A Dialogue About Race: African-American Teachers Discussing History and Experience of

African-Americans in the Teaching Profession

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Abstract

The achievement gap in the United States develops when millions of children enter the classroom on their first day of kindergarten. The sociological effects of the achievement gap as it relates to the racial and socio-economic strata create cyclical, systemic problems in our country that ultimately affect the next generations of children in our schools.

The purpose of this study is to learn from adult African-American teachers about the issues confronting African-American high school students who no longer have role models in the classroom, as was previously the case, prior to school desegregation. A former teacher, of African-American history, was interviewed for the study.

Results indicated that African-American teachers must take on the responsibility of engaging in conversations about race with their colleagues. The effect of this dialogue would be to help all teachers understand the challenges that all students with different cultural backgrounds face in the contemporary high school.

Because there are so few African-American teachers, African-American students frequently lack role models with whom they can easily identify. This can negatively impact self-esteem for students and can keep students and teachers of all races from building rapport. Sometimes, it can even keep students from accessing the academic content.

Chapter 1 Introduction

I am the only African-American teacher in my school district. I did not grow up in a stereotypical African-American household. I grew up in a predominantly affluent, predominantly Caucasian town, and I went to affluent and predominantly Caucasian schools. My father is a former Black Panther, former drill sergeant and former African-American History teacher, at a San Francisco school that no longer exists. My mother, although she looks Irish, is an Italian-American, retired high school English teacher who dragged me to more staff meetings than I can count as a child. Aside from the fact that their interracial union alone is unique, given that it was illegal only 45 years ago, the length of their marriage is even more so. They celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary two years ago. I did not grow up in any ghetto. My father has never been incarcerated. My mother is not addicted to drugs.

But for many of my African-American students, these stereotypes and statistics are anything but stereotypes and statistics because they are their realities of growing up African-American in the United States.

My students are not interested in my knowledge of African-American studies, African-American literature or African-American history that I gained from my privileged and prestigious undergraduate university. They ask me, "What *are* you?" I tell them I am half African-American. And they say, "Oh…you're black!" They are fascinated by the way I speak, the pride I take in being African-American and Italian-American, the movies I watch (checking to see how "white" I am – they answer is very), and sometimes they're angry with me because they know they can't manipulate me with threats of crying, "Racist teacher!" I am one of them in identity alone. I think of them even more every time I have a sharp pang of awareness, as I look around a staff meeting and remember I am the only brown teacher in the meeting room.

Statement of Problem

Because there are so few African-American teachers, African-American students frequently lack role models with whom they can easily identify. This can negatively impact self-esteem for students and can keep students and teachers of all races from building rapport. Sometimes, it can even keep students from accessing the academic content.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to dialogue with African-American teachers about race and the challenge created by the decrease in numbers of African-Americans in education.

Research Question

Having positive role models in school is important to adolescents. It is particularly important to students to have role models who share a similar history and experience. This is particularly important for African-American students who are typically not represented in the teaching population. In what ways did desegregation and the Civil Rights Movement inadvertently cause an exodus of African-American teachers from education? What is the experience of African-American teachers in today's predominantly Caucasian teacher work force?

Theoretical Rationale

An ironically negative effect of the Civil Rights Movement and the ruling on Brown v. Board of Education was the exodus of African-Americans from the education profession. African-American students who once found themselves surrounded in the classroom by role models with a shared history became the minority population in what were once white-only schools. African-American teachers who were once relegated to the classroom found other career paths. Today, the legacy of Civil Rights has helped to create the structures for diverse educational environments amongst our students but has created homogeny in amongst teachers.

African-American students in high school would have a more defined, grounded and strong understanding of their identity and history if they had more African-American teachers in their high schools. If African-American students are exposed more regularly to African-American role models in schools, they will be more successful in high school. Frankenberg (2009)

Assumptions

I assume that the graduation rates for African-American students in the United States remain low, as compared to those of Caucasian students. I also assume that the percentage of African-American teachers in public high school in the United States remains low, as compared to that of Caucasian teachers in public high schools in the United States. I assume that African-American students, parents and teachers, regardless of ethnicity, would like to see more African-American teachers be a part of public high school faculty.

