responses that influence my decisions. Using the Four Agreements and Shame Research, I have uncovered my true deficit in care, revealing my inner bigot. My mis-education has hindered my ability to recognize that the social capital of African American students has been blocking my ability to care, creating an unsafe space for students of color to learn and reach their potential (Frankenberg, 1993; Howard, 2003; Ruiz, 1997; Woodson, 1933).

The Four Agreements

Don Miguel Ruiz (1997) described a general state of consciousness as a dream. From birth children are given truths from adults, parents, relatives, teachers, and religious leaders that create an understanding of the world. As children, we are empty vessels that accept truths

without question, as described by Paulo Freire's banking model. Over time these truths develop into our core belief system, sometimes referred to as an internal compass, which we use to make decisions, determine right and wrong, good and evil, etc. Ruiz posited that people continue to live in this dream state (similar to Freire's magical consciousness) until an awakening occurs, causing them to question the truths of their childhood.

Ruiz mapped out Four Agreements that can lead to a re-education that would move a person out of the dream state into a critical level of awareness. The first agreement is to be impeccable to your word. Your word is the most powerful tool you have; it can be used to create beauty or to destroy everything around you. Our parents use their word to create our domestication, detailing for us what is good, what is bad, what is right or wrong, what is pretty or ugly. Whenever we hear an opinion and believe it, we make an agreement and it becomes part of our core belief system. We must discover the truth, break the old agreements, and be impeccable to that truth that will set us free from the mis-education of our youth. Being impeccable to one's word dedicates one to dropping assumptions and prejudice and allows one to form opinions and truths without influence: "With the impeccability of the word you can transcend the dream of fear and live a different life" (Ruiz, 1997, p.45).

The second agreement is not to take anything personally. Each person enters every situation with a unique lens, built from her own personal experiences and belief system. Therefore when another person enters your situation, that person comes to that situation from her own perspective. If you believe what that person is saying is true, then you can cause yourself great pain because you may not share that person's belief or point of view. You must always

filter what people say and do, understanding that a person comes into the situation with herself as the main character of the story. She does not always have your best interest in mind. Sometimes you must also filter your own thinking, to determine if you are speaking truth or believing things from your own domestication. It is vital never to take things personally so that others' prejudices and mis-education cannot harm you.

The third agreement is not to make assumptions. People make assumptions all the time about what others are doing or thinking, and we take it personally. A primary example of this agreement is racial profiling. People let their prejudice create knowledge about other people in the first fifteen seconds of meeting them, based upon skin color, clothing, hairstyle, music, etc. These assumptions alter the outcome of interactions with others. It is easy to tell someone not to make assumptions, but it is very difficult to train the mind to recognize when we are using prejudice or our inner bigot to dictate how we feel or act.

The fourth agreement is always to do your best. Moment to moment your best will change and look different. You must live life intensely, be productive, be good to yourself and try to make good things happen for other people. Ultimately when you always do your best, you take intrinsically motivated action.

Care Ethic

Using the work of Nel Nodings, especially the book *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics & Moral Education* (1984), and *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* by Carol Gilligan (1982), I will explore Care Ethic and the work of Gilligan. I will also explore the notion of fear, using Tyrone Howard's (2003) article "Culturally Relevant

Pedagogy: Ingredients for Critical Teacher Reflection,” *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life* by P. J. Palmer (1998), and the articles “Teaching White Students about Racism” (Tatum, 1994) and “Talking about Race, Learning about Racism” (Tatum, 1992).

The present-day leaders of Care Ethic, Nel Noddings, Carol Gilligan, and Virginia Held, have given strong arguments and a good lens to look at past, present, and future Service Learning models. Developing care for others breaks down the barriers of othering, creating a society that works and votes for each other and celebrates diversity. Care Ethic Theory claims that development of care in schools will generate a sense of social connectedness, thereby reducing bullying, acts of violence, hate crimes, emotional issues and suicide tendencies, and other high-risk behaviors.

Critical Race Theory

Using Critical Race Theory as a methodology to peel back the layers of my multi-dimensional system of privilege and identity development as a child, I focus on my role as a pre-service teacher and teacher in order to provide a process to the journey that may allow the reader to identify with me. The lens of CRT gives structure to my meta-cognitive and meta-emotional growth through the narrative. In this section I will detail the tenets of CRT and show how these tenets act as a filter shaping my identity reconstruction (Howard, 2003, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2005, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tatum, 1992).

The following are tenets of CRT: (1) the permanence of racism, (2) counter narratives and the centrality of personal experience, (3) interest convergence, and (4) the critique of

liberalism. The permanence of racism is ever present in our culture, passed on in an unconscious manner, surfacing as our inner bigot. The inner bigot unconsciously supports racial prejudice in the form of racial profiling. This systemic practice and policy creates the norm. The disparity in education, opportunity, employment, and lopsided imprisonment all reveal the permanence of racism.

The accepted narrative that racism is diminishing and shared belief in myths like colorblindness, meritocracy and the bootstrap mentality make up the dominant narrative. The use of counter narratives can dismantle the white hegemony. Historically the law has encoded a norm, passed down from generation to generation through family and school, creating both institutional and structural racism (racial prejudice plus power), which is masked so well that racism appears to have disappeared. Counter narratives help dismantle the myth that racism has diminished but reveal contradictions in the current reality, creating cognitive dissonance. Counter narratives can also help identify the two distinct definitions of racism used today: individual meanness (bigotry) and racial prejudice plus systemic power (racism). The counter narratives are useful to uncover the existence of the system of privilege and system of oppression.

The next tenet, interest convergence, suggests that policy and practice changes will only be supported if they converge with the general interests of whites (Bell, 2004). The final tenet, critique of liberalism, takes into consideration such concepts as color blindness, the notion that one does not see color and treats all people the same. Color blindness is a common theme in the discourse of white middle-class female teachers. Color blindness is dangerous because it

perpetuates the theory of meritocracy, the bootstrap mentality that if the students of color work harder they will achieve, like the white students. This thinking provides the context in which educators encourage students (through the context) to assimilate, to peel away their cultures and discard their social capital. The myth of meritocracy continues to create cognitive dissonance, allowing the dominant group to cling to the status quo despite evidence of inhumanity. The permanence of racism (Bell, 1995; G. Ladson-Billings, 2006) guarantees that educational reform and systemic change are unlikely to succeed. It is the job of the teacher, staff, and community to foster humanity, to cultivate and develop critical consciousness individually and in community ultimately, together to dismantle racism.

Shame and Vulnerability

Shame researcher Brene Brown detailed the relationship between fear, shame, and vulnerability. Brown's research explained the residual relationship between past, present, and future and detailed the connection between what we think and how we feel based upon shame and feeling vulnerable. For me, CRT and the awareness of my inner bigot brought forward waves of shame, guilt, and pain. The conversation about white guilt occurs often in the realm of professional development and work on race relations. Brene Brown's work with shame has helped to explain the power of shame, often touted as white guilt, and to explain the knee jerk reaction we all have when a wave of shame overtakes us. "White guilt" is used as a label to explain the defensiveness, and sometimes anger, that is expressed when whites are confronted with overt racism. Dr. Brown's work on shame led to vulnerability research. She explained a common experience and discourse among women initially with regard to shame and

vulnerability. The detailed descriptions of people “armoring up” and reacting with anger supported Nodding’s claim that the breach of trust between student and teacher occurs when a desired response is not given to the teacher. The awareness that teachers bring a hidden curriculum into the classroom, filled with rules, reactions and emotional responses, gives us a new terminology that will begin conversations, turning the lens onto the teacher. This paradigm shift will allow real dialogue to occur, leading to healing and the development of hope (Brown, 2012, Noddings, 2012).

Spiritual Leadership/Septima Clark/Ella Baker

This dissertation will highlight the important influences of Septima Clark and Ella Baker in the quest of teaching for social justice. The name of Septima Clark is intricately woven throughout the civil rights movement, dating back to the early 1920s, when she lobbied for equal pay for white and black teachers, and extending to her development of the curriculum used to promote literacy and voter registration through the citizenship schools. Septima Clark worked at the Highlander School developing leaders and teachers that would go out in masses to run the citizenship schools, resulting in thousands of people becoming registered voters. Freire (1970) summarized the teachers’ role in the development of students as contributors to social justice in three parts: helping students intermingle new knowledge with pre-existing knowledge, facilitating the discovery of and reflection on new information, and assessing whether the students’ knowledge acquisition aligns with the stated goal of the lesson. Septima Clark was an innovative teacher who empowered the African American community through education. Her guidance helped me to peel back layers of mis-education and embrace my spirituality.

Septima Clark was a true servant leader who believed people could not barge into a community and start implementing programs. She believed that all change must come directly from the community. Although Septima Clark designed the curriculum and trained the teachers, she never imposed her own ideas onto a community. Clark would go into a community and listen to the leaders and then provide the needed resources and teachings to achieve their goals. Clark felt that “participation in the citizenship schools profoundly affected daily life. Those who learned to read, write, and figure felt more self-sufficient and less vulnerable. More important, they had means to preserve their independence” (Charron, 2009, p. 259). A dramatic sense of liberation occurred when people could handle their own business; they were transformed, and experienced a complete change in attitude.

According to Charron (2009), “Clark’s vision of political possibility remained firmly rooted in a spirit of service that became a source of her strength” (p. 261). Teachers in the citizenship schools tapped into the mutual reciprocity between teacher and student that had long defined southern black education (Charron, 2009). Septima Clark was a quiet leader who remained behind the scenes, possibly because of the lack of feminine presence historically, but possibly by choice. Clark often said she did not believe in leaders, that a true leader stood to the side and listened to the people, guided them, and allocated to them direction and resources. But the ideas and the change came from the people. Her position was that people needed to own the change, or it wouldn’t stick. She was not of the slave mentality that we do things for other people, quite the contrary; she believed the people had to do for themselves. She strongly fought against policy that was implemented without input from the community.

According to Septima Clark's teaching philosophy, "Teaching is the ability to ensure that the instruction causes positive, permanent changes in self, other people, and society. Clark's pedagogy adds more diversity to the overarching and original objectives of education for social justice: maximizing human interest and needs" (Charron, p. 8). Septima Clark was the pebble in the pond, whose gift was the ability to make people aware of their surroundings, to question and critique their circumstances and to find their own answers in order to overcome their struggles. She understood how to communicate with marginalized people, allowing them to see the oppressive nature of their lives, and more importantly she helped them discover the necessary answers to set them free by moving through consciousness development (Freire, 1970).

Ella Baker is often referred to as *Fundi*, a Swahili word defined as a person who possesses practical wisdom, is skilled at passing wisdom onto new generations, and is a teacher and a learner. The *Fundi* supports other people in learning and does not seek credit or fame. "She is quietly satisfied to provide a bridge from one generation to the next and to help young people root their ideas and actions in their culture's most enduring traditions. Throughout her life, Ella Baker stepped in again and again to model learning, relationship-building, teaching, and leadership" (Preskill, 2005, p. 12). Ella Baker's art was community organizing, and she was dedicated to empowering youth. Ironically, her involvement with community organizing was never recognized or written about because she believed public validation would ruin the message. Ella Baker believed organizations should be run by the people and for the people and were only effective in the absence of a strong charismatic leader. In fact she left the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Southern Christian

Leadership Conference (SCLC) because she felt the organizations focused too heavily on a message and did not truly represent their members (Baker & Cooke, 1935, 1972, 1989).

Ella Baker saw herself as a bridge connecting community members and community issues to an organization that people of the community ran by themselves. She believed that people needed to have a sense of their own value and strength. Reestablishing community among marginalized groups was an important element in her thinking that transcended her lifetime. In the mid-1950s Ella Baker joined forces with Bayard Rustin and Stanley Levison to create In Friendship, an organization that offered economic support for African Americans who were suffering because of their participation in political activism. The work of In Friendship led to the creation of SCLC, and Bayard Rustin and Stanley Levison convinced Ella Baker to take the job of lead organizer in 1957. Through SCLC Ella Baker worked with voter registration and citizenship training drives. This was a time when Ella Baker and Septima Clark worked side by side, tirelessly canvassing the South, developing citizenship schools, getting thousands of voters registered and creating a vast grassroots network (Baker, 1972).

In time Ella Baker grew frustrated with the top-down leadership model of the SCLC, and she frequently expressed her dislike of the leadership and direction of SCLC. Ella Baker felt the organization had lost sight of its members, and she worked without success to get the SCLC to place more emphasis on women and young people. The sit-in movement opened a door that Ella Baker jumped through. She used her extensive contact list to help create the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), sponsoring the first meeting at her alma mater, Shaw University, on Easter weekend in 1960 (Baker, 1972).

