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Michael A. Crosby

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SCHOOLS FOR PROFIT OR SCHOOLS FOR EDUCATION? A CHRISTIAN SCHOOL PRINCIPAL'S PERSPECTIVES

by

MICHAEL CROSBY

(Under the Direction of Robert Lake)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a series of speculative essays (Schubert, 1991) that address the forces of neoliberalism on schools today—both public and private. While there have been studies on the detrimental effects of high-stakes testing on public schools (e.g., Au, 2015; Giroux, 2014; Wacquant, 2000) as well as the associated harmful effects of school to prison pipeline (e.g., Saltman, 2016; Taubman, 2009), there remains little research associated with the damaging impacts of neoliberalism on Christian schools. Building upon the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy (e.g., Friere, 1970; Kincheloe, 2008; McLaren, 2015), I undertake a critical examination of neoliberalism's calculated efforts on schools (e.g., Gallagher, 2007; Giroux, 2008; Kumar, 2012; Ryan, 2016) and its dangers to both public and Christian schools--an on-going threat of losing additional Constitutional democratic values that were designed to provide equal treatment for all students. I investigate the damages associated with the one-size-fits-all curriculum implemented initially through the No Child Left Behind legislation in 2002. Through the lenses of my past experiences as a Christian school principal and as an educator, I share with the reader impacts on Christian schools and their primary constituents, middle class families.

The dissertation includes my suggestions based upon critical pedagogical research that schools should consider as they move forward in the 21st century. Drawing from Schwab (1978) and the four identified commonplaces of curriculum and more recently, Lake (2014), I examine how each commonplace complements the other in my ideal school. I propose long-term relationships between teachers and students over multiple years. Within such a context, the student and teacher learn from each other beginning at the kindergarten level. Students having opportunities to bond with teachers (e.g., Noddings, 2005) is at the core of such a curriculum where relationships and trust replace the current trend of teaching to the test. I emphasize the need for beginning teachers to practice their skills during an internship period of several years alongside a mentor teacher with reduced class sizes. The dissertation concludes by addressing current inhibiting forces conflicting with implementing this child-centered format for learning.

INDEX WORDS: Neoliberalism, Critical pedagogy, Speculative essay, High-stakes testing
School to prison pipeline

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PRINCIPAL'S PERSPECTIVES

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University
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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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PRINCIPAL'S PERSPECTIVES

by

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Electronic Version Approved:
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DEDICATION

To my wife, Susan, who has stood by my side for the last 34 years as we have raised our two children and five grandchildren. To fellow educators “fighting the good fight” for all the children in today’s classrooms.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My journey continues to this day as an individual and an educator. The two are woven together into one person, making up who I really am, me. From humble beginnings, (as we all have had) my life continues to be one where I have had the opportunity to be blessed by so many individuals. If the saying, “You are a product of those around you” is true, I am deeply grateful for the opportunity afforded to me by Dr. Ming Fang He, who was gracious to give me the opportunity to re-enter the doctoral program and complete my final three classes with her as my professor after an extended period of time away from the program. Dr. He, your efforts as a scholar in curriculum studies continue to inspire me daily. Thank you.

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To my always patient and caring dissertation chairperson, Dr. Robert Lake, thank you for your encouraging and supportive text messages, e-mails, phone calls and supportive smiles you have sent my way every time we have met to discuss my work. Thank you, Dr. Lake.

But most importantly, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my wife for believing in me and my abilities to persevere through the challenging times life throws our way on occasion. Your words of encouragement and support have been a source of inspiration to me during this journey of endurance which we both have traversed. Of paramount importance, I

would like to thank my Lord and God, Jesus Christ, who has blessed me with health and faith in returning to the university and completing this dissertation.

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PROLOGUE

During my initial years as a teacher in elementary school, I had an experience with a student that began to open my eyes to the need for treating all students as special, regardless of the color of skin or socio-economic level. Back in the days when cell phones were nonexistent, everyone used automatic machines for recorded messages stored on mini-cassette tapes. One could retrieve those messages using a touch-tone phone. I remember one instance of performing a few touchtone commands from a pay phone while on vacation. Little did I know the next few seconds listening to a recorded message would begin my transformation in curriculum studies. The voice on the recorded message came from a local sheriff. His message informed me one of my students from the past year was killed in an accident, and the parents were trying to contact me. They asked if I would attend the visitation prior to the funeral. After listening to the recorded message, I called the sheriff and received a more detailed story of the events leading to the child's death. I asked him to assure the parents that I would be there for their child's funeral service. I remember experiencing a numb sensation after getting off the phone. I could not believe this student had died. The next few days leading up to the funeral, I recall reaching out and embracing our two children for reasons they did not comprehend. My wife understood. She and I talked at length in the car on the way home as we drove back from vacation recalling vivid memories of this child. I remember his struggles with other classmates and how I would be pushed to my limits with incessant questions and his quirky outbursts, eventually leading to classroom disruptions during the initial months of school. I still can recall the shifting of attitudes I experienced with this student before the fall holidays. One day I witnessed a major turnaround in our relationship. It all started with an activity called "Beat the Teacher." It was a fun activity for the children in which the student and I competed against each other in order to be

the first to solve a math equation in front of the rest of the class. Naturally, the students always cheered for their classmates to win. This activity was designed to fill in time as we waited for the arrival of afternoon buses. This child became the only one to defeat me. The other students in the class cheered because the whole class would receive candy as a reward! What a special moment this was! This emotional interaction became the springboard for the connection I would build upon for the rest of the year. It was a turning point for the child and me. James Campbell (1995) describes this critical component of interacting with others by suggesting, “We are social creatures whose identities and fulfillment are grounded in communal participation” (p. 26). We continued to bond for the remaining months of the year. One day this student announced to the class before summer vacation: “I am the most improved student because my behavior has really improved and so have my grades!” With the other students clapping and cheering, I looked in his direction. He never saw my glance of affirmation because he was preoccupied with the praises emanating from classmates.

At the funeral home, I spoke with the mom and dad. They explained the incident leading to his death. What I recollect from the conversation now were the kind words their child shared about me. They shared stories of his excitement about school, classmates and new friendships. Before leaving the funeral home, I walked over to the casket. Standing there, I thought back to earlier that year of an incident when he became agitated with another student. I remember gently rubbing the top of this child’s head, which instantly diffused the situation. Without hesitating, I extended my hand into the casket and once again began rubbing his head gently one last time.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Purposes of Study / Key Research

This emotional event served as a turning point for me as an educator and a person. My perception and view of culturally diverse students became more personal. I began the process of looking at all learners as special. This student, who came from an impoverished family, impacted my life both personally and professionally. I began to see students differently than I had before. Now, twenty-six years later, I continue to value all children with dignity and respect. Through the curriculum studies program at Georgia Southern University, I have found common ground with critical theorists who advocate for building relationships with the marginalized and forgotten in society. Meier & Gasoi, (2017) remind us of the importance of building relationships with all our students:

Over the years I have learned that sustaining a democratic culture depends on building practices that enable us all to develop strong habits of heart and mind through frequent association with one another. Something as seemingly simple as setting aside time to voice our opinions, to hear one another out, to wrestle with ideas and face dilemmas together is actually imperative. (p. 23)

Meier & Gasoi (2017) reflect on the importance of educators appreciating students as unique individuals that bring enormous potential to be valued and appreciated by those surrounding them. Students are naturally inclined to respond appropriately to teachers and administrators at schools when they equate the classroom as a sanctuary— a place where they can feel free to explore interests in non-threatening climates. Critical theorists challenge those of us working

with students to see them as who they are— individuals with talents and interests that should be allowed to be released and cultivated via child-centered activities as opposed to existing authoritarian traditions that stifle such possibilities. We should all remember why we entered the field of teaching. Was it the money? I think not. Noddings (2005) puts it more succinctly adding, “I want to suggest that caring is the very bedrock of all successful education and that contemporary schooling can be revitalized in its light” (p. 27).

Looking back at my life, I had few interactions with minority groups. During my childhood one of my few encounters with minorities occurred when my parents hired an African American woman, Ethel, as a maid to help around the house. To me, she was more than a maid; Ethel became a second mother to my siblings and me. She was there for us during the day, watching closely over us as if we were her own. I found myself getting disciplined by her as well. Admittedly, I deserved punishment often! A few years later, I came to know a kind African American man, Mr. Johnson, who worked as the school janitor. I liked being around Mr. Johnson. At school I was one of his “helpers” as he used to call us, assigning chores to do around the school, mostly emptying trash cans. I recall coming home one afternoon from school and proclaiming to my mother, “When I grew up, I wanted to be a janitor just like Mr. Johnson!” Perhaps my last childhood memory of an African American was my second- grade teacher, Mrs. Brown. My memories of Mrs. Brown were positive. I can still picture her standing in front of our classroom and greeting us daily. Then, one day, during my second-grade year, our parents informed us that we would be attending a private school in the fall. The reason they gave us was due to racial riots breaking out across the South, and they wanted to keep us safe. Looking back now, private school was about the same with only one exception--all my classmates were white.

For the next ten years, I had little or no interaction with black children or any other ethnic groups.

Entering college, I took for granted the benefits I had the opportunity to experience. I credited the rewards and promotions I received to hard work and tenacity. I assumed my successes in life were based on a strong work ethic with very little associated to the color of my skin. As a younger man, whenever I considered the lives of others who were not as successful in life, I attributed their misfortunes to a lack of motivation or perhaps bad luck. I never stopped to think that there were other factors, which might be triggering their poor standards of living. Perhaps I was too comfortable in my life to stop and think that there might be more to my good fortune than a strong work ethic. Bell (1992) speaks of this tendency for many Caucasians choosing not to question such matters. Indeed, in my case, he was right about that. I see now that growing up within a constricted environment served to enhance my naïve assumptions regarding the American Dream and how this applies to predominantly only to a select few.

Critical Pedagogy as Theoretical Framework

This dissertation will be theoretical in design as opposed to a qualitative or quantitative study. Day (1993) maintains that the theoretical study continues to have its merits despite being the oldest forms of research. Day (1993) advocates for theoretical research writing: “The theoretical dissertation is at once a work of deconstruction and invention, in which old orders are dismantled and new possibilities for seeing and acting are made convincing to eligible readers” (p. 80). Traditional doctoral programs have discouraged such forms of inquiry and have generally encouraged their students to conduct more scientific research via quantifiable studies (Eisner, 1979). Critical pedagogy provides a lens to view the world epistemologically and critically (Freire, 1970). McLaren (2015) poses that critical pedagogy provides a means of

unlearning, learning and re-learning the world. Within this world is where we find ourselves struggling as educators in advocating for the rights of all children caught in neoliberalism's web of a marketed economy and the deterioration of democratic rights. As an educator, I find myself in a continual process of learning to unlearn or deprogram my mind regarding prior beliefs. I am less prone to accept decisions; instead, I exercise caution by imploring a series of steps and filtering the information through reflection then action (Freire, 1970). The ability to question and examine curriculum in a collaborative environment with peers should be commonplace. I believe this was in part what Freire & Macedo (1995) referred to as an "epistemological curiosity" (p. 382), that elicits a reaction inside the individual to pause and reflect critically on issues once before left unchallenged. Critical pedagogy can transform one's personal epistemological beliefs (McLaren, 2015). It can also be utilized as a catalyst to bring about change in society (Freire 1970). Critical pedagogy challenges me to internalize my "white privilege" background and acknowledge the opposite effect minorities experience who are continuing to be subjugated and marginalized (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993).

Kumar (2012) describes neoliberalism as the desire to accumulate wealth while simultaneously purposely choosing to lay aside fairness, equity, and democratic principles in its wake. Neoliberalism operates within our schools and society much like a cancerous tumor in the human body. Possessing tiny hairs or tentacles, cancer reaches out in multiple directions within an individual seeking to infect healthy cells with its deceptive yet venomous components. Like cancer, neoliberalism interjects seemingly logical ideas into systems, such as schools, in a society and ultimately renders them inoperable to fulfill their original purposes as institutions of learning. This economic ideology has found its way into the schools via corporate models that

condone streamlining strategies striving towards efficiency with cost productive measures that seek to guarantee results with transparency (Giroux, 2008).

Drawing upon the ideas of critical theorists who I shall reference later in my dissertation, I have chosen the following title as a basis for my study: *Schooled to profit or schooled to learn? A Christian school's principal's perspective*. This dissertation, that is grounded in theory, will be intertwined with my experiences offering possibilities and alternatives in educating children. Nickerson (1993) describes how theoretical researchers seek to explore possibilities:

The theoretical researcher using the oldest and most common method, draws on library and archival materials. Beginning with premises found in the literature, – ideas or theories already established– and proceeding logically and critically, he or she argues towards new conclusions. The researcher seeks to persuade you to a new view of truth by the careful marshaling of sources, by a precision of thinking, and by the strength of the logic displayed. (p. 59)

Nickerson's (1993) description of a theoretical researcher appears to be one who values not only practical experiences but adheres to the importance of applying theory when attempting to understand phenomena in daily encounters. Theory is an integral component in research efforts in serving to compliment, explain and validate what manifests itself daily. In attempting to decipher situations and phenomena, no matter the context, we find ourselves seeking answers while often wondering if what we view as solutions, in effect, only further complicates matters. As an educator, attempting to explore possibilities and avenues for schools, theoretical insights can provide possible guidelines, pathways and roads previously unexplored by educators. My intent and purposes in choosing a theoretical format will be to combine theory and practice in exploring possibilities and alternatives currently being dismissed by those in authority.

Speculative Essays as Method of Inquiry

The methodology I have chosen for my dissertation will be writing speculative essays. According to Schubert (1991), the essay “can provide integrative, imaginative, and speculative leaps of interpretation that are still soundly grounded in a variety of other research traditions” (p. 64). Adopting the essay as my method of inquiry provides the opportunity to cross traditional boundaries of research methodology commonly associated with qualitative research. Speculative essays will provide me the avenue to ponder and reflect over my practical knowledge in education. Piantanida (2006) later points out that the definition of speculate is “to meditate; to contemplate; to consider a subject by turning it in the mind and viewing it in its different aspects and relations” (p. 167). This speaks directly to my efforts in this dissertation identifying the education crisis from my viewpoint as one who has been in education for over twenty-five years. What is happening in our schools? How have my encounters afforded me multiple perspectives? How can we examine alternatives best suited for everyone? In these speculative essays, I will address these and other questions. The literature review will be embedded within each of the essays of this dissertation (Lake, 2006). I have chosen the speculative essay as my methodology due to its potential abilities to persuade and convince (Schubert, 1991). The process required for such a transformation of schooling requires creativity while pondering possibilities and solutions to complex situations. Richardson (1999) further validates writing as a viable methodology, proclaiming it as “a method of inquiry, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic” (p. 499). As Richardson (1999) suggests, I will share my own story within these essays and the path I have chosen to take as an educator and my desire for equality in classrooms.

Schubert (1991) provides five guidelines to follow when adopting speculative essays as the methodology (p. 68). His first recommendation is to acquire experience with the

phenomenon under inquiry (p. 68). Having served over twenty-five years in education has provided me multiple stories to share. Following Schubert's (1991) thoughts on conscientious or sustained reflection (p.68) of being a principal, retreating temporarily from the demands and distractions associated with administrative duties allows time to reflect on my experiences. Schubert's (1991) second criterion associated with adopting speculative essays as a form of inquiry is the importance of having something "important to say" (p. 68). It is critical that an essay demonstrates rigor by integrating scholars with personal familiarity. The third guideline espoused by Schubert (1991) calls for immersing oneself into the "great originators of the essay style of writing" (p. 69). In my research, I will be challenged to craft words persuasively as Schubert (1991) supports, with theoretical arguments complemented by critical theorists calling for equity in schools. Why this school of thought? It will be advantageous for me to draw upon others in the field who support critical pedagogy as a necessary component needed for change.

Throughout this dissertation, I will be referring to research in critical pedagogy that has impacted the way I view curriculum. Schubert's (1991) fourth criterion calls for the essayist to become acquainted with others who have contributed to curriculum thought (p. 70). There must be familiarity with the contributions of others in the field and their respective works.

Fortunately, I will have at my disposal a plethora of authors who have previously chosen the essay to communicate relevant issues, identifying children as the focal point in education (Eisner, 1998), (Whitehead, 1929), (James, 2008), (Counts, 1932), (Dewey, 1938), (Dewey, 1899).

Schubert's (1991) final guideline to follow is to practice writing essays (p. 71). Although I have never considered myself to be an excellent writer, the skills to be an effective communicator require a high degree of commitment and persistence. I have found writing

essays requires constant revision to assure clarity to the intended audience. The audience I hope to address in these essays is current or future principals as well as other educators at all levels in schooling that seek alternatives in changing the status quo using a one size fits all approach. The purpose in choosing speculative essays as my methodology will be to inform and persuade my administrative colleagues and others to consider different paths and alternatives in their assigned schools by offering research-based evidence supporting a curriculum focused on the child.

Adopting the essay as my methodology will provide the forum required to analyze, criticize, and offer research-based possibilities. Over the years of examining the essay as a form of inquiry and when seeking for an exact definition of the essay, Schubert (1991) notes the essay over time has become more complex, taking on more possibilities. With the speculative essay, “the writer often makes a personal statement, asserts some knowledge with conviction, treats a variety of different topics, develops an argument shorter than a thesis, and frequently writes in an informal style” (Schubert, 1991, p. 61). The essay can be described as a work of art as it expresses and portrays the opinions and ideas of its author as does any work of art—painting, sculpture, dance, film or theatre. It is a manifestation of personal expression. This collection of speculative essays will not provide specific answers to “fix” schools. Far more time is required to systematically address the complexities requiring that project. These essays will pose substantial questions raised by this former principal designed to stimulate discussions both inside and out of educational circles not typically associated in conventional studies. Barone & Eisner (2011) support this argument: “The purpose of arts-based research is to raise significant questions and engender conversations rather than to proffer final meanings” (p. 166).

My journey as a writer will continue to evolve. As in anything, one hopefully grows with experience. The goal throughout this dissertation will be to continue my growth in curricular

theory simultaneously uncovering unexplored territory serving to spark other educators serving students with pure motives and sincere hearts. Moffett (1983) argues the reason we write is because an author “was intent on saying something for real reasons of his own and because he wanted to get certain effects on a definite audience” (p.193). Additionally, this type of study promotes an adversarial relationship to powers deeply rooted in our schools today (Apple, 1996). With the growing number of students experiencing detrimental effects, more will continue to suffer if a transformation in learning does not happen soon.

The reason for choosing to incorporate speculative essays as my methodology has one primary purpose--to communicate to readers the urgent need for change. Essays have the potential to expose and enlighten. This will be my objective as I employ this methodology. My research will serve as a mirror reflecting upon past, present, and future implications for those trapped in bureaucratic settings. Writing has a purpose to communicate to others as Moffett (1983) claims when stating that in the essay “the fact that one writes by oneself does not at all diminish the need for response, since one writes for others” (p. 191). Choosing speculative essays as my methodology will allow me the flexibility to move forward within the constructs of my theoretical framework drawing from my expertise as a principal. I find writing to be liberating. At times, writing comes naturally, like a stream of water flowing down a mountain brushing gently against rocks and pebbles until reaching its destination. However, there are times when writing is a struggle. Thus, the strength of writing an essay can be both exhilarating yet humbling. I anticipate this bifurcation to continue as I embark on this journey identifying constraints and stumbling blocks restraining students from thriving.

Context: A Curriculum of Excess Accountability

The current state of America's education continues to be a topic that many find to have strong opinions and concerns. I have discovered that no matter where I am, individuals are quick to share their ideas about what they feel is wrong with America's educational system. An overwhelming majority do not believe students are receiving strong educational opportunities. Numerous individuals level blame on poor teaching. Still, others I have spoken with, find fault with the Common Core curriculum and its new standards. Frustrated with the additional expectations and demands, many teachers have walked away from the profession they once felt called to, resulting in teacher shortages across the nation (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Many public schools, especially those that have large numbers of minority students, find themselves on the state's underperformance list, facing constant pressure to raise test scores. In effect, the curriculum has been removed out of the hands of teachers and principals and shifted to district offices controlling what is taught. The impacts are far reaching on teacher/student interactions. A mechanized approach to learning has been the result. In 2015, government legislators struck down No Child Left Behind (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002) federal statutes, that called for increased testing; it has been replaced by similar legislation, the Every Student Succeeds Act (Every Student Succeeds [ESSA], 2015). Adler-Greene, (2019) argues that both pieces of legislation are flawed:

Critics of NCLB argue that the act's rigid requirements contained unrealistic expectations and set up school districts to fail, resulting in a lack of equal opportunities for all students. Proponents of the act believe that ESSA would better focus on fully preparing all students for success in college and future careers. Unfortunately, both NCLB and ESSA fail to address the individual needs of all students, regardless of their backgrounds.

These acts ignore the underlying socioeconomic and racial issues affecting our nation's students. (p. 12)

ESSA (2015) continues to strengthen the emphasis on standardized testing in schools by requiring schools annually to test students at all levels. ESSA (2015) has, however, removed the federal government's authority in selecting specific tests for students. Individual states now choose their own specific tests to administer. With states now holding the authority to choose testing instruments, a deeper examination reveals added pressure being applied to educators who find themselves burdened with additional criteria requiring greater time and focus away from learning. Under ESSA (2015), schools are now obligated to adhere to mandated reporting of school violence during the instructional day as well as during school-sponsored extra-curricular events. For many administrators who are obliged to report instances of alleged bullying and fighting between students, there is now a new temptation to overlook such episodes by attempting to dismiss altercations as trivial or minor offenses that can be dealt as insignificant requiring no mandated report. The tendency of principals to not enforce necessary punishment is due to the fear of being identified as a school not providing a safe environment. Under ESSA (2015), districts that exceed acceptable levels of violent reports must offer parents alternative schools for children to attend while paying for the additional transportation costs associated with bussing students to schools further away from homes within the region. For this reason, many schools choose to adopt in-school suspension programs for students committing violent or disruptive acts.