Background and Need

Frankenberg (2009) argued that *Brown v. Board of Education* had a major impact on the career paths of African-Americans seeking jobs and graduating after the Supreme Court Decision was made. Most of these graduates chose professions that were, before *Brown*, not available to them, causing an under-representation of African-American teachers in United States public schools. Based on the sample, this study found that African-American teachers commonly teach with other African-American teachers. Based on the research, the authors found that teachers of color can serve as unique and important role models for all students regardless of race, and that integrated schools (both faculty and students) allowed for the creation of "cross-racial understanding:. The study found that white teachers had, predominantly, attended schools that were mostly white, or where most of the population was of the same race, while African-

American teachers had, predominantly, attended schools where 30 percent of the population was different from them.

Summary

This section explored a key issue for African-American students in today's classrooms. While the Civil Rights Movement created career pathways for many African-Americans, an additional impact was the exodus from careers in education leaving African-American students with a limited number of role models. The next section, A Review of the Literature, examines this problem in depth.

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

Introduction

The literature that relates to African-American teachers in schools only loosely connects to the subject of this research paper. Much of the literature focuses on African-American teachers existing in a predominantly Caucasian teaching staff or school or the relationship between African-American students and Caucasian teachers. Few articles, studies or journals examine the relationship between African-American teachers and African-American students specifically. The review of the literature in this chapter provides a context for this research paper in terms of the history of African-Americans in education and the issues of racism that still permeate through the U.S. education system today.

Historical Context

Desegregation in this country had a tremendous impact on the education system. *Brown v. Board of Education* demolished the segregation *Plessy v. Ferguson* had made legal in this country, and therefore, in our schools. However, under *Plessy v. Ferguson*, African-American students had access to an African-American teaching force in a way that doesn't exist today. African-Americans were driven into jobs that were supported by Jim Crow and segregation, which meant that they were excluded from what was and is considered the professional sector. When *Brown v. Board* made segregation unconstitutional, there was a mass exodus of African-Americans from the teaching force. Jobs once unimaginable for an African-American person to have became attainable. In a way, segregation of public education created the stigma still present today that suggests that teaching is not a professional career. Today, the education system remains predominantly white and an increasingly less attractive career path for many African-Americans.

Review of the Previous Literature

Impact of Legislation

Lyons and Chesley (2004) assessed the effect of pre-Civil Rights Era Supreme Court cases, such as *Brown v. Board of Education* and *Plessy v. Ferguson*, on 21st Century African-American students and the presence of African-American teachers in public schools in the United States. The authors draw on previous research that suggests that one of the negative impacts of *Brown v. Board of Education* was the de-segregation of the workforce, and subsequently, a decrease in the number of African-American teachers.

Gay (2004) addresses the history and the legacy of the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in her article. She analyzes the changes in multicultural education since the ruling and the ways in which those changes are affecting desegregation and equity in schools. She also looks critically at the pedagogical problems and assumptions that resulted after the ruling. She explains that, "some serious fallacies characterize the underlying assumptions of how the decision was received and interpreted for practice," (p. 4). One the effects of the ruling and of school desegregation, she argues, was the establishment of European American education as normative. Educational equity was established, according to Gay, on this principle and it still holds true today. This argument, that the subtext of the phrase "high quality education" refers to the Europeanization of education, is one that supports my own research in that it provides evidence of the kind of homogeneous and predominantly Caucasian school environments that are pervasive in the U.S. education system today. This same system and continued educational ideological beliefs contribute to the kinds of isolating and sometimes hostile teaching environments in which many African-Americans simply do not enter.

Cultural Inclusion

Milner (2005) addressed a gap in the literature that spoke to the importance of developing a culturally inclusive curriculum in a predominantly white high school. The study, rooted in narrative research, is based on an African-American high school English teacher's experience connecting with her students who were mostly white. The case study revealed that Dr. Wilson, the English teacher, perceived that her colleagues were not supportive of her insistence on teaching racial and cultural awareness through her curriculum. Her students, however, responded positively to the transformation of the curriculum, which included an emphasis on under-represented authors and literary canons.

African-American Male Perception of Teaching as a Profession

Graham and Erwin (2011) conducted a phenomenological investigation in which they examined the perceptions of successful African-American male students on their perceptions of a career as teachers. Sixty-three, 11th grade, African-American students in North Carolina with a weighted GPA of 3.00 or above and a minimum combined math and verbal SAT score of 1000 and a current enrollment in a higher-track class participated in this study. Interview sessions were taped and later transcribed. Afterward, the researchers used an *explicitation* process described by Hycner (as cited in Graham and Erwin, 2011), in which the transcribed data was reviewed by the participants of the study for authenticity and accuracy.

