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# Re-living Dangerous Memories: Online Journaling to Interrogate Spaces of "Otherness" in an Educational Administration Program at a Midwestern University

Jennifer Friend
Loyce Caruthers
Shirley Marie McCarther
*University of Missouri - Kansas City*

*This theoretical paper explores the use of online journaling in an educational administration program to interrogate spaces of "otherness"—the geographical spaces of cities where poor children and children of color live—and the dangerous memories prospective administrators may have about diversity. The cultures of most educational administration programs do not help graduate students "dig beneath the surface" of the seemingly benign recipes of current school reform to explore cultural differences. When given the opportunity to use reflective online journaling, candidates talked more freely about race, ethnicity, class, language, ability/disability, gender, sexual orientation, and other facets of diversity. Reculturing educational administration programs will require both students and instructors to have similar opportunities to interrogate spaces of "otherness" and work to transform them.*

Today's school leaders face unique challenges in the current policy context of accountability for closing the achievement gap—namely to provide an instructional program and a school culture that promotes excellence and equity for every student. Preparatory programs must adapt curriculum and pedagogical methods in order to prepare candidates to transition successfully into the responsibility for meeting the needs of diverse learners within school communities. As two African American female professors and one Caucasian American female professor, we theorize about how online journaling in the Urban Leadership and Policy Studies in Education (ULAPSE) division created a venue for candidates to challenge and examine mis/representations of the marginalized other (Middleton, 1993; Tong, 1989; Young, 1990). First, we clarify key concepts integral to this paper, including "otherness," "reculturing," and "dangerous memories" and connect them to the context of urban schools and our task of reculturing an educational administration program. Next, we discuss the online journaling

environment and its use in the recultured program. The themes of the online journal entries of three prospective administrators, who agreed to go public with their interrogation of otherness, are shared, and we conclude with our reflections and implications for recultured educational administration programs.

**Framing "Otherness" and "Dangerous Memories" for Reculturing Programs**

To be cast as "other" means "to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the other" (Young, 1990, p. 59). The marginalized others in schools are often poor and culturally diverse children who do not fit the expectations of the dominant White culture. We also use the relational notion of "other," suggested by Markham (2005): "In [that] technologically mediated environments, self, other, and social structures are constituted through interaction, negotiated in concert with others" (p. 794). Few can argue against learning as a social process—we learn about ourselves in relation to others—and in an increasingly diverse society educators must work to break down the ideology of otherness. We aim to make the personal political through challenging professors of educational administration to reculture programs to illuminate and make meaning of the ideology of otherness.

Modeling high expectations for all students' learning and providing stewardship for reculturing schools are integral to the work of principals. Reculturing (Caruthers, Thompson, & Eubanks, 2004) is defined here as changes in schools and communities as a result of educators and community members beginning to reflect on, evaluate, and expand their own images, assumptions, and stories about others, institutions, and every aspect of the world. The stories educators and community stakeholders tell about schools, particularly urban schools, are linked to cultural and historical precepts that have shaped the organization and structure of schools (see Caruthers, 2000; 2002; Weaver, Smith, & Daspit, 2002). We suggest that the negative and distorted images and meanings educators and community members may have about race, ethnicity, class, gender, language, disabilities, and other differences, are not only connected to cultural and historical precepts, but they are reflected in our stories.

Memories are the store of things all people learn and retain from activities or experiences, as reflected in behaviors, recall, and recognition. In the context of this paper, if individuals constantly hear negative and distorted images about cultural differences, these memories are likely used to assess their experiences with people who are different from them. Welch (1990) points out the effects of dangerous memories often revealed in our stories:

> Particular stories call us to accountability. As dangerous memories of conflict, oppression and exclusion, they call those of us who are, often unknowingly,

> complicit in structures of control to join in resistance and transformation. For those of us who are members of the Western elite, by reason of race, gender, education, or economic status, we are challenged by the stories of the marginalized oppressed to grasp the limits of our ethical and political wisdom. . . . We in the first World are not responsible for others; we are responsible for ourselves—for seeing the limits of our own vision and for rectifying the damages caused by the arrogant violation of those limits. (p. 139)

Left unexamined, negative and distorted images and meanings become dangerous memories (Caruthers, 2005) that must be confronted and explored in order to reculture schools and communities.

In short, dangerous memories are likely to perpetuate otherness and must be interrogated rather than hidden or repressed. Such memories are likely to keep educators from teaching all children for understanding and teaching all children for diversity. Our intent is not to debate who may be the most racist, sexist, homophobic, or ablest; but to emphasize that if both White people and people of color do not examine dangerous memories, they are likely to become integrated into our practice. Moreover, reculturing schools demands the challenges posed by Darling-Hammond (1997); schools in America do something they have never done before—educate all children:

> Building a system of schools that can educate people for contemporary society requires two things U.S. schools have never been called upon to do. To teach for understanding. That is, to teach all students, not just a few to understand ideas deeply and perform proficiently. To teach for diversity. That is to teach in ways that help different kinds of learners find productive paths to knowledge as they also learn to live constructively together (p. 5).

The use of the phrase "all students" when referring to the fulfillment of a school's mission is common in national standards for school leaders, including the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2002) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (2008). However, educational leaders must critically reflect on the implications of these words or risk generalizing or over-simplifying. In the context of students who are identified with special needs, "Thinking about establishing best leadership practices means resolving what Kaufman and Lewis (1999) referred to as the confusion in current reforms about providing education for all students versus education for each student who has a disability" (Boscardin, 2007, p. 197). The diverse readiness levels of "all learners" relative to a particular learning outcome necessitate the recognition of each student's unique strengths and needs in terms of learning.

With this goal in mind, we have broken from a disjointed educational leadership preparatory program with an "unclear mission" (Levine, 2005, p. 23) to begin the journey of a counter-discourse to the hegemonic discourse of teaching in the academy. The researchers involved in this study have experience as educational leaders in urban, suburban, and rural schools, and have diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. All three share a commitment to promoting democracy and social justice in schools and in society. The researchers work at a university located in an urban setting, and many of the leadership candidates in the university's preparatory program will seek jobs as school administrators in nearby school districts with widely diverse student populations. At this juncture, we turn to the discussion of the terrain of urban schools and the possibilities of framing a counter narrative within a different educational administration program—one where colleagues work collaboratively to interrogate otherness and dangerous memories as part of the reculturing process within the academy.

