

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Teaching in Grief: Critical Reflections, Redefining Justice, and a Reorientation to Teaching

by Heather Cherie Moore



DEMONSTRATION IN BALTIMORE - JANUARY 15, 2015 (IMAGE: DORRET)

## After Malcolm: 51 Years Later

With a 3/3 teaching load during the academic year, I typically use weekends to re-read course materials, construct rubrics, and prepare my weekly lesson plans. But on Sunday, February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016, I received news that shattered my world and completely reshaped my identity as a college professor. Every other year on this date, I typically celebrate the life and the legacy of Malcolm X on the date of his untimely assassination. Instead, at 7:30 p.m., my cousin, Nika, posted a simple message on one of my social media accounts that said "call me." This request was a bit unusual as our primary form of communication was usually (and rarely) via text message:

*Nika: "Hey baby cuz. How are you?"*

*Author: "I'm ok...I'm alive. Thankful for that. How are you cuz?"*

*Nika: "I don't know how to tell you this baby...but Ari is gone cuz."*

*Author: "WHO? I don't know what you are talking about Nika. What are you talking about Nika?!"*

*Nika: "Ari. He is gone baby. I know y'all said you were twins. I know you were close. I just wanted to make sure you knew."*

*Author: "Nika-please tell me you are playing cuz! Please! What happened?"*

*Nika: "He died in police custody."*

Once I ended the call, I paced around my home in disbelief and rubbed my forehead to relieve myself from this excruciating, invisible pain. Minutes later, I collapsed on my living room floor and screamed as loud as I could. I needed the world to hear this pain. I hollered for his 6-month old son who would never remember his father's voice and for his 11-year-old daughter who just lost her role model and her best friend. I wept for his wife and his high school sweetheart, the woman he loved for over 20 years. And I cried for Ari: my favorite cousin with the brightest smile, the deepest dimples, and the biggest heart.

Admittedly, as part of a large family, I do not have a close bond with many of my relatives. But Ari protected me and vouched for me when outsiders questioned my upbringing and my educational pedigree. I stared in a mirror that sits right beside my front door. Tears forced their way out of my eye sockets. As I looked at my reflection, I searched for my cousin's face. I desperately searched through my phone to see if I had any lost texts, social media messages, anything that would allow me to hear his voice. Then I wondered, *what were his last thoughts while he was incarcerated? Did he know how much he meant to us? Did he feel isolated?* And most

importantly, *did he know how much we loved him? How much we needed him back?*

After several hours, the tears dried and anger set in. Nika's last five words rang loudly in my ear: *He died in police custody.* While repeating these words, I immediately questioned my commitment to fighting injustice. I considered my identity as a young Black woman who was asked to contribute to a new, interdisciplinary program at a small liberal arts college. I thought about how often I justified the #BlackLivesMatter movement to white students who did not understand the need for such a social movement in a so-called "post-racial" America. Most importantly, I winced at the thought of Ari's final moments in his jail cell. He abhorred injustice in a variety of manifestations. He studied human rights activists like Malcolm X. But, I wondered if in those moments he, too, questioned the justice that he advocated for on a daily basis. And here I sit, on my living room floor, wondering if justice really exists or if it is simply an unreachable aspiration that we have yearned for since our introduction to the "New World." Before this tragedy, it was easy to speak about justice and injustice. It was easier to discuss the stories of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown because I was simply an academic citing and referencing a movement that I participated in as an outside protestor. But this was personal. I heard Ari's heartbeat in person and in real time. And in reality, I didn't run towards protest because I was raw with emotion. My commitment to fighting injustice was simply not strong enough to handle this.