Through analyzing the data, the researchers found, among their findings, that African-American male students had negative associations with the teaching profession, which they also described as oppressive, they felt devalued as African-American males by their teachers, disrespected by white parents. Participants ultimately concluded that they had negative perceptions about teaching because of their stressful experiences as K-12 students. These

African-American male students associated their teachers with derogatory and racial speech, disrespect and a lack of professionalism. This study confirms, in a more specific sense, some of what I hypothesize in my own study, that there are so few African-American teachers because of a hostility created by a lack of fluency in the language of talks about race.

Bianco, Leech and Mitchell (2011) conducted a study in which they sought to discover the factors that influence African-American males to consider teaching. The researchers used both a mix of gathering qualitative and quantitative data in interviewing and surveying their five students. Students completed a survey as part of a class assignment, and the results of that survey were later used to engage students in conversation during interviews. The authors of the study used descriptive statistics to analyze the survey results and transcribed the interview responses.

The researchers found that the students accounted for the small percentage of African-American teachers by drawing a connection to the low college attendance rates among African-American males. They also shared that African-American male students' experiences in the classroom may also affect their decisions not to enter education, in addition to the lack of compensation in teaching.

Part of my own research addresses the theory that African-American students benefit from having African-American teachers on their campuses. Students in this study reported that having teachers with a shared racial background at their schools had a positive affect on their thinking about becoming teachers. High school teachers, in particular, had the greatest effect on those decisions. The students made repeated references to role models and peer tutors as a means of encouraging African-American young men to enter education.

African-American Teachers as the Minority in a Homogeneous Work Environment

Mabokela and Madsen (2007) conducted research regarding the ways in which differences amongst staff members at a predominantly Caucasian district affected the behavior of African-American teachers in that district. The authors of the study note that a great deal of information exists relating to the effects of desegregation on majority teachers and students of color, but that little research has been conducted on the effects of desegregation on African-American teachers.

This study focused on the perceptions of these teachers regarding their interactions with school administration, parents and students. For this study, 14 teachers, of various grade levels, were interviewed. Of that 14, 7 were male teachers and 7 were female teachers. The researchers noted that there were some similarities between the male and female African-American teachers. The researchers used a qualitative and thematic data analysis strategy, which subsequently allowed them to use a constant comparative method of research analysis. Several themes emerged from the study.

Both the female and male African-American teachers discussed feeling highly visible in their predominantly Caucasian school. The female teachers, however, had negative associations with this increased visibility while the male teachers viewed it as being a means by which they might compete with their peers. Female teachers expressed their frustration with constantly being made to feel as though they were under-qualified, while the male teachers felt that they needed to dispel negative, African-American male stereotypes. Both male and female African-American teachers in this study expressed a resistance to having to represent their race in a homogenous staff.

This study supports what my interview subject argued regarding the demands both subliminal and visible of African-American teachers, who are almost always the minority group

on a teaching staff. The demands of being a teacher are great, but, as this study concludes, the demands of being an African-American teacher are greater. The workplace conditions for African-American teachers are uniquely difficult given the homogeneous nature of a mostly Caucasian and culturally dominant teaching force in the U.S.

The Stereotype Threat

Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott and Garrison-Wade (2008) conducted an exploratory qualitative analysis study of the effect of Caucasian teachers on the academic achievement of African-American students. The authors utilized purposeful sampling to increase the likelihood that the sample subjects would be knowledgeable regarding the topic. The sample included eight African-American students, including five female and three male students. The students in this study attended two different high schools, but had similar academic backgrounds, in that they were fairly high achieving. They also all had at least one Caucasian teacher for a core academic subject.

The interviews focused on engaging students in frank discussions about their experiences as African-American students of Caucasian teachers. After transcribing the interviews, the researchers analyzed the information by identifying key patterns and themes in the student responses. Of the themes that emerged from the research, the most prominent theme related to students expressing feelings of disrespect or a lack of respect from their Caucasian teachers. A finding in the study that strongly connects to the research in my own study is the idea of "stereotype threat" (Steel as cited in Douglas et al., 2008) that the authors use to support the following student responses. Students communicated the stress of feeling representative of their entire racial group. This "extra burden," as the authors describe it, created an added stress for these students and can greatly affect their academic success. Similarly, African-American

teachers reported experiencing these same feelings that can also affect their own professional success. In contradiction to my own hypothesis, however, the authors argue that the mere presence of an African-American teacher would not necessarily guarantee academic success for African-American students or "that the race of the teacher can be expected to overcome known debilitating effects on school performance" (p. 49).