## The Terrain of Urban Schools

While cities have consistently housed many of America's poor, according to Anyon (2005), many suburban communities have become new ghettos where poor and culturally diverse familes reside—"about two-thirds of the U.S. poor live in central cities and 'urbanized,' financially distressed suburbs" (p. 24). The majority of residents in these areas are African American or Latina/o with limited middle class jobs, whose children attend public schools and are often viewed by educators as others. With a fleeing White population, these spaces of otherness have become places solely for the poor and children of color, and their teachers are predominately Caucasian (Berman et al.,1997; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Ng, 2003; Nieto, 2002; Thompson, 2004; Foster, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2001), who often operate from paradigms informed by dangerous memories. The increasing population of culturally diverse students in these communities is significant in that, according to Haymes (1995, p. 44), "as the racial and ethnic landscape in the United States becomes more and more African, Latina/o, and Asian American, the certainty, or rootedness and centeredness of White identity is disrupted and threatened by difference."

Current definitions of "urban" encompass not only descriptions of abnormal and disordered space but also view urban students as objectified subjects. The following definition depicts the means in which geographical spaces are portrayed and the ideology surrounding urban terrains (Parish, 1997):

> Urban schooling or urban schools refer to schools located in the inner city, metropolitan, and sometimes suburban and rural geographic areas that have a profile that includes some of the following: urban fits a school population with a significant number of minority and/or

> poverty students but may also contain a cross section of students from the broader social class spectrum. . . . have declining test scores and other indicators of perceived lower academic ability. . . has disproportionate levels of discipline referral of students of color and/or low income students to administrative offices; has an increasing loss of control and safety among many in the school, particularly within the teacher culture; have an expanding learning gap between majority and minority students and between students from different social classes as well as a gender gap in some academic areas; is full of stories about how good the school used to be. (p. 1)

What this means is "urban" has come to mean racialized terrains of the other; where disenfranchised groups, who cannot escape cities and financially distressed suburbs, reside amidst a decreasing tax base and losses of businesses and community services. In turn, educators in their interactions with students of color may see them as abnormal, disorderly, and dangerous; some students eventually view the process of becoming the objectified other as inevitable and natural. Many believe that they are destined to fulfill certain roles and have little hope for an actualized future.

In many school settings across the United States, the disproportionate identification of students of color in special education programs is another indicator of the pervasiveness of the "abnormality" paradigm (Skiba et al., 2008). Students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency, regardless of their racial backgrounds, may be viewed by educators as "other" and separated into self-contained programs where these identified students have limited interaction with "mainstream" students or the general curriculum. The current policy context encourages such stratification in order to prepare students for high stakes standardized assessments through remediation and targeted practice activities in alignment with the tests (Frattura & Topinka, 2006).

Political projects grounded in what matters about school and the politics of curriculum and teaching require educators to examine beliefs and practices that perpetuate the status quo and to interrupt a "terrain of traditionalism, standardization, productivity, marketization, and industrial needs" (Apple, 1996, p. 6; also see Apple, 2004). To interrupt the historical, social, and cultural conditions of the urban terrain, according to Parish (1997), means overhauling the current system. He states:

> Transformed urban educators understand that conventional school cultures maintain (perhaps unknowingly) a historical hegemony of race, class, and gender associated with Western European cultures. The leaders in these urban schools become determined that they and their schools will no longer be part of this vestige of segregated

> schools in America. Transformed educators ask different questions and make different assumptions. (p. 1)

Our journey to establish a counter-discourse to the hegemonic discourse of teaching in the academy pays homage to voice and otherness—giving attention to a critical inquiry as to how mis/representations and practices that name, marginalize, and define otherness as the deligitimated are actively learned, internalized, questioned, and/or transformed (Giroux, 2004). An example of this discourse involves educational leadership candidates in the creation of an "Ideal School" over the course of one semester. Elements of schooling that surround candidates' in their daily work as teachers, instructional coaches, special education facilitators, or other positions, are explored through personal narratives that connect the "status quo" of schooling to each candidate's core beliefs and practices as an educator. Through reviews of the research literature, field experiences, and in-class discussion that is facilitated so that each candidate's voice is heard, these traditional schooling elements and core beliefs are deconstructed to identify institutionalized hegemonic practices, transitioning to the creation of new mental models and innovative structures and collaborative practices in a comprehensive plan for a school that is "ideal" for meeting the academic and affective needs of every student.

Britzman (1990) defines voice as "meaning that resides in the individual and enables that individual to participate in a community. . . . Voice suggests relationships: the individual's relationship to the meaning of his/her experience" (p.14). Hegemony, according to McLaren (1989), is the "maintenance of domination not by the sheer exercise of force but primarily through consensual social practices, social forms, and social structures produced in specific sites such as the church, the state, the school, the mass media, the political system and the family" (p. 173). Given the opportunity to use their voices to interrogate spaces of otherness, new school leaders may be able to resist the hegemonic discourses that are powerful socialization conduits within schools, especially urban schools. The narrative, with its focus on voice, testimony, autobiography, memory, and other forms, "carve[s] out spaces for the embodied voices of the silenced (the stress on the last two letters is important here, since it signifies an active process of control, regulation, and policing) to be articulated" (Apple, 1998, p. x).

## Methodology

### *Reculturing the Educational Administration Program*

The University is located in the center of a large metropolitan city in the Midwest where African American children have been moved and shuffled and displaced for much of the 50 post-*Brown* years, all in an effort to gain access to a quality education. Indeed, the city's elaborate and expensive magnet program, designed to enhance schools and bring about racial balance, was perhaps the boldest movement of

any district in the country to reverse the troubling trend toward resegregation in urban schools (Davis, 2004). That the district has failed to do so, which is evidence of what Jonathan Kozol (2005) terms the "shame of the nation," or the restoration and acceptance of apartheid schooling in America.