On this Sunday evening, I wanted to cancel my courses for the remainder of the week. I needed to be surrounded by my immediate family and go check on Ari's wife and children. But in order to spend time with family during the upcoming weekend, I decided to assume my teaching responsibilities for the week. In prep for the workweek, I looked toward bell hooks's scholarship on healing, self-love, and critical pedagogy. She provided tough love from the "Sweet Communion" chapter of her book *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self Recovery*. She stated, "I mostly want to remind her of the recipes of healing and give her my own made-on-the-spot remedy for the easing of her pain. I tell her, 'Get a pen. Stop crying so you can write this down and start working on it tonight'" (hooks, 1993, p. 150). I was certain that my grieving would continue, but I knew that reflecting on this untimely experience could prove cathartic.

## Teaching, Grief, and Challenging the Master Narrative

This article interrogates widespread definitions of injustice, pedagogy, and the #BlackLivesMatter movement. On the one hand, this article describes a new professor's struggle to teach a pilot Multicultural Education course that includes anti-racist and critical pedagogies. According to James Banks, Multicultural Education is "designed to restructure educational institutions so that all students, including white middle class students, will acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function

effectively in a culturally and ethnically diverse nation and world" (Banks, 1993, p. 23). Specifically, I asked students to consider my own, first-hand experiences with injustice as they studied the field of Multicultural Education and became more "empowered," "knowledgeable," "caring and active citizens" (Banks, 1993, p. 23).

But on the other hand, I position the last three months of the course alongside a personal tragedy that radically informed the questions I posed, my interpretations of course scholarship, and my philosophy of teaching. I employ the self-narrative method and a grief framework to discuss my experiences during a new undergraduate course. Since the self-narrative method has become more popular across various interdisciplinary fields, I specifically utilize this method to question how I became a "culturally responsive educator in a diverse classroom" while I question the decisions I made in light of this tragedy (as cited in Kennedy-Lewis, 2012, p. 109). I describe my own personal engagement with grief and teaching as a "two-way discursive process. It constructs our experiences and, in turn, is used to understand our experiences" (Anderson, 1997, p. 213). I weave examples of key course texts, classroom discussions, and my idiosyncratic grieving process into my critical reflections on social justice, teaching, and loss. I question my own personal responses to teaching and grief within "local individual and broader contexts and within culturally driven rules and conventions" inside academe (Anderson, 1997, p. 213). This methodological framework is not uncommon in Education-related courses with a social justice bent or even among university educators who question "how we came to be teacher educators, what it is like to be a teacher educator, how we see our role, and how we think" (Puchner, 2014; Hayler, 2011, p. 2).

Furthermore, this self-narrative approach works to actively challenge the largely homogenous, master narratives of Black males in mainstream America, especially the recent images of Black men who die in police custody. Unfortunately, many martyrs who have become the face of the #BlackLivesMatter movement are only presented as criminals and so-called "thugs" who are products of their inner-city neighborhoods. But this article provides a glimpse into the man Ari was, the family he left behind, and outright challenges the media portrayal of him in his final hours. Lastly, over the course of a 3-month period, my teaching pedagogies were transformed through grief. Psychologists have studied individuals "grief reactions" and individuals' responses to tragedy (as cited in Shah & Meeks, 2012, p. 40). As described by geographers who have theorized grief, bereavement, and mourning periods, Ari's death "shocked me to my core and made me question everything about my beliefs, world view and life-decisions" (Maddrell, 2016, p. 168). This article contributes to scholarship on self-narrative and grieving frameworks from a first person perspective of a college professor during an untimely grieving period and an unexpected teaching transformation.

This Multicultural Education course was unique. Early in the semester, many of our class discussions were hypothetical—we interrogated student experiences in formal educational settings and their responses to key

educational terms like cultural capital, stereotype threat, acting white, and the model minority myth. But in February and early March, I began to push students to define justice and explain how that related to students of color inside American classrooms. My rollercoaster of emotions heavily impacted my teaching strategies—I spoke vehemently about educational injustices like the school to prison pipeline and how these realities supported systemic racism in our educational system and our nation. I described how the "school to prison" pipeline is no longer part of the hidden curriculum but rather is an acceptable ideology that has moved beyond the classroom into other institutions (e.g., television and social media).