Ella Baker was able to keep the adult power structure from influencing the SNCC and insisted that leadership had to be group-centered. The student group took to Baker's philosophies and opposed any hierarchy of authority and committed themselves to the task of organizing through education and connection. Through the SNCC Ella Baker helped to organize the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (FDP) and Freedom Summer. Ella Baker maintained a strong commitment to group-centered leadership that ultimately created the next generation of activists. Ella Baker believed that freedom requires people to analyze their own social position and understand their collective ability to do something about it without relying on leaders: "Strong people don't need strong leaders. My basic sense of it has always been to get people to understand that in the long run they themselves are the only protection they have against violence or injustice...People have to be made to understand that they cannot look for salvation anywhere but to themselves" (Baker, 1972, p. 347).

Summary

Overcoming familial or community identity by breaking down previous ideology about others can allow students to identify with members of society that are outside of their group. This identification can broaden the social identity of the individual, decreasing stereotypes and increasing tolerance and a sense of social justice. We have seen that integration of schools, just putting students together, does not break down the barriers; in fact it can reinforce the stereotypes and prejudices. Educational systems need to proactively create connectedness to move forward.

The quest for freedom is attained only through education and change, and it begins at the grassroots level by empowering individuals. Septima Clark's life's work is evidence of this philosophy in action. Septima Clark was instrumental in fueling and energizing the civil rights movement, but her legacy is much deeper and richer. One purpose of this study is to highlight the contributions of Septima Clark, Ella Baker, and Nel Noddings to the transformation of my teaching philosophy as well as emphasize their collective contributions to society. These women have developed theory and practice in Care Ethic, servant leadership, and transformational citizenship education.

Septima Clark was the program designer of the citizenship schools. Clark and Baker worked tirelessly with African American women, teaching them how to educate their communities, empowering them with knowledge and confidence. This strategy was the key to the civil rights movement as the women behind the scenes educated and shaped the future leaders of the movement. In the words of Charron (2009), "In short, Clark recognized that the everyday practices of black women activist educators, properly channeled, could play a fundamental role in the emerging civil rights movement" (p. 166). Indeed they did—the "citizenship school teachers tapped into the mutual reciprocity between teacher and student that had long defined southern black education" (Charron, 2009, p. 263). Ella Baker dedicated herself to working with youth. She embraced education and leadership development. Ella Baker understood that true freedom would come out of grassroots, group-centered leadership that would empower individuals to "cast down your bucket where you are" (Moses, 1989, p.426).

These women believed that learning is a fluid and interactive relationship between the teacher and student, based on the teacher standing back and listening to the needs of the student, helping the student to see his/her own ideas and then providing resources and confidence to the student to bring those ideas to fruition. Ella Baker stated, "I believed very firmly in the right of the people who were under the heel to be the ones to decide what action they were going to take to get from under their oppression" (Cantarow et al., 1980, p. 84). Baker tried connecting to the community by identifying with them on a personal level, gaining their trust by listening to them, working to accomplish the goals of the community. Ella Baker understood that the building of trust came from listening to people, and only after they trusted you would they take action.

Septima Clark and Ella Baker serve as my mentors, guiding my identity construction and allowing a caring, spiritual leadership to enter my classroom practice. Teaching is not a transfer of knowledge from teacher to student (Freire's banking model); rather teaching is the art of cultivating the students' thinking and belief systems to uncover their own unlimited construction of knowledge. Teaching and learning are a continuum of development. Teacher and student share experiences, embracing the struggle of learning, growing into confident and curious people who actively question the way things are done, constantly trying on new ways to solve problems.

My goal as a teacher is to foster ideas of service, kindness, and curiosity within daily life so that the next generation moves away from the idea that good citizenship is defined as a number of service hours performed per month and embraces the idea that every aspect of daily life should be focused on serving and living a life dedicated to doing good things for other people. In order to create a world that is peaceful, just, and sustainable, the next generation must

be dedicated to action and change. The global networking available today allows students to reach around the world, to work together to solve problems and create a global community dedicated to peace and just living for all living creatures. My personal strengths are listening, leading, and motivating. My goal is to empower students through education, to build their self-confidence and generate in them the idea that all individuals are leaders and have the responsibility to actively involve themselves in the community as agents of change for the good of all people. The popularity of dystopian novels and a dystopian concept of life among this generation is evidence of a paradigm shift. Previous generations were raised with hope for the future and a sense of the excitement of life. Hope was a fundamental structure that framed our way of thinking. This generation seems to be void of hope, which is perhaps the reason that dystopia has attracted so much attention. This dissertation will investigate the idea that the structure of hope is gone, and it will consider the consequences for the educational system as well as for individuals and the community at large. Can hope be taught, as Paulo Freire believed, by providing opportunities to develop compassion through authentic dialogue between student and teacher? Is hope the key ingredient for liberating teachers and empowering them to reprogram their thinking? Can changing our internal software create safe classrooms, resulting in equitable education?

Chapter Three: Methods

Introduction

This is a qualitative study that uses autoethnography and CRT as the methodologies. Qualitative research is used to investigate a topic, usually without a research question in mind. It is a process of inquiry and analysis that occur simultaneously, allowing the researcher to identify emergent themes. In the qualitative approach (1) the data is collected as words, (2) the outcome is a process rather than a product, (3) the study focuses on how the participants make sense of their lives and experiences, and (4) the language is expressive (Creswell, 2013). I have chosen a qualitative approach in order to deepen my understanding of group behavior and its effect on my own identity. According to Chang (2008), autoethnography “transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interrelations” (p. 43). As the culmination of writing and research about my personal experiences (Ellis, 2004), this narrative autoethnography aims to connect with the reader in such a way as to share moments of epiphany that may transform him or her. Autoethnography goes beyond storytelling and provides guidelines for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data, allowing the researcher to gain insight and provide a rich narrative that will help other practitioners to benefit from those experiences (Chang, 2008). In addition, the data collection, analysis, and interpretation culminate in a cultural understanding of self within the dominant cultural and identity paradigm (Ladson-Billings, 2005). Palmer (1998) stated that “authentic community with our subjects, with our students, with our fellow teachers and with our own souls is at once the empowering outcome and renewing wellspring of the courage to teach” (p. 3). I hope my process of self-reflection on my teaching practice will

provide a path for other teachers to explore identity construction and change of practice. I hope utilizing the tenets of Critical Race Theory will reveal a shared discourse among white female teachers that has disrupted the caring relationship between white teachers and students of color.

The method of ethnography results in interpretative story or narrative, and autoethnography makes the researcher's own life and experience the focal point of the narrative (Reed-Darnhay, 1997). Ellis (2004) stated that ethnography is a description of the culture of people. In this study I examine the cultural interactions between African American students and the in-group of white middle-class female teachers (my own cultural group), using W.E.B. Du Bois's notion of double consciousness "as a transcendent position allowing one to see and understand positions of inclusion and exclusion—margins and mainstreams" (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 403). This introduction to Du Bois's theory of double consciousness combined with the reading of *The Mis-Education of the Negro* by Carter Godwin Woodson (1933), acted as a catalyst for the development of my critical consciousness (Freire, 1973). The autoethnographical method offers a safe and healthy process that allows me to confront and understand my white privilege, my internalized racism, and my gender-based fear that shaped my teacher identity and was reinforced through the common discourse of my colleagues. For this autoethnography I am the subject, and my interpretation of my experiences and learning represent the data (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Autoethnography is the culmination of my personal narrative using memory, journals, former writings and stories (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Self-reflexive practice, which is the process of exploring one's philosophy and practice (Reed-Darahay, 1997), has been encouraged in teacher professional development. Self-

reflection is written in the first person and provides richness in descriptors of significant events, people and cultural norms. Howard (2003) stated that racial and cultural differences between teacher and student may be the largest factor explaining the achievement gap between two student groups. Howard called for a critical reflection within “moral, political, and ethical contexts of teaching...pertaining to equity access and social justice” in an effort to reveal to white teachers that students of color are capable learners (p. 196). This narrative autoethnography shares my self-discovery of the impact that race, culture and social class had on my teacher identity as well as how critical reflection, personal experience and exposure have reshaped my identity. The autoethnographic process of comingling the reader and researcher mirrors the comingling of student and teacher. The complex mutual exchange between student and teacher is explored in great detail through this narrative. The researcher hopes to define the hidden curriculum brought into the classroom by both the white teacher and the student of color. For example, an African American student is taught from an early age to be cautious of white authority figures. This study will explore how this distrust of white authority figures contributes to the disruption of the mutual exchange of care between student and teacher. On the other hand the white middle class teacher brings into the classroom a hidden curriculum of fear of students of color, often perceiving them as angry and hostile. This study will explore how the perceived threat and hostility disrupt the caring relationship between white teacher and African American student.

Denzin, Lincoln, and Giardina (2006) described autoethnography as a personal type of writing that allows the researcher to connect with the reader through shared experiences and

different layers of consciousness. The narrative will sift through my social and cultural background, uncovering my core beliefs and common experiences that lead to the in-group discourse of all white female teachers. The exploration of my white privilege and internalized racism put me in a vulnerable state through the process. As I recognize myself as privileged, as I acknowledge myself as oppressor, as I process the pain of my internalized racism with a goal of sharing my pain, and as I uncover the root of my fear, I hope that my undressing in this narrative can elicit a shared experience for my reader. Vulnerability implies that the details of my past experiences and practice may be less than flattering. Ellis (2004) said that autoethnography situates one's self within the explored culture. Because of the duality of cultures considered in this project, this study sets out to describe the social capital of the African American student specifically in white space and also the in group mentality of white female teachers (Hooks, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Stets & Burke, 2000).

Chang (2008) argued that autoethnographical methodology serves those in the humanities, like teachers and counselors, better than traditional research because of the narrative style that speaks to the reader on a more personal level. Because the author's voice resonates from the page, teachers and counselors are able to make a personal connection with the researcher. The sharing connects readers and allows them to understand themselves better while developing a personal connection with the researcher. The researcher develops a more insightful understanding of self, thus autoethnography can be transformational for both the researcher and the reader. My goal for this narrative style is that readers may connect their lived experience to mine and undergo a transformative moment.

Rationale

As I develop my narrative, I hope to connect my thinking and feeling with the changes in my consciousness as a teacher. Through the story, I hope to discover the relevance of the changes in my thinking and link these to changes in my practice. Beyond understanding my thinking, I hope to uncover a hidden curriculum as I unravel my domestication, gaining an understanding of my inner bigot. This self-interrogation and the reflective nature of autoethnography has stimulated an emotional development, also called mentalizing, that has uncovered a process of thinking and understanding my emotional responses in different situations (Schwartz, 2012).

I chose autoethnography as a method because my narrative situates me in multiple subcultures that I understand, in retrospect, have shaped my experiences and my practice. The goal of this narrative is to share my experience, growth, and retrospective insight and allow readers who share a similar experience to connect my story with their lives (Lewis, 2007). I am inviting readers to become co-participants, engaging in the story spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually (Ellis, 2004).

This narrative approach (Denzin, Lincoln, & Giardina, 2006; Ellis, 2004) allows the researcher to describe moments in time that connect and explain how the experiences came together and transformed the researcher. The researcher lays out the details, highlighting the moments in time, and explains what she, the researcher, was thinking and feeling during each experience. Richardson (1996) claimed that the narrative provides a tool for discovering and transferring the impact of these epiphanies to the researcher and the reader simultaneously. A

narrative autoethnography empowers the researcher to uncover her thinking and feeling about lived experiences and understand her relationship to them.

Research Design

This section will describe the guidelines used to make connections between theoretical perspectives and the strategies of inquiry (Denzin et al., 2006). This design situates me inside the culture of white middle-class teachers. The narrative details my experiences and makes meaning of my experiences (Ellis, 2004). The goal of the narrative is to illuminate the complex construct of care within my classroom for myself and the reader. I hope to gain an insight into my feelings and reactions as I relive the exchanges between me and my African American students. My awakening and awareness of my mis-education and construction of my teacher identity refines my ability to interpret my behaviors that define me as a teacher.

Outwardly my reactions and behaviors may be interpreted one way while I may understand my actions to have a different meaning, based on emotions and thoughts that occur inwardly. For example my colleagues and administrators have viewed me as an effective teacher of African American students, yet those students consistently underperformed as compared to their white classmates. This leads me to believe the students of color would view my classroom as unsafe, whereas the staff viewed my classroom as positive and safe for African American students. This narrative is my telling of an awareness, as well as an identity reconstruction that leads to a continual change in my teaching practice as I am reflecting, journaling and viewing my actions in hindsight.