Focus of Inquiry

I have witnessed numerous disadvantaged students struggle in classrooms and this injustice has significantly impacted my decision in choosing this topic for my dissertation. My

research will seek to provide new answers and alternatives for schooling the next generation. Key issues that will be addressed in my research include the impact of the current standardization movement and its effect particularly on minority pupils. Are schools really in need of massive changes? If so, what can be practically and realistically accomplished by turning a well-oiled machine (such as our schools) inside out and at what cost to young learners who have only a few years to prepare for a lifetime of work? Other questions then rise to the surface such as: What should be taught and who will make these decisions?

Entering the teaching profession over twenty-five years ago, I have experienced pressures and expectations to teach only to the test. No matter the name of the assessment, the pressures for student mastery on standardized tests remain the same. I was trained by the state to focus on material designated by those in district and government offices. The reason, as it was explained to me and my colleagues, was that this was the same material young learners would be responsible for during annual testing. Years later, as a school principal, I learned that standardized testing had risen to new levels of importance. I found myself sitting in administrative meetings being reminded of the necessity of students to achieve satisfactory levels. If scores were unsatisfactory, principals could face unpleasant consequences, including possible termination. These pressures would rise to a fever pitch prior to annual standardized testing. To make matters more challenging, additional instructional time was forfeited prior to “testing week” and replaced by practice exams, that supposedly were administered to the entire student body in order to prepare everyone for the actual exams.

It was after leaving one of these intense administrative meetings that I decided to focus on the testing phenomena as a critical component detrimental to schools for my dissertation. I remember asking myself the question: What is going on here? I felt like I was being treated more

like a foreman at a production plant than a principal of a school. Nothing in my administrative preparation at the university level prepared me to place testing of students at such a critical level of importance. After all, if I was experiencing these emotions and conflicts within myself, perhaps, choosing this topic as my dissertation would allow me the opportunity to dig deeper into this oppressive phenomenon and reflect on possibilities and options addressing this issue. While contemplating my dissertation topic, I was immersed in reading one of the most profound books in my curriculum studies program, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire. Freire (1970) gave me fresh insight identifying forces influencing not only how curriculum is taught but also what is being taught and who makes these decisions:

One of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings' consciousness.

Functionally, oppression is domesticating. To no longer be prey to its force, one must emerge from it and turn up on it. This can be done only by means of the praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it. (p. 51)

Freire (1970) confirmed what I was already experiencing as a school principal. His articulation of an oppressor and its attempts to suppress a weaker group in a society began to provide insightful answers I had been struggling with for a long time (Freire 1970). I began to connect the dilemma I was experiencing with intentionally designed plans by forces desiring a stronger hold on schooling. Minority students and those children from impoverished households suffer the greatest from a one size fits all curriculum that places a high priority on standardized testing. As a result of reading Freire's book, and others, who I shall discuss later, I am more equipped to identify these entities operating in schools promoting their own agendas. As a principal of elementary and middle schools for thirteen years, I will address critical phenomena that are

collectively resulting in dismantling the fabric of the educational ideals required in order to be prepared to function effectively as critical thinking adults in a democratic society.

As a principal, I continued to witness the harmful effects of teaching to the test, especially toward students from disadvantaged households. This dissertation will focus on these adverse effects and reveal additional disturbing trends brought about by policies being implemented in schools today. Apple (1996) contends a deliberate plan is deeply woven into schools perpetuating and favoring the dominant white culture. One does not have to look far to share this sentiment when examining other social entities such as prisons in our country. Jail populations are skewed by Hispanic and African American males in comparison to white inmates. If compliance to the dominant culture is not adhered to by minorities, the result is poverty and incarceration, leaving little hope and much despair for any future. Gasoi (2017) concludes:

How can we begin to think of ourselves as a democratic nation if a significant (and growing) segment of our population is made to feel that unless they adopt dominant cultural norms, they have nothing of value to contribute and therefore take no stake in a shared vision of the future? (p. 5)

Gasoi (2017) adds that many minorities are forfeiting their own identity and unique backgrounds in hopes of being accepted by white America. One does not have to search far to see examples being played out daily with minorities being encouraged to sacrifice their cultural and ethnic values. As a proud grandfather of three beautiful children whose father's family originates from a Hispanic background, it saddens me to no end when two of my granddaughters and I are searching for dolls to take home at retail stores and the only choice they have is to select white baby dolls from the selection on store shelves. This subliminal message of prejudice, favoring

white skin color, goes unnoticed by many white families. However, for many non-white ethnic groups, a clear message is passed on regarding the dominance of a white America.

As a teacher, on my way to the lunchroom, I would pass the detention classrooms where children were assigned to spend days, even weeks, copying paragraphs from a sheet of paper.

Many serving this punishment were African- American males. It resembled a small prison.

Wallace, Strike, Glasgow, Lynch & Fullilove (2016) remind us of a well-documented reality that our prisons house black males proportionately higher than other racial groups:

Black men in the U.S. are incarcerated at much higher rates than men from other racial groups. It is reported that one in three Black men will have been involved in the criminal justice system at some point in their lives. Individuals who have been incarcerated tend to come from marginalized, low income communities and have often lacked adequate medical care prior to incarceration. (p. 163)

Wallace, Strike, Glasgow, Lynch & Fullilove (2016) point out that there are more young black men who spend time incarcerated compared to black males attending American universities. For many American schools, in-school detention is used by principals hoping to avoid higher numbers of documented suspensions. Furthermore, early release time is an option granted to students due to overcrowding conditions caused by additional children assigned similar consequences. This policy of early release for good behavior, while serving time in in-school detention rooms, is reminiscent of prison where incarcerated inmates are also granted release for acceptable behavior. I believe one of the reasons why this practice exists in both schools and prisons is due to overcrowding conditions being perpetuated in both systems. Numerous non-white females have become victims of teenage pregnancy now facing a bleak future with

multiple children of their own. From my outlook, the idea of equal education with equal opportunities for all races and ethnicities continues to be a fallacy.

The story of injustice and bias against minorities in our society must be shared with the public. It is a story continuing to foster division between the rich and poor. Education is a microcosm of our civilization. Equity imbalances do not only reside in schools. We should not remain silent with the numerous cases of inequality taking place in our nation's classrooms. However, that is exactly what is happening across the nation. I equate this silence and apathy to a puzzling phenomenon we as humans possess. It can best be described by sharing an event I witnessed recently. While waiting in line at an automated teller machine (ATM), I was encouraged to notice how rapidly the line was dwindling down to my turn, when finally, I placed my bank card in the ATM for a transaction. At that moment, I realized why the line was moving so quickly--the machine was out of order. Before getting back into my car, I shared with those behind me that the ATM was not functioning properly. They thanked me and left as well, taking my word instead of trying it for themselves. I left amazed that the individuals ahead of me in line never paused to share with the rest of us the fact that the ATM was out of service. This narcissistic trait, that includes lacking empathy for others and being preoccupied with one's own personal welfare, happens often in educational circles and in our society (Bell, 1992). Instead of making a concerted effort to communicate their dissatisfaction individually or collectively, some may choose to grumble and complain temporarily at local levels; however, with the conclusion of the school year, previous concerns fade away only to be replaced with fresh hopes for better days ahead with the beginning of a new school year. Students from impoverished households have become the recipients of bias via disproportionate funding (Giroux, 2008). The poor have been left behind. Can anything be done to stop this trend?

While struggles remain in public education, there exists complexities and dilemmas in Christian schools that undermines that fabric of our society which many families in America have vested interests. My experiences in Christian schools have presented its own set of challenges. I encountered teachers holding unreasonable expectations with their rationale being that a college preparatory curriculum demands rote memorization of facts with multiple-choice tests containing hundreds of questions. These private school teachers resemble their public-school colleagues as they require students to spend countless hours completing worksheets. This is how they define rigor. What is the answer? More emphasis is needed in public and private schools focusing on child-centered learning incorporating critical thinking, collaborative learning, and authentic assessment derived from the practical knowledge of students. Giving all children opportunities to think critically and collaboratively within a democratic context as Giroux (2008) calls for is at the core of schooling.

Corporate influences have penetrated our learning institutions, promoting the emphasis on the regurgitation of facts. Freire (1970) referred to this type of learning as the “banking method” (p. 85). I will argue in the first essay that “teaching to the test” is one strategy by those in power to intentionally handicap and limit the minds of children. As a result, in the future, an entire generation will be primed and prepared to accept more readily a neoliberal agenda that exists to strengthen its hold on society by devaluing governmental structures designed to protect the general public (Giroux, 2008). What is neoliberalism and how is it affecting our schools and society as a whole? Ryan (2016) summarizes neoliberalism and its historical roots:

Neoliberal theory is the collective term given to the utopian normative vision promulgated by thinkers such as Friedrich Hayek (1973; 1978a; 2001 [1944]), Milton

Friedman (1962; 1980), and Robert Nozick (1977). This theory is generally understood as presenting the market as the most efficient way to organize society. (p. 79)

Perhaps what concerns me the most about neoliberalism is its blatant disregard in acknowledging minorities and those struggling in poverty as viable and valuable groups in our country. When I consider the corporate take-over of prisons coupled with the privatization of services now being offered to students identified in special education as well as disruptive youths being pushed away from public schools, a pattern of predictability can be recognized that not only are these individuals being perceived as expendable, but simultaneously, corporations are profiting. A society that accepts the neoliberal agenda is one that opens its doors of opportunities to those it perceives as possessing the necessary abilities to sustain and strengthen privatization while simultaneously reducing governmental services to less fortunate members. Public schools, trapped within any neoliberal economy, are viewed as counterproductive while operating as large governmental entities that divert potential profits away from private corporate institutions. From my perspective as an educator, neoliberalism's influence on schools continues successfully through a curriculum of standardization and strict accountability.

It is my hope educators facing struggles and demands placed on them in schools will benefit from this dissertation. Others concerned for America's education or who share similar opinions might also receive additional insight from this study. While there has been notable and exceptional research on critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2006), (Freire, 1970), (McLaren, 2015), (Apple, 1996), and (Apple & Beane, 1995), I am not aware of a significant number of public or private school administrators who have published theoretical research related to social injustices via testing in schools. Eisner (1970) offers reasons for the lack of research from principals critical of today's curriculum:

School administrators were vulnerable in 1915, and they are vulnerable today. To keep one's job in a complex system, one must do what will look good, what is considered up to date, and what will be regarded as acceptable. The maintenance model of educational administration that I believe most school administrators embrace has as its first principle personal survival on the job. (p. 14)

Personally, as a principal, I found the job to be extremely complex and challenging as Eisner (1970) echoes in what he perceives as the tiring tasks for principals. While attempting to adhere to the requirements and mandates set forth by my district superiors, I was also aware of the difficulties and frustrations being experienced by my teachers who were working diligently to meet these additional expectations. It was my experience that being caught in the middle, between those in higher places of authority versus the teachers charged with carrying out requirements, caused me to work in isolation and loneliness—without peers and colleagues—inherently available to those at both of the other ends. At times, my devotion to my teachers and their challenges contradicted the expectations of those at district offices concerned with mainly quotas and protocols. During those difficult moments, when faced with pressures from above and below, I was often reminded about my own vulnerabilities and being easily replaced. However, my teachers and I formed stronger bonds during those difficult seasons that served to mold us together in developing a reputation of excellence within the community.

This dissertation is about one principal's journey discovering fresh insights and possibilities once before not imagined. This dissertation will serve as a blueprint to current and future principals who share a common bond for reaching all students. Using speculative essays (Schubert, 1991) as my methodology provides a platform to flexibly identify issues and phenomena operating counterproductively in schools. This form of inquiry permits me to share

experiences while meditating research-based alternatives to curriculum. Once completed, this dissertation could be considered a source of theoretical possibilities for those interested in seeking alternatives to the current trend educators are faced with daily.

My beliefs as an educator have been transformed by writers in curriculum studies. For example, Bell (1992) expanded my view of racism and its stability in America. hooks (1995) wrote candidly of the state of oppressed African Americans:

Even though legal racial apartheid no longer is a norm in the United States, the habits that uphold and maintain institutionalized white supremacy linger. Since most white people do not have to “see” black people, (constantly appearing on billboards, television, movies, in magazines, etc.) and they do not need to be ever on guard not to observe black people to be safe, they can live as though black people are invisible, and they can imagine that they are also invisible to blacks. (p. 36)

While this phenomenon is not restricted solely to the United States, hooks (1995) reminds us that the social capital Caucasians possess in capitalistic countries can continue an entire lifetime without ever stopping to consider the plight and treatment of others less fortunate who are forced to endure predestined hardships due to the color of their skin. And, as mentioned previously, my experiences growing up in the suburbs in Savannah, Georgia, presented me with a similar scenario where my interactions with minorities was scarce until attending college. Bell’s (1992) message of hopelessness in removing the tyranny and oppression in our country continues to speak to me as a white man. Often, I meditate on his thematic message that speaks of the permanence of racial hostilities reaching well into the 21st century. At times, I contemplate my own lack of action as a principal and reflect on instances where I aided in perpetuating racial

inequity and injustices by remaining silent or passive allowing discriminatory procedures to flow unabated.

Overview of the Chapters

The proposed collection of essays will address a specific area or phenomenon that is impacted by the influence of the current neoliberal era. Additionally, I will allude to avenues I chose to act in combatting neoliberalism's influence where I served as a principal. I will take the reader on my personal journey as an administrator while providing both theoretical references and practical applications. The research-based examples provided in this study will serve as a continuing literature review as well as ensuring a flowing theoretical framework.

I begin my study with examining the destructive accountability system implemented across the nation. I will demonstrate how teaching to the test and prescriptive curriculums are wreaking havoc on young learners stemming from minority households. Researchers contend that "teaching to the test" has the adverse effect of minimizing the curriculum to narrow sets of objectives leaving little room for authentic learning. There is a well-known proverb that states: "The definition of insanity is expecting different results without attempting new approaches when solving a problem." As educators, we continue along this path with antiquated strategies and schemes while simultaneously hoping for better results. I equate the accountability movement in schools to that of a parent who notices his or her child shows signs of having a fever—chills, pale, clammy and warm skin. Those who advocate for excessive testing would recommend to this mother to take multiple temperature readings under the tongue. Next, after getting that reading, not satisfied, another procedure would be advised to the mother to take his temperature under the armpit. Surprisingly, the reading might match. However, because he or she is still not convinced, the child's temperature is taken rectally and yet another suggestion to

the mom would be to seek a temperature reading in the ear. I reference researchers critical with similar tactics in schools via unceasing testing. Evidence will be presented in support of immediate needs for change to the curriculum.

The second chapter in my dissertation addresses the idea of democracy focusing on the democratic concept of equal rights for all citizens. The ruling upper class, who typically are white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant males, continues to hold a vice grip on power and control in our society. This should not be the case within our society. Democratic nations place equal value on minority groups from all backgrounds. An ideal democratic state is one where all its citizens have equal opportunity to advance educationally and economically (Apple, 1996). However, as witnessed all too often, diverse peoples originating from other nationalities, find themselves excluded from privileges and benefits found within controlling powers. The curriculum in schools must be one that incorporates and supports cultural diversity within a context where all students from all socio-economic backgrounds are encouraged to feel appreciated. Unfortunately, this has not been the scenario in our schools. As Americans, we have never fully embraced democracy and all that it represents. Meier & Gasoi (2017) remind us:

During the first half of the last century, when soaring rhetoric about democracy as a conceptual cradle for high ideals such as freedom of movement, expression and association was more prevalent, we have never been willing to extend such freedoms to all our citizens. (p. 4)

It is therefore paramount that educators exercise efforts within academic circles to ensure that democratic characteristics find their way to the forefront with discussions and debate that challenge the bureaucratic elite who force their ideas through multiple avenues. As the reader

ponders this second essay, he/she will be left with a greater conceptualization of the forces within our political system that continue to advocate for greater accountability in our schools and the harmful impacts on impoverished families. Neoliberals, supporting a competitive economy, remain steadfast in their efforts to advance a global marketing system that relegates many in our country to remain on the sidelines of life, and worse yet, forced into obscurity and given little hope for a better tomorrow.

The third chapter will address another dilemma--- the impact of neoliberalism on Christian schools. Christian schools have lost their way in allowing political and corporate interests ahead of the primary party it was designed for-- children. I recount some of my prior episodes as a private school principal while drawing connections with critical theorists who call for a child-centered curriculum. What does a child-centered curriculum resemble? Can a curriculum be devised to accomplish such a task? I believe the answer is a resounding, yes! In my administrative courses during graduate school, my professors emphasized the importance of placing students first. Nevertheless, despite the research, efforts continue to be enforced through systematic accountability policies across the country and atrocities showing up most poignantly with the marginalized and poor (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Private school teachers are also forced to control the learning environment-- depriving children of participating in lessons that foster creativity. Consequently, harmful effects become instilled in many children attending private schools.

The final chapter of this dissertation will synthesize my ideas while adopting research-based suggestions outlining what an ideal school's four commonplaces Schwab (1978) might resemble when considering the milieu, teacher, subject matter, and learner. The milieus, for example, within a school, can be described as the unspoken curriculum or, as first coined by

Jackson (1968), the “hidden curriculum” discussion. If milieus are not acknowledged, curriculum development will not succeed. Having taught in the inner city with its unique challenges, there are significant differences associated with rural settings. Having taught in multiple settings during my career, I can confirm that the same approaches effective with one school may have counter-productive results at another. Milieus can differ from lower to middle schools. Therefore, curriculum developers should not adopt a practice of a one size fits all program in attempting to meet all students’ interests. This is not feasible.

Schwab (1978) identifies teachers as an equally important commonplace. Teachers must be considered as an integral component of active learning. Passive learning in schools is not effective and never has been. Noddings (2005) declared: “When we discuss teaching and teacher-learner relationships in depth, we will see that teachers not only have to create caring relations, but they also have a responsibility to help their students develop the capacity to care” (p. 18). Fostering the importance to care is one critical component educators should be instilling in young learners. I believe relationships are critical. However, fostering the ability to care is not a simple process, nor, does it happen overnight. This can only be achieved through a democratic process when a teacher accepts the student as an important individual, requiring time and effort.

I argue for long-term opportunities for relationships to grow between teachers and students. Beane (1990) supports such collaborative efforts between teachers and students, “When students plan with teachers, possibilities for democracy and personal efficacy are opened up” (p. 149). While there has been research on the importance of collaboration on curriculum development using the four commonplaces— teachers, students, subject matter and milieus – in the behavioral sciences, Schwab (1978) called for a fifth member who “has an extremely critical

role as moderator and one who presides as the leader of the group to ensure equity for all parties to have fair representation in the process of developing curriculum” (p. 368).

In the epilogue, I explore implications of such a school setting and potential limitations identified that would require further study. Writing takes the author and reader on a shared journey that enables both parties to mutually ponder possibilities and ramifications simultaneously while connected in thought. As my dissertation unfolds, insights will be entertained that beckon the reader to join the author in exploring fresh options and exciting possibilities for the schooling of future generations.

CHAPTER TWO

HIGH STAKES TESTING AND THE ASSOCIATED HARMFUL EFFECTS ON SCHOOLS,
STUDENTS, AND TEACHERS

In this chapter, I begin with bringing attention to the destructive impacts of the accountability intrusion in America's schools. I articulate how these misguided priorities are wreaking havoc on numerous students, especially those from low socio-economic households. Additionally, I examine the dilemma many teachers are compelled to do--teaching to the test. "Teaching to the test" has the adverse effect of minimizing the curriculum to a narrow set of objectives with its overall focus to prepare students for high-stakes exams. Throughout, I reflect on my interactions and perceptions as a school principal and share how research in critical pedagogy leads to alternative solutions in this age of over-accountability.

From my earlier days as an educator, enrolled in leadership training courses, there was one common theme expressed by professors. The permeating idea in most of the classes was placing the child's interests ahead of all others. In preparing future principals, these university instructors believed that by prioritizing the child's interests ahead of others, a greater likelihood of making better decisions would result. Dewey (1902) held to this position writing:

The child is the starting point, the center, and the end. This alone furnishes the standard.

To the growth of the child all studies are subservient; they are instruments valued as they serve the needs of the growth. Personality and character are more than subject-matter.

Not knowledge or information, but self-realization, is the goal. (p. 13)

This quote from Dewey has continued to influence my understanding of child pedagogy.

Dewey's words call for a curriculum specifically designed to accommodate for a student's individuality. Tragically, today's schools are not concerned with the "personal interests of

students”; (Dewey, 1902, p.9) instead, they have chosen a different path saturated with unending accountability measures stifling creativity and natural curiosity. John Dewey’s words from *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902) articulate his philosophy related to the purpose schools should aspire to when working with children. Dewey (1902) believed in educating children where schools directly reflected practical experiences. He supported a curriculum that advocated for flexibility in catering to the needs of the whole child. Dewey (1902) was critical of the traditionalists who believed children were blank slates and should be silent during class that would then provide the necessary time for teachers to fill students’ minds with facts and information.

What are we Doing to the Children?

When pondering this question, numerous issues surface that require attention. Leiding (2009) writes: “Our schools continue to fail; everyone knows it. School board meetings have become battlefields as angry parents are on the attack. State legislators have admitted it, and the media expounds it” (p. 52). Teachers are under attack from the media, parents and administrators. They have become the scapegoats from these stakeholders for the poor test scores being reported by the media. Pressures often lead to poor choices. Accounts continue to surface of teachers facing criminal charges for cheating during standardized testing. Researchers such as Dorn (2007) find this activity inevitable: “High-stakes testing narrows the curriculum which narrows the test preparation in turn leading to educational triage and outright cheating” (p. 59). Schools caught in this accountability nightmare remain powerless to escape this confining situation. Despite the eradication of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2015, accountability mandates have not subsided. Unfortunately, accountability measures are on the rise. Sizer (1986) writes, “Some critics feel, however, that their remedy merely begets another disease,

indeed a scary one--an overwhelming politization of the school's curriculum" (p. 5). Sizer's predictions over thirty years ago regarding remedies and their corresponding illnesses are taking place with the government's recently adopted legislative Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), that has strengthened pressures on teachers to teach to the test.