Today, African American and Latina/o students attend largely segregated schools in the city. For instance, 2007 State data report that 83.70 percent of the 24, 449 students in the district, a steadily declining enrollment for the past five years, are African American and Latina/o (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2007). One of the goals of the University is to serve the surrounding community and the schools that work to educate students in the school district and other urban profile districts in the metropolitan area. The Urban Leadership and Policy Studies in Education (ULAPSE) division in the School of Education at the University believes it takes bold and courageous school leaders who are willing to interrogate dangerous memories that are likely to perpetuate otherness and create schools that are both high performing and socially equitable.

Approximately a decade ago, the ULAPSE division redesigned its k-12 principal preparation program and adopted a work philosophy that involved discussing dangerous memories—issues surrounding otherness—elements of diversity such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation. Only through honest dialogue about these dangerous memories could the division hope to get at the heart of reculturing schools in the city. We wanted to help school leadership candidates "dig beneath the surface" of the seemingly benign menu of current school reform with its recipes of "standards," "best practices," and "accountability" and use critical race theory (Yasso, 2005) to "theorize, examine, [and] challenge the ways race and racism implicitly impact on social structures, practices, and discourses" (p. 70).

The program includes eighteen hours of Block courses (Block I: Foundations of School Leadership and Organization, Block II: Building Administration and Management, and Block III: Student, Staff, and Organizational Development). These courses provide the foundation for all other coursework in the program in addition to courses in curriculum design, research, school supervision, education foundations, and school law (Thompson, Davis, Caruthers, & Gregg, 2003). Students also complete a practicum. Group projects, class readings and discussions, pair and share activities, simulations, videos, and various other activities in the Block courses are used to engage students with critical curricular concepts surrounding leadership and reculturing schools.

The curriculum is designed to help prospective leaders gain greater understanding of their beliefs, assumptions, behaviors, and educational practices with respect to educating diverse students in terms of culture, race/ethnicity, language, gender, sexuality, socio-economic status,

ability/disability, and other differences; examine myths in education regarding human development, culture, and language; critically interrogate texts in order to create new meanings and/or representations; and advance their work toward reflective, social action that views diversity as a resource to be tapped in the education of all children. Our goal is to do as Ng (2003) suggests, pay attention to the text and subtexts of the Educational Administration program:

> The text of a program includes its course sequence, fieldwork experiences, reading and writing assignments, and certification procedures. Within the text itself is a subtext—what messages the materials, discussions, and activities convey directly as well as subtly, how people's reading and interpretation of particular books are affected by their subjectivity and experience, and what happens in response to the text of the program that is not planned or necessarily made public. (p. 103)

In addition, we seek to push students to ask themselves "…how and why knowledge gets constructed the way it does, and how and why some constructions of reality are legitimated and celebrated by the dominant culture while others clearly are not" (McLaren, 1989, p. 196). More recently, we have discovered that these activities are necessary, but not sufficient, to entice prospective school leaders to break their silence linked to otherness and to begin deconstructing dangerous memories that may influence polices and practices within a school.

***Research Design: Online Journaling to Interrogate Spaces of "Otherness"***

We adopted reflective journaling, using the e-mail system, as a strategy to increase interactions with prospective leaders and ourselves and to challenge the mis/representations of the marginalized other. There were no ground rules with regard to content—prospective school leaders could discuss personal issues and respond to course content, class experiences, and experiences within their districts and buildings. Through their stories, a strategy of critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000), we heard muted voices of experiences that had been silenced about the often dangerous memories that educators may have about race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other differences.

Markham (2008) asserts the value of technologically managed communication lies in the unique relationships between the qualitative researcher and the participant that is found in the virtual world (p. 255). We use Markham (2008) to draw a parallel between the qualitative researcher and the course instructor, and between the participant and the educational leadership candidate. Inside this private on-line environment is a space where social construction, self, and other find discourse, consultation and exchange of ideas by manipulating printed signs and symbols between sender and receiver. Markham explains:

> The absence of visual information about the participant functions more paradoxically than one might realize. Socioeconomic markers such as body type, gender, race, and class are used consciously or unconsciously by researchers to make sense of participants in physical settings. Online, these frames are still used but without visual information, they function invisibly. (p. 255)

The invisibility factor obligates the qualitative researcher to probe introspectively to "recognize the limitations bred by our traditional five senses and take the risks necessary to reconsider how and why we seek and create knowledge" (Markham, p. 256).

Markham cautions the qualitative researcher to engage in continuous recursive introspection and self-examination in an effort to uncover the infringement of personal bias or preconceived notions upon understanding, explanation and interpretation of others. She offers that "reflecting on our own biases is not just useful, but ethically necessary. . . [as] the process of locating and defining sensible boundaries of the [virtual] field can be convoluted and elusive" (p. 257). "Interpretative inquiry" (Markham, p. 266) becomes critical to the authentication and confirmation of the qualitative researcher's analysis of online discourse. Looking inward requires truth, honesty, and integrity on the part of the qualitative researcher or instructor, as well as the courage to own their reflection and attend to the shadow it produces. Without the comfort of visual cues, the internet-based communicator has only "the existence of the online persona . . . encapsulated by the(ir) pixels on a computer screen" to rely on (Markham, p. 267) and these "persona being represented are already one step removed from their bodies when encountered by the researcher [instructor]" (p. 278).

Rovai and Gallien (2005) stress the value of online courses for increasing interactions of students with peers and faculty and reducing student anxiety related to cultural differences. "Students who feel they do not fit in are likely to have a low sense of community, feel isolated, and are at-risk of becoming dropouts" (p. 53). Bonk (2003-2004) further emphasizes the mounting interest in using computer managed discourse in pre-service instruction to help learners "negotiate meaning in their theories of teaching and learning" (p. 96). He asserts . . . "[their practice] can be expanded or modified in a positive direction . . . then a transformation of education from didactic instruction to facilitated learning may . . . be possible" (p. 96). Our value in online journaling lies in helping prospective leaders examine their beliefs and assumptions first with their instructors, and then with their peers during class discussion; thereby, causing candidates to be more open and honest about their beliefs and experiences.