The phases of my journey are as follows: (1) Exploration of my magical consciousness, also known as my domestication, told through the beginning stages of my teaching career, identifying my early beliefs and practices. (2) The awakening stage, during which I became acquainted with literature and experiences that guided my journey of discovery and enlightenment. I investigated the literature on Care Theory, CRT, Shame Research, the Four Agreements, and Liberation Theory, sought the spiritual guidance of civil rights activists like Bayard Rustin, Ella Baker, and Septima Clark, and entered into the process of autoethnography, learning to critically self-interrogate and identify true moments of epiphany. (3) The discovery of my deficit of care, my fear, and the supporting data sources that helped me to uncover my internalized racism, dual identity and all contributing factors that led me to reach some possible conclusions. (4) The gathering of all information, the retracing of the journey using the levels of consciousness detailed by Paulo Freire, allowing me to put the pieces together, connect the dots and make meaning of the journey. The analysis of this phase probes and interprets the transformational moments of the journey in hopes of generating sustainable change for the researcher and the reader.

Data Collection and Processing

My lived experiences are the data. These experiences reveal the creation of my personal and teacher identities. My critical reflection on and interrogation of my past has led to discovery of moments of epiphany that I use to detail my identity deconstruction and subsequent reconstruction. After telling my story, I retrace my steps using Paulo Freire's levels of

consciousness to interrogate my journey and analyze the praxis that brought about my personal awakening and development of critical consciousness. In addition, I articulate the influences of Care Ethic Theory, CRT, and the spiritual influences of Septima Clark and Ella Baker, and Shame Theory as I analyze my journey. In an effort to recreate the transformative journey, I detail the comingling of ideas from my research with actions taken and the impact of this process as I perceived it.

Chapter Four: My Narrative

I was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on June 5th, 1970, into a white middle-working-class family. My parents are blue collar, one generation from living below the poverty line during the Great Depression. My grandparents were farmers, with less than a sixth-grade education, who were forced to move to St. Louis during the depression because their community was devastated. My parents grew up together in an ex Hooverville neighborhood. My father, the youngest of five, was the first to graduate from high school and, went on to become a carpenter. My mother, was the youngest of three, was also the first in her family to graduate from high school and, has spent her life working as domestic help and doing secretarial work. My parents' value system can be summarized as polite white supremacy, meaning by all appearances a northern well-adjusted, accepting family, but one layer beneath the surface I have uncovered an intricately coded belief system with very distinct rules and hierarchies. My parents identify themselves as racist and classify individuals with a prejudicial lens. So from a very early age I was domesticated (Ruiz, 1997), taught the rules of society from a strict and bigoted frame. In time I would come to understand the coded language and how to interpret and follow the code by which I was to live. The guidelines were clear and easy to follow, just difficult to accept without challenge as I grew up and witnessed for myself the contradictions in this thinking.

It wasn't until I was much older that I understood the racist, sexist, bigoted scripting enveloped in coded language that gave my family an appearance of tolerance. My reality is that I am racist, with a deeply rooted, bigoted belief system. Some examples of the thinking within my thorough indoctrination: Some blacks are good, but most are not; they are lazy, dangerous,

and drain the economy, using the system by living on welfare, taking money out of my pocket. Women should serve men, do all the chores, never talk back, vote the same as their husbands, and schooling for women beyond the basics is unnecessary. Gays are bad and immoral; Jews are stingy; Middle Easterners are dirty; foreigners in general are thieves and not to be trusted. I was never to date outside my race, never buy a foreign vehicle, never talk back to my parents or question their point of view; a successful woman is married, has children, and takes care of her family.

As I entered school, and other influences and experiences contradicted my training, I found I possessed a natural resistance to the overt racism in my home, often questioning my parent's comments or asking my father to lay off the jokes, and saying that I did not find them funny. I remember my parents would say I was being smart and I would come to my senses eventually. I suppose I did. I learned to tell the right jokes, act the right way, date the right boys, and drive the right car. I figured out the rules and learned to keep my comments, questions, and feelings closeted. My identity was shaped by the narrow-minded environment in which I grew up. It took me nearly 40 years to uncover the depth of my mis-education and to understand the impact that mis-education has had on my life and on those with whom I have crossed paths.

I went to college to become a doctor but graduated with a degree in Math Education. College was a time of exploration, independence and self-discovery. Unfortunately, I found myself surrounded with likeminded people, programed with similar guidelines and a common discourse. The influence of my childhood teaching is so deeply rooted into who I am that the process of breaking down the belief system was filled with guilt, pain, conflict, shame, and self-

doubt. At times I have to remind myself that as a young child I had no reason to question the messaging. I must remind myself not to blame that young girl for blindly following and believing the script. Even now as an adult, spouse, parent and friend, I acknowledge a dual consciousness, the internal conflict constantly occurring between the teachings of my childhood (my domestication) and my new reality, a compilation of new agreements and beliefs based on my lived experience and my education.

I began student teaching at a suburban midwest high school, a primarily African American, lower income public school. My cooperating teacher, a middle-aged white male, introduced me to the hidden curriculum and familiar discourse of my soon-to-be teacher identity. He had some *rough* classes created by a *strict tracking system* that funnels “*undesirable students*” into sections of Algebra and Geometry that were comprised of the “*lowest, most unmotivated, most challenging*” students in the building. My cooperating teacher would often pull me aside and talk to me about *those* students, reminding me that *success was keeping them out of trouble*. He informed me early and often that the administration appreciates when a teacher *can handle her* own classroom with *no discipline issues*. He would tell me it is sad that some of these students are taking this basic algebra class for the fourth semester in a row, and with *no parental support or guidance* it is truly a blessing that the students simply bring a pencil and paper to class. The expectation: half would fail, some would drop out or get expelled and others would retake the class next semester for the fourth or fifth time. My job was to *save them*, teach them anything I could, *support them* because they had no support at home and *remediate them* with basic skills. They were so far behind that they should be prepared for low-level jobs

and basic life skills. Just do whatever I could to keep order, save those that I could, teaching the basic skills and not filling their heads with dreams of college or careers; these students were to be workers. This experience was my first privileged look into the *common* discourse and belief system of white middle-class female teachers. At this suburban middle-class school the rules were spoken and expectations made clear; the “othering” language was common practice.

I discovered teaching is my niche; I was empowered, determined, and purposeful when I worked with students, enthusiastically embracing the challenge of making a difference. My desire to make a difference and help people was being actualized. My cooperating teacher trusted me with his students, often leaving me alone in the classroom for weeks at a time. I was saving these students, really making a difference. The students were receptive, working hard for me and finding success on assessments. My cooperating teacher was impressed with my ability to manage the classroom with no discipline issues and thrilled to see the students producing work each day. He passed me with honors and a glowing recommendation, giving me my first nudge toward my teacher identity and helping me to formulate the myth that I was a teacher who was good with low-track African American students. Looking back, I realize that my identity as a teacher was cultivated during this brief teaching experience; I became acclimated to the culture of teaching. The discourse was so familiar and true to my core beliefs that I embraced it without consideration. The *beliefs of the group (culture)* were that tracking is beneficial in separating blacks and whites; the honors classes are privileged space; the basic classes are necessary to help those students without parental support and a proper educational background. I found my space in the low-track classes where I would excel as a savior to those students. After all, those kids

needed me. I had a great deal of success from the very beginning. In fact, in my first few years of teaching I was told repeatedly that I was remarkable with the low-track students. In my binary world I recognized that students of color were at a disadvantage; their parents did not support their education; it was the sole responsibility of the school to save these students, and I was a teacher who could make an impact (Tatum, 1994).

Oh how wrongly I was labeled. My student teaching was a massive mis-education, but nevertheless my mis-education was an awesome success. Unfortunately, my identity was formed with this mis-educated mentality; I came into the classroom as a savior, which shut down my ability to learn from the students; I became a distributor of knowledge, never asking students what their goals or dreams were. I made the rules and became the authority. Some students were successful; however, in hindsight I saw that I was harming students, discounting all students' social capital and rewarding all students who assimilated.

In my first eight years I pushed students to strive for assimilation. I developed a mentality that students of color were lazy, unmotivated, unprepared, with no parental support, low in ability, in need of remediation, in need of behavior modification (to be more like their white counterparts), and in need of saving. My educational philosophy was perfectly aligned with educational rhetoric and the identity of my fellow white teachers.

In addition to teaching I am also a high school coach. In the first few years of my teaching career I coached girls soccer in the spring, girls volleyball in the fall and girls basketball in the winter. My mentor in the classroom was also my mentor on the court. A veteran teacher and coach, she helped to show me the ropes. She explained to me early on that most of the male

coaches don't bother to get to know the female coaches because females don't stick around.

Most of them will use coaching to get hired, coach for a year or two and then quit because they get pregnant or decide to focus on academics. I understood this to mean I needed to prove myself in order to get into the boys club.

I was familiar with breaking down the door to the boys club. I had struggled every day of my life to prove myself, first to my father and then to my brother. I had heard frequent comments like stop acting like a girl; stop crying like a girl and toughen up; you throw like a girl, and so on. To be honest, I had learned early that to fit in I needed to toughen up and rub some dirt on it. I understood that to fit in with the coaching staff I would have to make grave sacrifices, including coaching basketball practice while in labor and returning to coach the team one week after delivery.

Unfortunately, even with all of the sacrifices, and coaching for 20 years, I learned that I was not in the boys club; in fact I never had a chance to be in the club. I was tolerated and let in on the surface, but when it came time to pick a varsity coach, I was passed over. When other issues arose, I was sacrificed and used. I had a glimpse into the unfair practice, but I was gently nudged into a different direction and given the varsity job at a different school. In that moment I felt alone, isolated, not good enough and convinced that life was not fair. But how could I complain? After all, I had gotten what I wanted; I became the head boys and girls varsity soccer coach; I was given two AP-level courses to teach and I was given a clean slate to start over.

I did not completely understand the systemic nature of sexism even then. My reaction to the forced change of schools and being passed over and used was not a healthy one. I became

determined, perhaps even possessed with proving to everyone that they had made a mistake. I set out to be perfect, both in the classroom and on the field. In fact I began to seek outlets to make real change in the sexist world of coaching. I enrolled in a master's program to become an Athletic Director (AD). After all there were only two female ADs in the entire metro area. So with two small children, a full-time teaching career, and coaching three sports I went back to school every Wednesday night for two and a half years.

Throughout this time I struggled to find peace. I was on edge and out to break down the unjust sexist ways of high school athletics. This pursuit led to many late nights as I tried to fit in, working extra late hours to excel in the classroom and stretching myself very thin.

During this time I came to realize that the art of teaching is not simply a matter of standing in front of the room imparting knowledge, the banking model described by Paulo Freire. Teachers and students must be engaged and invested together in the struggle of learning (Freire, 1970, 1998). In my quest for excellence (perfection) I began to look for ways to change my practice. At first I framed the change in terms of student success. I sought out changes in my practice that would elicit the positive responses from all students that would generate higher student achievement. I connected student success with student engagement. I began to seek programs and techniques that promised high levels of student engagement. Ultimately this theory of engagement would partner me with t³ (teachers teaching with technology), a program developed and funded by Texas Instruments.

I wanted to be that charismatic teacher, the one that made a real impact on students. I came across a new gadget released by Texas Instruments called the TI navigator. The device

wired the student calculators to the teacher's computer, allowing for a multitude of activities that promised to increase student engagement, to give every student a voice and increase student understanding. The promise of increased student engagement and increased student success reinforced my theory and prompted me to explore the product and training. That spring two colleagues and I flew to Colorado for the Texas Instruments International Conference. This was my first business trip; I had flown only once before on my honeymoon. The experience was truly transformational. I felt important, new, excited, and for the first time in my life I could create my identity from scratch. I embraced the academic pursuit and was drawn into the rich, thought-provoking world of professional development. I craved membership in this community. On the return trip, as my two colleagues and I sat in the airport lobby waiting for our flight, we were energized, passionate, and liberated. In that moment I set a personal goal of joining this professional community, becoming a TI-Regional Instructor, and capturing this feeling of freedom (February 24-26, 2006).