Tightening its grip on the schools, a one-size curriculum is being rationalized by those favoring more accountability. Kohn (2000) declares: "Politicians demanding high scores fits nicely with the use of slogans such as "tougher standards or accountability or raising the bar" (p. 3). Dorn (2007) adds, "With record levels of testing firmly in place, students are faced with the unenviable task of performing at prescribed levels set by politicians and state representatives who are oblivious to unique community challenges inherent within individual schools or districts" (p. xv). Has there been significant improvement in test scores due to increasing accountability? Thus far, little evidence has been provided. Despite the rhetoric for improving schools, data shows increased accountability put in place does not support the goal of raising test scores on a perpetual level and basis (Dorn, 2007). While growing dissatisfaction is aimed at teachers for failing students, ironically, it is not the schools' underperformance but the political and corporate systems controlling what and how schools operate (Apple, 1996).

What Prompted the Accountability Movement?

In looking to address this question, a closer examination of America's education and the public's perception of it is necessary.

According to Leiding (2009):

Storm clouds erupted in 1955 with Rudolf Flesch's book *Why Johnny Can't Read* reached the national best-seller lists, where it remained for more than thirty weeks. Serialized in many newspapers, Flesch's book struck a nerve, especially among parents who were convinced that the current curriculum was not teaching basic skills. His comments set off a national debate about literacy. (p. 23)

After the infamous *Why Johnny Can't Read* bestseller, Sputnik was launched by the Russians, serving as an additional spark fueling additional flames of discontent. Leiding (2009) writes: "Sputnik became an instant metaphor for the poor quality of U.S. high schools" (p. 23). American schooling was targeted and received blame in allowing the Russians to orbit the Earth's atmosphere (Sever, 2004). The perception most Americans came to accept was our country was being threatened by a hostile communist regime, and our schools were not producing skilled workers. A major shift of education for America was on the horizon. Sever (2004) further states: "Between the years of 1966 and 1976, 35 states passed accountability statutes including numerous new state tests including minimum competency" (p. 3). Looking back at the mid-20th century and comparing these events with today, patterns emerge once again with examples of national hysteria prompting calls for action based on unsubstantiated myths, striking fear in our nation. The shifting to these extreme measures of accountability continued to fester years later with the controversial Nation at Risk (NAR) report in 1984 (Sever, 2004). Declaring schools to be inadequate, the NAR report created a renewed panic in Americans (Johnson, Johnson, Farenga & Ness, 2008), (Vinovskis, 2009). Americans were outraged by NAR's verbiage that spoke of present dangers and future fears:

Our goal must be to develop the talents of all to their fullest. Attaining that goal requires that we expect and assist all students to work to the limits of their capabilities. We should

expect schools to have genuinely high standards rather than minimum ones, and parents to support and encourage their children to make the most of their talents and abilities.

The search for solutions to our educational problems must also include a commitment to life-long learning. The task of rebuilding our system of learning is enormous and must be properly understood and taken seriously: Although a million and a half new workers enter the economy each year from our schools and colleges, the adults working today will still make up about 75 percent of the workforce in the year 2000. These workers, and new entrants into the workforce, will need further education and retraining if they--and we as a Nation--are to thrive and prosper. (U. S. National Commission on Excellence, 1984, p. 14)

The national media added fuel to the fire in this travesty by continuing to report distorted information through rhetoric calling for greater control of education. The report blamed teacher preparation for student failures, including accusing numerous teachers as inept and unprofessional in nature. NAR called for higher standards, insinuating positive results would follow shortly thereafter (Vinovskis, 2009). This pattern of relying on a standards-based curriculum, that was first introduced by NAR, has not diminished nor does it show any signs of losing its strength within our schools.

Recently, one teacher shared with me her experience of being called to the local school board of education in her county. Upon arriving in the board room, all four walls and door were covered with data extrapolated from her grade level's recent benchmark test scores. The meeting began and she was directed to sit in the middle of the room, surrounded by district personnel on all sides. Each district officer then proceeded to level questions and concerns to this teacher addressing data that was of importance in their opinion. She recalled that the meeting continued

for over an hour as she was compelled to defend the reasons for such poor results. She was then excused and sent back to her elementary school, receiving a clear message to increase their efforts in adhering to standards-based teaching as the standardized exams were only a few months away.

Today, educators are held to strict control by these standards pushed down from these outside forces. Leiding (2009) writes:

Currently we have a combination of centralists, who see greater top-down regulation, accountability, and control of the educational establishment as the answer, on one side of the spectrum. This side includes strategies such as local management of schools, which attempts to place more power in the hands of local interests outside the school. The other side is instrumentalists, who see greater control by school-based teachers and other educators as the basic solution. (p. 9)

As an educator, I can affirm Leiding's (2009) description of the polarized forces struggling against one another for control of the curriculum in schools. Unfortunately, my encounters, as both a teacher and principal, have shaped my opinion that local control of the curriculum by school districts and administrators has not been transpiring for many years. For example, numerous district superintendents have shared with me their own frustrations and anxieties when attempting to explain their own reasons for retiring prematurely. Their rationale for resigning from their jobs resembles many others in the field who have sought alternate vocations. The common explanation they provide for leaving is a system out of control with non-educators making decisions and policies who have no understanding of the consequences on students or teachers.

This phenomenon of a mass exodus of professional educators has also been felt by parents across America who have lost confidence in local schools. Today, an antagonistic relationship has developed between schools and families. Parents are more inclined to view schools with pessimism and ambivalence. Conversely, schools have become more defensive in their efforts. Sizer (1986) describes this relationship: “In a word, lots of Americans have some doubts about the schools” (p. 4). Sizer (1986) further criticized the political dilemma by alluding to a “politicized curriculum, a set of academic mandates, shaped inevitably by pressure group politics at the state capitols, that are imposed on all public schools” (p.4).

With the business model paradigm firmly in place, principals are held to strict policies and guidelines outlined by non-educators making decisions for all educational administrators to follow. Principals are faced with more mandates with prescribed consequences set to go into effect when not met. As a result, in the classrooms, changes have taken place that are eliminating “teachable moments” with less emphasis on individualized learning opportunities.

Is Standardized Testing Driving the Curriculum?

To understand what educators are experiencing, it is vital to take a closer examination at how accountability influences our schools daily. “High-stakes” tests are often given this description due to the ramifications associated for students not performing well on state exams. Standardized tests carry powerful implications forcing schools to restrict educational efforts as testing week approaches. During my years in the classroom, I observed differences after testing week concluded with administrators breathing a sigh of relief that the most stressful week of the year had concluded. Tension was then shifted eventually to parents as they anxiously waited for scores to be reported to the families.

As a principal, being aware of these pressures to teach to the test (Apple, 1996), I began to challenge the annual testing phenomena by instigating several policies within my school that impacted my students, teachers, and parents. My approach was multi-faceted acknowledging that my assault on the status quo would not be effective unless all stakeholders (Friedman, 1962) were informed of my intentions to reduce this stressful annual event. Having said this, some of my initiatives were subliminal due to my school's emphasis on a college prep education with testing holding a high priority. I intentionally began to omit this topic during parent meetings. In its place, I began to place more emphasis on child-centered learning by garnering parental support with changes to the schedule that called for more opportunities for teachers and students to spend quality time together, that fostered relationships (Schubert, 2009).

This scenario of standardized testing continues to be reenacted annually. These accountability measures are not fair for numerous reasons. Gallagher (2007) points out that punitive measures are aimed at underperforming schools. What is lacking are the ramifications for states. Gallagher (2007) argues "accountability is a one-way street because test-makers, district administrators, state and federal policy as well as textbook publishers are not held to the standards dished out to the school" (p. 4). Darling-Hammond (2004) agrees, arguing that "the short-comings of a one-way accountability system holding children and educators to test-based standards they are not enabled to meet, while it does not hold federal or state governments to standards that would ensure equal and adequate educational opportunity" (p.6). Gallagher (2007) and Darling-Hammond's (2004) shared concern should prompt a deeper look into this injustice.

The time and resources required from school personnel to prepare for and administer testing is not justified. Numerous personnel are needed to oversee student testing, robbing time from the instructional process. It produces a domino effect on the school's climate with

opportunities for learning being forfeited by standardized tests. Dorn (2007) adds “this indirect cost represents time that counselors cannot talk to children, teachers cannot teach, and volunteers cannot tutor. These opportunities’ costs are invisible in a school budget but very real” (p. 20). Regardless of the cost of lost teaching time forfeited to “high-stakes” testing, there appears to be no end in sight.

Major Concerns with Accountability

Critical researchers have expressed concerns including prescriptive curriculums and the potential harm towards minority learners (Apple, 1996). Proponents of accountability direct attention to testing as a viable remedy while others maintain that higher test scores do not equate to more effective schools. Thomas (2004) writes, “America believes quantity equals quality--it’s all about numbers” (p. 12). This is a difficult task for educators to overcome– especially with one’s job being jeopardized, pending the publication of testing scores. Thomas (2004) adds, “We are a finish-line society, not a journey society” (p. 34). The proliferation of accountability has been circulated by the media who are quick to report dismal results. Popham (2001) writes:

Newspapers can easily write stories that compared schools within a district on the basis of competency test failure rates (and subsequent diploma denial). Consequently, a public perception began to emerge that schools in which few students failed were good schools, and schools in which many students failed were bad schools. The quality of schooling was being linked to the quality of students’ test scores. This approach to judging schools has flourished. (p. 8)

As educators, we have permitted this intrusion. Steadily growing in power, educators have stood by allowing this “cancer” to spread unabatedly. Faced with this infestation of

accountability, schools now find themselves paralyzed to slow down its progression. And, like treating cancer, simply removing testing is not enough; it must be replaced with child-centered instruction that will be discussed in subsequent chapters. Lesch (2007) writes, “Evaluation procedures themselves have now become part and parcel of actual curriculum development” (p. 7). Lesch (2007) describes this phenomenon as an “inversion” (p. 7) of the curriculum that has led to sending a subtle yet powerful message, which relegates learning to being no more than appeasing those in authority. While the debate continues if NCLB set out to intentionally punish minorities, it soon became apparent this would be the case only after a few years of implementation. Wood (2004) points out the detrimental effects of NCLB:

NCLB is set up to penalize schools that actually do attempt to make a difference for our poor and minority students. In this, the second year of NCLB, schools with more diverse populations are being punished by NCLB. Called the “diversity penalty,” this phenomenon occurs because the greater the diversity in a school, the more likely the school will fail to meet AYP [Adequate yearly progress]. (p. 46)

There are numerous issues with NCLB, that cause significant concerns. One disparity I detected while working at a predominantly African American school was a lack of funding, supplies, and resources. NCLB fell short in its effort to bring equity in funding. Schools that are predominantly composed of minorities and do not attain adequate yearly progress (AYP) are severely penalized with financial cuts. Johnson, Johnson, Farenga & Ness (2008) observed “Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana and Tennessee withhold funds from low performing schools (who need the money most) and sixteen states provide rewards to high performing schools” (p. 10). This contradicts what should be happening. NCLB went further by punishing these same schools if one sub-group does not make AYP (Johnson, Johnson, Farenga & Ness,

2008). Phillips (2004) adds, “NCLB results in less funding but more accountability” (p. 97).

This type of logic resembles a biblical example from the Old Testament. The story recounts the trials of the Hebrew nation, who at the time were slaves of the Egyptians. The Jews were given an ultimatum by Pharaoh who required that the Hebrews “produce more bricks but given no straw” in their assignment of building the pyramids (Exodus 5:7, King James Version).

Similarly, just as the Hebrews were expected to reach higher quotas on creating bricks with less resources, withholding funds from schools who perform poorly on standardized tests is not logical; on the contrary, this type of punitive action only serves to make school for impoverished students more challenging and frustrating.

One of the reasons why NCLB failed is addressed by Thomas (2005): “Plans do not take into account the socio-economic and cultural backgrounds of a school’s clientele, thereby holding the same expectations for students in crime ridden inner-cities as schools in wealthy suburbs” (p. 69). Additionally, Thomas (2005) referred to NCLB as a “one size fits all error” (p. 68). (Johnson, Johnson, Farenga & Ness, 2008) agree with other researchers writing “there is a lack of evidence of proof that standards with accountability equate to quality education or how well students are learning” (p. 25).

Efforts continue to be enforced through systematic accountability policies despite the atrocities continuing in schools across the country. Teachers are forced to control the learning environment while depersonalizing the individual. Consequently, harmful effects become instilled in children.

Lesch (2007) describes this tragic phenomenon by noting:

Once students are conditioned not to trust the validity of what they perceive to be meaningful experiences, they begin to feel alienated from such experiences in a manner that suggests to them that those experiences may be frivolous and not worth pursuing. In other words, they are actually learning to regard their own experiences of their world as being less worthwhile than the experiences that others who have been placed in charge of the direction of their learning have decided they should be learning. (p. 4)

The depersonalization of students that Lesch (2007) alludes to is disconcerting yet accurate. Children today, while attending school, are placed in the most restrictive environments in discouraging opportunities that celebrate choice and diversity. Students, in the 21st century, are told when to go to the restroom and what class classes they must take with few exceptions. Forced to walk in lines, like prisoners in a penitentiary, children are paraded down halls to assigned lunch times, assemblies or brief periods of daily outside recess. For those who have transgressed the rules in the class, outside opportunities are forfeited and replaced with being constrained to observe their friends play while they stand from afar on a wall or against a tree having to reflect on their non-compliant behavior.

I have always been amazed at the lack of common-sense educators possess for punishing children when students failed to complete homework assignments. For many, the school remains the remaining bastion of hope and promise where children can receive a meal or proper attention to their needs. Many homes, where our students reside, are places of despair with single parents who have the arduous tasks of raising multiple children on limited incomes. Often, this results with schools serving as a child's last hope for a better future. Yet, how do schools function in such a role? Regrettably, in my judgment, we are doing a poor job in such situations. Instead of working with individual students whose homelife is atrocious, our response remains rigid and

unyielding by robbing these children of their dignity as they are coerced to stand and watch as other students bask in temporary moments of free play.

Our culture places high emphasis on proficiency in basic facts. The types of responses expected are typically brief and concise. The regurgitation of facts fits conveniently with questions associated with “high-stakes” testing. Students are rarely challenged by questions requiring deeper levels of thought. Thomas (2004) maintains schools have abandoned creative learning opportunities in lieu of “valuing the ends over means” (p. 34). Thomas (2004) further acknowledges the sacrifice of experiential learning through natural curiosity inevitably replaced by rote learning. This mentality is flawed and extracts a heavy price for those who learn differently with various areas of interests. Thomas (2005) substantiates this argument writing “there is an overwhelming amount of evidence on child development, social psychology, and student learning indicates that such a one-size fits all expectation is ridiculously naïve and bound to fail” (p. 68).

Critical pedagogy encourages the facilitation of opportunities where learners pause and reflect on practical living encounters. A curriculum that is void of personal connections only serves to strengthen the powers that suppress creativity and imagination from learning. Wormeli (2006) warns many will shut down after prolonged exposure to curriculum, that fails to connect with daily living. Should we be surprised? Those identified as noncompliant continue to be transferred to alternative schools for brief time periods. Upon returning to the regular classroom, many take on a less combative attitude--appearing to have succumbed to prior expectations. Dewey (1938) believed “isolation is even more irksome to them [students] than adults” (p. 56). Should educators consider this type of intervention a success? I think not. What should be an alternative to the current prescribed and mandated lessons currently promoted? Ayers (1993)

calls for an approach similar to Dewey with “concrete experiential learning” (p. 3). This type of learning is grounded primarily with those who are permitted to “learn actively” (p. 3) in the classroom setting. Ayers is not alone in his beliefs. Schubert’s (2009) fictional work *Love, Justice, and Education: John Dewey and the Utopians* adds, “If education is to release wonder, imagination, speculation and a quest for meaning and growth in unknown directions, then how can purpose be established in advance?” (p. 72). Eisner (1998) equates schooling with an overemphasis on standards as a “tendency to convert education into a race” (p. 21). From my perspective, as a teacher and principal, it is a race many students and teachers are losing.

Ranking our Children with other Countries

One concern for those supporting “high-stakes” testing resides with America’s compulsion to compete with other countries in a global economic system (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1984). The hysteria from the Nation at Risk (NAR) report included rhetoric accusing schools with substandard performances. This negative opinion of education remains today. One liability with interpreting data from reports is that information can be manipulated and left open for misinterpretation. Berliner & Biddle (1997) address several false charges reported by NAR ranging from achievement rate declines of American learners from previous generations to unacceptable gaps, comparing our children to their western European counterparts. Berliner & Biddle (1997) point out that students in countries such as western Europe purposely eliminate weak learners before nationally reported tests are ever administered. They propose, “Thus, making comparisons between American schools with other countries cannot be assessed without disaggregating the scores among sub-groups” (p. 53). Berliner & Biddle (1997) suggest valid attempts to compare students with PSAT tests has never been considered-although indications point to a “flat line comparing America’s entire student

population sub-groups with similar sub-groups from other nations" (p. 24). In meditating on the words of Berliner & Biddle (1997), I reflect on the state our schools find themselves with the skewed attention towards testing and the obsession to keep pace with other countries. Not surprisingly, little is said nor mentioned publicly about the tremendous stress and anxiety high-performing students from other countries are experiencing.

A culture of competition has engulfed many schools in Asian countries and, as a result, suicide rates have increased among those students due to extreme stress and unnecessary expectations. Research by Spielberger & Vagg (1995) confirms such experiences: "Students often experience significant levels of test-anxiety which include low performance on tests and varying degrees of depression" (p. 7). With pressures to perform at increasingly higher levels, America's schools find themselves faced with similar expectations to produce a growing number ready for college. Thus, college preparation has taken on additional importance. In my viewpoint as a school principal, college prep courses are limited to presenting knowledge and facts dismissing collaborative approaches. Today, those who enter college, potentially suffer the consequences of a limited education and are ill-equipped for the rigor of an advanced curriculum that stresses higher order thinking skills.

Individuals learn differently and at various rates. Eventually, however, most arrive at a common destination. "High-stakes" testing deprives children of opportunities to experience individualized learning. Whitehead (1929) called for education focusing on the present. Whitehead (1929) writes, "The present contains all there is. It is holy ground; for it the past, and it is the future" (p. 3). Perhaps, the concept of the "present" has been lost due to high-stakes testing and its pervasive tendencies to implement a one-size fits all paradigm. Pressures to perform well also are passed on to parents. As principal, I often corresponded with unreasonable

parents and grandparents at the beginning of a school year, who were vehement that their child was a prodigy or genius and needed to be placed in extremely difficult college preparation courses. Reluctantly, at times, I acquiesced, knowing their children were not ready for this level of difficulty. Often as semesters would progress, many experienced frustration, depression, and loss of self-esteem. Not surprisingly, these same parents would return to my office pleading for reassignment to less demanding and more reasonable classes for their children.

Who is Impacted Negatively from High-stakes Testing?

Research suggests students coming from low socio-economic homes suffer the most from “high- stakes” testing and accountability practices (Meier & Gasoi, 2017). This reality has been difficult for me to accept, especially since I am a white man. Looking back over my life through a different lens as a critical learner in child pedagogy, I now understand why my initial experiences in the classroom as a child were quite successful.

My first year of teaching was a different story. The lessons I learned during that first year were enormous. Listening to my students’ stories referencing drive-by shootings and hearing screams late at night was difficult for me to comprehend. Now, twenty-six years later, I believe children coming from poverty households continue to experience bias through unequal learning opportunities. Johnson & Johnson (2002) describe conditions they experienced while visiting one low-income school:

The windows, tops, of the fluorescent lights, and rickety ceiling fans looked as if they had never been cleaned. Apparently, the walls had not been painted since the construction of the school. Scuff marks, holes, cracks, tape, falling plaster, and other signs of neglect

were everywhere. Parts of the overhead light fixtures were missing. The ceilings were water stained... A hole offered a view into the next classroom. (p. 15)

It is hard to imagine how learning can take place in such conditions. The lack of funding between poor schools and their affluent counterparts not only impacts learning environments, but with the current accountability protocols embedded within our school districts, poor minority students are trapped with no escape. Spring (1997) points out the irregularities with cuts in funding to schools already facing challenges inherently found among poverty ridden neighborhood schools: “Without equal funding of schools, academic standards and high-stakes tests will widen the gap between the rich and the poor” (p. 118). Johnson, Johnson, Farenga & Ness (2008) agree: “High-stakes test results most strongly reflect neighborhood and family socio-economic status--not student learning. The tests punish poor, minority, special needs, and non-English speaking students who must compete with children of affluence on the same tests” (p. 17). Dewey (1927) spoke of the dangers of those in power years ago and warned of the importance of placing the entire public’s education as a primary interest and priority. Tragically, for the less fortunate who come from impoverished homes, our schools are not serving students equitably. The trend for many remains the same. The poor get poorer while the wealthy and affluent continue to discover opportunities from multiple resources within our society.

The Poor Continue to be Left Behind

Children from poverty households continue to be “left behind,” not only with respect to the conditions of school buildings but in comparison with affluent students regarding standardized test score disparities. In a rural southern school district where I taught twenty years ago, the quality of education was polarized (and remains so) into two distinct logistical zones. The southern portion of the county was known to be “the affluent side” while the northern

segment of the county, where I taught, was stereotyped “the poor minority students.” My colleagues and I often displayed defensive attitudes--certain our children were just as capable of learning at higher levels on tests when compared to schools with predominantly affluent families. Mathis (2005) validates this argument: “Six hours of instruction a day for 180 days a year cannot overcome the effects of a deprived and impoverished home environment for eighteen hours a day, 365 days a year” (p. 592). Separated by the town’s railroad tracks, the schools were not the only buildings that differed in quality of construction. Banks, grocery stores, post offices, and funeral homes were all noticeably larger and more recently constructed on the affluent side of the tracks compared to our side with the dilapidated buildings permeating the countryside. To make things more complicated and pronounced, new housing developments were springing up, thus bringing in additional dollars for new school facilities and resources for the affluent families. Adding insult to injury, our students were unable to compete in standardized testing as reports were posted. Popham (2001) warns of detrimental effects regarding posting scores across communities:

These rankings invariably lead to judgments about which educators are doing good jobs and which are doing bad jobs. And because citizens believe that high scores signify successful instruction, the annual rankings place enormous pressure on teachers to improve their students’ scores on statewide tests. (p. 11)

I still recall the feelings I experienced when visiting the county’s affluent southern elementary schools for staff-development sessions. Recalling my disbelief in the plethora of resources at the disposal of their teachers, I remember thinking to myself: If only we had just half of the assets of these schools, what could be accomplished? Now, twenty years later, little has changed concerning the buildings, schools or the test scores. Sacks & Thiel (1999) describe this

phenomenon as a continuous cycle of “children getting short changed” (p. 50). One might ask the question: Are the teachers simply better at their jobs on the affluent side of the train tracks? I would respond with an emphatic “No!” I would choose to follow up this response with making several research-based conclusions. Haynes (2006) adds to the defense of minorities in schools declaring “children from poor backgrounds can succeed if schools are responsive to their needs” (p. 10). Additionally, Sacks & Thiel (1999) allude to the unfortunate truth related to equity battles for impoverished children: “These children are pawns in a political game” (p. 51). Education is a microcosm of our civilization. We should not be surprised with inequality running rampant in our nation’s classrooms. Those from impoverished backgrounds have become the recipients of bias through disproportionate funding disparities, which have exasperated an already broken pipeline of funding for education. As a result of similar situations transpiring all over the country, many of our children have been left behind via high-stakes testing.