However, in his article, *The Relationship Between Black Racial Identity and Academic Achievement in Urban Settings*, Brian E. Harper (2007) investigates the complexities involving the development of African-American racial identity among African-American adolescents and describes the positive impact that African-American teachers can have on their African-American students through modeling behavior.

In his analysis, he addresses the ostracism of those African-American students who, because they espouse the counter-behavior of those students who choose to underperform academically, are deemed by their peers as "acting white." The author writes, however, "Black urban teachers, who, themselves, exhibit a wide range of interests and talents, are in a perfect position to rebut this notion. As they invite their students to investigate non-stereotypical expressions of self, they encourage the reconceptualization of what it means to be Black. This, in turn, lessens the appeal of an oppositional conception of race in favor of a wider, more expansive Black identity, in which hard work and achievement are accepted as consistent with one's racial self-concept" (Harper, 2007, p.234).

Statistical Information

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2012), in 2007-2008, 7 percent of U.S. K-12 teachers were black and 83.1 percent were white. Of the male teachers, 6.9 percent were African-American, and of the female teachers, 7.1 percent were African-American and 83

percent were white. According the United States Census Bureau (2012), in 2010, of students enrolled in school, 7.2 percent of high school students and 13 percent of elementary school students were African-American.

Chapter 3 Method

Interview with an Expert

This is a non-experimental design study using the interview format to gather information on the topic. Information collected was qualitative in nature, gathered from a conversation with a former teacher of African-American history.

Sample and Site

The expert was purposely selected because of his knowledge and experience as a teacher in an urban setting in which he was part of the majority and subsequently in a suburban setting in which he was the minority.

Ethical Standards

This paper adheres to ethical standards in the treatment of human subjects in research as articulated by the American Psychological Association (2010). Additionally, the research proposal was reviewed by the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), approved, and assigned number 9091.

Access and Permissions

The interviewee was asked to set aside time to engage in a dialogue about the historical changes that are reflected in the decline in the number of African-American teachers in the profession. He was also asked to share his experiences as a minority staff member.

Data Gathering Strategies

During a pre-arranged meeting, I, as the researcher, asked my subject the following questions:

1) To what extent do you believe segregation exists in U.S. public schools amongst students? To what extent do you believe segregation exists in U.S. public schools amongst teachers?

2) Some authors argue that there is a correlation between the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling and the currently small percentage of African-American teachers in the U.S. Do you believe that this ruling may have inadvertently caused an exodus of African-Americans from the education profession?

3) In what ways do you think African-American students would benefit from having a greater number of African-American teachers in their classes? Do you believe there is also a larger impact – on the staff, community, etc.?

4) Aside from the theory regarding *Brown v. Board*, why do you think that there are so few African-American teachers actively teaching in the U.S.?

5) In my thesis paper, I am arguing that an increase in the number of African-American teachers in U.S. high school classrooms would correspond to an increase in discussions of race. Author Linda Darling-Hammond argues that educators spend a great deal of time avoiding discussions (both inside and outside of the classroom) about race. How do you predict both the frequency and depth of discussions about race would be affected if there were more African-American teachers in U.S. classrooms?

6) How do you think the academic success of African-American students would be affected by this presence? How do you think the academic success of all students would be affected by this presence?

Data Analysis Approach

Following the interview, I analyzed the responses to the questions. I selected the responses that were relevant to the topic and discussed these areas in narrative form. Similarities and differences were identified. In the final reporting, certain themes emerged from the data.

Chapter 4 Findings

My participant (personal communication, November 1, 2012) responded to only four of the original questions. Following the interview, we engaged in conversation about the topic. Responses to specific questions are indicated below.

1) To what extent do you believe segregation exists in U.S. public schools amongst students? To what extent do you believe segregation exists in U.S. public schools amongst teachers?