I returned to St. Louis excited, rejuvenated and passionate about finding a way to become a member of the Texas Instruments Instructor team. This spark inside was a new sense of hope and aspiration that I had not felt in a long time, if ever. The following school year I attended a local National Council of Teachers of Mathematics conference and explored the avenues within my district that would allow me to pursue my dream. Through my district I applied for a two-year grant based on action research. I was given a \$10,000 budget and was encouraged to attend the Texas Instruments International Conference the following spring in Chicago. At this conference I expanded my interests, took risks and introduced myself to as many people as

possible. In the end I was given an opportunity to attend Regional Instructor training for one week in Dallas over the summer.

The week in Dallas and my subsequent travels and professional growth with TI expanded my vision of life, allowed me to reinvent myself and pumped me full of energy, hope, and direction. I became excited about teaching, which propelled me into three years of growth and self-exploration. My hard work and enthusiasm was recognized and applauded by my colleagues, and I was named Teacher of the Year in 2008. My confidence was soaring; I was taking risks and finding that the sky really was the limit.

Beyond my work with Texas Instruments I was leading the way in my school, training staff, helping to guide district decisions, speaking and presenting at multiple conferences a year. I was also able to bring a Special Olympic Track Meet event to our high school. It is a huge event and is now in its seventh year. Being a part of the Special Olympics has been my favorite school day since 1994, and I was thrilled to bring the event to my new school. Entering the 2008-2009 school year, I was flying high. I was balancing teaching and working as a regional instructor for TI. I was knee deep in action research for my district; I was coaching boys and girls soccer at my high school and extremely involved with both of my sons' school, sports, and friends.

At this time I had stretched myself really thin. I was ferociously attacking every aspect of my life, striving for approval. I was determined to achieve perfection in every aspect of my life, still dedicated to proving to my former administration and colleagues that it was their loss when they had passed me over. On a regular basis I was working 10- to 12-hour days, getting

home for a late dinner, putting the kids to bed, then starting at midnight with an hour-long workout followed by 1 to 3 hours of schoolwork. I would sleep less than 5 hours each night. But I was living the dream, winning awards and grants from the school, gaining recognition within my school district, my community, and with the larger international Texas Instruments community. Everything on the surface was amazing. Unfortunately, my reality was dark, lonely, and empty.

One week after our second annual Special Olympics event, on April 23, 2009, my husband of fourteen years committed suicide. In one moment, the reality I had created, the image of perfection, came to a screeching halt. I was completely exposed, vulnerable and devastated. Simultaneously life was upside-down and out of focus, but yet in the midst of the chaos a vision of clarity pulled at me: life is not fair. The clarity was not like “poor me, oh my life is not fair”; it was an awakening or liberation revealing that life is not fair, that the rules were made up so that some people would always lose and some would always win. In the wake of the emotional tsunami, I sought balance. I craved inner peace, yet I was inundated with the stark realities of injustice that seemed to radiate from every aspect of life. I retreated into a personal cocoon, shielding myself from the world as I found myself wounded and experiencing life without a compass. The compass would be oriented by Don Miguel Ruiz’s Four Agreements. In retrospect I understand that my very core belief system was dismantled by the suicide and I was left in the carnage of my hollow soul, desperately trying to discern my purpose in life. The following months were the most difficult. I was very angry, confused, and unbalanced. Spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually I was clinging to childhood ideals that no longer made

sense. I was like a pilot trying to stop his craft from spinning out of control, desperately searching for a focal point, to steady myself, to find balance, and to stand upright in my crooked room (Harris-Perry, 2011). I found some solace in the words of Don Miguel Ruiz and his Toltec wisdom.

In his book *The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom*, Ruiz (1997) defined the Four Agreements as follows: (1) be impeccable with your word, (2) don't take anything personally, (3) don't make assumptions and, (4) always do your best. The agreements created a lens or filter for me, to examine my thinking, to question my core values, and to discover my authentic self. This lens served to orient my moral compass, which became a catalyst for my personal growth and ultimate transformation. The agreements were described as four principles to live by in order to create love and happiness in one's life (Ruiz, 1997). Utilizing the agreements as a filter, an inner voice of direction, I made a commitment to live a purposeful life, to stop going through the motions, to discover meaning for my existence in a wide-awake, questioning state of being.

The other chapters in Ruiz's book are dedicated to explaining how difficult it is to actually live the Four Agreements daily. Ruiz began by explaining the agreements we have made with our parents from the onset, and showed how many of these behaviors are acculturated in the school and on the playground. The agreements provide a process of revealing how much others' opinions influence our choices. Our learned reality creates habits, norms, and ultimately our belief system. Ruiz called this process "domestication" and explained that we live our lives guided by the opinions we learned from others rather than the reality of our lived experience. In

time we generate assumptions of what we think is true, and base our decisions and actions on these assumptions. Adopting the Four Agreements is an active, critical consciousness of “challenging the beliefs you learned and the habits you practiced since your childhood domestication” (Ruiz, 1997, p.29). The breaking down of one’s primary teachings creates multiple levels of conflict in the mind and spirit; during the process we become vulnerable and can become consumed with fear and confusion (Ruiz, 1997).

The coupling of the devastation of suicide and the clarity offered by Ruiz propelled my journey into motion. I realized that I was ready to embrace change, to seek out my true beliefs and begin a journey dedicated to the discovery of my true life’s purpose. The turbulent nature of suicide generates a coursing anger and haunting questioning of why? Survivors are left with an insatiable quest for understanding that can drive one to madness. In the following weeks and months I found myself reflecting on my past, reviewing my life, my choices, and my mask. Suicide injected questions about my reality. My friends, family, and even strangers seemed to want to dig into my life and find out why he had done it, and why I had not prevented it. Although the idea is juvenile, my reality became “life is not fair.” And thus, through the lens of life as unfair, I walked back through my life, my choices and actions and tried to figure out why he had killed himself, but even more importantly was I to blame? So many people expressed to me that they would have prevented it if only they had known. In the light of my accusers, I removed myself from every aspect of my life that I could.

I retreated to a small isolated reality consisting of my children and one friend; I found solace in reading, reflecting and working out. I could lose myself in scholarly work and

discussion, and I would remind myself that I was still alive by running and working out. It was a dangerous time, and I do understand why so many people who lose someone to suicide choose the same fate. I found myself on occasion slipping into darkness, sometimes painfully alone late at night. I became afraid of sleep and quiet and turned to running. One night my confidant called me at 1:30 a.m. filled with worry. I had not checked in as I promised. She discovered that I had been sneaking out at night after I had put the kids to bed and had done chores. I would run with my headphones blasting, drowning out my thoughts and trying hard to feel anything so that I knew I was alive. My friend was immediately concerned and explained to me that I live in the city, and being a woman running alone late at night was irresponsible. She was supportive but firm in helping me see the dangerous risks I was taking.

Her concern was like a bucket of ice water dumped on my head, a realization that I was behaving irrationally. It was a moment to notice that I was unraveling, spinning out of control. I needed an anchor. I needed hope. My only salvation came in the form of the pursuit of peace and purpose, in a way a journey to make sense of life in the midst of my breakdown. I clung to the ideology of peace and peace activism, praying for a day when I could pack my things into one small bag and fly off to help others, side by side in their suffering to make meaning out of life. I embraced the ideology of the Peace Corps and prayed for the opportunity to immerse myself in the suffering of others and escape my own pain. Having school-aged children and being financially vested in teaching, I could not abandon my current reality. In lieu of immediate action, I mapped out a journey that would guide me toward my vision of the future. Education

has always been a constant in my life; I was drawn to a doctoral program to pursue my interest in peace work and social justice, laying the foundation for my new life's purpose.

The chain reaction that followed was complex, interwoven and powerful beyond measure. Social justice and peace work pulled me instantly toward the civil rights movement, the people and the philosophy. My initial inquiry was centered on the Peace Corps and its founder Sargent Shriver. I was intrigued by Sargent Shriver and his supporting role in history. It appears that the powerful Kennedy family had kept Sargent Shriver in the background so that his brilliance never overshadowed that of John F. Kennedy or his brother Robert Kennedy. The Kennedy brothers were groomed for presidency, and Sargent Shriver was destined to remain in the background even after John F. Kennedy was assassinated. Sargent Shriver's wife, Eunice Shriver, was the founder of the Special Olympic Games. This fact was especially interesting to me since I had participated in the annual Special Olympics event at our high school throughout my tenure. Learning how and why the games were founded deepened my resolve to continue this event for our high school students to experience.

In this time of isolation I retreated into books, befriending historic characters as I revisited the civil rights movement from a nontraditional vantage point, looking for counter narratives and personal accounts rather than dates and historic events. I became fascinated with the interlocking relationships of the primary and secondary players in the civil rights movement. The more I dug into the life and times of Sargent Shirver, President Kennedy and the Peace Corps, the more interwoven civil rights activists and the war on poverty became. I reread Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail," stories of the Montgomery boycott, details of

the assassinations of President Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. I found myself fascinated with the movement at the grassroots level, and this curiosity uncovered amazing role models. Initial literature on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led to my personal discovery of Bayard Rustin, one of the most interesting activists of the time. Bayard Rustin surfaced in the 1930s as a member of the Quaker American Service Committee and the Fellowship of Reconciliation and later went to India to study peaceful protest under Gandhi. Bayard Rustin is known as a controversial political activist who was responsible for the organization of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. The March on Washington is known as the model for mass protest, and Rustin is known as the master organizer who reminds us that it is fine to protest, but we have to make it clear to the opposition what we are protesting about. Rustin was constantly being told that he was not good enough because he was openly gay. Although his sexual orientation created barriers in his ability to lead, often leaving him open to blackmail or manipulated by powerful rumors, his sexual identity allowed him an awareness of his double consciousness. This awareness in combination with his Quaker belief system yielded a unique and powerful insight into racial issues, giving Bayard Rustin almost prophetic knowledge about the direction and importance of his time. Bayard Rustin's awareness about his double consciousness allowed him to peel back the duality of his blackness in white America (d'Emilio, 2003). This consciousness gave Bayard Rustin unique insight into the violent nature of white privilege and internalized racism, fueling his identity as a peaceful activist for life.

I began making time lines and investigating the relationships of the civil rights activists, curious about what went on behind the scenes, trying to map out chance encounters between

various figures, often finding the then-current civil rights leaders all belonged to SNCC and sat in conference together regularly. Historically, women were not allowed in the political arena, especially during the civil rights movement. Septima Clark and Ella Baker emerged as the seed from which the movement began; every trail I discovered led back to the work of Septima Clark and/or Ella Baker. These women understood change to be an ongoing process that was centered on addressing the immediate self-identified community issues. The members of the community needed to be personally involved in the process. Charron (2009) observed, "Today, in a world where millions of citizens struggle to have a voice in the decisions that shape their daily lives, Septima Clark has much to teach us" (p.12). Reading *Freedom's Teacher: The Life of Septima Clark*, a narrative biography by Katherine Charron (2009), inspired me to develop a personal connection with Septima Clark, who became my spiritual advisor.

Septima Clark's life was dedicated to the empowerment of people through education as the road to freedom. Septima Clark is credited with establishing the Freedom Schools throughout the South, as well as with developing the curriculum and supervising, the education and training of thousands of teachers, leading directly to hundreds of thousands of citizens registering to vote (Charron, 2009). I discovered that both Septima Clark and Ella Baker were servant leaders, meaning that they were dedicated to bringing resources to the communities they visited but that they also trained and empowered local community leaders to lead. Clark and Baker did not trust a single leader to pave the way; rather they entrusted the people to lead themselves. Their shared philosophy was that true change can only come from within a motivated individual. Therefore, the servant leader's job was to help organize, empower, and

guide the people to lead themselves. Under their tutelage hundreds of political activists were born.

Ella Baker was extremely fascinating. She was strong, confident, and independent, and it is documented that she frequently questioned Dr. King and even left the SCLC to work with the student movement in the '60s. It is said that Ella Baker demanded that Martin Luther King Jr. keep his hands off of the student groups that were conducting the lunch counter sit-ins. Ella Baker protected the student group, which ultimately developed into the SNCC, and participated in Freedom Summer rides. Baker was dedicated to the empowerment of youth.