Teaching, a Lonely Profession

I have witnessed fellow colleagues grow increasingly despondent with the testing mandates that require putting aside teachable learning moments, which have the potential to transpire naturally with children’s tendency for curiosity. We, who are in the field, did not enter teaching to act as authoritarians dispensing knowledge expecting regurgitation and needless information on multiple-choice tests. Dewey (1910) describes the dilemma that scripted lessons have on teachers:

The feeling that instruction in “facts” produces a narrow grind is justified not because facts in themselves are limiting, but because facts are dealt out as such fast and ready-

made articles as to leave no room to imagination. Let the facts be presented so as to stimulate imagination, and culture ensues naturally enough. (p. 151)

A teacher has a lonely road to travel with few to share his or her daily frustrations associated with authoritarian controls with no voice in choosing lessons and annual “high-stakes” testing. Fullan & Hargreaves (1996) state: “Teaching is not the oldest profession. But it is certainly among the loneliest” (p. 38). A significant number of teachers are leaving education, creating enormous vacuums of experienced and trained educators only to be replaced with poorly trained and unqualified employees through alternate pathways to teaching. Schools face increasing pressures from standardized testing and extensive accountability measures. These pressures are passed down the hierarchical ladder to classroom teachers. While many in the field do not condone critical pedagogy, I believe examining the learning environment through this lens can provide others, as it has myself, the opportunity to comprehend the philosophical forces working against research-based best-practice teaching. Ravitch (2002) articulates candidly the opposing paradigms struggling to win in classrooms:

Professional educators continued to believe that the inadequacy of the schools could be resolved by adding additional resources. However, policymakers, public officials, and, in some cases, community activists and parents concluded that the problems were structural consequences of the bureaucratic system of public education and had to be addressed by competition or structural change. (p. 15)

My memories of fellow teachers choosing to leave their jobs, sometimes in the middle of the school year, are not limited to a few examples. The levels of frustration for teachers continue to rise as non-educators referred to by Ravitch (2002) are now calling the shots instead of trained qualified educators. These influential decision-makers continue to wreak havoc on teachers and

the instructional process. Teachers who are not inundated and overwhelmed with students in their classrooms requiring significant attention due to their learning abilities or behavior outbursts, are certain to be confronted with unreasonable amounts of paperwork ranging from labor intensive prescriptive lesson plans while being charged with the task of analyzing testing data documenting their awareness of student deficiencies within a standards-based curriculum.

Within the schools, educators now view each other suspiciously. From my perspective as a teacher and principal, I am conscious of this phenomenon. Unfortunately, the outside forces as described by Ravitch (2002) demand quantitative results for schools. This has increased the distrust between administrators and teachers. Teachers feel abandoned by principals to fend for themselves and not make waves, which might be contrary to system policies. Many teachers speak privately among themselves criticizing their superior's lack of presence in their classrooms. The common assertion is that principals choose instead to sit behind a desk resting in their ivory tower. While I understand such criticism, numerous principals do not fit into this category of being a paper pusher. I would argue many principals are cognizant of the trials and tribulations teachers are experiencing; however, they lack the authority to make changes required within schools. Principals are also aware of consequences should their schools' scores not reach required mandates. Principals know their jobs will be the first to be forfeited for low test scores, thus affecting their own personal livelihoods. As a result, I have found a principal's job can be just as lonely as the teacher's job. I believe schooling is near a point where few can envision what is next. I am not alone in this opinion. Ayers & Ayers (2011) comment on the conditions in which our schools find themselves:

Schooling today is at a crossroads: Will it simply serve an old order that has reached the stage of crisis? Will it fight for a future in which a new economic bubble has been

inflated and Americans get back on the saddle of world domination? Or can we-will we-fashion schools that allow students to envision a new relationship with people of the world, a new purpose for social production besides the creation of more commodities? (p. 19)

Ayers & Ayers' (2011) challenge should not be dismissed as extremism. As teacher morale continues to decline, students will be faced with instructors focusing more on teaching to the test as the top priority. Can anything be done to stop the inevitable outcome, which I believe will be the end of public education? I believe the answer to this question is most assuredly, yes. As with any problem, it is important to be self-aware of the issues. Teachers need to make their voices heard of the unreasonable expectations and demands placed on them every day. Perhaps if more parents and policy makers truly understood the challenges educators face in classrooms, difficult questions might begin to surface within communities challenging those in political arenas to reexamine unrealistic expectations are being placed upon teachers. In addition to the demands placed on teachers, one should not ignore the sheer number of children placed in one classroom. I have found myself assigned with over thirty children on multiple occasions. Logically, it is unreasonable to assume critical learning will thrive in such scenarios. Teachers must be free to do their jobs and given freedom to work alongside their pupils, not over them as authoritarians demanding obedience and conformity. While this may be foreign in today's schools, it is nonetheless what must begin to be implemented. Reimer (1972) reminds us, "Teachers were greatly honored before there were schools and will again when they are freed to practice their profession without the constraints of forced attendance, mandatory curriculums and classroom walls" (p. 101). The one-size fits all curriculum continues its assault on our schools. Relegating all children to a single curriculum will only serve to further exasperate the learning

process. The devastating impact of this is cannot be accomplished under the current state of accountability mandates. Ayers (1993) explains this writing:

One thing becomes clear enough. Teaching as the direct delivery of some preplanned curriculum, teaching as the orderly and scripted conveyance of information, teaching as clerking, is simply a myth. Teaching is much larger and much more alive than that... Teaching is spectacularly unlimited. (p. 5)

Ayers (1993) equates education with relationships. Through building relationship one can witness true teaching. Teachers deserve permission to teach what they deem necessary without threat of ramifications for veering off scripted lessons, thus, learning is more apt to transpire naturally. Teachers can once again draw upon the curious tendencies children naturally bring to schools. In such an environment, principals and teachers work together, forging a curriculum based on student interests as practical building blocks for learning. Ayers (1993) describes this further: “A common experience of teachers is to feel the pain of missed opportunities, potential unrealized, students untouched” (p. 7). Meier & Gasoi (2017) assert “standardized tests are an inadequate measure of student learning and are crude instruments that have wrought incalculable damage to students, teachers, and schools, and to public education more broadly” (p. 96).

Teachers should serve as guides, not as keepers of all knowledge imposing their will. Children are not oblivious of the role they are expected to play in authoritarian classrooms. “High-stakes” testing dismantles the true role of the teacher. Phillips (2004) describes the effect in classrooms: “The kind of top-down initiatives...violated the integrity of educational discourse and the authority of the classroom teacher” (p. 103). Phillips (2004) calls for a return to a curriculum that fosters relationships while promoting mutual respect through symbiotic interactions between teachers and students, bringing fresh insight back into classrooms. The

current standards-based curriculum, with its emphasis on teaching to the test, must be replaced by a more vibrant teaching model. This new mode of instruction would be one that fosters exploration and discovery. It would be a curriculum where students seek answers that are derived by their own questions- a curriculum driven by curiosity while searching for understandings about the world surrounding them. Teachers must have opportunities to cultivate long-lasting relationships with their students. Only then can teachers come to appreciate a child's learning styles, interests, mannerisms and personality, that, when brought together, provide the critical components necessary for authentic learning.

Making a Difference One Educator at a Time.

After completing my seventh year as principal, it seems ironic I would serve in administration at this specific school. The primary reason for feeling this way lies in the fact that this is the same school where I attended high school thirty-five years ago. While I do not recall many of the daily episodes, there remain several etched forever in my mind. Some were pleasant and some were not. One person who made a difference in my life was an English teacher who taught an elective drama course, which I chose because I thought it would be an easy grade. Little did I realize that it would be one of the best decisions I could have made. Initially, I was apprehensive in taking the class. I possessed a speech impediment that often became more noticeable when speaking in long durations. Despite those embarrassing moments in her class, she continued to encourage me. I was encouraged to not allow this abnormality to inhibit me from performing in plays and literary events. Her tenacity to challenge me paid off. At local and state competitions, I received awards for placing first in numerous categories! I believe the motivation and effort needed to address this speaking abnormality originated from this unique teacher who fulfilled the primary aim of every teacher as set forth by Noddings (2005) states "to

promote the growth of students as competent, caring, loving and lovable people” (p.154). This teacher chose to spend extra time with me and others until a breakthrough took place. I can never thank her enough. I overcame my speech impediment thanks to this teacher who chose as Gallagher (2007) describes “to engage with a student-which is the heart and soul of education” (p. 28). This teacher understood this one important concept of what it means to be a special teacher. Far too often, however, experiences like mine remain an exception to the rule.

This chapter has addressed the detrimental impacts of “high stakes” testing on students, teachers, and schooling in general. Students from disadvantaged homes continue to suffer the greatest from a one-size fits all curriculum. Having served thirteen years as a principal, it is my belief this system of over-accountability has become so deeply woven into schools that it will be no easy task to undo many of these mandated practices. The time is now for those individuals concerned with the deteriorating conditions of schools to speak out articulating injustices. Change must occur not only at local levels but at higher points of government. Unfortunately, governments are reluctant to change and instead opt for a redundancy of operations. Schools, like governments, remain rigid. The real questions remain as to the remedy of the problem. Can the schools be improved using band aids and knee-jerk reactions? I believe that type of approach will not work. What must be considered and implemented is a total transformation of the curriculum requiring courage and determination. Our future as a democracy hangs in the balance. Let us open our minds to the possibilities before us.

CHAPTER THREE

THE THREAT OF NEOLIBERALISM

Ask most teachers what they deem to be the most detrimental factor for instruction in schools and their answer often centers around having to teach exclusively toward the objectives and standards prescribed by the state. In the previous chapter, I addressed this phenomenon of a “one-size fits all” curriculum via high stakes testing. School systems across the United States are forced to press onwards with this accountability mandate, despite the repercussions for many students and teachers who struggle to keep up with increased procedures and protocols introduced by the state (Gasoi & Meier, 2017). This section will address the economic ideology identified as neoliberalism as the driving force empowering the current accountability movement in schools. Reflecting upon research and my own practical knowledge as a principal, I will identify avenues in which neoliberalism continues to negatively influence students, teachers, and schools. Additionally, I will share how I wrestled against neoliberalism’s influence drawing from critical pedagogical writers by implementing strategies designed to disrupt neoliberalism’s influences at my school and those of my colleagues who experience similar frustrations and challenges.

Giroux (2008), speaks directly to the core of neoliberalism’s assault on our schools and values as a democratic nation. As a writer advocating critical pedagogy, Giroux continues to impact my personal pedagogical beliefs with his perspective and ideas. One quote from Giroux (2008) that speaks to me as a researcher is the following:

Within the discourse of neoliberalism that has taken hold of the public imagination, it becomes increasingly more difficult to talk about what is fundamental to civic life,

critical citizenship, and a substantive democracy. In its dubious appeals to universal laws, neutrality, and selective scientific research, neoliberalism eliminates the very possibility of critical thinking, without which democratic debate becomes impossible. (p. 7)

As an educator, I entered teaching within the constraints of a system already deeply entrenched in the accountability movement. Many students who were once free to explore their personal interests now found themselves trapped in a controlled learning environment with the expectation of absorbing specific knowledge like sponges (Freire, 1970). Within such an environment, students feel powerless, lacking a voice toward a curriculum of creativity once deemed possible. Teachers were expected to conduct specific, yet meaningless, prescribed lessons that included writing standards on the board, serving to placate the administrator. This model of education prevails even today. During those brief times when we, as teachers, were afforded opportunities to enhance our computer literacy skills, we found ourselves relegated to student desks after school hours forced to develop our skills in technological advances. However, lacking significant influence in these decisions, we knew our only alternative was to comply or face disciplinary measures. Discipline in the classrooms has also gone from bad to worse. One veteran teacher shared with me during my early years as a teacher, “Sometimes, I feel like the only thing I can hope to accomplish during a school day is to keep the children from fighting.” After hearing horror stories like that, I began to wonder if my four years of training to be a teacher was enough for the new school culture.

Setting the Stage for the Perfect Storm

What precipitated this intrusion into our schools? During the period after World War II, school districts required classrooms to function like factories, sending the message to teachers

that all children are to be seen and not heard. Schools were often regarded as the optimum venue to raise the next generation with pro-democratic values. Control of the classrooms across this country has diminished since the attention given to Sputnik in the 1950's (Sever 2004). Since that time, classrooms have taken on a mechanized atmosphere with the teacher possessing a curriculum handed down to the, not by the principal, but from bureaucrats at the state level.

During the days of the Reagan administration in the United States and Margaret Thatcher's leadership in Great Britain, neoliberalism's influence began to resurface with political ideology calling for greater deregulation of government oversight and programs. Opting instead for a free market philosophy, neoliberalism encourages competition among schools, calling for greater choice for families (de Lissovoy, 2015). Kumar (2012) writes schools that once provided a bastion for democratic values, now find themselves trapped in a vicious cycle competing for dollars to survive.

During my first year as a teacher, I experienced clandestine attempts of hiding the realities of educating children and the extreme challenges associated with teaching. One day, while supervising students waiting for school to begin, a fight broke out between two male students. Without warning one of the boys ran outside of the school and into the neighborhood with the larger student in pursuit. Fortunately, for the smaller student, I was able to overtake and restrain the larger boy until additional help arrived from the assistant principal. During that incident, in attempting to prevent the fight from escalating, I suffered a back injury that prevented me from teaching for several weeks. Upon my return to work, I was astonished to learn that neither student received any disciplinary action except being assigned detention for one school day. After inquiring about the lack of punishment, the principal reluctantly informed me of the school district's wishes not to suspend students. According to my principal, she stated,

“Too many students getting suspended leads to bad press coverage, which makes us look bad!”

After finding out later that this disciplinary procedure was common in our district and state schools, I was not surprised a few months later to discover that many schools began to implement in-house suspension rooms to privately house disruptive students in lieu of sending them home for days and weeks at a time. School officials remain reluctant today for the media to even visit classrooms unless special preparations have been made with the principal and the district office ensuring a utopian setting prior to cameras coming into the classrooms.

What message are we sending to our students with similar episodes transpiring daily? Unfortunately, it is a message many have come to realize all too clearly. Students quickly understand that misbehavior will be tolerated despite the verbiage printed in district handbooks via code of conduct policies. This mindset of hiding the truth continues to cripple schools further and in effect serves to strengthen the rationale for a more business-like model of education, which promises to raise the bar by holding teachers more accountable for student learning (Lee, 2007). At a school system where I served as a middle school teacher, I was amazed at the absurd approach taken by district personnel who posted daily the number of days remaining until standardized testing week. The count-down would begin several months out and continue until the final day as if a rocket were about to launch! By that time students and teachers were in such a state of anxiety that often resulted with students too nervous to even take the tests. This type of unnecessary pressure continues today with little signs of slowing down. I believe that teachers’ voices must be heard. And, if given the chance, such scenarios might be drastically altered regarding the value of testing.

How has Neoliberalism Influenced the Curriculum?

Schools continue to experience the pressure and temptation to remove art, music and physical education from the curriculum, allowing more opportunities for additional time for test preparation. With today's continued emphasis on accountability, science and social studies are now being targeted for removal from the elementary curriculum to add yet more time for students to prepare for testing. This is of special concern for teaching tomorrow's generation about democratic principles and citizens' rights as called for in the Declaration of Independence and The Constitution. Clearly, the decision to remove social studies out of today's curriculum in schools can only serve to promote the neoliberal agenda, which aligns itself with government deregulation and safeguards as prescribed by these historical documents (MacLean, 2017). Critical thinking skills inherent within the science curriculum are becoming less of a threat to the neoliberalism agenda that favors compliance over questioning (Giroux 2008). Similar concerns of priorities in the curriculum are found with the removal of writing from today's public-school curriculum. Within a few generations, many adults will not be capable of reading historical documents due to manuscripts written in cursive. Perhaps, not too surprising, only those who receive private education will be capable of comprehending historical writings with advanced curriculums. With this precedent in place, it appears time may be reversing itself back to the Dark Ages when only priests possessed the skill of interpreting The Bible. Most of the population were illiterate and incapable of reading scripture, thereby relying on clergy to instruct them on daily living requirements.

As restaurants are required to post annual health inspections reports, schools today must likewise share their respective report card scores on district web sites and other web-based reporting agencies for the public to view. Tragically, with few exceptions, schools with high

numbers of minority students find themselves with significantly lower scores for all to see. This is due to a lack of funding coupled with a curriculum that caters only to select students (Meier & Gasoi 2017). It is not uncommon today for many schools wrestling with budgetary concerns to withhold textbooks from students which, in turn, places greater strain on teachers to create scripted lessons from scratch. Teachers attempt to comply with this phenomenon by mass producing worksheets for students to complete. Often, teachers are ultimately faced with the dilemma of exhausting their quotas of paper and resort to personally buying copy paper from retail stores in efforts to maintain instructional practices in the classroom. Schools which are flush with resources within flourishing districts find themselves immune from such scenarios.

Wrestling with the Giants

It has been my experience as a school administrator, during the early years of the accountability phenomenon and beyond, principals have been required to develop detailed action plans designed to raise test scores should yearly results fall below acceptable ranges. In response to these demands, several of my colleagues put in place at their schools Saturday instructional programs and required their faculty and staff to return to classrooms on weekends and aid students identified as struggling on benchmark tests. Many teachers and students in public schools continue to find themselves staying long after the school day ends as well for additional instructional hours implemented by administrators to raise test scores.

Gallager (2007) describes neoliberalism in schools: “Compliance equals success, just do as you’re told” (p. 7). Gallager’s (2007) words are reminiscent of a television show I enjoyed watching, the *Star Trek* television episodes. I became particularly interested when the crew of the *Enterprise* encountered a new enemy, The Borg (Piller & Bole, 1990). The Borg wreaked havoc on any alien civilization, including the members of the star-ship *Enterprise*. What struck

me as odd was an unending phrase verbalized by members of The Borg to their enemies: “We are the Borg. Your biological and technological distinctiveness will be added to our own. Resistance is futile. Surrender and be assimilated” (Piller & Bole, 1990). The quote from *Star Trek’s* Borg episodes has prompted me to pause and reflect upon a similar opponent educators and students find themselves engaged within the confines of a powerful neoliberal system.

As an educator who has adopted critical pedagogy as a theoretical lens, I perceive connections with the assimilation of the *Enterprise* crew with the real-life dilemma with top-down accountability. Teachers who are courageous enough to defy compliance risk losing certification and their jobs. Students who are caught in the middle often lose interest in their education while others challenge school authority and quickly face punitive measures that include suspension and alternative environments to learn. The over-standardization of a “one-size fits all” curriculum stifles spontaneity and creativity. Students are discouraged from exploration and imaginative opportunities and relegated to the regurgitating facts daily.

Upon realizing corporate attempts to commodify schools using assessment preparation materials, I refused to purchase test prep software or workbook activities, which promised to raise test scores. This tempting offer by various publishers takes away more time from instructional opportunities and places even greater credence to high stakes testing. During informal meetings with fellow administrators, I encouraged my colleagues to follow suit with my ideas to refrain from providing test-prep materials, which only serves to provide additional profits to corporate entities who receive significant profit margins from test-preparation materials from schools. Johnson & Johnson (2002) provide astounding figures when examining the dollars that can be earned by publishers in one state alone. Johnson & Johnson (2002) point out that

even during the early days of NCLB, states such as Louisiana were raking in huge profits for test publishers:

We have been told that Louisiana will spend in excess of 56 million dollars on its accountability testing program--very disappointing when schools in the state have no hot water for the children, no library, no playground equipment, no art classes, a shortage of textbooks for each child, and uncertified teachers in some of the classrooms. (p. 154)

The profits described by Johnson & Johnson (2002) should not come as any surprise to those within public or private school administration. Often, principals are charged with difficult choices to make regarding discretionary dollars they have been given authorization to decide on by district offices. Unfortunately, due to the high stakes testing pressures, principals must make difficult choices whether to defer dollars away from the curriculum such as costs associated with field trip opportunities for students or new playground equipment and instead opt for additional test preparation materials designed to raise student test scores. For many administrators, the choice to purchase materials associated with improving test scores has become more commonplace within our schools.

Kohn (2000) sheds additional light on the massive profits being poured into scoring companies by declaring "scoring company revenues estimated at a quarter of a billion dollars in 1999 with all expectations to grow each year" (p. 3). During the past thirty years in my interactions with textbook publishers, I have noticed a trend where giant conglomerates have been formed, creating individual mega-companies. Unfortunately, for schools, this merging of publishing companies provides less options in selections of textbooks. One principal shared with me stating, "It's like they have us over a barrel, and we have only a few options given us when making decisions about what are the best materials for our students!" Another principal

expressed his frustrations while shaking his head: “You know, I can see why some of us are choosing to move away from text books altogether; it’s not worth it to allocate dollars on these new text books when they are so geared towards the tests.” Many individuals might be surprised to hear how many principals are frustrated with a mandated curriculum from the state. As another principal shared with me, “Hey, there is nothing we can do; our hands are tied!”