***Context of the Course and the Leadership Candidate Participants***

The online journaling was conducted on a weekly basis with a cohort of 17 educational leadership candidates during a three-semester consecutive course of study (six hours per semester) that focused on foundations of school leadership, building-level management strategies, and student, staff, and organizational development. Candidates were given instructions in the course syllabi (Friend, 2007) regarding their journal entries:

> Each class participant will e-mail the instructor one journal entry per week. The journal is designed to help students account for the various levels of their learning, and is more than a step-by-step account of class or professional experiences or the emotional responses to those encounters. While personal reactions are necessary, your journal will be a more useful tool in that it also contains the personal reflections and learnings you encounter, written with a larger audience in mind. The levels or steps that might be included in your journal include:
>
> ***Observation –*** What you perceive and/or what you experience. What events, thoughts, conversations, etc. this week stood out in my mind as a result of readings, and class discussions and activities? What was it about the event that made it stand out? What about the event was significant?
>
> ***Reflection –*** How you understand what you experience and perceive. What have I learned about the thoughts, feelings, attitudes of students, teachers, leaders, and parents through this experience? Have my thoughts changed? What do I think about it now? Have I leaned something about myself by observing my thoughts?
>
> ***Translation –*** What you do with what you have learned, and how you relate what you have learned from one experience to others in your life. What have I learned about this situation in the school setting? In the community? In the lives of the students involved?
>
> ***Application –*** How you apply what you have learned in your personal and professional activities. How can I apply what I have learned to my personal or professional life? (p. 5)

The candidates were given topics or themes for the weekly journal entries, often related to course readings, class discussions within the cohort, or their field experiences.

Collaborative projects, in addition to course assigned readings (Apple & Beane, 2007; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Howard, 2006; Lambert, 2002), infused issues of diversity, school culture, and democracy in schools throughout this course sequence. Online journal entries were e-mailed to

the instructor on a weekly basis, and candidates received weekly feedback to promote further self-reflection related to these issues. As stated in the syllabus (Friend, 2007):

> School administrators must understand the relationship between educational theories, educational research, and school leadership practices. This course will include a strong component of self-reflection through an "inside-out" approach to school leadership, providing a foundation for educators to promote democratic schools and multicultural education that encourages activism and social justice. (p. 1)

The candidates in the cohort included 10 females and 7 males. Thirteen of the candidates were White (8 female; 5 male), two were Black (1 female; 1 male), and two were Latina/o (1 female; 1 male). The majority of the candidates worked as teachers in large suburban districts, several were teachers in urban districts, and two candidates held district-level special education positions, one in a parochial setting and the other in a smaller rural district.

While the diversity of professional educational experience within the candidates was evident, the majority of the candidates had not encountered nor engaged in reflection related to dangerous memories and educational practices with respect to the education of diverse students. At the beginning of the first course, many candidates wrote in their journals that they did not see anything wrong with the "status quo" in public education in the United States, and that they were offended by many of the early course readings. One candidate's journal in the second week of the first semester demonstrated a common attitude toward student failure that surfaced in other candidates' journal writing and during the in-class discussions, "If a student fails in my classroom, it is because they chose to fail, and it is implicitly the responsibility of the student."

The greatest resistance in self-reflection arose when issues of racial/ethnic diversity, social class, and sexual orientation were the subject of journal entries. Young, Mountford, and Skrla (2006) identified three categories of resistance in educational leadership candidates: distancing, where the issue "existed but did not impact them personally" (p. 272), opposition, or "invalidating the teacher or course content" (p. 272), and intense emotions, such as "guilt, anger, fear" (p. 274), particularly around issues of White dominance in society. As the course sequence progressed, attitudes and mental models related to otherness were transformed to varying degrees as evidenced by the weekly journal writing.

Three educational leadership candidates from this cohort of 17 candidates were invited to share their journal writing as a part of this heuristic study, where "Heuristics is concerned

with meanings, not measurements; with essence, not appearance; with quality not quantity; with experience not behavior" (Patton, 2002, p. 7). The three candidates were selected through purposive selection based on two criteria: (1) to share the voices of leadership candidates from diverse racial and socio-cultural backgrounds, and (2) to select candidates whose journal writing demonstrated a transformational shift in mental models related to otherness. Students granted permission in writing when they were contacted six months after the conclusion of the three-semester cohort sequence by the course instructor, who was one of the three researchers in this study, to seek their permission for the authors to collaboratively analyze and deconstruct their archived reflective journal writings to connect to themes of otherness and the dangerous memories that impact educational leadership practices within diverse school communities.

Guided by our conceptual framework of "otherness" and "dangerous memories" within the recultured educational leadership program, we utilized narrative analysis and socio-cultural analysis (Reissman, 2003) to examine 66 journal entries from the three candidates. Narrative analysis enables researchers to explore the realities of people's lives and the meanings they attach to these experiences (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994). The socio-cultural lens was applied to the affective facet of learning, or the understanding that cultural context and content impact teaching and learning (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Lee, 2006; Pang, 2005). The coding sequence was conducted independently by two of the three researchers and included processes of: (a) noticing interesting patterns in the data, (b) marking patterns with code words, and (c) retrieving them for further analysis. Using our conceptual framework, the two researchers identified emerging themes in the data, which were shared with the third researcher. During collaborative review sessions conducted by the three researchers, the selected journals were further analyzed and the themes were refined.

Assimilation and acculturation, culture and language, curriculum issues, identity formation, resistance theory, interpersonal skills, and community involvement in democratic schools were the categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to propose relationships that suggested causal conditions, phenomenon, context, intervening conditions, action/interactional strategies, and consequences. The heuristic tradition and the socio-cultural lens helped us explore the "broader interpretive frameworks that people use to make sense of particular incidents in individuals' lives" (Grbich, 2007, p. 124). In the next section, we illuminate through the use of on-line journaling how three leadership candidates (their names have been changed for confidentiality) challenged, learned, and internalized mis/representations of the marginalized other.