I was drawn to these background activists. I was feeling so wounded and vulnerable that I knew I would not be able to stand at the front of a crowd and lead, but I found a small glimmer of hope in the idea that I could use my position as a teacher to empower students to become change agents. At this point I needed hope, and this seedling of an idea was a small light of hope. This spark polarized my thoughts, feelings, and actions into a single concept, a Service Learning class. A vision came into focus, that combining service work and education would create a generation that would demand social change, ultimately paving the way for a more just society. The mission of developing a Service Learning class filled my cautious heart with hope for the future. The project gave me the confidence and strength to return to teaching the fall after my husband's suicide. Reengaging in life was turbulent and delicate—I often found myself subject to anxiety attacks and near breakdowns. I was well trained in the art of armoring up and masking my fear, but this daily battle of reengaging was at times an overwhelming task. Ironically, the creation of the Service Learning class was exactly the armor I needed to succeed

in my reentry to “normal” life. I often felt like a shell of a person, going through the motions of a life I once knew, but at times I felt that I was outside myself as an observer, watching and questioning if it was real.

The creation of the course was a long process that began with the pitch. I approached my advisor first, to explain my idea of creating a Service Learning course for seniors at the public high school. The course would include research, reflection, and authentic service work. I would document and survey the students, and this would develop into my dissertation topic. My advisor's support was instrumental in pushing me through the bureaucracy of my district. I began with a formal proposal of the course and recruitment of supporters. I found my building principal to be supportive but cautious, warning me along the way that in this time of budget cutbacks the district would likely deny my request. The next step was to acquire district-level support. I met with district coordinators to pitch the idea, and fortunately the Social Studies coordinator agreed to sponsor the proposal. In the meantime I was informed that I would need to be certified in Social Science to teach the course if it was approved. While I was waiting for the district to decide the fate of the proposal, I signed up and passed the Social Science praxis. Cautiously I approached my building principal with my approved course proposal and new social studies certification and asked if she would support the course. The next hurdle was to get a minimum of 20 students per semester to enroll in the course. In grass roots fashion I went to as many junior-level classes as possible during the registration process, promoting the class. Again my principal warned me that it was still likely that funding would not get approved even if I were able to generate the numbers to run the course. Just before the school year ended, I was

informed that I could teach the course the following year if I were willing to teach it in lieu of a planning period as an extra course. I would be paid a fair stipend, but I would lose my preparation time. For the first time in over a year I began to feel alive again, to feel a sense of purpose and direction in my life. I was beginning to see my new reality as somewhat normal and less like an out-of-body experience.

During the summer I reached out to colleagues and friends in the private school community, asking for guidance and mentorship in creating my Service Learning course. I have spent the last two and a half years teaching math and Service Learning, coaching soccer, working on my PhD, and discovering many outlets to engage in social justice reform. One amazing gift of teaching is the cyclical nature of the school year. Every semester I start from the very beginning and work through the curriculum and process from start to finish. I have come to learn that I grow as an individual each day, by engaging in service work, by engaging in tough dialogue with students about social justice topics. Each semester I cycle through the process and I am able to peel back new layers of my own identity and my thinking and belief systems as I go through the process. Many of the local private schools have existing service requirements and projects for their high schools. Although none had a specific Service Learning course, I was able to find generous resources that helped my students find amazing service projects.

Septima Clark's grassroots style guided her practice. "We felt that she had the most important quality; the ability to listen to people" (Charron, 2009, p. 250). Clark's leadership was transformational for me in that she listened intently to the people in the community, uncovered what the wants and needs were in the community and then dedicated herself to educating and

training leaders among the community to attain their goals. According to Charron (2009), "People do not decide to risk their lives and livelihoods because an organizer talks them into it. They choose to do so because something inside of them changes" (p.304). With my inner belief system dismantled in the wake of personal tragedy, I fully embraced Septima Clark as my mentor. Looking back now, I see that my experiences with Service Learning have allowed me to rebuild my core belief system and have helped me to develop a new lens in which I view the world and my place in it.

My advisor suggested that I read Nel Noddings's (1993) book *Educating for Intelligent Belief or UnBelief* just as I was developing the idea of the Service Learning course. Nel Noddings's philosophy is grounded in the significance of caring and relationships as the fundamental aspect of teaching. This relational concept delivered with the soothing prose of Noddings spoke to me. As I read Noddings's book, she challenged me to embrace my spirituality and true beliefs inside my classroom. Noddings was a high school math teacher and a philosopher of Education. She showed me how to personalize my teaching practice and justified humanizing my classroom and teaching style. Noddings questioned the status quo of teaching and directed me to challenge my own beliefs and practice. This guidance helped me to develop the confidence I needed to walk into my classroom and be authentic, to strip away the political mask and become real with my students and the clients we served during our projects. I wanted as much support from Noddings as I could get, and I proceeded to read a collection of her books and articles, including *Happiness and Education* (2003), *Peace Education* (2011), *Caring: A Feminine Approach To Ethics and Moral Education* (1984) and then *Educating Moral*

People: A Caring Alternative to Character Education (2002). I have come to consider Nel Noddings a friend. Her style of writing acts as a catalyst, generating questions in my head as I read, creating an authentic dialogue between the author and me. In some ways, this experience is more like a conversation, one in which we have a mutual exchange, with Noddings's words pushing me to become a reflective practitioner. Through this dialogue Nel Noddings shared with me an alternate view of teaching, a glimpse at a new model, one in which I bring down my waterline and have authentic interaction with students rather than holding firm to the image of the teacher I had created (Noddings, 1993). Without Nel Noddings's words I would never have been able to embrace my own spirituality within my classroom walls. I understood from Septima Clark and Ella Baker that modeling caring and creating opportunities for students to experience caring through acts of service, comingled with an integrated academic seminar around various social issues, would create a new generation of citizens with a commitment to civic responsibility (Charron, 2009; Payne, 1989). Service Learning is a vehicle to empower students to become active change agents (Itin, 1999; Weigert, 1998). These students will become doctors, lawyers, businessmen, teachers, parents, and all kinds of other professionals but will have a philosophy of putting others first and dedicating their lives to doing good things for other people, which in turn will bring about good things for themselves, the community, and the world.

My attention focused on Service Learning as a model that could transform the lives of my students. The Service Learning course would propel students into culturally sensitive leaders who were attuned to social justice and committed to action. I believed that Service Learning was an essential part of leadership training. Embedding the service class into my school day allowed

me to participate with my students in the various service projects. This sustained participation in service rekindled my love of teaching and refocused my purpose on making a difference (Weigert, 1998). I had been unable to release the strong commitment I had to the importance of curriculum and allow my passion for life, natural curiosity, and love of learning to pour into my classroom. The participation in service encouraged me to look inward and explore my inner relatedness to the world. Palmer (1998) stated, “Authentic community...with our own souls—is at once the empowering outcome and renewing wellspring of the courage to teach” (p.3). As he observed, we teach who we are, and courage is necessary to have authentic exchange between teacher and learner (Palmer, 1998). This model of authentic exchange is present in the life and practice of Septima Clark and Ella Baker. By standing aside and giving voices to others, they embodied leadership that is centered on supporting ordinary people to lead themselves. They believed that the leaders should be dedicated to fostering leadership in others rather than looking for personal gains. There is a need for future educators who are dedicated to Care Ethics and servant leadership. The current curriculum for K-12 education and pre-service education needs to be infused with Service Learning opportunities on a daily basis, creating a platform for Care Ethics Theory and servant leadership and ultimately fostering civic responsibility that will produce a new generation of democratic citizens who are actively engaged in the pursuit of a peaceful and just world.

I had a strong dedication to the idea that the area of Service Learning and social justice was my calling, that I was serving the community and fulfilling my purpose in life by focusing my energy and my time helping students to embrace service and become empathic leaders of

tomorrow. Time started to speed up, and I was packing as much into each day as I could. In addition to teaching, coaching and finishing up my coursework for my PhD, I was balancing life as single mother, juggling the kid's schedules and tackling the financial questions of paying for college and ensuring my retirement. A year and a half ago I came up with a plan that would pay for my children's college as well as generate income to help take care of my parents as they reach retirement. I was going to purchase foreclosed homes, fix them up and rent them. My aunt and uncle have over one hundred properties, and they encouraged me and their two children to do the same. The idea really made sense, and I began the process. After all, I am a teacher. I have summers off, so this would be the perfect summer employment. Things really started to fall into place. I had finished remodeling two homes and had them rented, and I was enrolled in the exit course for my PhD program. Both of my sons were doing well in school and actively participating in athletics. My eldest son was working at a restaurant; my parents were healthy and working; I was teaching Service Learning for the second year in a row (my third time through the course); and I was to write the first three chapters of my dissertation during this exit course.

As I sat down to write, the blank page stared back at me, and I had nothing to say. I could not write. I spent the majority of the semester struggling with blank pages and producing terrible ideas that lacked any substance. I found myself in an unpleasant, subdued isolation, filled with panic. I felt as if I were naked in an arena filled with critics booing and hissing at all my flaws, pointing out my inconsistencies, seeing all of my skeletons and uncovering that I was a fraud, a fake, a phony. I discovered that I had been keeping myself so amped up and busy that I had successfully avoided being authentic and real. Shame washed over me. And then I found

Dr. Brene Brown, a shame researcher. I first saw a Tedx talk in which she described her spiritual awakening (breakdown). Dr. Brown's work depicted my isolation, panic, and writers block with such detail that it felt as if she had interviewed me and was describing me. I was compelled to read several of her books, including *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent and Lead* (2012), and I knew she was speaking about me. During this time I realized that the growth and change I was trying to describe in my students was actually my own. I had been working so hard to project my own experiences onto others that I had deeply buried my own feelings and self.

I met again with my advisor and talked to him about my writer's block. I explained that I felt I needed to tell my story before I could pursue research in this field. My advisor was so supportive and encouraged me to write an autoethnography for my dissertation. As I began to embrace the idea, I used the work of Dr. Brown to guide me as I peeled back the layers of armor that had grown so strong and so thick. Finally, I had the tools, the strength and courage to turn my reflective process onto myself, to detail my spiritual awakening. In the past six to eight months I have unearthed the process of self-discovery that has led me to a true state of critical consciousness and propelled me into an authentic reality. I have discovered the power of reflective practice that has occurred in the process of writing an autoethnography. There are two levels of consciousness happening simultaneously. One is the active learning and pathways that occur in the course of one's life. This is the process that I have tried to detail here. The second is the reflective process of fitting a theory to the moments in time that were fundamental in mapping out the journey, while actually maintaining forward progress on the journey. The

primary level of consciousness is the one that guides the decisions and actions in everyday life. The secondary level of consciousness is the critical interrogation of past, present, and future choices that reveal the power of the journey. In the next chapter I will work through my story, analyzing key moments of epiphany, times in which my secondary level of consciousness interacts with my past or my present.

I became consciously aware of my levels of thinking when I came across the work of Paulo Freire, specifically his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The study of Freire's three levels of consciousness, incorporated into his Liberation Theory, has allowed me to analyze past events and detail the power and impact those events have had on stripping away my domestication and rebuilding my core belief system so that I am truly liberated and free. This freedom has elevated me to a state of unfinishedness.

The subsequent chapters of this dissertation will create an argument that Ella Baker and Septima Clark are my *Fundi*, masters of the craft of life, following their hearts with their intuition driving them forward to do good work for others (Grant et al., 1986). I gained guidance and wisdom through a critical investigation of their life's work in my effort to extend the Care Ethic of a white female teacher to students of color. This journey details my self-actualization and subsequent identity redevelopment. This will be a qualitative study using autoethnographical methodology and Critical Race Theory in an attempt to understand the metamorphosis of my own philosophy and identity. I will be closely interrogating my learned prejudice and racism and discovering how it has mis-shaped my pedagogy. Bayard Rustin, Martin Luther King Jr., Sargent Shriver and Paulo Freire all have contributed to my awareness

and growth. Through an exploration of Care Ethic texts, through the lives and practice of Septima Clark and Ella Baker, and through the process of developing a critical consciousness (Freire, 1970) I hope to synthesize the ingredients for critical teacher reflection that will lead to culturally relevant pedagogy (Howard, 2003). My journey of liberation, through the levels of consciousness, will be laid out for the reader. It is necessary to acknowledge the violence experienced in this transformation and remind readers that when we look deeply and critically in our own hearts and minds, we must be filled with self-love and forgiveness. Although at times readers may feel anger, sadness, and pain with the researcher through the process, both Noddings and Freire have reminded us to love ourselves and to work to be authentic internally and externally.

As I reflect back on the memories, working to chronicle my growth, one challenge is the complexity of the development of consciousness as the cycle loops back onto itself through time and space. The development of consciousness is a multi-dimensional process. This autoethnographical study will chronicle the stages of my growth with the benefit of hindsight, illuminating my understanding of Liberation Theory even before I was aware of the intricacy of CRT, Care Ethic, and my lived and learned experiences.