Sadly, due to the large profits being generated for these powerful corporate testing agencies, it continues to be more difficult to slow down the testing phenomenon. In theory, accountability is not necessarily an inappropriate practice. The problem with those who favor accountability in schools fail to comprehend the need to hold all parties to high standards. Giroux (2008) reminds us to ponder neoliberalism’s invasive presence: “The representations and by-products of a neoliberal assault on a democratic imaginary are everywhere” (p.164). Kennedy (2003) describes this dilemma: “Standardized tests have the potential to improve schools, standardized tests associated with high-stakes testing also have the potential to do a great deal of damage” (p. 118). “High-stakes testing” is more problematic and dangerous than beneficial to our children. Those who are advocates of “high-stakes testing” point to the low costs associated with the gathering of necessary data, keeping American students on track for global competition. Baker (2006) traces the history of multiple-choice tests: “One reason this test came into popular use is that the format became readily available. It was found that it was relatively easy to design a test using this format” (p. 4). Dorn (2007) concedes, “Finally, and this is not to be underestimated, standardized tests have lower direct costs than any other system of accountability that might be politically viable” (p. 19). While this may be true, as stated by Dorn (2007), the collateral damage associated with “high-stakes testing” far outweighs the benefits. Caught in the middle are students who are subjugated to mass testing sessions where they are

expected to sit for endless hours in testing cubicles where individual subject exams are administered one after another despite the hardship on children's bodies. One child recently shared with me his frustrations with an endless testing session proclaiming, "I can't wait to get home (rubbing his head), all this testing has given me a headache!" Unfortunately, *this testing*, he was referring to, was only the conclusion of an initial day of benchmark testing that would continue for many more hours and days during that week of school.

Neoliberalism's Assault on Democratic Values

Whatever is uppermost in the student's mind constitutes to him, for the time being, the whole universe. That universe is fluid and fluent; its contents dissolve and re-form with amazing rapidity.... He goes to school, and various studies divide and fractionalize the world for him. Facts are torn away and from their original place in experience and rearranged with reference to some general principle. (Dewey, 1902/2011, p. 10)

John Dewey's description of the child's experiences at school during the late 19th and early 20th century have not changed significantly despite the plethora of research in child pedagogy and development. Schools caught within the neoliberal gauntlet continue to extinguish the curiosity in children through various means, crushing individuality while promoting mass conformity. Dewey (1899,2007) points to the traditional arrangement of classrooms continuing today by adding, "Another thing suggested by these school-rooms, with their set desks, everything is arranged for handling as large numbers as possible; for dealing with children en masse, as an aggregate of units, involving, again, that they be treated passively" (p. 49). Dewey's ideas suggest a mindset held by those who control schools whose sole mission is the depersonalization of students, seeking to foster environments that promote communities free of individuals replaced by a collective mind-set superseding all else.

Critical theorists are all too familiar with the injustices carried out daily in our supposed “democratic” schools by powerful corporate and governmental entities. Lesch (2009) makes it clear by reminding us “learning is less chosen by the learner and making it more predictable and predetermined by narrowing students’ fields of inquiry” (p. 13). Lesch (2009) articulates the decline of a spontaneous curriculum needed so desperately in our schools. It is this spontaneity that is called for by Dewey (1938) when he describes another type of learning that should transpire in classrooms. Dewey (1938) calls for “collateral learning in the way of formation of enduring attitudes, of likes and dislikes, may be and often is much more important than the lesson” (p. 48). In narrowing the curriculum, the neoliberal agenda reaches far into a child’s future beyond his or her school years. Reducing what is taught in the classroom to strictly items known to reside on multiple-choice tests does not produce the type of learner necessary in our country to perpetuate a democratic culture. Ohanian (1999) also challenges the rationale for teaching only one curriculum and who makes these decisions.

Pressures reside within major corporations imposing unreasonable expectations on its employees to perform at higher levels on a continuing basis. Irrational quotas set by corporations on a weekly basis determine the projected quota for the next week. The stress and strain on adults to perform at such high levels result in additional stress for those same employees being forced to surpass the new quota for next week’s sales. One manager shared with me his frustrations: “If for some reason my employees met a weekly goal, we found ourselves holding on to our jobs for another week. The only problem was we were assessed a higher goal to meet the following week.” This example of raising the bar is replicated in schools annually under NCLB and ESSA. Lee (2007) concurs by writing, “Researchers and educators had raised concern about the negative consequences of NCLB’s test-based accountability and its

performance requirement and its potential to exacerbate existing racial and economic inequalities among schools” (p. 2).

I found it ironic that in President Trump’s last State of the Union address, he failed to use the word “democracy.” While it was one of the longest speeches on record for an American president, this ominous omission remains a concern for all Americans (Ghitis, 2018). One might argue that the United States remains the strongest democratic nation compared to other countries, but I would care to differ. We are not democratic any longer! I am not certain that we ever have been! How important is it that we as a nation remain true to our heritage as a democratic society? It is painfully clear that our leaders have moved drastically away from our constitution’s intent in recognizing equality for all. Beane (1990) declares, “The fact remains that the United States was founded as a democracy and we should continue to claim this right to democratic self-governance as one of its fundamental identifying characteristics” (p.53). Clearly, democratic principles make up a significant portion of the philosophical foundations, which this nation was founded but Dewey (1916/1968) argued, “Democracy is more than a form of government. It is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience (p.93). While it is true that we live in a world that possesses incredibly difficult and complex issues, nonetheless, Dewey (1916/1968) argued, “One of the central truths of democracy was that it should always be evolving in relation to contemporary concerns. The very idea of democracy, the meaning of democracy, must continually be explored afresh; it must be constantly discovered” (p. 197). Thus, within democratic parameters there lies, according to Dewey (1916/1968), freedom to recreate democratic ideals and principles that adjust to and with the complexities as identified within society. Tragically, we have done just the opposite in education! Stuck in the quagmire of mediocrity and complacency, schools are

paralyzed with fear of losing control and taken over by the state should test scores continue to drop over time. As a result, school districts make the major curricular decisions for individual schools by employing curriculum directors to ensure compliance and accountability. Neither the principal nor the faculty are entrusted with the authority to make significant changes for the school. Like puppets on a string, administrators at the district office dictate what to teach and how to teach it and relay their ultimatums to principals, who are forced to comply.

School to Prison Pipeline

The more time I have spent in the doctoral program in curricular studies at Georgia Southern University, I have been introduced to an increasing number of critical theorists who continue to speak to my episodes in the field as a teacher, coach, and principal. One author whom I continue to reap benefits from is Henry Giroux. Giroux, among other critical theorists, points to the destructive impacts of neoliberalism--specifically as it impacts schools. One quote from Giroux (2008) continues to motivate me as a researcher, educator and administrator:

The militarization of public high schools has become so commonplace that even in the face of the most flagrant disregard for children's rights, such acts are justified by both administrators and the public on the grounds that they keep kids safe. In schools across the country, surveillance cameras are being installed in the classrooms. School administrators call this "school reform" but rarely do they examine the implications of what they are teaching kids who are put under constant surveillance. The not so hidden curriculum here is that kids can't be trusted and that their rights are not worth protecting.

(p. 45)

Drawing upon Giroux's (2008) ideas of surveillance of schools, I was simultaneously noting the thoughts expressed by Foucault (1975) who spoke to the conditions of modern prisons coupled with underlying motives and intentions. Foucault (1975) pondered upon the reasons associated with prison revolts: "In fact, they were revolts, at the level of the body, against the very body of the prison" (p. 30). Thus, it was after combining these two authors that I began to realize that there was a militaristic presence taking place within schools across the country. It continues with additional efforts as a part of the neoliberal agenda that includes not only cameras, but now many schools have taken more drastic attempts of control. Lewis (2003) writes:

In the aftermath of the Columbine school shooting, districts across the country began to implement a plethora of new surveillance measures, including the use of cameras in halls and night-vision cameras in parking lots, bomb-sniffing dogs, random locker checks, armed police guards, crime analysts, metal detectors, transparent backpacks, and computerized student ID cards. Fifteen to thirty percent of post-Columbine high schools now have metal detectors, and there are security cameras in half of primary and secondary schools. It's an understatement to argue that schools now represent a subsector of the larger prison-industrial complex. (p. 336)

These words from Lewis (2003) prompt me to think of similar prison-like conditions where educators and students gather daily— America's schools. As a principal, I have also been given access to my classrooms and viewing multiple locations around the campus. Initially, I gave little or no credence to peering into classrooms, halls, parking lots, and various social areas where students and teachers are often found during certain times of the day. After all, wasn't this surveillance justified in the name of school safety? School resource officers are also more prevalent than any other time in our nation's history (Giroux 2008). Armed with pistols and

shotguns, these uniformed officers have been given authorization to hand cuff students and take whatever means necessary to subdue unruly students for minor offenses such as failing to abide by the school's dress code.

One principal shared with me her encounter regarding police intervention during the school day. One morning, as students were entering the school, she witnessed a male student who had been stopped by the school's resource officer. The student was visibly becoming more agitated with the resource officer who, in turn, repeated his command that the child's hat be removed from his head. Failing to obey the command, the student was forced onto the floor in the presence of hundreds of middle school students. Ignoring the principal's request to ease off with the physical force, the principal could only stand back and watch one of her students be handcuffed and carried off school grounds.

These stories of students being incarcerated for minor offenses are becoming more commonplace in our schools. Unfortunately, students in primary schools find themselves experiencing intervention and arrests from uniformed police officers for violating school rules (Gonzalez, Jetelina & Jennings, 2016). I have found in my judgment of visiting multiple schools, students are required to walk in straight lines and transition from class to class only when prompted to do so by a bell system that promotes unified conformity. In and of itself, this audible system to promote movement within schools may not seem significant. However, school transitions precipitated by a bell system, which are designed to be heard by an entire school population, lockdowns, and clear book bags correlate with similar practices found in prisons and other penal institutions in society (Sussman, 2012).

Perhaps one of the most surprising reactions I received from my faculty occurred when I announced the decision that I was removing the bell system from our school. Classes would

change silently without an alarm reverberating down the halls every forty-five minutes of a school day. Typically, such decisions would have been based on input from my faculty and staff. This would not be the case with this decision. After serving as principal for several years at this location, I found myself searching perpetually for strategies to combat traditionally accepted protocols, which I felt robbed students of individuality, such as class changes precipitated by an invasive bell. I suppose one of the reasons I remain opposed to transition bells is the correlation to prisons and their transitional movements during the day orchestrated by similar means (Noguera, 2003). During one group conversation with numerous teachers who were opposed to removing the bell system, I was not surprised by their feelings that it should remain in place due to historical and traditional protocols. Their argument was, “It has always been this way, therefore why change?”

This typical response to change is a mindset many in our society hold onto as a logical rationale for maintaining the status quo. We, as educators, often find ourselves settling for mediocrity due, in large part, to our reluctance and hesitation even when our number one priority is ensuring a climate within our schools where our children feel comfortable and safe.

Who Suffers?

Within our nation a deliberate attempt has been intentionally designed to perpetuate and favor the dominant culture while simultaneously suppressing minorities who predominantly make up the lower strata of our society. One does not have to go far to share this sentiment when examining the prisons in our country, which are skewed by mainly Hispanic and African American backgrounds (*Wacquant, 2000*). Clearly, the argument can be made that if compliance to the dominant culture is not evident, many Hispanics and African Americans end up incarcerated across our nation. Giroux (2008) argues that neoliberals are all too aware of this

phenomenon—perfectly willing to forfeit an entire generation or race to perpetuate corporate takeover of a nation.

Far too many minority children reside with a single parent or guardian. Lacking the cultural capital to succeed in our society, many find themselves destined for poverty and unable to prosper financially or emotionally (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1994). Meier & Gasoi (2017) continue to challenge all of us by writing, “How can we begin to think of ourselves as a democratic nation if a significant (and growing) segment of our population is made to feel that unless they adopt dominant cultural norms--they have nothing of value to contribute and therefore take no stake in a shared vision of the future? (p.5)

Having to forfeit your identity and ethnic heritage in a democratic nation should never be a requirement for advancement in a society. On the contrary, groups and cultures from all backgrounds and ethnic groups should be celebrated and acknowledged as important contributors in a democratic nation. In our schools, all students should receive equal opportunities and resources. While those in educational circles who are fighting for the democratic rights of all students, it is paramount to recall the words of Dewey (1913/2012) during his time and the onset of the industrialized revolution. Dewey (1913/2012) declares, “At no time in the past has the world faced as many serious problems as now. For, at no past time has the world in which we live been so extended and so complicated in its interconnected parts” (p. 471). These interconnected and complex entities alluded to by Dewey, act as a reminder to us of today’s similar circumstances we find ourselves encountering.

Dewey (1916/1968) formed a foundational basis in the movement to create schools as democratic communities. Dewey was an advocate of a richly diverse curriculum espousing democratic ideals between different groups, each with its own ideas and perspectives. He

believed in the ability of diverse groups to interact with one another freely and cooperatively (Dewey, 1938). Dewey faced criticism from both traditionalists and progressives in that he advocated for neither in his ideal democratic schools. Conversely, Dewey promoted a hybrid approach to education that included both educational approaches in the classroom (Dewey, 1938). This approach was consistent with his beliefs that schooling should not be an either/or experience but possess an eclectic aspect focusing on the experience of the student as the building blocks for all learning. Dewey (1938) called for schools to be open-minded and pluralistic in their thinking and to embrace diversity. Notable critical theorists have since followed the path first set forth by Dewey in identifying optimal conditions for learning. Freire (1970) was also critical of a curriculum that facilitated a “banking” of knowledge. Like Freire, Dewey believed all children could learn a curriculum emphasizing individualism and diversity. Dewey believed the curriculum should be fashioned individually for each student (Dewey, 1938). For Dewey, democracy was the ideal form of social life. He proposed lessons that challenged the critics calling instead for a curriculum that directly contracted what was predominantly the methodology at that time. Dewey (1913/ 2012) vehemently opposed the separation of subjects. He was critical of this mechanized approach providing few opportunities for students to view the entire curriculum collectively. Dewey proposed an integrated model that espoused values and skills associated with life in a democratic society and that this should constitute the core of the curriculum (Beane, 2013). What I have seen as a practitioner in the field for the past thirty years has been just the opposite. Students are relegated to lessons and activities outside the control of the local principals and teachers. Testing and standardization of the curriculum suffocate any attempt to promote democratic values. The over-arching question remains. Whose curriculum is to be taught, and who makes the decisions?

It is critical to understand that neoliberalism's impact is not always easily identifiable as special interest groups have laid siege on America (Giroux, 2014). Operating through complex networks, neoliberalism seeks to operate silently behind the scene. As a result, American democracy is under attack through the neoliberal agenda with the sole intention of stripping America of its democratic principles to nothing more than neoliberals who favor corporate controlling interests (McLean, 2017), (Giroux, 2014). The national media has been hijacked by special interest groups promoting lies and deception. It has found itself being manipulated to promote rhetoric that is counter-productive to democratic ideals (McLean, 2017), (Giroux, 2014). I see examples of this harmful rhetoric being promoted through social media with extremists promoting their agendas of hate and bigotry against minorities and specific ethnic groups. Just as similar propaganda aided in the displacement of thousands of Japanese Americans during WW II into American internment camps, today's national leaders allow special interest groups to drive deeper wedges of mistrust and false stereotypes targeting African-Americans and Muslims.

Feelings of discontent and uncertainty for a better tomorrow helped propel a celebrity billionaire into the presidency during the election. Helping to add fuel to the fire of uncertainty and fear, conservative think tanks such as the Cato Institute, The Heritage Foundation, Citizens for a Sound Economy, Americans for Prosperity, and Freedom Works have emerged over the past twenty years all backed financially by billionaires, specifically the Koch brothers (MacLean, 2017). As in the case with the Koch family, a strong philosophical leader, James Buchanan, was present to add insult to injury with his historical knowledge and ingenuity to assist the Kochs with strategies that would go a long way in helping to defuse the hope and enthusiasm present when the first black man became president of the United States. Pouring millions of dollars into

a war against President Barack Obama helped to destabilize and limit voting while deregulating corporations and shifting taxes to those in our country who are less well-off (MacLean, 2017). Buchanan's philosophy resembled neo-liberalism's ties to an open market with capitalism and less government control (MacLean, 2017).

An elaborate web of neo-liberalism spun by James Buchanan and the Koch brothers now seems to have strong support by the Vice-President of the United States, Mike Pence (MacLean, 2017). This free-market mentality trickles down to the schools. Thus, a weak government will perpetuate a weaker public-school system (Apple 1996). This attack on the democratic public system is creating multiple and complex issues for those of us in education. While democratic schools press for curriculum that condones critical thinking and collaborative learning, it is not surprising that this contradicts the conservative influences and powers who do not wish for the next generation of citizens to possess those skills. Other conservatives point to the benefits of a national curriculum. This, too, is flawed and can be easily construed as an attempt by the conservative right in standardizing or controlling what is to be taught and more specifically from a certain perspective.

There are powerful forces within our society such as the Kochs and other billionaires and millionaires who have made disturbing comments that they want all the wealth and leave little for anyone else (MacLean, 2017). The question remains: Can a democratic government in which all men and women are supposedly born with equal chances to succeed, have equal opportunities in a capitalistic society (under a neoliberal agenda) where greed and lust for immeasurable wealth abound? Unfortunately, the answer to this question may not be what many of us want to hear. Taking a closer look at democracy and its true meaning is not always easy. The meaning of democracy is just as ambiguous in our times, and the rhetorical convenience of that ambiguity

is more evident than ever (Apple & Beane, 1995). The same could probably be said when posed for the definition of capitalism. However, while the debating over definitions continues, more minorities will continue to suffer through compromised school systems catering to those with cultural capital. The assumption that we will find long-term answers to the drop-out dilemma, and to the realities of poverty and unemployment by keeping our attention within the school, is dangerously naïve (Meier & Gasoi, 2017).

As an educator who is also a Christian, I am an advocate of democratic schooling. Based upon the biblical examples, democratic principles are woven throughout scripture as Christ's followers are encouraged to treat each other equally— regarding no one less than ourselves. What we are seeing today and throughout the history of our country's inception are oppositional political and corporate forces vying against each other for more wealth and power at the expense of those lacking a voice. The options are undeniably clear. Those opposed to this oligarchy must decide to take a stand and resist by whatever means necessary (Giroux, 2014). Mayer (2016) believes our nation is on this path due in large part to those who are actively pouring billions of dollars into whittling away at democratically inclined institutions such as our public schools. Mayer (2016) cites Charles Koch as saying: "My overall concept is to minimize the role of government and to maximize the role of the private economy and to maximize personal freedoms" (p. 145). Unfortunately, for many, only a select few benefit from this ideology.

Should we be surprised that despite the tremendous loss of life that this nation continues to experience via radical, right-wing extremists using automatic weapons that have killed hundreds in our country, national leaders continue to procrastinate in producing legislative measures limiting assault weapons? Powerful groups such as the National Rifle Association have clearly made deep in-roads throughout Washington DC in preserving the profits of gun

manufacturers. However, bringing noticeable resistance to the attention of the media are hundreds of thousands of youth rising across the country demanding action. Giroux (2006) offers one possibility in addressing this sense of hopelessness regarding education by challenging citizens to take “an ethical stand about the purpose and meaning of public education and its crucial role in educating students to participate in an inclusive democracy” (p. 50). Perhaps there resides hope for a democratic America that seeks equal treatment for all citizens via the next generation currently in our schools. The choice remains with today’s generation whether the embers of critical consciousness will be snuffed out or facilitated and fueled by those courageous enough to resist by whatever means necessary.

In the previous two chapters, I have identified the damaging impacts on students attending public schools in this country from an accountability system put in place by those outside of educational circles who primarily reside within corporate entities with established political connections. Schools which were once operated and controlled by educators trained in curriculum have lost their decision-making abilities to outsiders who know little regarding child development and pedagogy or fostering the love of learning for students (Giroux, 2008). These new decision-makers, who mandate a “one size fits all” curriculum, are deeply rooted within a neoliberal agenda promoting competition between schools. The neoliberal ideology driving this free-market capitalistic machine continues to wreak havoc on many students, particularly those from poverty and minorities.

CHAPTER FOUR

NEOLIBERALISM'S ASSAULT ON CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

Research also shows Christian schools are not immune to neoliberalism's influence (Heertum, Torres, & Olmos, 2011). It has been my experience that neoliberalism, and its market-based ideology, guides and directs many decisions within parochial schools. As a principal who has served in two Christian schools over the past twenty years, I encountered significant neoliberal administrative challenges that surfaced during my career in parochial education. In this essay, I reflect on numerous examples in which neoliberalism has intensified its efforts in impacting Christian schools and principals across this country. Though the challenges may differ with public education, neoliberalism pursues a similar objective for both entities by implementing a corporatized and competitive system often replacing aspects of the school's original mission and purposes. From my perspective as a private school principal, I describe personal struggles, encounters, and efforts applying critical pedagogy in combatting the neoliberal ideology influencing private schools in the 21st century.

The Proliferation of Christian Schools in America

In order to comprehend the origins of the modern Christian school movement, a critical examination of its rise to significance, particularly in the southern states, is required. The Supreme Court ruling in *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954) initially caused little concern among many southern states because their representatives ignored the court's request for desegregation (Jarausch & Klarman, 2006). It was not until over a decade later that the federal government began strictly enforcing desegregation on public schools by threatening to cut off

federal dollars of annual aid, which was vitally important for the states to operate efficient school systems (Jarausch & Klarman, 2006).

Fears and anxiety spread rapidly within white communities as parents pondered what the future of schooling would be with the inclusion of black children among white children (Wolters, 2008). Many Caucasian families, who were feeling threatened by the successful legal actions removing the Bible from public schools, promptly formed their own religious schools outside of governmental controls (Jeynes, 2009). As a result, during the 1960's and 1970's, "white flight" began as private Christian schools grew in popularity across the south and the rest of the country. Christian schools ranged from independent entities to those closely aligned and fully sponsored by local churches (Wolters, R. 2008). During those initial years of prominence and popularity due to "white flight," Christian schools provided an alternative to wealthy white middle-class parents (Wolters, 2008). Christian schools continued to experience significant enrollment growth into the 21st century.