### *Carlos, Susan, and Joyce: The Journey of Three Educational Leadership Candidates*

We realize that space does not permit a comprehensive analysis of otherness or the meanings attached to geographical spaces where a majority of poor children and children of color live; differences are complex webs entangled with other historical, economic, and structural webs of the larger society. Hence, we turn to the voices of three prospective leaders and their interrogation of otherness in an educational administration course.

As noted, we seek to make visible the realities and desires of Carlos, Susan, and Joyce (pseudonyms) and theorize tentatively about the connections they make to the spaces of otherness. Memories, as a process of "cultural production" (Giroux 1994, p. 31) and removed from historical, social and political context, can provide opportunities for us to open up rather than close history. In the first entry, Carlos, a Latino special education teacher, revisits his history and reflects on the somewhat painful memories and loss associated with assimilation.

### *Carlos*

The beginning of the three-semester cohort block included relationship-building activities and a reading assignment by Shields (2004) related to "Dialogic Leadership for Social Justice." The first journal assignment was to write a response to these opening activities. Carlos wrote the following online journal entry:

> Having read the piece by Shields and a few pages of our texts, I have come to the conclusion that we will be delving into the inequities that exist not only in a school setting but in society. We will also explore the idea that our differences should be celebrated. This however is somewhat contradictory from what I have been striving for since I was young. As an immigrant from the age of three I have been striving to assimilate into my environment. I also tend to try and forget what made me different from my peers, neighbors, and anyone I knew growing up. Yet, it is ironic that literature suggests that we embrace those differences and share them when I was taught to do the opposite. Even to this day my life is far removed from what I would have become if I had held on to my differences.

Carlos is surprised that differences, a major text of this course, are openly discussed which suggest a counternarrative to the assimilation experiences of his upbringing. While he recalls the dangerous memories of assimilation, he also wonders about the nature of a life that embraces differences. Banks and Banks (2004) offer an explanation of the differences between acculturation and assimilation:

> When power is exercised by the dominant group to make the subordinate become more like them, there develops a one

> direction only cultural movement which is acculturation, this can occur at the structural or the personal level. When this one way cultural movement occurs at the personal level, acquisition of the dominator's language, forms of comportment, dress, and demeanor, as well as aspiration it is assimilation. (p. 70)

As aspiring school leaders synthesized the knowledge, skills, and dispositions introduced within the educational administration Block courses and reflected on dangerous memories, their journal entries revealed growth and learning. The confidentiality of the journal entries, seen only by the instructor each week, combined with the in-person discussion during class sessions, fosters a high degree of trust. This leads to candidness in the journal writing, and the opportunity for the instructor to engage in feedback online to reinforce key learning and to prompt further reflection. A second entry from Carlos appears to acknowledge painful memories that are compared to the experiences of the instructor:

> What I do know is that I have what most do not. Yet, I'm not sure if I mean it in a materialistic or philosophical sense. I have more now than my single mother provided me growing up. You commented on your early years with your sister and going to the Laundromat. I also have similar memories and many more that cause me some sense of sadness.
>
> I think what I have gained from my experience in assimilation is a skill in flexibility…What does this have to do with education? Well, until we are made comfortable and safe in challenging the status quo it will be difficult to cast the first epic blow. It is hard to be on the front line of a skirmish knowing that there is a 50/50 chance you will become a casualty. I know this seems morbid, but it is when you consider losing everything you've worked so hard to create. I am reminded of the administrators that were collateral damage in my district. I have been included in many high level administrative meetings with my principal and several deputy superintendents. It is frightening how a few can impact lives over a cup of coffee.
>
> Does this mean I will sit idly by when wrong is being committed? No, however, what I have learned is that until you reach a status that can bring you a greater security you have to be creative, diplomatic, and strategic. So, my intent is not to necessarily create waves but to navigate below them to achieve as much as possible before cresting and hitting one.

Carlos believes that assimilation has provided a degree of flexibility for him and thinks about what he has given up both personally and professionally in order to be accepted by the dominant culture. He perceives the danger in

recalling dangerous memories and the cost of breaking the silence surrounding race, class, and ethnicity. Carlos recalls "administrators that were collateral damage" and the power of feeling more in than out—"I have been included in many high level administrative meetings with my principal and several deputy superintendents." The power of a few to affect the lives of others may be defined as a hegemonic narrative, connected to "the maintenance of domination not by the sheer exercise of force but primarily through consensual social practices, social forms, and social structures produced in specific sites such as the church, the state, the school, the mass media, the political system and the family" (McLaren, 1989, p. 173).

Near the end of the Block course, Carlos became more aware of social and educational institutions of U.S. society that have been molded and shaped by "assimilation ideologies and monocultural perspectives" (Anderson, 1992, p. 137). He connected this knowledge to his experiences with assimilation and is disappointed that so many educators have given up on the idea of democratic schools. Carlos writes:

> The last couple of weeks have been filled with a plethora of historical information as it relates to education. . . . It was a bit disheartening to find out within my group and interviews that the application of democracy in public schools was still a vague notion. There are many who believe it is a moot point because of the enormous amount of disconnect between those who advocate positive change and those who are unwilling to support change or step aside. . . . As a leader I feel it will be my responsibility that everyone is well informed so as not to trivialize differences among society members. Furthermore, it will be my task of instilling tolerance in those who may not be at a point of acceptance. This will allow those who are struggling with their social identity to feel safe in exploring their uniqueness. This will permit acknowledgment of covert or unintended injustices and allow a cessation of any practice that perpetuates these acts. . . . It is our moral responsibility to strive for equity as long as necessary if only to change the life possibilities of one individual.

Carlos appeared to struggle with the dichotomy of connecting to his personal culture and "feeling safe." He uses his voice to advocate for action steps that involve tolerance which connects to feeling safe. Tolerance, in this context, "is reserved for those we think are wrong, yet we still choose to treat decently and with respect" (Koukl, 2006, p. 1). It is safe to be tolerant—"This will allow those who are struggling with their social identity to feel safe in exploring their uniqueness." Toward the end of the block, he seemed to become more empowered to use his voice to promote change.