Chapter Five: My Analysis

To begin the analysis I will dissect the autoethnographic method. At first I was unable to see how a white middle-class female schoolteacher fit into an ethnic group. I thought being white was just an individual identity, a powerful example of my white privilege. As I peeled back the layers of my white privilege through my journey, however, I came to understand the power of being white. The process of autoethnography is twofold: growth and learning that happens in real time, and growth and understanding that occurs during reflection and analysis. The process of analyzing and reflecting using a strict methodology cultivated my transformation. An autoethnography traditionally utilizes three chapters to develop a conceptual framework,

which is grounded on four assumptions: (1) culture is a group-oriented concept by which self is always connected with others; (2) the reading and writing of self-narratives provides a window through which self and others can be examined and understood; (3) telling one's story does not automatically result in the cultural understanding of self and others, which only grows out of in-depth cultural analysis and interpretation; and (4) autoethnography is an excellent instructional tool to help not only social scientists but also practitioners—such as teachers, medical personnel, counselors, and human service workers—gain profound understanding of self and others and function more effectively with others from diverse cultural backgrounds. (Chang, 2008, p.13)

How to determine my own culture, white culture, has been a guiding question throughout my liberation.

Paulo Freire detailed a tiered system of consciousness in his Liberation Theory. In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire emphasized creating a critical consciousness through dialogue and praxis (action based on critical reflection). The core elements of Freire's philosophy were based on an individual's or group's overcoming alienation, discovering a respect for one's own culture, and developing an action orientation to change. The education for critical consciousness was founded on the idea that people have been alienated from their culture and are encouraged to identify, examine, and act on the root causes for their oppression. An individual going through this process was referred to as developing a critical consciousness, whereas a group transformation was referred to as "conscientization." Paulo Freire described a reading or naming of the world, which would enable one to decipher his or her place in the world, to uncover his or her culture. Freire's original approach can be detailed as follows: (1) identify and reflect on one's reality, (2) look beyond what one sees to discover root causes, (3) examine the implications and consequence of the fundamental issues, and (4) develop a plan of action based on critical reflection to address the problem. Throughout his work Paulo Freire applied the four stages of development in many ways. He applied the process using a single-problem approach, then applied it to the overall development of a person's consciousness, and then applied it to the overall development of a group's consciousness. The four-stage process continued to develop throughout the course of Freire's lifetime.

Paulo Freire acknowledged the need for an awakening to propel a person or group into liberation. He thought that the stages of development started with an awareness of one's place in the world. To begin, one must identify and reflect on his/her reality, the beginning stage referred

to as magical consciousness. Perhaps an event or a moment of developmental maturity will allow a person to see herself as a part of something larger than herself. Freire admitted that most people are in the state of magical consciousness through their teenage years and that some remain there well into adulthood. Magical consciousness is the state of seeing oneself as the primary character in a narrative (Ruiz), in which that person is the focal point of the story and all events are interpreted through this self-centered lens. Everything is interpreted as about that one person; all encounters are from the "I" perspective, and people within this magical consciousness would be unaware of system oppression and overarching power structures. There would be a strong sense that one's domestication or core beliefs were true and unchallengeable. The first awakening would occur in a person or group mentality, raising an awareness of something bigger than one's self as root causes for the way the world is. The awareness of a larger society at work would transform the individual or group into a naïve consciousness, a state of inquiry in which a curiosity or questioning develops. A person or group in naïve consciousness would understand that life is not fair, that some characters seem to have an advantage, but the person or group may be unable to see more than an individual comparison. The act of looking beyond the surface issues to uncover the root causes of privilege and oppression propels a person or group on the journey of transformation from naïve consciousness to critical consciousness. The process is not cut and dried, but rather a development of understanding, awareness, and a series of critical challenges to one's domestication that lead to an examination of implications and consequences uncovering fundamental issues. During this transformation a person or group develops an awareness of systems of oppression. The individual or group develops an awareness of the

injustice in the world, the marginalization of groups of people, the inhumanity of society. In his later work Freire described a next level of consciousness called unfinishedness. The movement from critical conscious to unfinishedness includes a call to political action through praxis. Freire described a compelling force pulling one from self-awareness into the position of change agent dedicated to the pursuit of authentic democracy (Freire, 1970, 1998).

Some critics of Paulo Freire have tried to use his process approach as a step-by-step problem-solving strategy or leadership technique, missing the power of Freire's true genius as a servant leader, one dedicated to empowering the masses absent of a traditional leader. Paulo Freire's approach attempted to eliminate the asymmetrical or paternalistic aspect of the leadership role, and to turn ordinary people into change agents and seekers of the dream of authentic democracy. Paulo Freire's approach boils down to listening, dialogue, and taking action. Freire was a revolutionary whose ultimate goal was a fundamental change in the structure of society.

In this section I use Liberation Theory to interrogate my journey, specifically three moments identified as epiphanies, in a reflective analysis to peel back the layers of development and uncover the power of my journey through the levels of consciousness. Like many white middle-class females, I spent a long period of my life in magical consciousness. In reflection I understand that my white privilege allowed me a comfortable existence in the status quo. I embraced my domestication because life was turning out just as my parents and teachers had promised. The allure of the American Dream was coming to fruition just as promised. After all, I was a first generation college graduate, coming from a hard-working blue-collar family,

jumping from lower class to middle class through sweat and hard work. The bootstrap mentality was my reality. I dug in to the belief that if I could do it, then all people could follow suit, and if a person worked hard, was disciplined, and took advantage of opportunities, then that person could move out of poverty and up the ladder. My life truly reinforced my racism and bigotry. I was able to see myself as better than others because I had moved up through hard work. I viewed the world from my self-centered, privileged belief system. I am the main character of my story, and it is hard to recognize systems of privilege without taking away from my own self-worth. The rhetoric of the bootstrap mentality not only explained my reality but justified the injustice that I saw around me. The poverty and oppression that I did acknowledge were easily explained by the American Dream. We are all free; we make our choices; some of us just work harder and make something of ourselves while others are lazy and use the system.

My first epiphany came in the arena of sexism. I joined the teaching and coaching staff at a prominent suburban high school in 1994. For the next six years I struggled to obtain a key to the “good old boys club.” In the beginning I believed that I could prove myself as good enough by working hard and being equally capable. The bootstrap mentality was my guiding force, and I was the star character. I was warned by my mentor, the only other female coach in the building, that we had to work harder and that it was difficult to gain the respect of the other coaches. She explained that many female teachers during their interviews had promised to coach in order to get a job, but would coach only a year or two and then would move on to have children and simply teach. She explained that the male coaches distrusted the female coaches, believing the females were not committed. Unable to heed the warnings, I became determined to

prove my worthiness to the veteran male coaches, so that I could be one of them. I would go out to the bars after games, talk like the male coaches, engage in binge drinking, and push myself and my athletes to conform to the boys' image of what a dedicated program looked like and what a dedicated coach looked like. After I was married, I would continue to hang with the boys after games. I played in golf tournaments and attended all the functions. After I delivered my first son, I was in the gym six weeks later, returning early to work after having a C-section. I refused to take my full leave of absence. Upon my return, I created a makeshift crib in the corner of the gym, to ensure I would not miss practice. I was determined to prove myself worthy, demonstrating my work ethic and my family sacrifice. Although I was pushing myself, I found that my Athletic Director often challenged my performance and dedication. He belittled me after losses, demanded that I "man up" and push my athletes to a higher standard. Over the course of the next three years, I took the abuse, using it as fuel to push myself harder and farther. I was now coaching volleyball, basketball, and soccer as well as the basketball summer league team. My Athletic Director explained that a successful basketball coach participated in summer camps and leagues, and ran a youth program that would feed into the high school program. The successful coaches ran the leagues, camps, and feeder programs for free because the program was more important than money or family. Challenged by this standard, I created a junior program, ran a summer camp and enrolled my team in summer league, essentially dedicating myself to the basketball program every weekend during the school year and for multiple weeks during the summer. The more I was challenged to step up, the more sacrifices I made.

A critical sacrifice occurred after the birth of my second son although it would take me years to measure the power of the event. On the day my second son was born, I taught all day and coached practice until nearly six o'clock. After practice I drove to pick up my older son from daycare (he was now three) and then went home and had dinner. Just as we finished dinner, my water broke. I was admitted into the hospital at 7:45 p.m. and delivered my son at 1 a.m. Exactly one week later, I drove myself to coach our first game of the season. I was under the illusion that I had truly made it into the boys club. After all, I had delivered a child and would not miss a game. As I walked into the locker room at half time, I became light headed and grabbed the arm of my assistant coach. I was pale and weak and nearly fainted. I remember time moving very slowly. I leaned against him and, looked up. He said, "You should not be here. This is not right. You should be resting at home with your family." In this moment I saw for the first time the crazy reality I had created for myself. I was fighting so hard to be one of the boys that I had sacrificed and lost my identity as a woman completely. I had no idea, but would soon discover that no matter how hard I worked, how much I sacrificed, and how much I stripped myself of my female identity and tried to assimilate into the culture of the male coaches, I would never be in the club. I had never had a place at the table. Sadly I pursued my quest, even more determined to fit in after that night because I viewed myself as weak. I saw myself as one of those lazy, excuse-making people who can't succeed because they are not strong enough to make it. In time I became a shell of myself, belittled, broken, lost and beaten. I was passed over for a job for the girls' varsity soccer position. The job was given to the "golden boy of the school," who seemed to get everything he wanted with no effort. I was devastated by a series of

challenges and losses and made the decision to change to a different high school in the district. I was given the varsity girls soccer job at the new school and a full-time teaching position, including honors courses. I did not see my own privilege in this moment, however. I just felt the pain of what I called "sloppy seconds." I was humiliated, thinking of myself as a failure because I had not worked hard enough. In time and with reflection, I realized that my own story was a counter narrative to reality and was instrumental in my growth and liberation. In time my understanding of the system of male privilege would help me develop into critical consciousness. I began to uncover the systemic oppression of women and learned the worldview of female professionals. I began to question the system in terms of sexism, and I began to see that women were expected to work harder for less in every aspect of our society.

I used this awakening as a catalyst to break down barriers of sexism in my life. I explored my own belief system and compared my experiences with the reality of sexism in the workplace. The contradictions gnawed at my belief system. As time passed, I would question my domestication and unofficially begin to deconstruct my belief system. Unfortunately, my core system was mostly intact and my belief in meritocracy overpowered the contradictions, leaving me to embrace my new job with hard work and dedication. I would work harder than anyone and carve out a place for myself at this new school and not just in the athletic realm. I would do so in the academic world as well. I would become stronger and better to show my previous school the magnitude of their loss. In retrospect, I see my arrogance. I was bouncing between magical consciousness and naïve consciousness, still clinging to the ideas of my domestication and still viewing the world from the naïve perspective. I understand now that my

reaction was fueled by anger, brought on by the shame of failure; however, in the moment I did not acknowledge this. Instead I generated lists of goals and plans to achieve those goals. I was determined to prove to the world that I was the best and that my former school had made a huge mistake in letting me go. The sad truth was that no one was watching my accomplishments or measuring a loss because of my departure, no one that is except me. As I settled into my new position and new environment, I laid out a plan of growth and excellence to ensure that I was never passed over again. A three-tiered plan emerged: (1) to acquire a Master's degree in Athletic Administration, (2) to attend AP workshops and conferences to excel in teaching honors/Advanced Placement courses, and (3) to participate in action research, developing a new practice in my classroom to get 100% engagement of my students, and 100% success.

In the next six years I attended night school to acquire a degree in Athletic Administration. My goal was eventually to become an Athletic Director and dismantle the boys club, to create a safe space for female coaches in our area, an honorable goal but truly one built on a negative idea of revenge, fueled by anger and shame. The goal of academic excellence led to my attending AP workshops and conferences, which made up my second epiphany.

A colleague and friend introduced me to a new piece of technology for the mathematics classroom, called a TI Navigator. The system was developed by Texas Instruments and was being marketed as a way to engage all students in the process of learning. I looked into the system and found myself on the cutting edge of research and technology. I traveled to Denver, Colorado, to attend the Texas Instruments International Conference with two colleagues. This was my first business trip, the first time I had been in an environment of professionals in which I

was accepted as an equal. For the first time in my life, I invented the person I wanted people to know. I was able to create a new identity. I was empowered and filled with excitement. For the first time I felt connected to a group of people, accepted among a group of intellectual professionals. I invented myself and was accepted into a sought-after group even though I had always seen myself as an underperforming dumb jock.