Neoliberalism's Influences on Private Education.

With the rise of global free marketing systems, public schools would not be the only target for neoliberals; private schools would also feel its effects and influences. Enrollment numbers across the country for parochial schools significantly declined since the economic collapse of 2008 and continue today (Heertum, Torres, & Olmos, 2011). Numerous Christian schools have closed their doors forever while leaving many families with few choices that include returning to public schools or home schooling (Davies & Quirke, 2005). Why have numerous Christian schools encountered significant declines in enrollment? Davies & Quirke, (2005) state that with the current economy, middle class family incomes have been reduced

despite the number of jobs generated annually. For Christian schools, this continues to serve as a vital threat to their existence (Ornstein, 2007).

In attempting to address the decline in Christian school enrollment, especially since the 2008 financial crisis, many Christian schools have implemented a number of strategies to improve their bidding for students, as they compete against each other from a reduced pool of middle-class families who remain potentially able to afford private school tuition (Davies & Quirke, 2005). It has been my experience that Christian schools have started to function within a business model. Corporations refer to families as shareholders, clients, and customers.

Teachers in Christian schools are encouraged to consider themselves not only as instructors but additionally as ambassadors for schools, and in this manner, use their relationships with families to encourage retention. Christian schools encourage parents and students to reenroll with strategic marketing campaigns held during the spring. This additional burden places stress on private school teachers and administrators, knowing that without enough students, the school is unable to guarantee continued employment. This is a concern unique for Christian school educators who have witnessed many of their colleagues terminated due to enrollment declines over the past decade. Numerous Christian school leaders have had the unfortunate task of terminating teachers during the last week of school due to lack of enrollment for the next school term. In addition to the shock and dismay of the teachers receiving notice of termination, those teachers who remain harbor insecurities and fear of similar treatment by their superiors.

Due to the competition for students, it was my experience that Christian school principals were also uncomfortable in meeting with each other for fear of giving away strategies, which were producing positive results in their own schools. During my thirteen years as a Christian

school principal, I can recall only one instance in which a meeting took place with other Christian school administrators within the region. The reason for that session centralized on efforts to allow another Christian school reentry into the athletic league. The demeanor and tone of that meeting was undeniably unpleasant. I was taken back with the petty attitudes and narrow-minded views shared by many principals that night.

Alternatives for Survival

Currently, Christian schools continue to seek alternate strategies to increase enrollment. Traditionally accepted practices from the previous century are no longer practical nor applicable. With significant numbers of Christian school closings, those that have remained open continue to court those families who show interest in private education (ACSI, 2008). The modern corporate tendency of forming larger institutions is now being fully implemented in private education (McMillan, 2007). Parents whose children attending Christian schools that closed found new homes in larger more established entities with greater resources and revenue (McMillan, 2007). Often, these robust and vibrant private schools were more aesthetically pleasing to the eye while touting multiple sporting options via larger campuses as compared to smaller schools struggling to survive with deferred maintenance on buildings and declining enrollments.

One approach many Christian schools have adopted is the rebranding of their school to target the general public (Hayashi, S. K. 2014). This well-known corporate strategy consists of examining past, present, and future marketing strategies that seek to aid potential new clients or shareholders in favoring their product among the competition (Hayashi, S. K. 2014). Ranging from changes in the school's name to altering the logo on signs and web sites, Christian schools have adopted this corporate practice of branding to assist them with dwindling enrollment trends (Frank, 2007). With the onset of 21st century challenges unique to private education,

entrepreneurial strategies can inadvertently lead to replacing the original purposes from which some Christian schools were founded (Volkman, 2004).

Often during this period of rebranding, the original mission, vision and purpose of the school are shifted in new directions. Whether this new direction is warranted or helpful in strengthening the school's finances is unique to each institution. Neoliberalism encourages a school to consider others offering similar services as potential threats and liabilities which, if allowed to prosper, could possibly assist in their own eventual downfall and closure. Neoliberalism sends a clear and powerful message to all Christian schools- rely on your own individual savvy and prowess to prosper as an institution.

Through my lens as principal, our school experienced such a transformation through marketing. In seeking possible alternatives and paths to follow with our local school trustees, thousands of dollars were allocated to a branding consultant company in hopes of impacting the current trend of declining school enrollment. After several months of deliberations and research, following the consultant's recommendation, a meeting was called gathering the faculty and staff together for the purpose of announcing the direction, implications, and marketing strategies, which would be implemented to improve the school's image to the local community. Included in the plan, the school's logo and crest were altered towards an updated design in hopes of appealing to 21st century families. The community would soon be introduced to new billboard campaigns that included a carefully designed statement to be embedded in all future advertisements on television, the internet, radio and signs. From my perspective, as principal and as an alumnus, the school which I had graduated from was being transformed before my very eyes. Perhaps these changes were necessary, perhaps not, only time can provide the answer to that question.

To remain competitive, a significant number of Christian schools feel pressured in adapting the business model philosophy, focusing on marketing their school to potential families (Volkman, 2004). Within this corporatized framework, parents are viewed as customers whose needs must be satisfied by excellent service. Parents are less likely to collaborate with teachers and school administrators by not pursuing advice and suggestions to enhance their child's learning opportunities. Parents within this business framework are sought after by schools desperate to fill seats in classrooms. This, in turn, equates to more revenue and stability.

Parents today, who have children enrolled in Christian schools have been enabled inadvertently to view themselves as vital contributors to private education. This creates additional strain on private school teachers conflicted between providing the best education for students requiring student accountability while simultaneously sustaining parental approval (Leone, Warnimont, & Zimmerman, 2009). Educators often find themselves in difficult positions feeling pressured to conform to the wishes and demands of empowered parents who threaten to move their children into another private school at their own discretion. Knowing this as a possibility, Christian schools work diligently from multiple angles in placating parents in hopes of maintaining enrollment numbers.

Welcoming Students with Learning Disabilities

Christian schools have also chosen to address the decline in enrollments by opening their doors to those students who have been historically predominantly shunned, children with diagnosed learning disabilities (Taylor, 2005). Historically, Christian schools shunned away from learners who were unable to perform at high levels of performance and unable to keep pace with other students. Students with diagnosed learning differences were turned away from Christian schools during the 20th century due to high enrollments (Pudlas, 2004). In the 21st

century neoliberal era, Christian schools are welcoming diverse learners into their schools with open arms. Numerous schools have opened their doors to these students in hopes of adding revenue (Taylor, 2005).

With a significant shift in enrollment openings toward students with learning disabilities, one unintended consequence Christian schools may encounter is the possible perception from the community associating the institution as a special education school. Leaders of these schools fear such repercussions from returning parents who may be considering another private school whose mission remains steadfast in maintaining a reputation of serving students with a rigorous curriculum (Taylor, 2005). In this age of neoliberalism, I find it interesting that those who have been dismissed by many in our society and, at times, stereotyped as unproductive contributors to the economy, are now courted by Christian schools who compete aggressively against each other for enrollment. I believe one reason for this shift in policy favoring students with disabilities can be found within neoliberalism's theme which welcomes all possibilities and opportunities to profit.

As a principal who operated within this context, I welcomed the opportunity to accept all students. One sought after program my school offered was the Learning Support Center (LSC). One of the reasons behind the success of the LSC at my school was due to the care and oversight provided to students identified with learning disabilities by trained educators. Hired with the expectations to work alongside the student, LSC teachers accepted their roles as liaisons between the family and administration, ensuring close communication critical to the child's success with a with challenging curriculum that can be overwhelming for some students (Fawcett, Brobeck, Andrews & Walker, 2001).

Unfortunately, I discovered as principal, teachers are not always receptive to the idea of making accommodations in their classrooms for students with learning disabilities. On many occasions, I found myself having to remind teachers that these students deserved equal opportunities to succeed and we as educators were obligated to provide necessary adjustments in our instruction. Far too often, teachers adopt narrow-minded mindsets by resisting change of any variety. Not surprisingly, the tendency to maintain the status quo is a trait that effects not only educators but, human beings in general.

Opening Doors to International Students

During my years as principal of Christian schools, a second phenomenon took place offering yet more revenue opportunities. Students from other countries were offered enrollment options if their parents agreed to paying double tuition. These extra fees assessed by private schools allow many schools to hire employees to serve as advocates within schools. The extra cost for enrolling international students provides few concerns for wealthy parents in China and other countries being courted by college preparatory schools in the United States. Christian schools across the country are working collectively with international brokering agencies and wealthy families across the world in attempting to secure additional students (Jordan, 2015). Yin (2013) is clear to point out that students attending Christian schools are not seeking religious indoctrination, but instead seek admittance into Christian schools as a viable alternative in preparing for American universities. Yin (2013) writes:

Their frustrations and struggles with academic and spiritual growth in a new cross-cultural setting, their reasons for coming to study in the United States at their own expense, as well as their motivations to come to the United States were investigated. The findings signified that none of the participants came to the Christian school for a

Christian education, but for a good academic education and a bright future. In addition, the absence of their home cultures, the lack of academic language, and the large culture distance contributed to their frustrations and struggles in the process of adaptation to the new school environment. (p. 139)

However, despite the motives for international students attending private schools, Christian schools reap financial benefits associated with international student enrollment. Regarding the students themselves, it remains a different narrative. From my perspective, faculty and staff are generally receptive to these students as they fit comfortably within a challenging curricular setting. A different story unfolds with the development of new friends. During non-structured activities, such as lunch or assemblies, these students are rarely found mingling with the general student body. Instead, I observed, international students sit in isolated areas or congregate together as a group when given the opportunity. Many of these students have shared their sentiments of loneliness with little hope of being allowed to return to their native countries until they complete their education from American universities. Their feelings of isolation should not come as much of a surprise. Numerous international students come to the United States with little say in the matter. Finding themselves within a foreign culture, they struggle significantly at times in the absence of families. Greater attention and care must be directed towards these students in their transition to this new environment.

Tax Credits and Vouchers

Christian schools have discovered a third resource to increase numbers in enrollment—vouchers and tax credits (Lane, 2013). Children from low income households are often persuaded to consider enrolling their children into private education through these programs. Vouchers remain a legitimate option for some families who meet the poverty level eligibility

(Lane, 2013). However, conflicts can surface when wealthy white families, who, already have their children in private schools, view this intrusion of low-income students as a potential threat in jeopardizing the image and integrity of their school (Benveniste, L., et al., 2002).

Vouchers remain a controversial issue within political parties as alluded to by Grove (2018) who writes: “One puzzle is why Republican politicians have long supported vouchers despite the fact that Republicans had fought for neighborhood schools during the school desegregation battles of the 1970s, whereas Democratic politicians have long opposed vouchers yet supported school desegregation” (p. 517). Grove (2018) asserts that each party’s current position on vouchers places it at odds with its “constituents’ preferences” (p. 517). White “well-off suburbanites,” a key Republican constituency, are not supportive of vouchers because they do not want an influx of urban students in their schools; African Americans and Latinos, key Democratic constituencies, support vouchers (Grove, p.517).

Meanwhile, Christian schools choose to rationalize this program position defending vouchers as morally responsible and ethically advisable (Benveniste, L., et al., 2002). Christian schools continue to be closely scrutinized by minority families in the deep south who know from experience that racism and bias continue today (Benveniste, L., et al., 2002). One of the challenges I encountered, while serving as a principal at parochial schools, was fostering an environment rich in the appreciation of diversity and the celebration of all cultures and backgrounds. One strategy I initiated was exercising due diligence in hiring faculty and staff whose hearts and attitudes were consistent with the teachings of Christ, showing no partiality toward anyone (Romans 2:11 King James Version). In accordance with the school’s mission, it was my job to ease equity concerns of these new families. Research shows that minority families remain suspicious of racism and favoritism across the nation (Benveniste, L., et al.,

2002). I have discovered Christian schools remain ignorant of subtle messages sent to low income parents who opt to enroll their children via tax credit assistance. From communication by email to parent conferences, educators often fail to identify with the challenges of those residing in the lower socio-economic levels. Despite this disconnect, Christian schools continue to focus on significant opportunities for possible revenue supplied by voucher programs.

New Role for Christian School Principals

One of the factors causing shortages in Christian school principals is a redefining skill set of qualifications called for within the 21st century. These revised qualifications have little to do with curriculum and prior leadership. In today's neoliberal competitive setting, the abilities to secure gifts and donations from affluent companies and individuals willing to contribute dollars to Christian school education is critically important to schools that often receive no direct state or federal funding. Jorgenson (2006) argues that leaders in private schools are now being sought after with previous experience in corporate backgrounds coupled with experience in marketing and fund-raising strategies. These new leaders are considered qualified by board members for the leadership position, which requires revenue generation to meet the needs of today's Christian schools (Dunne, 2000). My own personal encounters confirm what researchers are upholding regarding this new phenomenon in selecting leaders. Before accepting my first position as principal of a private Christian middle school, I had been selected to the next round of interviews for another private school in the region. During the second round of interviews, I was disturbed by the line of questioning presented to me from the interview committee. Instead of addressing school community related questions or strategies required for curricular improvements, their questions were specifically geared toward wishing me to provide stories pertaining to dollars I had raised from donations. It was at that point in the interview that I stated to the interviewing

committee, “Ladies and gentlemen, if all you want from your next head of school is a person solely dedicated in raising financial capital, I feel you have selected the wrong individual to consider as your next leader. In fact, I am going to withdraw myself from being considered.” My desire was to serve as a leader of a Christian school where I could work collectively with a group of teachers, parents, and students in fulfilling the mission and purpose of the school.

One powerful moment for me as a younger and inexperienced principal came from a conversation with a retiring veteran Christian school educator. I can recall in detail his words of advice to me on his last day serving as leader of one of the largest private schools in the state. Calling me into his office and offering me a chair for a few minutes, I remember sitting down, feeling quite fortunate to spend time with this well-respected private school leader. After a few pleasantries, I remember his words of advice to me: “Get out as quick as you can from being a principal!” Initially I was stunned, not only by his words, but the serious tone of his voice also made his words so vivid. Now, looking back at my years as a principal in Christian schools, I can appreciate his words of advice and caution. Obviously, this veteran leader had experienced similar struggles and challenges that, at times, were daunting and overwhelming in nature.

Despite noted levels of satisfaction, the demands placed on administrators in private schools are significant (Archer, 2002). These levels of stress and anxiety can be more demanding than pressures public school principals encounter (Leone, Warnimont & Zimmerman, 2009). One of the expectations placed on Christian school leaders is maintaining a high degree of visibility (Archer, 2002). The practical knowledge I gained as a principal in private education affirm Archer’s findings.

Upon arriving at school before the rest of my faculty, I was responsible for unlocking gates of entry into the campus in preparing for parents dropping off their children for school to

begin the school day. After deactivating alarms and codes, I strategically positioned myself in the parking lot where I would open each passenger door of every car greeting parents and students with cordial yet brief conversations. After this morning routine, which often lasted over an hour, I often found myself expected to conduct assemblies or oversee chapel programs, yet again greeting parents and relatives, exchanging cordial interactions with as many of those attending the programs as possible. At the conclusion of the program, it was not uncommon for me to rush to facilitate challenging parent meetings that required mediation skills, bringing reconciliation to the individuals at odds with each other. I often found my presence was needed in supporting teachers who might be feeling overwhelmed by a contrary student. During lunch with the students, not only was I responsible for maintaining a presence for my students but, often, I interacted with parents who wished to share their concerns regarding their child's progress. Several hours later in the day, drawing near dismissal, I once again positioned myself in the parking lot waving and exchanging pleasantries to departing families as children were reunited with parents. Additionally, I was responsible for supervising our after-care program. Thus, additional hours were required on my part to conduct this program, which lasted several hours each afternoon. In order to attend the extra-curricular events, I found myself rushing to be seen at school sponsored events varying from football, basketball, soccer, baseball, or tennis matches. I would be remiss if I did not mention the task of being visible during band concerts, theatrical plays, musicals, and open house programs, which typically lasted well into the evenings. It was not uncommon for me to arrive home late at the night, only to repeat similar protocols and duties the next day.

Principals in public schools are not required to adhere to such levels of public scrutiny (Jorgenson, 2006). Numerous administrators who previously served as public school principals

find the change difficult in making the necessary adjustments successfully navigating to the private sector. Many of those administrators whom I have maintained close contact with have expressed to me their feelings during those times of attempting to adapt to private education. Concerns surrounding a strong organization framework with decisions being implemented seemingly at random lacking input and reflection from other leaders stood out as major stumbling blocks.

Public school principals and superintendents are accustomed to systematic steps and procedures mandated by a bureaucracy not found in private education. Christian schools function daily on a different level, mainly due to their significantly smaller governing body consisting of eight to twenty board members. These board members have been traditionally charged with overseeing the direction of the school, the financial oversight of its expenditures, and the facilities, which often require maintenance. Board members of Christian schools can serve as effective leaders bringing insight and expertise due to their financial skill derived from the corporate world. Unfortunately, private school board members can also become stumbling blocks in preventing schools from focusing on child-centered learning. This occurs when board members bring their business mindset, which has served them successfully in the corporate world, and make decisions through the lens of a corporate entrepreneur. Decisions that should be focused on providing mission-based solutions are often skewed by a board member's approach that is heavily influenced by neoliberal corporate ideas.

I was all too aware of my interactions as a Christian school principal with affluent families and the pressures associated with maintaining healthy relationships with those in positions of power while having their children or grandchildren enrolled in my school. Christian school leaders must be cognizant of the delicate complexities between maintaining a strong

program for students and balancing those interests with those affluent individuals and families who hold significant influence and prominence within the school. Throughout my career as a school administrator, I was alert to the possible threat of being removed as principal should individuals or families holding influence become disgruntled.

Research on the longevity of private school principals confirms such dilemmas (Gilson, 2008). Christian school administrators typically have a tenure of less than five years before being replaced (Hussmann, 2006). Despite this reality, leaders can make sweeping changes within a school that public school administrators, due to high levels of bureaucracy, are unable to achieve (Leone, Warnimont & Zimmermann, 2009). Realizing the average tenure of administrators who served in Christian school administration is five years or less (Hussmann, 2006), I chose to maximize my opportunity by implementing changes within the school that focused on child-centered learning, which often conflicts with the neoliberal agenda calling for control and accountability characterized by a “one size fits all” curriculum.

Impact on Christian School Teachers

Neoliberalism’s corporate approach now impacts Christian schools internally concerning teacher productivity. Many Christian schools have adopted corporate procedures of guaranteeing satisfaction from their students and parents by implementing satisfaction surveys on teachers and coaches. These surveys are designed to gather feedback and insight regarding the overall impressions of children and parents. While school administrators contend that these evaluation techniques are designed to provide avenues for collecting valuable feedback from the school’s shareholders, teachers continue to express skepticism with gathering data from students that can provide administrators with less than favorable opinions of teachers. Also included as common

practices within Christian schools is the exit interview with parents who have decided to leave the school for certain reasons.

Parents are often encouraged to return to the school and to share stories and frustrations, which led to their decision to remove their child from the school. I discovered principals and leaders of the school are the primary parties present during meetings with the disgruntled parents. These meetings can become emotionally intense as parents recount unsatisfactory episodes often including their child's previous teacher. One concern that I have with this strategy of interviewing disillusioned parents is the possibility of casting a skewed perspective on excellent teachers performing satisfactory in other situations and circumstances within the school. Unfortunately, as a result of these exit interviews, teacher reputations can become tarnished, possibly leading to eventual dismissal.

Christian school coaches are also susceptible to being terminated in their athletic roles. Coaches are all too aware of the need to provide a delicate balance between competing at a high level and satisfying parents' desire to see their children compete on the field. There are countless examples in private schools of head coaches who were dismissed for illegitimate reasons. Sabedra (2017) maintains that some of the reasons for termination of Christian school coaches are often not associated with a team's success or championships. Often motives for their dismissal can be traced to decisions not to allow a son or daughter belonging to a prominent family in the starting lineup. Individuals with positions of power continue to hold influence as board members of Christian schools (Sabedra, 2017). Despite protocols put in place by school accreditation agencies designed to safeguard school leadership abuse of power, administrative decisions impacting teachers and coaches continue to remain questionable.

A Principal Fights Back

Within the neoliberal framework for education, schools, both public and private, are viewed as private businesses. Districts are viewed as potential markets. Students are considered consumers while knowledge is product (Giroux, 2008). With these corporate terms and ideas working actively within schools today, I chose to take a stand against corporate neoliberal intrusion as a principal. By setting in motion a revised curriculum, which maximized learning for students, the regurgitation of facts became less of a priority for my students. The curriculum approach I chose to implement emphasized critical thinking and problem-solving, developing skills in students to be lifelong learners.

One of the changes I implemented as leader of my school was establishing a policy that no child could receive a grade below a fifty on tests and quizzes. Traditionally, students in schools have been assessed truncated grades that virtually make it impossible to recover from despite improved scores on future tests and exams. The competitive paradigm influencing this traditional and corporatized approach in education condones this practice of permitting extremely low scores to stand. Typically, private schools hold fast to holding students accountable. And, it is a noble practice, to be sure. Unfortunately, it has been skewed over the years to such an extent that students who demonstrate glitches of imperfection find themselves in jeopardy of remaining enrolled.

There is a significant number of private schools that take great pride in removing children for not measuring up to strict standards. This survival of the fittest mindset accepts the notion for certain students to excel while struggling students are guided towards a mediocre future at another school. Neoliberalism upholds this idea of disposing of students and relegating many children to subservient lifestyles (Giroux 2014). Those who are unable to attain proficiency have

traditionally been encouraged to find alternative schooling options more suited toward lower levels of learning. I was not in favor of this “you are in or out” approach holding students accountable due to a single exam. Students live complex lives and arrive at our schools daily while coping with multiple issues within their families and surroundings (Ladson-Billings, 1994). This was one policy I chose to battle. Many of my teachers were uncomfortable with my decision to permit this allowance for students. While these educators may not have openly shared their concerns, I was assured by others that a group of teachers was not convinced that my decision was grounded on firm educational practices. As a principal, I have found that many private school teachers have adopted unreasonable expectations for students. Dewey (1902/2011) suggests this emphasis of maintaining an instructional style inundated with rote memorization and skewed approaches to instruction is diametrically opposite to a curriculum designed to foster a child’s growth and self-esteem, which focuses on the individual’s interests and proclivities. I urged my teachers to consult more often with students and follow protocols of communicating with parents in promoting greater success on assignments. By adhering to these communication mandates, students also remained accountable as a byproduct in their roles as learners.