*Susan*

Another foundational reflective writing in the Block program pertains to helping candidates deconstruct the dangerous memories that may influence practices and their perspectives of the state of public education in the United States. Susan, a Caucasian high school teacher, created the following online journal entry related to this topic:

> "Because our beliefs and attitudes have developed over time and function 'below the level of consciousness and language' they are extremely resistant to change" (Shields, 2004, p. 111). This seemed to be the best explanation of why the status quo is the way it is in schools today. It is easy to say that low-SES minority students are not succeeding at the rate of their middle class counter parts because that fact has already been proven. The question we need to be asking is "why" and "what can we as teachers and administrators do about it?" There are too many teachers today (who would never admit it) who still blame low SES or minority children for their own failures. Either they believe the culture is to blame or the students are just not trying hard enough. Blaming the culture a student comes from is the same as blaming that student. We should be focusing on how we combat some of the issues these children face every day. . . .
>
> As a teacher I see the enormous impact a positive relationship with a student can have, especially those children who have instability at home. One common link that is present in many low-SES households is instability. The one constant that we can control as educators is our relationship with the student. We may be the only adult who can be a constant, positive factor in their lives.

Unknowingly, Susan has captured the power of Nisbett's (2001) concept of inherited patterns, teachers' beliefs, values, and attitudes that are connected with the history of their past cultural and familial lineage. Negative beliefs and assumptions are often associated with the lack of opportunities for teachers to examine deeply rooted cultural dispositions.

While she recognizes the problem of blaming among other teachers, she unconsciously mirrors the behavior of her colleagues and resorts to assessing normality through her own experiences. "One common link that is present in many low SES household is instability." She assumes that she and her colleagues may be the only "constant, positive factor in their lives." The assumption appears to be if these students were more like us, we could do a better job of teaching them. Susan has unconsciously used her own dangerous memories to construct "otherness." Manning and Baruth (2004) suggest:

> Teachers for the most part unknowingly, have transmitted biased messages to students. . . .

> Most educators do not consciously or intentionally stereotype students or discriminate against them; they usually try to treat all students fairly and equitably. Nevertheless, teachers like others in the U.S. society, have learned attitudes and behaviors that are ageist, disability biased, racist, sexist, and ethnocentric. (p. 241)

These dangerous memories left unexamined perpetuate the maintenance and stability of behaviors and practices that reinforce the belief that family background and the characteristics of students—race, ethnicity, level of English proficiency, family income, parental education determine their success in school.

Susan's reactions are not unfamiliar to McIntosh (1988), who would catalog them as manifestations of privilege and suggest that "Whites are carefully taught not to recognize White privilege" (p.1) which she defines as:

> An invisible package of unearned assets which [she] can count on cashing in each day, but about which [she] was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks. (p. 1)

Unaccustomed to thinking about her special advantage or inborn benefits, Susan seeks to make sense of unfamiliar terrain and assesses the students' environment through the lens of the norms of the privileged class to which she belongs, the privileged class that has set the standards by which she has learned to measure all (Wildman & Davis, 1996).

Online journaling provides an opportunity for prospective leaders to voice feelings which they might not feel comfortable sharing in a large group setting. During the first Block course, students read Gary Howard's book, "You Can't Teach What You Don't Know." An excerpt from the journal entry of Susan reflects a sudden awareness of hegemonic narratives that emanate from a dominant European culture:

> I was just beginning to feel the frustration build as I was reading the chapters for this week and I was not really sure why. I believe what Howard is saying, but I cannot get over the feeling that I am being blamed. I am a very religious person and I almost had to put the book down when he was discussing the role of the Christian church in the theory of White dominance. As I continued reading, I began to understand his message. It is not necessarily one person, or even a group of people that needs to take the blame. However, collectively the culture of dominance in America has roots from a number of different places and they must all be addressed. I also began to understand the argument that I myself have benefited from being White in some situations where I probably

did not deserve the benefit of the doubt. Finally Howard asked the question I had been waiting for, "what can I do as a white teacher" (73).

Honesty—The first thing White teachers can do is be honest with themselves. As a history teacher, this point really hit home because I have an opportunity every day to teach about the history of the world and correct mistakes that create a culturally insensitive curriculum. All of the sudden I had a light bulb come on in my head. Our district just changed the curriculum this year so we have new books and a new scope and sequence. During one of our collaboration meetings with the Social Studies department I had mentioned that I felt overwhelmed by the vast amount of material I had to cover for world history in just one semester. A fellow colleague, who I respect a great deal, mentioned that it is impossible to get through everything so he is forced to cut out some sections of the book. Looking back, the sections he recommended cutting were about "Early African Kingdoms" and another about the Inca and the Maya. I do not think this was intentional, but now I can see how on a subconscious level this sends a pretty clear message to the students in his class who spend a month on Greece and Rome and not even a day on the African Kingdoms. It was an ah-ha moment for me to realize that just because we are not overtly racist does not mean our decisions won't send a racist message. . . .

Susan seemed to recognize the hegemonic narratives of schools that guide curricular decisions—what and how we teach. She viewed the exclusionary practices of the admired colleague as unintentional and did not recognize as Parker, Deyhle, and Villenas (1999) suggest that most curriculum in U. S. schools comprise a master script where the voices of children of color are silenced. Swartz (1992) further elaborates that content which does not reflect the dominant voice "must be brought under control, mastered, and then reshaped before it can become a part of the master script" (p. 341). For Susan to silence the dominant voice and transform the existing reality of the students in her classroom, she must break away from the comfort of tradition, embrace differences, promote all voices and forge new teaching practices that reflect the multiple perspectives and diversity within her classroom, thus creating "a curriculum that interweaves issues of gender with ethnicity, culture and class, a framework [that] acknowledges and celebrates a multifocal, relational view of the human experience" (Tetreault, p. 182).