In reflection, I understand that this reinvention of myself allowed me to see a reality outside of my current world. I was able to see a different world, to imagine a different reality. In a sense I began to question my place in the world during this time, although I was completely unaware of the extent of the change that was to come. I participated in education and growth opportunities during the next two years. I was treated with respect and professionalism. I was learning and growing within my profession and as an individual. The contradiction between my new reality and my domestication was stark and elusive. Using Dr. Brene Brown's research, I now see that I was exchanging one avoidance behavior for another and hiding from my authentic self. I had used alcohol primarily in my early years, but this habit was very hard to let go of. I found extreme comfort in the numbing effects of drinking. As I interrogate my behavior now, I understand that the more aware of my reality I became, the more masterful I became at avoiding reality. On top of drinking to numb myself, I was a workaholic. I was working 10 to 12 hours a day, completely immersed in being perfect. As I described earlier, I would teach, coach, and then transition into parenting and drive the kids to activities, cook dinner, help with homework, clean the house, do laundry, and then begin working on lesson plans and grading at 11 p.m. I would work well into the night, occasionally being called out by students that the time stamp on

my notes would be 2 or 3 a.m. My marriage did suffer; in fact, my greatest regret is not noticing the pain and suffering of my husband. I was so masterful in numbing myself with activities, work, and alcohol that I avoided his depression for ten years. I knew it was there, but I denied its existence and avoided the situation as long as I could.

Although my day-to-day world was numbed by activities, my time away was illuminating and rich with self-discovery and reflection. Over the next three years I attended multiple training sessions and conferences in many different cities across the country. The time away allowed me to feed my inner need to grow. I was able to step out of my life as a coach and mom and into a world that was all about me and my own development and growth. When I left Denver with my colleagues, I declared that I would return to the next conference as a TI instructor. I was not going to be a participant; I was going to grow into a leader, a teacher of teachers, a well-respected academic. I utilized my strength in networking to lay the groundwork with many people in Denver and the next year in Chicago. I was elated when I was accepted into the TI instructor training program and spent an unbelievable week in Dallas, Texas, a week that changed my life. I was one of 20 teachers who were flown to Dallas for a week of education, business, and personal growth.

I was in Dallas for six days, free of the responsibilities of family, home, and friends for the first time in my life, during a week dedicated to myself and my personal growth. I enjoyed working out, reading, learning, and making new friends. The other teachers all seemed to share in my awe and amazement, the freedom from caring for everyone else and instead focusing on ourselves. The experience was liberating and empowering. I was able to remove my various

masks and explore my true self in a safe space with others who seemed to be doing the same thing. I was able to share and explore my core beliefs with a few close new friends who were openly participating in the same experience.

Looking back, I see that I was in a self-discovery phase of my life. I suppose some would call it a midlife crisis. I was aware for the first time that I was capable of changing who I was and how I view myself, that I was capable of changing my identity, my direction, and my happiness level. I became aware of discrepancies in my belief system and in the world around me. I set in motion an interrogation of the world, of my life and my belief system. I had again substituted one avoidance behavior for another in the name of change and growth. I had decided to limit my drinking and had replaced drinking with fitness and working out. I had begun new friendships that allowed me to be my true self: I was starting to open up with my new friends, cautiously removing my mask. I had the desire to peel back the layers, to expose my fears and to risk trying on my new authentic self in my current reality. It was a slow and cautious journey, and I was willing to show my true colors with only a few people.

As my excitement and my friendships grew stronger and my commitment to becoming authentic grew stronger, tragedy struck. My husband's suicide, the third epiphany, was a devastating explosion that leveled my world and imploded my core belief system. People often talk about a tragic event in their lives that acts as a catalyst for great change: this story is no different. Although I was caught up in many personal changes prior to this tragic event, I would not have been able to transform without the annihilation of my entire belief system. So strong

was my domestication that I would not have had the strength to strip away the shame, fear, and safety of my old identity. In truth the suicide was the event that led to my awakening.

The awakening was a rebirth, and with every birth there are stages of development, from infancy, to adolescence, to adulthood. Paulo Freire describes one's reality as a blend of past, present, and future, more in a spiral of interconnectedness. Only now do I understand that I was working my way through levels of consciousness, but the tragic event of suicide erased everything, and I started my life again, from a deep dark isolation.

Suicide is torture for family and friends left behind, which may be why people in all of the support groups are called suicide survivors. Suicide raises unanswerable questions of why. Because I was the spouse, friends and family questioned me. Common questions and comments were the following: Was he depressed? Did you try to help him? If I had only known, I would have stepped in. Why did he leave his children? Did he leave a note? Why did he do it? Was he on drugs? Did something happen? Why didn't you ask for help or tell anyone he was that bad? In typical fashion, the questions began in a tone of concern, but in time the accusations and blame took over and consumed my life as the survivor. I can still feel the wave of shame wash over me today as I take responsibility for my husband's suicide. The only way for me to make sense out of the suicide was to blame myself, and the only way to move on with my life was to learn that no one was to blame and no one would ever know why.

Moving on, letting go of blame, letting go of shame, living with never knowing why was the hardest thing I have ever been asked to do. The dark and lonely existence of surviving a loved one's suicide explains the high statistic of suicide survivors also committing suicide. I also

now understand why my therapist was so worried when I explained to her in a session that I had a dark place in my heart that would never heal, that living with another person's suicide changes you forever. My therapist was concerned that I would fall into a depression: she could see the devastation in my life. But instead of running from life, I embraced life, working to reconstruct a belief system from scratch based upon my lived experience.

In one selfish act my husband had obliterated my belief system, had created a counter narrative that allowed me to question all injustice that I saw, had seen, or would see. In a rage I proclaimed that life was not fair, and a fog was lifted and I could see a cold reality filled with oppression, marginalization, and inhumanity. Now, looking back, I can utilize Liberation Pedagogy to trace my critical consciousness development, but in the moment I was simply surviving.

Using Paulo Freire's Liberation Pedagogy, I can understand the development of my critical consciousness. I was able to understand that the world is not fair, not just, and that oppression affects us all, even in our moments of privilege. It is equally important to interrogate the interconnectedness of my journey. My understanding grew out of losing my marriage privilege and being cast into the role of single mother. Being a single mother is challenging, but my fear of my children's pain and struggle growing up without their father at times became overwhelming. I found comfort in learning about and researching social justice and peace work. Discovering research and pursuing my education gave purpose and meaning to my otherwise up-ended life. Educational research and questioning guided my journey. Future readings, reflection,

and interrogation, the act of uncovering my culture and my place in the world, transformed and liberated me. My understanding of Freire's work, my praxis, led me to unfinishedness.

I began by reading Miguel Ruiz's (1997) *The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom*, which details the stripping down of one's domestication and rebuilding one's identity based on an authentic way of existing. In reality, I used this book as a tool to question my teaching at the individual level, to question my racism and bigotry as taught by my parents, teachers, community, and white culture as a whole. My questioning became a bridge over which my mind traveled—in a ping-pong state—between my critical reflection using developed theories and my research and live experiences. After my husband's suicide, after my American Dream was shredded, I embarked on a journey to make sense of life. No longer was I a married teacher with two kids and a nice home, summer vacations, and an inviting retirement to wrap up a successful and happy life. I was now a single mother, victim of suicide, raising two boys who now are different. For the moment they are defined by their parents' choices. How would their father's suicide affect their lives? Could they find happiness? I was riddled with questions of happiness, success, and purpose. What was it all for?

My academic pursuit became my reality because it gave me purpose, direction, hope, and a structure. As I tried to reenter the world from my isolation, I compartmentalized everything. I completely segregated my personal, emotional, and spiritual selves into a small world that included only my children and one friend whom I had let in just before the suicide. Everyone else was kept at a distance, and I tried to stay detached. I was too fragile, too vulnerable, and too filled with shame.

It seems a natural response to the violence of suicide to turn to peace for comfort and direction. Physical violence is easy to name, and easy to withstand. But violence on spiritual and emotional levels was a new revelation for me (Morgan & Bjorkert, 2006). I had never experienced overwhelming visceral emotion: I had always been numb. For example, I would get anxiety attacks being in groups of people, and I would find myself unable to focus on conversations or tasks. I tried going to school one day to teach, and I became overwhelmed and withdrew. It was embarrassing and crippling. I was frozen and unsure if I would be able to return to my life. At the same time I was angry and out of control. I found myself subject to mood swings from helplessness to violent outbursts that often times materialized as road rage or confrontations with my parents and children. As I described earlier, I would embrace extreme behaviors such as running alone at night on city streets. My friend warned me and explained to me that I was risking everything and that I needed to find a way to channel my energy, to limit my risks before something awful happened. Looking back now, I understand my reaction was shame. I viewed my inability to cope as weakness, and I did not value my life. I believe I was actually seeking punishment for allowing the suicide and for not being strong enough to go on with my life. I was filled with rage and self-hate, masked by grief and attempts to cope. This shame was so great that I had to set it aside, so that I would not succumb to it completely. By compartmentalizing I was able to crawl toward the light.

I embraced peace, peace work, peace activism, and non-violent leaders. I needed a roadmap or a plan to move forward. In order to find purpose in a violent world, I clung to peace. Looking through the lens of Liberation Theory, I can trace my development. As I began

researching the Peace Corps, I was drawn to Sargent Shriver. His presence in the background as a leader was very alluring for me because I wanted to make a difference but I was too weak to stand in front. I needed to be a supporting character. Sargent Shriver seemed an underdog type because the Kennedy family kept him from greatness, holding him in a secondary role. I realize now that I was identifying with Sargent Shriver: I was seeking out examples of people who were oppressed, as far as I understood this concept in my privileged white world. As I stated in Chapter Four, I was attracted to the relationships between people, who knew whom, for example. I craved their stories. As I began to investigate the peace movement, I was simultaneously studying CRT and race. During one of our meetings, my advisor asked me why the peace movement was void of people of color. This simple observation/question changed my view of the world and eventually my reality. At this time I was living in a naive consciousness, trying hard to look beyond the surface to root causes. I continued to chase various stories down, leading me from one historical mentor to another. Two paths emerged that would be critical to my transformation: (1) the discovery of servant leadership, and (2) the discovery of dual consciousness. The core philosophy of Freire's Liberation Theory is listening, dialogue, and action. I was unaware of Freire's work at this time, but I was drawn to the grassroots mentality of the civil rights movement. I traced back the movement to the servant leadership of Septima Clark, Ella Baker, and Bayard Rustin. I was able to see their presence in so many arenas. I admired their dedication to the empowerment of the masses. Later Paulo Freire's Liberation Theory formalized these ideas for me. As I began to implement such ideas into my practice as a teacher, I experienced an attraction to service work. My reflection allowed me to see that I was

seeking answers to my previous questions. I was looking for mentors who could show me how to live true to myself, to live in an authentic reality amongst a community that had domesticated me in such a violent manner.

Teaching my Service Learning course was the first time that I allowed myself to truly embrace both Nel Noddings and Paulo Freire. After reading Nodding's (1993) *Educating for Intelligent Belief or Unbelief*, I was no longer able to keep myself neutral in my teaching and practice. I needed to be authentic to become whole again, but I also needed permission to be authentic. Nodding's book promised me that not only was it acceptable to be authentic and spiritual, but it was necessary for quality education. For role models I also called upon Septima Clark and Ella Baker, who had successfully entered the classroom as spiritual leaders and impacted the world. I found confidence and hope in their lives.

Teaching lends itself to reflective practice. Each semester I am able to go through the social justice curriculum and the process of breaking down the topics of oppression presented in a social justice course. Each semester I am able to peel back another layer for myself. During the third and fourth times through the curriculum of my social justice class, I was able to let go of my power position as a teacher and embrace Paulo Freire's idea of authentic dialogue and authentic learning, a place where teacher and student are on the same level, learning together side by side.

Out of my authentic dialogue, which had been happening in my Service Learning classroom, during my graduate-level discussions, and in my private responses to the various research I was doing, I developed, an understanding of my place in the world, and I came to

embrace my critical consciousness. I was now seeking the root causes and deeper understanding and meaning behind everything. The power came not in understanding society, or oppression, or white privilege, but in understanding my lens in every daily encounter. I became acutely aware that I was a racist and a bigot. I was able to embrace my racism and bigotry as a part of who I am. I no longer felt extreme waves of shame and guilt wash over me when I recognized my racism coming out: rather I recognized it and learned to change my reaction. I understood my shame through Dr. Brene Brown's work. I understood for the first time that I am not alone, that I am not broken, and that who I am is my choice and in my control. I finally understood that my awareness of my thinking and feeling had made me able to move forward into a new reality, a reality in which I accept myself for who I am and accept my place in the world. I was ready to feel comfortable in my own skin, to embrace my dual consciousness, the ability to exist in two realities at the same time and in the same place.