You have to take into account where most of the African-American students reside. They don't reside in a homogeneous culture. They reside in a single ideological system that works and perpetuates the idea that African-Americans are always going to be the underdog. So, you have to fight. You have to stand up. You don't back down... There is definitely segregation, but it is segregation that is self-imposed, in that those students who venture outside the norm by extending themselves to other people…are such a small, small fraction of the total population that I'm speaking about right now that it's almost invisible. You have to know it by being out there and seeing how hard they work and struggle to maintain themselves in both worlds. Those are the youngsters who don't buy into the 'we're always going to be downtrodden' [notion]. Those youngsters who willingly accept the idea that being involved in a segregated community is the best way for all of them [are] those youngsters who create problems…the school system is set up in a way [that says], "You come here, we put you where we think you belong," and the youngster has to prove that they can do more than the school thinks they're capable of doing. Those youngsters are going to be the most difficult to reach and they're going to be the most hostile. And those teachers who do not engage those students who come with that hostility, and who have little understanding of the world as a whole, they have the biggest problem. It's nation-

wide. And I can't foresee [SIC] that there are public schools that are set up in such a way that [progress is] possible. As for the adults, once again, the issue has always been if you're visible, less things are likely to happen, but if you're visible that means you're also accountable for redirecting energies that are going to lead to problems later on and for most teachers I think that's a world that they don't want to be a part of. There are just so many other things going on in the day. I think that's because it's once again tied into money. Without money you can't really do that kind of work.

2) Some authors argue that there is a correlation between the Brown v. Board of Education ruling and the currently small percentage of African-American teachers in the U.S. Do you believe that this ruling may have inadvertently caused an exodus of African-Americans from the education profession?

No. The intent was to afford African-Americans a chance to come into the schooling system and teach on a regular basis. I say again if you are a new teacher and you are young you're not going to be paid a salary that is commensurate with their education. And I think that is a tremendous obstacle to overcome. It's different because Caucasian teachers are grounded in the education that they attempt to provide. From that standpoint, my point of reference is really just based on the Caucasian teachers because there are no African-American teachers at the school where I worked. [Regarding *Brown v. Board of Education*] the young people who were being taught in these segregated schools were really not achieving to the state standards. There were some schools that were excelling and there were some schools that were just a travesty. Young people began to take on different personas particularly in the cities. Those youngsters in the cities began to look upon gangs for the fraternal organizations that were created. Those elements brought in

more disenfranchised people. I just know, as time went on, as you had youngsters walking

through metal detectors, education changed. And I think for African-American people who were

attempting to provide that nurturance to the population, it became tiring. People who had gotten

their degrees realized that they could go on to different things and they could make more money.

It's just the natural progression of time.

3) In what ways do you think African-American students would benefit from having a greater

number of African-American teachers in their classes? Do you believe there is also a larger

impact – on the staff, community, etc.?

The more [diversification] you have, I think you have a better chance at success. There are

different voices being talked to [SIC]. Students have to address different aspects of that

diversification.

4) In my thesis paper, I am arguing that an increase in the number of African-American teachers

in U.S. high school classrooms would correspond to an increase in discussions of race. Author

Linda Darling-Hammond argues that educators spend a great deal of time avoiding discussions

(both inside and outside of the classroom) about race. How do you predict both the frequency

and depth of discussions about race would be affected if there were more African-American

teachers in U.S. classrooms?

If there were more African-American teachers within the classroom, I don't know whether or not

those African-American teachers would talk [about] or address the issue of race. It's a loaded

question from the standpoint that this society…spends a great deal of time in avoidance of the

topic of race. If we as a society aren't going to address that issue, we may be addressing the issue of doom. We're still not able to talk about it.

Overall Findings, Themes

The responses from this interview can be categorized into three dominant themes: Cyclical Avoidance, the Education Burden and Isolation and the Hostile Work Environment. The most prominent theme related to the cycle of avoidance of discussions about race, due to a lack of diversity amongst teachers and staff members. The second most prominent theme related to the burden African-American teachers face by taking on the responsibility of educating others about race. He described this as being, "a whole other job in and of itself." The third most prominent theme that emerged from these responses related to the hostilities that African-American teachers may encounter as a result of interacting with their non-African-American colleagues. The subject recounted a personal anecdote that involved a former administrator addressing him with a derogatory name in jest.