### *Joyce*

We conclude with the entries of an African American candidate, who vividly described during the first semester of the block, the dangerous

memories associated with "other" in response to class activities. We share the refinement of her administrative platform which reflects the benefits of online journaling. As described earlier in this paper, dangerous memories—the negative and distorted images and meanings we carry in our minds about race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientations, and other differences—are likely to perpetuate otherness and must be interrogated rather than repressed in order to reculture schools:

> As I began to think back to my past years as a student, mother of a student, friend of students, I began to remember experiences that I had either experienced, witnessed or heard about. I started writing and before I realized it, I had already written 10 scenarios. I could have kept going. After reading the various scenarios, I felt a sense of depression. Some of my experiences were in the past, however some were as recent as last week. Why were these old memories still so vivid in my mind? Why is my daughter still feeling the sting of racism at work from management and the public? Why do some customers refuse to give their order to my god-daughter at McDonalds? Why is there still racism in 2006?

Joyce's next entry is in response to a video presentation, "Color of Fear" where she again interrogates the memories associated with otherness. Young (1990) states that to be cast as other is "to experience how the dominant meaning of a society renders the particular perspective of one's own group invisible at the some time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the other" (p. 59). After viewing the "Color of Fear" video, an excerpt from Joyce's entry follows:

> The video was interesting, and I felt emotional as I watched the men deal with their own racism. I thought about the special that was on television recently called "Black and White". The reality show was about two families (one Black, one White) who were altered through the use of make-up, to experience life on the other side. The White family was made up to look Black and each member of the family (mother, father, daughter) had to experience life as a Black person. And members of the Black family (mother, father, son) were transformed to look White and merged into White society. They then had to live with each other and deal with their own racism. It was an interesting concept and educational for both families and the viewer as we saw some of our own stereotypical ideas played out before our eyes. The White man on the video reminded me of the White father who was transformed to look Black. He had trouble accepting the fact that as a Black person, he was treated differently and believed that it was our imagination.

> Sometimes when I (speaking for myself) experience racism, I too want to believe that it is my imagination. After all, this shouldn't be happening to me TODAY.

Joyce can't imagine that racism is real and deeply rooted in American society; and, as Parker and Lynn (2002) pointed out:

> Racism should not be viewed as acts of individual prejudice that can simply be eradicated. Rather, it is an endemic part of American life, deeply engrained through historical consciousness and ideological choices about race, which in turn has directly shaped the U.S. legal system and the ways people think about the law, racial categories, and privilege. (p.9).

At the end of each semester, the candidates completed a written draft of their administrative platforms. Often the reflective writing from the students' weekly journaling becomes the foundation for these platforms. Joyce integrated a personal narrative as an introduction to her administrative platform:

> A long time ago, a young student sat in the counselor's office waiting for her first career advisory meeting. She didn't care much about school and this was her first time in the counselor's office, so she was a little nervous about being there. . . . She attended a predominantly White high school, so there wasn't much focus on the Black students unless you were a football player or child of one of the two Black doctors in town. So, here she sat waiting for a counselor to call her in to talk about her career goals in twelfth grade. She didn't think much about her future career goals. Although she didn't think that she was capable of attending college, she had a secret dream of being a psychiatrist that she dared not share with anyone. She took two years of Latin to prepare for writing prescriptions. That young woman was me, and any secret dreams that I had vanished when the counselor suggested that maybe I should think about housekeeping or some other area in the service field.
>
> About 10 years later, I was attending an educational workshop with a group of counselors, I introduced myself to the group and he announced that he had been praying that someday he would have the opportunity to meet and apologize to me. He broke down as he talked about the hatred that he had toward Blacks during that time and the impact that those feelings had on his life and the lives of the people that he touched.
>
> I am committed to providing a

> safe learning environment for all students. . . . . As an administrator, I will encourage each student to work at their own potential . . . . ALL students can be successful regardless of their socioeconomic status, race, religious beliefs and gender. . . . we will encourage our students to be kind, caring members of our community and society.

Ironically, the high school counselor discovered that his dangerous memories perpetuated practices that were harmful to African American students. He learned that such memories affected his life and "and the lives of the people that he touched." Did he have the opportunity to interrogate these memories? Beliefs and assumptions about cultural difference are well hidden within the cultural ways of schools and often portrayed through teaching methodologies, codes of disciplines, administrative practices, and policymaking

An opportunity for Joyce to receive an apology from the counselor for his racist act, a rare event that most of us will never experience, and coupled with breaking her silence may have initiated healing. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) purported opportunities for oppressed people to share how they got over or overcame the storms of life will likely help them heal. Joyce concludes her story by expressing values and beliefs needed by school leaders for reculturing schools.

## Reflections and Implications for Recultured Educational Administration Programs

These prospective school leaders have interrogated their dangerous memories and broken the silence surrounding difference. They were all affected by silence. Carlos shared his first-hand experiences with assimilation during his upbringing and his early work as an educator, and formed a commitment to break the silence surrounding the hegemonic narrative found in schools. Susan developed an understanding of the manifestation of White privilege in schools and a new paradigm for examining curricular decisions through a lens of multicultural perspectives. Joyce examined personal narratives of racism, and gained an affirmation that racism is real and must be addressed in efforts to reculture schools. Cross-participant findings supported the conclusion that the repression of dangerous memories related to institutionalized discrimination and oppression of individuals cast as "other" served only to perpetuate "otherness" and to reinforce hegemonic practices in schools. While they may not at this point identify the theory connected to interrogating otherness, they certainly understand the power of deconstructing dangerous memories. When they become school leaders and encounter the terrain of schools, especially urban schools, we suspect that it will be difficult to maintain their convictions in environments of sameness and indifference. At what point will these prospective leaders confront the

constructed narratives of urban "structures, policies, practices, and relations that organize, naturalize, and ensure persistent inequities" (Fine & Weis, 2005, p. 75)?

We adopted reflective journaling, using the e-mail system, as a strategy for increasing interaction between candidates and instructors and to help them begin to use their voices to interrogate otherness within a terrain of sameness in both public schools and the academy, recalling dangerous memories and engaging in critical dialogue about otherness.