Chapter Six: Rebirth and Unfinishedness

An epoch is a web of complex ideas, concepts, hopes, doubts, values, and challenges interacting with their opposites while striving toward fulfillment (Freire, 1970). Freire also said that those who are authentically committed to critical consciousness or unfinishedness must re-examine themselves constantly. Ruiz said we must be impeccable to our word. Freire and Ruiz agree that to achieve transformation is not easy but those who undergo it must take on a new form of existence and can no longer remain as they were. Both Freire and Ruiz agree that we must let go of social myths, but these social myths will always have a dominant tendency, so learning and questioning are part of the critical process of authentic dialogue, reflection, and action. Be authentic, remain true to yourself, honor yourself, accept and love yourself for who you are: these messages have been repeated over and over, reaching deep into my soul, pulling my authentic self out. I call this chapter "Rebirth and Unfinishedness." It does not detail the beautiful moment of new life taking its first breath; it describes the messy life of complete vulnerability as we become naked, alone, and unprotected.

Five years ago in the wake of tragedy, in a moment of complete vulnerability, stripped of my domestication, fragile and isolated, I found love, forbidden love, forbidden by my own core beliefs. Confused and isolated, I found myself falling in love with my best friend, the person whom I trusted to share my authentic self, at least most of my authentic self. I was still hiding behind a mask, unable to face my racism and bigotry. I wanted so desperately to allow the love, allow the relationship, but I knew that loving a woman was evil and perverted. Unable to control my emotions and feelings and unsure what was real and what was made up, I trusted Don Miguel

Ruiz as he explained that my domestication was learned and that I could choose what I believe. I felt love: I understood it was real. In that moment we took a leap of faith, two straight, white, middle-class mothers both recently single, I a widow, she a divorcee. In secret we began to explore our relationship. I was unable to process what I was feeling, the confusion and isolation. The world did not need to tell me I was bad; I was able to self-hate and berate myself every day. I was convinced that I must keep our relationship a secret. After all, if the world knew I was gay, I would be fired, ostracized, dehumanized. Unwilling to let the world do that to me, I did it to myself by hiding and living in the closet. I became fascinated with Bayard Rustin and the idea of dual consciousness. I learned the power of micro-aggressions; the belief that I would be found out and humiliated created emotional damage almost instantaneously. I was afraid to share with family, friends, colleagues. Our life together was pretend, completely detached from my daily reality, a duality. Looking back, I understand that I was like a child embracing an entirely new life and identity. I was uncomfortable and scared, but found solace in being able to pretend to be "normal." But that word, normal, how it can damage the soul. The years I have spent living in the closet have taught me that turning the lens on oneself is the most important first step. I learned that I had to accept myself for who I am, completely, before I could move forward with my life. To be a healthy member of my family, community, and society at large, I must first embrace my own shame. My partner is exceptional, supporting me through my doubt and loss of self-confidence. She has been patient with me as I have grown into acceptance of myself.

Being in the closet allowed me to experience dual consciousness. The interesting power and privilege that I embraced was the ability to choose to appear straight. I am able to manipulate situations to protect my identity. For a few years this was a positive, but in time I learned the devastating cost of hiding my identity because I was ashamed. The anger and shame built up, splitting me into pieces, destroying my humanity. I have learned the power and the cost of duality.

The stages of coming out include the following: identity question, internal identity acceptance and education, support, pride, relationships, telling the family, balance. In reflection, I understand that my identity question was one that I was not permitted to ask. My upbringing did not allow for questioning of one's sexual identity. I was programmed from birth to understand my role and how I fit into the world. There was no room for change, no gray area. The realization I have made is that my world was painted black and white, literally a perfect dichotomy in every aspect: male/female, poor/rich, good/bad, us/them. It never occurred to me that I could be gay; it simply was not allowed. This dichotomy was my domestication, and I believed it to be reality, unquestioning and unwavering. After changing schools and participating in professional development, I began to see flaws in my belief system. I began to encounter counter narratives that established questions about my beliefs and my childhood teachings. During this time I sought education in a sense; I sought counterexamples that allowed me to peel back the layers of my domestication.

Although I was searching for truth, I was not able to bring down the layers of armor that I had created in my lifetime. It took the one-two punch of suicide and finding my soul mate to

dismantle the armor and reconstruct my belief system. I am truly blessed that I was not alone in this purge. I am not sure I could have found my way out of the isolation and pain if I had not been filled with hope and supported with the love and strength of my partner. Our situation is unusual because we are both white middle-aged straight mothers who happened to fall in love. We embraced our love in a blind leap of faith, holding tight to one another and ignoring the messaging of the world. In this moment if either of us had considered the depth of the change of our lives, we may not have had the courage to lean into our relationship. Rather the ignorance of our white privilege actually gave us a blind courage to fall in love, blend our families and cross over into a world that we did not know, understand, or even acknowledge. Initially our relationship was secret; we hid, we isolated ourselves, and we created stories that would explain our relationship as two very close friends who were supporting each other through death and divorce. I needed time to come to terms with my new identity. I was not happy or proud to be gay, and in fact I lied, denounced labels, and completely compartmentalized my life. It was easy enough to lie to my family, friends, colleagues, and even myself although my sleepless nights, confusion, and dramatic mood swings would eventually force me to turn the lens inward and deconstruct my belief system.

Initially I masked my pain and confusion, blaming society. I claimed I was fearful of how society, family, friends, co-workers and members of the community would react to my sexuality. I convinced my partner that I could be fired and so I must remain in the closet. Thankfully my partner quietly and patiently chipped away at my excuses and avoidance, pushing me to be open with my children, open with my parents and most importantly open with myself.

The process of self-acceptance has been a long one that will most likely last a lifetime.

According to my understanding, the process of growth is a lifelong commitment, as we are all unfinished. Living a closeted life has connected me to the CRT tenet of dual consciousness. I understand the pain and long lasting effects of interacting in a world that says that you are not good enough. I understand how the daily scars build up. I have witnessed the two faces of my peers, the two faces of my family, and my own two faces.

The process of getting comfortable in my own skin is ongoing. I have held strong to the contention that staying in the closet is my right, and that my business is private. I have held firm to my right to privacy for five years, constantly warning myself that I should stay in the closet because there could be repercussions if I were to come out. An intersection occurred that has made this concealment impossible, however. First, I found Paulo Freire, whose work spoke to me on every level: professional, personal, and spiritual. Freire's Liberation Theory was simultaneously a zoom and a focus as I gained clarity in my thinking, believing, and feeling. After reading *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, I consumed the rest of Freire's work. The process was an intense, reflective interrogation of my past, present, and future. I found clarity and understanding of my duality and growth. I was able to gain confidence in my new identity; Freire's work allowed me to understand that the thinking was real and viable, that I was not crazy. The way Paulo Freire described the levels of consciousness made sense to me. I could trace back through my life and see how my growing awareness allowed for my transformation. I finally believed my transformation was real and valid. It took great power to dismantle my domestication, and I still find myself migrating to my old programming, especially in times of

conflict or potential conflict. The trouble with growing, changing, and transforming my identity was that throughout the process I wanted to cling to relationships and aspects of my life that no longer fit with my new ideology. This conflict left me feeling awkward and disconnected.

I was struggling internally; initially I called it anger and explained it with the 12 steps of grieving, with the 12 steps of coming out, etc. I put stock in the process and tried to learn strategies to control my anger and move forward. Paulo Freire's core concept helped me to push through this barrier. An essential facet of Freire's Liberation Theory is looking for root causes, described in the stage of naïve consciousness, a key component that propels one into critical consciousness. I could mask my anger, just as I could mask my new identity, trying desperately to walk in my old shoes as a teacher, coach, friend, mom, colleague etc. But the anger would rise to the surface just as my new identity would peer out from beyond my dense armor. With prodding from Freire I dug in, searching for root causes of my anger. At the same time, while I was working through several social justice issues with my students for the third time, I discovered Dr. Brene Brown's work on shame. Instantly I understood how shame was the root cause of so much of my conflict and disconnect. In her book *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*, Brown (2012) discussed vulnerability. Vulnerability, which I had always considered a weakness, she defined as courage and bravery. Brown's words resonated with me; I was able to understand how my shame was controlling my life, causing me to isolate myself, creating fear and ultimately allowing me to become disconnected from my students, my peers, my family, and my community. Everything I strived to do with service work, reaching out to others, trying to fill this void, was hopeless as

long as I was consumed with shame. Every avenue I took in the fall of 2014 led to the word authentic. Paulo Freire detailed the need for authentic dialogue and authentic relationships in order for learning to occur. Dr. Brown explained that we must embrace vulnerability, must step into the arena naked and real, and this action would transform how we live, love, and parent. As I was convincing myself that authenticity was the path that would lead to conscientization or complete transformation, I became a witness, which propelled me from critical consciousness to unfinishedness.

On August 9th, 2014, unarmed African American Michael Brown, with his hands up, was shot by a white police officer. His body lay on the street for four hours; his mother was held back, wailing, and devastated. I was drawn to the story immediately, the outrage, the inhumanity, the clear display of white privilege and oppression. Witnessing Ferguson has allowed me the personal connection, the double consciousness, the exposure to a dire need for social justice reform and a true call to action. This call plays out in so many ways: I am white and middle-class and the conversation among my people is overtly racist, a discourse that throws me back into my childhood. I am outnumbered and silenced. In the beginning I ran to groups of people of color and groups of people who were like-minded. I believed my call was to join the protests, to be an activist fighting alongside the people of color. But I have come to understand that I do not belong on the streets of Ferguson protesting the injustice; that job would be easy. My job, the job that I shy away from, exists at home, expressing my beliefs to my children, or at my gym, engaging in dialogue, trying to deconstruct race with white moderate Americans, and

my toughest job is at the Thanksgiving table with my family, as their overt racism bubbles to the surface. In the "Letter from Birmingham Jail" Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said:

First, I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says, "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a "more convenient season."

Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection (King, 1963, p.2).

I am the white moderate that King spoke of. It is my call to stop craving order and work for justice. I can no longer passively participate in the racism of my family, friends, and community; I must lean into the hard conversations. I must dedicate myself to living without armor, to being real. The realization that I must embrace my racism and bigotry, that I must continue to research social justice issues and I must act in a positive, authentic way in my school,

my community, and my home, defines the next stage of my journey. I embrace the idea that we are all unfinished; it is our duty to move forward while we cling to our authentic selves.

At Riverside Church, April 6th, 1967, Martin Luther King Jr. delivered the often forgotten “Beyond Vietnam” speech. His words ring as true today as they did in 1967: The three evils in society that will surely send America to Hell are racism, poverty and militarism. This speech echoed through my memory as I watched tanks drive through Ferguson as protestors were sprayed with rubber bullets and tear gas. The events of 2014-2015 shine a light on these issues and beg us to interrogate the school system, a perpetual microcosm of society. The “three evils” play out in the educational system: racism (shining through the hidden curriculum of white middle-class female teachers), poverty (the social capital deficits of minority students), and militarism (tracking, suspensions, push outs and dropouts). Educators should embrace Dr. King’s warning by embracing their inner bigot. For too long the dominant group has utilized cognitive dissonance to maintain the status quo. Dr. King explained that America needed to stop waiting and start accepting all people as equal. The pursuit of justice is one of love, not ambivalence, understanding not difference, empathy not blame. Love is the antidote to dissonance; through love we can all witness.

I hoped writing this autoethnography would allow my readers to learn from me, to experience part of my story and grow to understand oppression and privilege through my experiences. I hoped that the writing and reading of my narrative would provide a window through which others could learn. I have learned that telling my story has forced me to research and develop a deep understanding of my culture and the culture of those around me. I have

learned that this in-depth cultural analysis and interpretation has provided a window into my own soul and that this window has allowed me a profound understanding of myself as an individual, as a spouse, as a daughter, as a mother, as a teacher, and as a community member. Only through the critical interrogation of every aspect of my life have I grown into unfinishedness.

The next step: witness the changes and monitor how this plays out in my classroom interaction and practice. Embracing my inner bigot and dismantling my racist discourse and belief system should remove the hidden curriculum from my classroom. Removing the racism from my classroom should allow all students equal opportunity to education. Through deliberate practice and change coupled with authentic interaction between teacher and student should remove the learning barriers for students, with a long-term goal of eliminating the African American Achievement Gap.

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