Despite the lack of federal oversight and accountability measures in the private sector related to annual testing, standardized exams have been a consistent practice for numerous parochial schools in the United States (Benveniste, L., et al., 2002). It has been my experience that parents are accustomed to annual testing in Christian settings to allow comparisons between their children and other families who enroll their students in similar schools. I found this practice of standardized testing to be counterproductive to a curriculum, which requires focusing on critical thinking and problem solving rather than on the regurgitation of facts. As a result, I

worked to systematically remove standardized testing at my school. Though challenging, my efforts were successful to remove standardized testing. My approach to removing standardized testing had to be conducted in such a way that I replaced the testing with an assessment that was beneficial for students that emphasized levels of creativity and critical thinking. Simultaneously, the assessment downplayed competitive and stressful percentiles and stanines, while placing less emphasis on the regurgitation of facts via the multiple-choice testing format. I found that removing testing completely and too quickly would be ill advised. The rationale for moving toward this innovative format of testing critical thinking skills fits comfortably within the parameters of a curriculum that promotes choice and student interests.

This curriculum of choice is grounded upon the ideas of Dewey (1902/2011) and his beliefs on a curriculum catered to each student's interests. From the outset of my administrative career, I endeavored to learn my students' interests and backgrounds. Over a period of several years, I implemented a strategy of collecting an inventory of student interest surveys. After examining the data garnered from the students, I began to reach out to our local community seeking individuals skilled in areas my students favored. Working within the parameters of the existing school day, I was able to design a curriculum catered to student interests. This child-focused curriculum was welcomed by the students' parents. Multiple community business owners ranging from expertise in the fine arts, music, including professional voice instructors responded with enthusiasm and committed themselves to working with students during school hours. What was once only possible after school had become a reality during the school day, making the most of valuable productive time. Parents were appreciative that their children's school was now offering multiple programs, thus alleviating the stress of attending evening commitments. I think back to those earlier days when I was accused of watering down the

curriculum. To silence the critics, I would have to provide a meaningful education that would excite the students, which in turn, would be shared by motivated parents and the community. Working collaboratively with my teachers, our school committed to making this curriculum based on interests a reality. Shifting our school's curriculum from the traditional approach simultaneously opened a door for our school to receive national recognition for providing a distinctive curriculum, which assisted in silencing those skeptical of a curriculum offering flexibility and possibilities. My teachers showed great determination in working together in placing the child first with a curriculum that provided for opportunities for students to explore and discover complexities about themselves than they had experienced before.

CHAPTER FIVE

TOUCHSTONES OF AN IDEAL SCHOOL

Now that my research has investigated the over standardization of the curriculum coupled with neoliberalism's threat on democratic principles in both public schools and Christian schools alike, it is an opportune time to reflect on my thoughts of an ideal school. In this section, I discuss the importance of maintaining schools which house smaller student populations. I will provide research-based evidence that supports stronger relationships between students and teachers while offering a curriculum based on the interests of children. References will be given which support learning environments that actively promote a curriculum of compassion derived from long term relationships with teachers. The importance of collaborating closely with families is identified throughout as a critical component of my ideal school.

Today's schools operate under strict assumptions of performance and compliance (Au, 2009). For those falling short and not demonstrating mastery of the national standards, they face retention as well as assignments to special education classes for remediation. Au (2009) argues, "The strong framing associated with high-stakes testing literally communicates some students should not be considered as a valuable part of the curriculum, thereby increasing their alienation from the process as a whole" (p. 118). Au (2009) makes the case that one child's learning proclivities may not be identical with that of another child in the same classroom thus, offering a rebuttal towards today's mechanized curriculum. The mandated one size fits all mentality only serves to discourage students and frustrate teachers. With the number of teachers walking away from teaching, the curriculum must account for some of the blame for the mass exodus of teachers (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond & Carver-Thomas, 2016). We should remember that we are interacting with authentic children with unique personalities that require individualized

attention. Schwab (1978) believed “curriculum should be formed in collaboration with their [students’] teacher” (p. 365). Relationships and trust can only flourish when many of these restrictions of accountability are removed from the curriculum.

Prior to providing evidence into what I deem to be areas of needed transformation and a shifting of priorities in schools, I believe it is important to first mention the need for instilling in the next generation a greater appreciation of the value associated with wealth (Noddings, 2005). Grasping such a comprehension contradicts neoliberalism’s credence to acquire more revenue—even at the expense of suppressing others who are living at or below the poverty level (Giroux, 2014). We, as a nation, must renew our efforts in placing value and empathy toward others less fortunate. Typically stereotyped by neoliberals as insignificant members of society, minorities and families residing in poverty continue to suffer the greatest in this era of greed and its unending quest for the acquisition of wealth. Saltman (2012) adds, “the neoliberal privatization reforms maintain the dual system, leaving in place the elite public schools but targeting poor schools and predominantly students of color to turn them into short-term profit opportunities in numerous ways” (p.32). I believe this type of inequality is not acceptable nor is it ethically responsible. We must begin to care more for others—especially for those who lack the opportunities for their voices to be heard!

My proposals and suggestions for ideal schools will not be specifically itemized in a list format. That approach would be superfluous and narrow; it would be similar in scope to what we are already confronted with— a set of prescribed objectives controlling the curriculum. Instead, I propose a set of benchmarks aligned with Schwab (1978) and his identified four commonplaces of a curriculum. These four commonplaces are comprised of the child, teacher, subject matter, and the school’s milieu (Schwab, 1978). Lake (2014) inspired me with his

thoughts in exploring possibilities for schooling using the four commonplaces of a curriculum. In pondering such a novel approach to education, I believe we should ask the question: What is the goal of education? Whose purposes are being served within the context of today's focus on accountability? Rose (2009) offers the following possibility:

We need a different kind of critique, one that does not minimize the inadequacies of curriculum and instruction, the rigidity of school structure, or the "savage inequalities" of funding but that simultaneously opens discursive space for inspired teaching, for courage, for achievement against odds, for successful struggle, for the insight and connection that occur continually in public school classrooms around the country. (p. 150)

I argue that the primary goal of education should be to ensure a child is receiving a safe, enjoyable, and loving environment. Schools should be a place to explore individual interests in a setting where learners can benefit from their unique gifts and talents (Rose, 2009). School should not be what many are experiencing— institutions of conformity to predetermined rules, expectations and standards found within a one-size fits all curriculum. The ideal school I envision and propose is diametrically opposite of the current system in place. Today, schools are preoccupied with coercing students to reproduce specific behaviors and information providing results that can be quantified neatly on a school's web site. My recommendation would be to halt this banking method of prescriptive learning and replace it with a curriculum that places the interests of the child as the highest priority.

Commonplace: The Student

The interests of the student, one of the commonplaces, Schwab (1978) identified is a major component inherent in schooling. The student should be placed in the center of any

educational setting. I view the child's interests and development as paramount in forming a new curriculum. For years, children have been subjected to a curriculum of harassment that manipulates and robs them of their individuality and freedom in choosing areas of interest to learn. With the associated rise of neoliberalism and its emphasis on productivity, students have been forced to accept the premise that their personal feelings, desires, and interests are not important (Giroux, 2014). Instead, their interests are squelched and stifled in surrendering to a curriculum chosen by those in power who are interested in only strengthening their own place in society. Schools have become preoccupied in adhering to a curriculum that expects all children to attend college with its associated rigor and demands.

Alternatively, I believe schools must become centers of great care as Nodding's (2005) writes:

More often we try to convince students that they can "make it big in America" if they study and do well in school. I am suggesting that students need to learn how to curb their appetites and to consider the possible effects of their own wealth on the rest of the world.
(p. 124)

Noddings (2005) considers the possibility of an environment with a curriculum that diminishes the value of high-stakes testing and replaces it with a curriculum fostering and promoting a culture of appreciation for all children— regardless of socio-economic level. With the additional lens of seeing the world as a school principal and now at the college level, my perspective has been expanded. In cultivating relationships with future teachers within a teacher education program, I witness firsthand the challenges awaiting the next generation of teachers and students. Embarking on their own careers and pathways, these new educators will be confronted with

renewed efforts from a system obsessed with data collecting and a curriculum that caters only to the elite (Au, 2009).

I envision schools which foster relationships between students and teachers by considering the importance of developmentally appropriate class sizes. Having taught in elementary and middle school classrooms with excessive numbers of children, I can attest, as well as others who find themselves in similar situations, that the task to effectively work in that environment is both exhausting and discouraging. Furthermore, I have noticed that principals are quick to place new teachers in excessively harsh scenarios while veteran teachers seem to be assigned less stressful situations. Often, these veteran teachers were given less students who were more successful on standardized tests. To make matters worse for new teachers at numerous schools, classroom materials and resources are removed by others seizing the opportunity to better equip their own classrooms for the upcoming year. The phenomenon of placing experienced teachers in these types of settings while simultaneously designating new teachers into challenging situations is not logical nor conducive for many students. During administrative meetings, I inquired with several of my colleagues as to the rationale for such decisions. The consensual response I received was that new teachers needed “trial by fire experiences” in determining their abilities in the profession. One administrator proudly proclaimed: If the first-year teacher survives such harsh conditions, they might be rewarded in future years with less students identified as more proficient. This approach is both flawed and detrimental to students and teachers. Inexperienced teachers enter the field struggling with multiple trials. Allocating excessive numbers of students into classrooms should not be one of those challenges.

Commonplace: The Subject Matter

Schwab (1978) speaks of the subject matter as one of the commonplaces in education. I argue for a school whose primary focus of the subject matter is to cultivate within children an appreciation of themselves as human beings by acknowledging and celebrating the foundational rights they possess as citizens in this country. In my ideal school, content or subject matter is downgraded in importance and replaced by how material is learned. The journey of learning becomes prioritized. This shifting of importance would replace the current trend found in most schools which values compartmentalizing subjects and assessment by annual high stakes testing. Grunelius (1966) describes a similar rationale supported within the Waldorf schools writing:

If we want the child to develop an alert mind, it will unfold like a flower of the plant if we carefully nurture the preliminary stages out of which the alert mind ultimately develops. If we give him the opportunity to build up his own approach to live through his will, the cumulative effect of these experiences are later on transferred into the realm of imagination and ultimately into that of thinking and intellectual judgment. (p. 13)

How can schools elevate the importance of process over content within the curriculum? I believe primary schools demonstrate this type of learning, albeit only in kindergarten classrooms. In Kindergarten, children learn to share, interact with others in a multitude of settings and purposes and all the while doing so in a climate that celebrates the individual without the limitations of timelines and expectations prevalent in future years. In numerous kindergarten classrooms, students work with their peers at interactive tables, then travel to other areas within a large room taking advantage of additional opportunities to engage in different lessons crafted by the teacher. In these settings, students interact cooperatively with their peers in environments that promote freedom in learning. In kindergarten, significant importance is given to students

going outside daily and experiencing play time or recess. Evans (2007) points out that play time/recess can be a significant and meaningful period where authentic learning can flourish. Unfortunately, as alluded to by Evans (2007), opportunities of free play or recess have been substituted for organized games directed by teachers or administrators— robbing children of one of the few remaining times during the school day to interact cooperatively in a student-led activities.

During this first year in school, many parents are welcomed into classrooms and encouraged to learn subject matter together with their children (Patel & Stevens, 2010). As a school principal, I found kindergarteners to be happy and caring as they interacted with their parents during designated school days exploring subject matter together in a climate conducive for their developing minds and bodies. During kindergarten, parents are often visible visiting their child's classroom participating in reading lessons, working on crafts, eating lunch together, attending class parades, field trips and seasonal programs/assemblies, while culminating with special festivities in graduation programs where entire families and distant relative take great efforts to attend.

Tragically, for many students in both public and private schools, there is an abrupt halt to this type of experiential learning upon entering first grade. With first grade, the tables students were accustomed, are abruptly replaced with desks lined up in straight rows facing boards where the teacher stands writing endless amounts of information drawing from multiple disconnected subjects. Instead of enjoying opportunities for interaction, students are relegated to views of the back of each other's heads to gaze upon should their eyes venture away from their assigned worksheets. This assures children a dull environment— void of interactions. I propose an education system where learning experientially does not stop at the conclusion of kindergarten—

instead, it continues until graduation. This curriculum for the child I propose also rejects the adherence to standards-based learning of subject matter using prescriptive methods.

I call for schools to retain the primary school teacher upon students advancing grade level. I argue for a continuance of the same teacher for extended years. The advantages of “looping” with the same teacher over extended years has been documented. Hiltz, Somers & Jenlink (2007) write, “In the looping classroom children build relationships over time with an adult confidant” (p. 81). I propose the same teacher remains with the child for several reasons. First, and perhaps most importantly, a strong bond is forged over multiple years. This creates significant advantages for the child and teacher, especially when identifying the interests, proclivities, and learning styles specific to individual children. Schools can offer nothing greater to a child than an opportunity to cultivate a relationship with a caring adult who can serve as a mentor, guide, and facilitator of learning. These types of relationships are rarely found in the traditional approach provided within schools today. Additionally, by retaining the same teacher over multiple years, time is not sacrificed in forging temporary relationships that last typically less than a year. With the traditional approach, teachers are naturally inhibited in their abilities to fully grasp what motivates each student including their interests and desires. In today’s schools, the only feedback new teachers received concerning students arriving at the beginning of the year were occasional bits of information shared informally during staff development meetings. In today’s data and results oriented curriculum, teachers are not given the time nor the resources to truly cultivate relationships with their students. Hiltz, Somers & Jenlink (2007) give additional benefits of looping students writing, “One of the most positive elements of looping is that it allows a child to grow at his or her own pace, not at an arbitrary fixed-grade rate” (p.83). Thus, the current structure of presenting subject matter and the importance in

adhering to an instructional calendar far outweighs the intentions of numerous teachers who desire to engage in creative or unique lessons designed for individual learners.

My ideal school builds upon the concept of looping students and challenges school districts to rethink such promising possibilities. As the child reaches the mid-level years transitioning from concrete operational cognitive abilities to abstract reasoning (Santrock, 2008), the primary level teacher, who has been with these students since kindergarten, remains in an ancillary role. Prior to that time of transitioning to the mid-level and several years later at the third tier, students meet perpetually with their learning committee comprised of parents, a curriculum specialist, the primary teacher and student. During these meeting, decisions are made for areas of study to further explore and focus on for the next several years.

The third and final tier of advanced courses awaits students during their teenage years. The primary teacher remains alongside students as they attain deeper contextual subject matter at the final tier while maintaining opportunities to preserve interests. I suggest these three tiers of learning would continue to be housed on one campus– making it feasible logistically for the primary teacher to interact consistently and periodically with their students.

Commonplace: The Teacher

Schwab (1978) identifies teachers as one of the four commonplaces of education. As a former principal, now interacting yet again with teachers at the graduate level as a college instructor, I continue to witness the effects of a broken educational system and its impact on teachers. Often, teachers share with me their feelings of isolation. For many, this view is not surprising. Assigned to classrooms for multiple hours with students being funneled in and out, teachers adhere to prescriptively designed lessons that leaves few opportunities for planning

creative and innovative interactions. A significant number of teachers are faced with the dismal reality of surrendering to the demands of administrative protocols never leaving their classrooms or venturing outside for even a breath of fresh air. Additionally, many teachers in schools must take great efforts even in securing time to go to the bathroom. Only in prisons and jails can such similarities be made for individuals experiencing such dehumanizing treatment (Foucault, 1975). Yet, such is the case for many who are charged with the difficult task of educating children in schools across this country. Instead of receiving needed financial support and staff development from districts, it is the classroom teacher who has become the scapegoat often blamed when test scores and discipline referrals drop to levels never seen before. It is no wonder today's schools are experiencing dramatic teacher shortages at all levels (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Furthermore, teachers who once were held in high regard now find themselves on the receiving end of harsh criticism for being incompetent or insensitive to their child's needs by frustrated parents searching for their answers themselves. Thus, teachers often become scapegoats in the process.

My ideal teacher would be one that receives significantly more field training before officially assuming responsibilities of a teacher. Rather than placing a teacher candidate in a classroom for one semester prior to graduation, I propose exposing prospective teachers to actual classrooms serving as paid interns for multiple years after graduating from universities. Such a format would resemble paid interns actively operating in the medical field. These teacher-interns would be mentored and guided by veteran teachers within the three tiers of education proposed. Such an intern program would provide vital learning experiences by participating first-hand alongside veteran teachers and students in an engaged learning setting.

This design not only serves as a training ground for future teachers, but also provides an additional support to primary teachers by supplying additional caring adults within classrooms. Within such a context, the skills and abilities of intern educators become more developed and pronounced as they prepare for the challenging task awaiting them one day as future primary educators.

Is there a need to take a critical look at improving student/teacher relationships? I believe common interactions away from school can provide insight into the current dilemma. Over the years in numerous grocery and department stores, my wife (also an educator) and I have found ourselves shopping and going about our business when off in the distance, one of us would notice a child pointing and staring in our direction while tugging on their parent's arms alerting them that their teacher or principal was in the store. Upon seeing one of our students, we would often walk over to the family— exchanging pleasantries. Parents were often friendly but, the students usually stood erect, some would hide behind parents, shocked that their teacher, who they interact with only at school, might require groceries or perhaps shop for clothes too. For my middle school students, who I either taught or was their principal, it was usually the parent who would attempt to prompt their child to acknowledge my presence and exchange pleasantries while they tended to drift away from their parents hoping to avoid a potential spur of the moment parent-teacher conference right there in the store. These humorous moments are common for numerous teachers. However, buried deep within this phenomenon, is an underlying truth between many students and teachers that requires a remedy. Perhaps, much of the blame resides with the reality that children rarely experience times in classrooms with their teachers sharing simple yet profound moments. Little time is allocated to sharing ideas, wishes, dreams and

hopes with teachers. These types of interactions are lacking in many classrooms due to time constraints placed on teachers.

In reflecting back to my days in the classroom, several memories affirm the importance of fostering the student-teacher relationship. During my first year as a teacher some twenty-six years ago, I remember one experience that demonstrated the benefits of bonding with students. As mentioned in a previously, my first year in the classroom was challenging—bringing me at times in wondering if I had made the decision to become an educator. I had been placed into a fifth-grade classroom with over thirty students. Many of the children been retained the previous year—several held back for multiple years. One day, before the Christmas holidays, I was approached by the school’s resource police officer. I can vividly recall the moment the officer came into my classroom and asking if I was interested in serving as a chaperone for a camping trip with him and a dozen boys— all already labeled at-risk students. My initial reaction (although I kept it to myself) was not pleasant on account of having to forfeit this brief period of quiet time during a thirty-minute lunch break. Additionally, what this officer was asking of me, to spend an entire weekend with these boys away from my wife and children, further added to my lack of enthusiasm. In an effort not to discourage the officer on that Friday afternoon, I remember informing him that I would talk it over with my wife over the weekend and let him know my availability the following Monday. By postponing my decision and not immediately declining the offer seemed to at least give the appearance that I would consider the idea.

Later that evening, after putting the kids in bed, I shared with my wife the officer’s request for me to attend a camping trip with other chaperones and a dozen unruly boys. Before giving my wife a chance to say anything, I remember adding that many of these boys, who I taught, spent more time in the office than my classroom. After pausing briefly, she told me

something I was not expecting or wanting to hear by responding; Why don't you go? Shocked, I could not believe what I had just heard! My wife had just told me to go on this camping trip and enjoy myself! This was not the response I was suspecting I would receive—nor was it the one I hoped she would provide. Little did I know, at that moment, I would experience something special on that camping trip that would last a lifetime if I followed my wife's advice and attend.

The following Monday morning came too quickly (as it always seemed to do that first year) as I opened my classroom door before the students arrived. Upon reaching the classroom door, I can recall the officer yelling down the hall trying to get my attention. I knew what he wanted. I had to make my decision quickly. There was no way to delay this any longer. Following me inside the room, he asked: Mike, can you go camping with us? Hesitating briefly, I told him to count me in. The next few weeks seemed to move quickly at school with the boys rarely mentioning the upcoming trip. In fact, many of those who were scheduled to attend continued with their disruptive and aggressive behaviors that only caused me to be more anxious about my decision to serve as a mentor. When the time came, that Friday afternoon, for the boys and mentors to board the small school bus taking all of us seventy-five miles away to a remote location, the mentors were giving out warnings about proper behavior with expectations to abide by the rules. None of the mentors had any idea what we would experience upon arriving—I only wanted the weekend to go quickly and safely with no one getting hurt—including myself.

Once we arrived at the campsite in the middle of the woods, after traveling down a dirt road for miles, we were greeted by the resource officer who quickly asserted himself as the leader in the eyes of the boys. Instantaneously, I felt a sense of relief upon realizing that this officer would not need my help with the boys. He had planned out the weekend—every minute. Although he was stern in his initial encounters, the boys responded well to his requests in

unloading their supplies, setting up tents, and followed up by a five-mile hike jogging in the woods. Chaperones were encouraged to stay at the campsite– we gratefully complied. When they came back from the hike, the boys seemed to have changed. I believe (Littky, 2004) provides insight when children are removed from a dull environment and placed in real-world settings that promote positive results for all students. Littky (2004) writes:

This story also speaks to another piece of learning that formal curriculum development rarely addresses: the importance of getting outside your own environment to make learning real. The curriculum has got to include experiences that lift kids' heads way up and take them out of their textbooks, their towns, even their countries, if possible. In 1996, one of our MET students– a quiet, inner-city kid from a poor family– went on an Outdoor Leadership trip to New Hampshire, and it changed his life. When he came home, he sat on his bed with his mom and talked to her about the experience for two hours, the longest he had ever spoken to her about school. (p. 82)

I was not the only chaperone who noticed changes in these boys. Many abandoned their aggressive behaviors which were replaced with a combination of respect, compliance, and mostly signs of bonding with the resource officer–choosing to stay close to him willingly between transitions. By the end of the evening around the campfire, many students laid prostrate on the ground exhausted yet happy to be among a host of men in a setting far different than what they were accustomed to back home in their inner-city neighborhoods. The next morning and the rest of the weekend went smoothly without one incident or altercation requiring attention or intervention by school chaperones. When the time came to leave, I remember thinking to myself: Is it already time to go home? My wife was right, this was one weekend I really

enjoyed! The real question, yet to be answered, was: Would this experience have long-lasting impacts on the boys once they came back to school.