Chapter 5 Discussion /Analysis

Summary of Major Findings

In reviewing the narrative following the interview, several key points emerged. The subject argued that African-American teachers have a responsibility that involves navigating discussions about race in a predominantly Caucasian teaching staff. While it may be uncomfortable and painful for many to engage in these conversations, without them, we as a teaching staff will only perpetuate a cycle in which African-American teachers feel uncomfortable working in environments in which they are underrepresented racially and perhaps culturally.

The subject differentiated between African-Americans who feel victimized, downtrodden and then become resentful of Caucasians, and those African-Americans who do not. He expressed concern that many African-American students adopt the former behavior, especially at schools in which they are the minority ethnic group. This resentment, especially when directed at Caucasian teachers, can create a barrier between teacher and students and can create an impediment to learning. The threat from the students is so great and so distracting that a culture of learning cannot actually be formed.

Teachers of various ethnicities, including African-American teachers, may experience this. The subject added that this behavior is not reserved by any means for teachers who are not African-American. He explained that when faced with the innumerable obstacles teachers encounter in education, the challenge of managing potentially hostile student behavior, and the difficult task of negotiating uncomfortable conversations about race with colleagues, many African-American teachers shy away from the idea of working in education.

Comparison of Findings to Previous Research

Author Linda Darling-Hammond (2010) argues in her book *The Flat World and Education*, that educators spend a great deal of time avoiding conversations about race. The lack of these conversations in U.S. public schools is devastatingly detrimental to the long-term welfare of our youth and of future generations. By avoiding conversations about race, we are continuing to deprive our students of a skill that is necessary to changing the racial paradigm in the U.S.

The *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling sought to dismantle the harmful, institutional structures that had been in place since the abolition of slavery. What it could not do, or perhaps failed to do, was compensate for generations of students who had experienced "separate but equal" classroom conditions by teaching all students techniques for interacting with people with whom many had never come into contact. Generations of students were not only not taught how to dialogue about and discuss race but were also later encouraged to ignore such discussions to avoid recreating the kind of tensions that were nationally exposed during the Civil Rights Movement.

The desegregation of American schools fused together two groups who not only had extremely limited contact with one another but who still experienced significant tension. This amalgamation of behaviors, practices and cultures, left unaddressed by politicians and by schools, transformed the previously overt segregation present in U.S. society into a veiled segregation that still exists today in our society and most definitely in our classrooms.

Limitations/Gaps in the Study

A small number of interview subjects were available to be interviewed for the purposes of gathering qualitative data for this study. Furthermore, access to a local focus group of African-American high school students with African-American teachers was limited.

Implications for Future Research

Beyond this study, information must be gathered regarding the highly personal and subjective reasons African-Americans overwhelmingly either do not choose teaching as a career path or choose not to practice as teachers. Why are African-American teachers the minority when our African-American students represent the highest percentage of students who do not graduate from high school? How do dialogues about race change when our teaching staffs are more diverse? What kinds of shifts in behavior occur when African-American students have access to African-American teachers on their campuses? How do we provide future generations of students with the exposure to truly diverse social and academic experiences and also provide them with the language and the opportunity to constructively and honestly discuss race?

Overall Significance of the Study

This study was meant to begin the discourse regarding the lack of African-American teachers in present-day U.S. public schools. It also asks that society look critically at the process of desegregating schools in the U.S. in the 1950's after the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. In analyzing some of the problems that arose or were even exacerbated by the Civil Rights Movement and the country's treatment of the Civil Rights Movement, we can begin to address some of the deep injustices that are currently committed in our public school system every day. These problems are rooted in the behaviors of a society that was eager, and too quick, to move beyond the racial tensions that the Civil Rights Movement brought to the surface. This study exposes a dire need that exists in schools for educators to participate in complex conversations about race and about our schools. Educators must lead by example by beginning these conversations and accepting that, as professionals, teachers must be given the time to engage in this discourse with one another.

About the Author

My story began the day my father was referred to as "northern nigger" in his new, all African-American class in a town outside of Austin, Texas in the early 1950s. The story found words each time I felt angry, grew silent and stifled my own speech when I was confronted with the privilege of white America in my classes. It found a context when I became the only African-American teacher in my school district, and I encountered that same angry, frustration and silence in my African-American students. My work thus far to attempt to counteract, through writing, the multitude of injustices I believe the U.S. public school system has committed against generations of students of all races is only the beginning.

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