As we reflect on our efforts as educational leadership faculty committed to this work, recommendations for reculturing educational leadership programs include the following:

1. Instructors in the program must have the opportunity to deconstruct their own dangerous memories, including ways in which they construct otherness. Students cannot be expected to change their mental models if instructors have not worked to change their mental models. In this case, a Change Team effort at the School of Education level is a broader structure that supports our continued growth in this area.
2. The faculty must work collaboratively to integrate issues of diversity, including culture, race/ethnicity, language, gender, sexuality, socio-economic status, ability/disability, and other differences, throughout all coursework in the program.
3. Foundation courses should allow candidates to study historical and socio-cultural processes that have helped to shape our responses to diversity as educators in American public schools. For instance, the cultural, historical, and philosophical foundations course content focuses on the socio-political, cultural and economic context that has helped to shape individuals' responses to differences which perpetuates otherness.
4. Candidates need a block of time to stay together. In the recultured program, because the cohort is together for three consecutive semesters, there is more trust among students and instructors, and among student relationships to discuss and reflect on dangerous memories.
5. Programs must deliberately design opportunities for students to reflect on issues of diversity that will be present in school administration. In this case we utilized online journaling to create a space or a structure for this to happen, and for the instructors to provide individual feedback as candidates progressed through the program.
6. Candidates must be given opportunities to openly

discuss and interrogate their dangerous memories with their peers as a component of every course.

While our efforts have focused on online journaling as a venue for candidates to challenge and examine mis/representations of the marginalized other in an educational administration program, we offer the process of storytelling for faculty and educational candidates in other programs to begin accessing and examining their own dangerous memories.

We suggested that the negative and distorted images and meanings educators and community members may have about otherness—elements of diversity such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, abilities/disabilities, and other differences—are not only connected to cultural and historical precepts but are reflected in our stories. The subtle and overt messages contained in the memories of the three candidates cannot be fully apprehended and understood unless there are opportunities for all persons to inquire and examine the memories that shape the attitudes and behaviors of all persons. As one of the steps for reculturing programs, we recommend that program instructors deconstruct their own dangerous memories linked to otherness. Storytelling, as a process for deconstructing otherness, provides opportunities for both faculty and candidates to explore beneath the surface facts, motives, behaviors, and practices to discuss dangerous memories (Caruthers, 2008).

In the storytelling process, participants first write a story about their experiences with cultural diversity. The story might describe a teaching or learning event, interactions with students and other adults, a discipline issue, special celebrations, or other significant and relevant events. Participants are given the options to identify themselves or remain anonymous. Next, participants spend time learning inquiry skills or ways of talking together. The goal is to help people engage in internal listening, accept differences, and build mutual trust. Participants must suspend judgment, listen, and explore other points of view without resorting to debate. Practicing advocacy and inquiry should be done first with less sensitive topics.

Senge (1990) suggests ways of balancing advocacy and inquiry so that all persons involved confront their own and others' assumptions, reveal feelings, and build common ground.

1. Make your own reasoning explicit (How did you arrived at your view?); encourage others to explore your view (Are there gaps in my thinking?); encourage others to provide different views (Are there different conclusions, different data, different perspectives?), and actively inquire into others' views that differ from yours (How did you arrive at your view?).

2. When inquiring into others' views, state your assumptions clearly and acknowledge that

they are assumptions; state the data upon which your assumptions are based.

3. When you arrive at an impasse, ask what data or logic might change their view or if there is any way you might together engage in future studies that might provide new information.

4. When you or others are hesitant to express personal views, encourage yourself and other people to think out loud what might be making it difficult. If there is a mutual desire to do so, design with others ways of overcoming these barriers. (p. 200-201)

Following the use of advocacy and inquiry with less sensitive topics, the instructor or facilitator selects two or three stories for small groups to deconstruct.

The process consists of the following questions: (a) what did I see relative to race, ethnicity, class, gender, language, sexual orientation, abilities/disabilities, and other cultural differences; (b) what did I not see; (c) why is there silence about differences; and (d) why did I see race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, and other cultural differences? Remaining in small groups, participants take turns discussing the stories and their responses. After each person has had a chance to provide input, participants are encouraged to use advocacy and inquiry skills to explore their own and others' ideas. This process is repeated with other stories. As trust develops among the group, the instructor or facilitator encourages the group to bring in stories about their current teaching experiences. From this activity, opportunities to study other subjects emerge; the storytelling strategy becomes a spring board for in-depth study. For example, topics in the three candidates' stories for further study include assimilation and acculturation, culture and language, the official curriculum, the hidden curriculum, culturally relevant curriculum, identity formation, resistance theory, interpersonal skills development, and ways to create community-based schools that are democratic and self-fulfilling.

In conclusion, generating a counter narrative within the academy and a culture where colleagues work collaboratively to interrogate spaces of otherness require professors of educational administration to do what we expect school leadership candidates to do—use their voices to interrogate spaces of otherness and work to transform them.

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**Jennifer Friend** is an Assistant Professor and Program Coordinator for pK-12 Educational Administration in the Urban Leadership & Policy Studies in Education program at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Her work experience includes work as a middle grades language arts teacher and administrator in Kansas. Her research agenda focuses on issues of equity related to race/ethnicity, class, and gender in education, middle grades education, and documentary film as research.

**Loyce Caruthers** is an Associate Professor in Urban Leadership and Policy Studies in Education and the Program Coordinator for the Doctor of Education in PK-12 Administration. She brings to the University of Missouri – Kansas City extensive experiences as a teacher and administrator in Missouri as well as program director in school desegregation and reform through her work with the regional laboratories, funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Dr. Caruthers' research involves the use of narratives or storytelling to break the persistent silence surrounding race, ethnicity, class, and gender in schools and other institutions, urban school reform, and teacher-student interactions in classrooms.

**Shirley Marie McCarther** is an Assistant Professor in the division of Urban Leadership & Policy Studies in Education at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. She is an experienced public school administrator having served in urban, rural, and suburban school districts across the country. Her research agenda focuses on equity and access across urban education and leadership issues and embraces narrative studies, ethnography, historiography, and documentary: all giving voice to those long silenced across race, class, and gender boundaries.