The following weeks at school provided the answer to my question in a multiple of ways. In the halls, the boys and I would exchange various greetings which included fist pumps that we learned together at camp. Many of them often requested to eat lunch in my classroom instead of spending time with the others in the lunchroom. Often, I would take them to the playground and throw the football or run laps around the school. For weeks after the trip, during times of conflict with teachers, the boys were brought to my room where I was given the opportunity to bring resolution before behaviors escalated. In class, during instructional time, I noticed their behaviors also significantly improved.

These interactions mentioned above served to strengthen my resolve to continue as an educator the following year. I had learned something about myself during that camping trip. These boys had not only bonded with the resource offer– but with me as well! Not only was this experience helpful for my boys, I benefitted as well! I began to see a pattern early in my career where connecting with students and forging new relationships beyond the four walls of the classroom have long-lasting rewards for the students and teacher (Littky, 2004). Today, I look back with gratitude that I followed my wife’s advice. By attending that camping trip, I noticed a change in me. I began to allow myself opportunities to question and challenge previous opinions about disadvantaged students and appreciate the challenges and difficulties many are confronted with in schools. It is this epistemological awareness Freire & Macedo (1995), refer to when we become critical thinkers– ready to make a difference in the lives of others.

As an elementary and middle school science teacher, I created outdoor science classroom learning centers at multiple schools in rural and urban settings. Building upon the experiences and opportunities afforded by an outdoor learning milieu (Littky, 2004), I was fortunate to have had the support of principals in creating and sustaining outdoor learning classrooms that actively engaged students despite my departure into the I role I took on later as principal. I think back to those relationships that were developed at those schools— particularly with struggling students. In creating these outdoor learning settings, I took efforts in making sure that these students brought a male relative on Saturdays for “work-days” at the outdoor learning centers. During those times, bonds of friendship were forged with students similar with the ones initially experienced my first year on the weekend camping trip. I have found that something special can occur when male students are provided opportunities to work alongside male adults in a project such as an outdoor learning center. Students can associate outdoor centers as part of a milieu (Schwab, 1978) that relate to authentic learning via lessons a teacher crafts that incorporates and compliments opportunities for learning. I discovered multiple subjects and lessons could be taught— not just science lessons. Teachers responsible for other subject matter began to find opportunities to hold class sessions outside. At times, entire grade levels filled the outdoor learning center for group projects ranging from civil war reenactments to modeling the solar system. Special times remain lodged in my memory. I remember how eager several female students were to demonstrate their skills in hand-feeding the fish they had raised in the pond. Opening the outdoor learning centers to parents and relatives encouraged families to participate in their child’s learning experiences. Littky (2004) speaks of the importance of including family, “Parents have got to get involved from the start right when we first start talking about designing their kids curriculum they have as much expertise about their own kids as we have about

educating” (p. 79). Such outdoor opportunities can serve to strengthen and enhance a child’s learning while simultaneously providing a forum for parents to gain a better perspective into areas which they can build upon at home (Littky, 2004). Taking advantage of such learning opportunities facilitates connections integrating content with families – making learning more cohesive between schools and homes.

In taking a more in-depth examination into my proposed role of primary teachers remaining with children over extended periods of time, valuable insight and perspective may be gained by examining the characteristic of successful coaches and their relationships with children. For years, coaches have established connections with students of all ages (Rezania & Gurney, 2014). As a principal, if a student was having trouble in the classroom, I would reach out to their coach for help. On many occasions, coaches were able to make a difference. When approaching coaches later, I would ask them: What did you say that changed this student? Often, their response was that they just had short conversations– nothing else. While these conversations between students and coaches may have been brief, the fact that a strong bond existed made the difference. What are the characteristics of a successful coach? How do they go about making a difference in the lives of students? These questions should be addressed separately in order to fully comprehend the importance of teachers adopting a similar role in classrooms.

One task of a coach is identifying strengths and skill levels of the team (Rezania & Gurney, 2014). When assessing the strengths and weaknesses of a child, coaches make initial assessments and determinations as to which roles and positions a player (the child) might best be suited (Rezania & Gurney, 2014). In the same way, teachers should be given similar opportunities, starting in the early grades, to observe and learn from the child in a setting which

promotes freedom and individuality via activities and play. It is during these early years that a child's proclivities and interests should be identified and celebrated by the primary teacher. Just as coaches identify the abilities of team members, determinations are made in guiding players towards suitable positions which complement their abilities and skills in producing a competitive team. Littky (2004) draws upon this adding, "Instead, we need to look at what is already inside the kid and use it to figure out how to help him learn more" (p. 81).

The role of coaches should be to guide and direct children in a manner which is perceived by children as positive and constructive (Gehris, 2014). Coaches who are successful do not force players into accepting positions. An effective coach works diligently to bring players to a realization that delegated roles are not based at random. An effective coach works collaboratively with players in a self-actualizing process of accepting an outsider's perspective and opinions (Gehris, 2014). For this process to be maximized, there are no time constraints. The role I envision for teachers, adopts a similar approach in classrooms. Teachers should be given the freedom to work alongside students within a context which affords the child the opportunity to demonstrate interests. Such interests can act as springboards for future learning by providing motivation and enthusiasm—crafted by teachers, making learning more practical and enjoyable.

Commonplace: The Milieu

Most successful coaches have a strong work ethic and require their players to practice routines which will be implemented in games. Coaches begin with identifying the skills of their players and then develop specific drills designed to enhance abilities. However, a successful coach should be more than one who builds on the skills of players. Instilling in players characteristics such as teamwork and an appreciation for others should be a priority (Gehris,

2014). Likewise, teachers should be working toward this goal in classrooms. Prioritizing compassion and equality for others then becomes an integral component of a school's mission which Schwab (1978) describes as part of the milieu— one of the commonplaces in education (p. 366). The effective teacher must be more than one who crafts lessons based on a child's interests. Teachers must hold a priority of instilling within their students an appreciating of the feelings and opinions of others. How can we expect tomorrow's generation to care for others and defend the rights of those who have no voice? Should we fail to recognize the opportunity to instill compassion and the ability to think of others we possess in classrooms? Schwab (1978) explained by writing:

Education cannot, therefore, separate off the intellectual from the feeling and action, whether in the interest of the one or the other. Training of the intellect must take place (“must” in the sense of “unavoidability”) in a milieu of feelings and must express itself in actions, either symbolic or actual. (p. 108)

Lessons of compassion and equity must start early in a child's education. It did for me—in kindergarten. Over fifty years ago, I vividly recollect having to attend a conference with my parents and kindergarten teacher. It was not a cordial event. The purpose of the gathering was to address actions I had taken the previous day with a drawing belonging to one of my classmates. I had made a poor decision to intentionally tear a piece of her artwork in half. Although the tear in the paper was minute (only a few inches), my teacher and parents were not going to allow me to develop such bad habits in the future. This behavior was going to be nipped in the bud. I can still recall the anxiety I experienced sitting at the end of that conference table as a five-year-old and having to gaze across the table at my parents and teacher. It was not an enjoyable time. However, it was necessary. As a result of this meeting, not surprisingly, no additional

conferences were required that year with my parents. Looking back now, I am grateful to my kindergarten teacher who chose to address my actions— even if it was a small tear on a piece of art paper. Her skillful attention in addressing this situation provided an opportunity for me to learn from in respecting the property of others. As a school principal, fifty years later, I have had opportunities to conduct meetings with students and their parents in hopes of producing similar results that might also last a lifetime.

Throughout my career in education, I have anecdotally asked adults and students; Who was your favorite teacher in school and why? In most cases, the individual I posed this question to has been able to respond with little hesitation. Although the names differ, one common theme has been noted. Teachers who connected with these individuals as authentic people with feelings and emotions stand out as a common thread. Little was ever mentioned crediting the teachers who assisted in content mastery. Wonderful teachers tap into students' dreams and hopes (Gehris, 2014). Each child is made to feel appreciated and an important contributor in the classroom. On the contrary, when prompted about the topic, these teachers were often viewed upon with disdain and at times, with hostility!

All teachers have a story to share why we chose education as a career. For some, a parent or close relative was a teacher. Others, perhaps it was a teacher that made such a difference in their life that fueled the choice to impact others. Regardless of the reason, some of us have strengths in areas where others may be lacking. Like our students, we teach differently imploring various methodologies to achieve similar purposes. Nonetheless, we can play an integral part in developing future generations. Great teachers not only sympathize with those struggling in their communities but, press on past sympathy, actively engaging in changing lives.

CHAPTER SIX

EPILOGUE

In the previous chapter, I discussed my ideal school which focuses on relationships between students and teachers lasting throughout a child's education. In writing my final thoughts on areas of future research to be considered, I see possibilities for change now more than ever before. With the onset of the covid-19 virus and the world-wide pandemic impacting our civilization, educational leaders in this country are being challenged to postpone annual testing as well as entrance and exit exams from elementary schools to graduate programs. At a time in our nation's history when education and testing were once synonymous with each other, students at all levels continue to be notified of exemptions due to the impact of covid-19. Assuming that a vaccine is developed, our educational system will likely return to its previous testing protocols with assessments that have plagued education since the days of NCLB. Building on this premise, I return to the importance of fostering long term relationships between students and teachers. I will identify several factors worthy of considering before implementing such an ideal school in the 21st century. Several potential issues surface that require attention prior to implementing a school designed with the ideas outlined previously.

Concerns with Student Mobility

One hindrance in maintaining long term relationships between teachers and students is acknowledging the high mobility rate of families within the United States. Today, students from all socio-economic levels transition to other schools within the same district, region or to other locations out of state. Whereas in the past parents often delayed moving until the summer months, today's families often find themselves moving during the school year. Consequently,

many children experience difficulties adapting to new environments and adjusting to new teachers, students, and curriculums. This can be the case for students with lower socio-economic backgrounds. Schacter (2001) finds that low income students and racial minorities move more often than students who reside within higher socio-economic levels. Dolbeare (2001) explains this phenomenon stating that poorer families are typically renters and not buyers of property and thus apt to be more mobile between geographical locations. Rumberger (2003) identifies greater student mobility especially high specifically within “large, predominantly minority, urban school districts” (p. 7). There are additional factors involving students impacting their attendance at specific schools other than permanent moves during an academic calendar year.

As a teacher, I encountered situations where students would travel out of state to visit extended family members in other states. One instance involved a student who traveled with his family to a large urban area several thousand miles away during winter break. Upon the completion of winter break, the student did not return. According to school policy of missing three consecutive days, I attempted to contact the listed parents/guardians with no success. Enlisting the help of school administrators and counselors, greater efforts were made to contact the family. The family contacted the school informing us that they were stranded out of state due to a broken- down automobile. They explained that they would returning to the area when they were able to come up with the finances to repair the car. Once the student returned approximately a month later, he experienced great difficulty assimilating back into the classroom routines.

On another occasion a student’s father was deployed overseas for an extended time. The mother and child left the area to stay with family in another state during the deployment, since they did not have a family support system in the area. As a result of the move, the child had to

say goodbyes to school friends and teachers as if it was the completion of a school year. These unfortunate transitions to other schools happen far too often to children in our country (Tucker, Marx, & Long, 1998).

Professional Development and Building Relationships with Students

A second area of research to be addressed is the need for training teachers in social and emotional skill development. There is increasing evidence that teachers lack professional development in ways to build successful relationships with students that foster positive learning environments. Bernstein-Yamashiro and Noam (2013) write:

Socioemotional development is not regularly covered in teacher education, nor are teachers' evaluations based on these connections. Nonetheless, teacher-student relationships can drive and define the meaning of teachers' work and can be pivotal to student success. While current state and national agendas focus on testing and hard data, many teachers acknowledge that teaching developing adolescents requires more than a mastery of content knowledge and pedagogy. (p. 46)

Not only are numerous teachers lacking training in developing relationships, many hesitate in attempting to form bonds with students for fear of crossing boundaries that can lead to accusations of inappropriate behaviors with students. This hesitancy not only applies at the secondary levels, but it remains a concern at elementary and middle schools (Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013). Despite these possible pitfalls in establishing strong relationships, I have witnessed the benefits of having strong social-emotional bonds with students who demonstrated difficulties in meeting the school's behavioral expectations.

One instance involved a teacher and student that had access to special education inclusion but was placed instead in her classroom to separate him from others. This student had a previous history of severe disruptive behavior that would often manifest during instruction and transitional periods. Upon entering the classroom, the student continued aggressive behaviors that included turning over desks, tearing papers in half, and yelling at others. Despite the overwhelming challenges this teacher chose to focus on areas of strengths that the student possessed. Realizing that the student's behavioral issues stemmed from the fact that he was unable to read, she provided ways for him to be successful in reading groups and in classroom discussions. She took the time to find out what his interests were by sitting down with him— talking but mainly listening. Additionally, there were small relational turning points that happened: such as providing a belt for the student in order to meet the school's strict uniform code, the teacher supplied a backpack, and the student was allowed to stay with the teacher during resource time if he did not feel like he could be successful that day. The results were astounding as evidenced by classroom evaluations by the school's administration. The teacher shared with me that a short time after one evaluation had concluded, she was called to the office to meet with both principals and the guidance counselor. Upon entering the principal's office, the teacher was immediately asked: "What have you done in the classroom to change the behavior of this child? We could not believe what we saw when you took the book out of his hands during instruction and continued to teach. He did not yell, nor did he turn his desk over like we have seen before." The teacher responded to the principal that the child knew that she would return his book at the appropriate time with it opened to the same page. She also stated that they had built a mutual level of trust and respect for each other.

This example of trust between this teacher and student serves as an important reminder that developing shared bonds in the classroom is a necessary component that must be addressed in teacher education programs. Rhodes (2002) speaks of these close bonds writing, “By conveying messages regarding the value of school and serving as tangible models of success, mentors may stimulate adolescent’s improved attitudes toward school achievement, perceived academic competence, and school performance” (p. 1663).

As mentioned at the beginning of this dissertation, my perspective as an educator was forever transformed by one student who died tragically one summer’s day. In reflecting on that time, as shared previously, there were significant improvements in his behavior and attitude. However, I omitted important parts in the story. I would be remiss if I do not mention the times we spent together with other students at lunch or at recess on the swing sets. Initially, I was surprised that this young man was so quiet. He never tried to dominate conversations as he traditionally would in class. Obviously, he was content to be a part of this group—swinging beside the teacher at recess. Many days, he would come and sit on the swing—never saying a word. After several days, he began to interject appropriate comments or opinions which were accepted by others. Almost intuitively, he would allow others to converse as they shared their ideas and thoughts about random topics. On some occasions, the other children would strike up a conversation that would then lead to another topic lasting until time to return to the classroom. I believe it was during those times at the swing sets, relationships were being developed and forged— not only with me, but with other students.

Need for a Diverse Faculty

Not only is there a need to train future teachers in building relationships with children, schools will require a more diverse faculty to avoid personality conflicts which may surface over

a period of years between teachers and students. Pianta (1999) notes that negative teacher-child relationships that exhibit high degrees of conflict appear to negatively impact school accomplishments. Hamre and Pianta (2001) found that personality conflicts with teachers in kindergarten characterized with high degrees of relational negativity, directly influence student's grades and test scores for sustained periods leading up to the secondary educational years. However, Birch and Ladd (1997) discovered that there are high degrees of correlations between close relationships and classroom success. Additionally, Silver, Measelle, Armstrong, and Essex (2005) further validate relational bonds starting in kindergarten by declaring students who experienced positive extended relationships with their teachers were more apt to demonstrate less aggression and hostility that continues for years.

In addressing this conflicting research with mentor teachers and students over extended years, the need for greater faculty diversity becomes a critically important criteria in my ideal school. Not only have schools fallen short by providing a narrow curriculum that provides success for only a few, Hodgkinson (2002) finds that today's teachers are still mainly white who were raised in middle-class homes. Bennett (2008) further contends, "there is little if any instruction provided to preservice teachers regarding working with low-income students" (p. 251).

At a school where my wife and I worked together as elementary teachers, driving to work in the mornings, we noticed several of our students running to school. During an informal meeting with my principal, I commented on the children's eagerness to get to school. The astute principal shared with me that for many of the children, this was the one meal they could depend upon. They were trying to be the first in line for breakfast. This comment from the principal reminded me once again of the trials and tribulations that some children in our country endure

daily. After watching our students running to school each morning, my wife and I became more empathetic and began discussing what we could do with the holidays approaching. Banding together with friends at church, a program was set in motion for families to provide jackets, clothes, shoes, toys, and dolls for the students. The school counselor was so impressed with the outpouring of love for these children that she continued reaching out to us each year prior to the holidays in coordinating families in need by providing specific sizes of jackets and clothing along with toy wishes. Many of the students who were provided jackets were so proud of their new clothes that they would continue to wear them well into the warmer months leading up to summer vacation. Thanks to an informal conversation with a principal, my wife and I became more aware and sensitive to the needs of the students we taught. Having been raised in two middle class families, we had not been exposed to the challenges many low-income students deal with daily.

This lack of training in cultural diversity for teachers is not uncommon in schools across the country. While Sleeter (1993) contends that preparing future teachers for working with students from various backgrounds and cultures is important, the need for a diverse faculty is recommended. Hancock (2006) asserts that although implementing diversity is a sound long-term goal, the reality remains fewer teachers of color are not entering the teaching profession. To account for this, efforts should be explored in attracting potential teachers from multiple ethnic groups and racial backgrounds.

Addressing Costs of More Teachers for Less Students

As described in the previous chapter, I envision schools with reduced class sizes while simultaneously adding additional paid intern teachers to assist primary teachers. Although, this idea may hold possibilities allowing critical time for students to function within a child-centered

curriculum, the dilemma of how to implement this plan may be hindered by added costs associated with such an arrangement. In today's public schools, budgets continue to be reduced often resulting in increased class sizes. To exasperate matters, large amounts of school expenditures continue to be diverted away from the curriculum and allocated to accountability and assessment measures.

During informal meetings I had with other public and private school principals, conversations often centered around budgets and abilities to make decisions where dollars might be spent. I recall one instance when I shared with the public school colleagues that, as a private school administrator, I had the authority to determine if I wished to hire more teachers or place those dollars in other areas such as technology or textbooks. The public-school principals stared back at me with disbelief. They shared their dilemma of being kept out of those decisions. Many of these principals expressed their dissatisfaction in such matters due to their limited roles which amounted to nothing more than sharing district decisions with their teachers where money would be spent in their budgets the following year.

As a teacher in the public schools, I recollect experiencing shock and disbelief when I was informed by my principal that I could not retain the current science textbooks. Although I had been using these textbooks as a resource for numerous ears, I was directed to give my input on other new editions. In essence, thousands of dollars would be spent on new books whether I liked it or not! Despite my protests, new science textbooks were purchased and brought into classrooms. In taking a closer look at this new text, I noticed the books had attractive colors and a special caption on the cover stating correlational standards for the state of Georgia. That was all. No other differences could be found. I thought to myself, what a waste of tax-payer dollars! During our next science department meeting, several science teachers remarked that they shared

my opinion on the new textbook. One science teacher remarked that the publishing salesman must have provided our district's purchasing agent with huge incentives that likely included free testing materials and assessment resources.

Au (2016) speaks of these lucrative profits publishing companies acquire from marketing testing materials to schools:

Pearson is paid to create tests, which it is then also paid to administer and grade. The company also markets a slew of test "support tools" for consumers to purchase, including test preparation materials, test-aligned textbooks, mobile apps, and computer software. In an education industry dependent on market competition to increase profitability, there is no better tool to turn teaching and learning into products— ready to measure, compare, and sell— than the high stakes standardized tests championed by the contemporary education reform movement. (p. 30)

In efforts to increase test scores, the result of purchasing these expensive assessment items as identified by Au (2016) drastically impacts the ability of schools serving low income students sacrificing resources necessary for student success. Bartlett (2005) agrees by adding, "Textbook publishers issue new editions when none are needed, "bundle" books with unnecessary supplemental material, and charge American students more than they charge students overseas for the same books" (p. 38). These extortionary tactics as mentioned by Bartlett (2005) further disrupts schools attempting to serve low income students. This inequity typically impacts numerous minority students who become caught in this trap of injustice. Books (2004) addresses this travesty, "Overwhelmingly, it is the schools of poor children that are rundown or unsafe, lack adequately trained and compensated teachers, or have too few if any up to date textbooks" (p. 75).

This dissertation has addressed inequalities prevalent in schools negatively impacting many students from low income households. Through strict federally mandated accountability measures originally enforced through NCLB and followed by ESSA, schools continue exposing children to scripted curriculums which compel teachers to teach to the test. Despite the evidence of the damages caused by a neoliberal system controlling public and private schools, it is unlikely changes will occur unless there is a public outcry critical of these assessment measures with their closely aligned scripted curriculums. In this section, I have suggested 4 areas of research requiring further attention that may serve to strengthen the kinds of schools I envision in the future. Rose (2009) speaks of such possibilities for schools:

What I am suggesting is that we lack a public critical language adequate to the task. We need a different kind of critique, one that does not minimize the inadequacies of curriculum and instruction, the rigidity of school structure, or the Savage inequalities of funding but this simultaneously opens up discursive space for inspired teaching, for courage, for achievement against all odds, for a successful struggle, for the insight and connection that occur continually in public school classrooms around the country.

(p. 150)

Rose (2009) ponders possibilities of what schools could be in the future without the assessment measures that plagues today's schools. The schools I envision allow for this discursive space for teachers to operate in an atmosphere of caring for less students over extended periods of time. With the close bonds that are formed in such an ideal scenario, students developmentally mature into adults who are caring, sincere, and responsible citizens who are more prepared to engage in critical discourse actively addressing the inequalities and injustices in their lives as adults.

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