Students in this Multicultural Education course watched me deal with various stages of grief. In February, I was mainly full of anger and sadness. During many classes, my eyes were bloodshot red and my soul was tired. In part, I was still adjusting to my life as a new assistant professor with a 3/3 course load. But, I also spent most of my days crying hysterically in my office often while preparing for my Multicultural Education course. Many of the key course terms were triggering; words like injustice, hidden curriculum, and meritocracy were not obsolete but rather were still part of public discourse in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The students saw my internal struggle: I failed to separate my personal and private lives inside the classroom. But my students purchased cards, sent their condolences via e-mail, and asked how they could support me in my grieving period. For the first time in my professional career, I *depended* on my students and teaching became my lifeline.

***Through unexpected grieving, and close engagement with core course materials in my pilot Multicultural Education course, I learned how to lean on my students during my undetermined grieving periods, learned the value of transparency in the classroom and how to truly be vulnerable with my students.***

I contend that academics in interdisciplinary fields can redefine their teaching philosophies based on their response to injustice. My identity as a college professor at a liberal arts college constantly evolved after my cousin's death. Through unexpected grieving, and close engagement with core course materials in my pilot Multicultural Education course, I learned how to lean on my students during my undetermined grieving periods, learned the value of transparency in the classroom and how to truly be vulnerable with my students. Through critical reflection, flashbacks, and discussion of course teaching materials in my Multicultural Education course, I discuss how my cousin's death radically transformed my pedagogical delivery and teaching strategies inside this particular course. While #BlackLivesMatter is considered a "global rallying cry" for historically underrepresented groups worldwide, I wonder *is there room for individualized*

*narratives on loss, justice, and teaching injustice in academia and popular media?*

While critical pedagogues like bell hooks and Paulo Freire undoubtedly informed my teaching experiences, my reflections are also informed by interdisciplinary scholarship in American Studies, Black Studies, and the voices of social justice educators. In the succeeding sections, I identify the two stages of my teaching transformation over the Spring 2016 semester. Each theme describes how my teaching identity shifted from late February to early May. In other words, these themes describe both my stages of grief and how the grieving process impacted my identity as a college professor.

## Stage #1: Confronting my Imposter Syndrome

After Ari's sudden death, my imposter perspective was heightened inside the classroom. As I entered the class on February 22nd, one day after I learned the news, I stumbled on my words and internally debated whether I should tell my students about my loss. Since Multicultural Education was a new course offering in the Community & Justice Studies program (and a new elective in Education Studies), I was overly self-conscious and hesitant to take risks in this course. My attitudes about teaching were in direct response to the race, gender, and disciplines the students represented in the course. At the time, I was a 29-year-old Black professor in the midst of a predominately white, mixed gender classroom. More than half of the students wanted to teach in K-12 classroom settings and a small group of students majored in STEM-related fields. Overall, I never wanted these students to believe that this course was less rigorous when I included my personal narratives as part of classroom discourse. I worried that I would be viewed as the Black professor who only discussed "Black" topics in popular culture and in American public schools. As I fought back tears and a deep lump in my throat, I told my students, "If I am not my usual bubbling self today, it is because I just learned that my favorite cousin died in police custody a few days ago. I am numb. I am very emotional. And I simply do not know what to do." My students were stunned. We held so many open conversations about injustice inside the classroom but in the face of this, their teacher had no scholarly recommendations and no lofty academic jargon to support this reality.

***Many students argued that there were pre-established boundaries and barriers between themselves and their professors due to titles, classroom expectations, and perceived roles in the classroom.***

Since high school, I have learned how to live comfortably outside my informal and formal educational networks. Admittedly, I was largely disconnected from my extended family networks. My working-class upbringing

differed from the upbringing of my relatives and individuals in my peer group. Some relatives ostracized me because I was raised in a nuclear family, attended prestigious schools with local and national reputations, and proudly displayed a diverse musical palate. I also did not find a home within the confines of my formal educational institutions. My long-term aspirations to attain a terminal degree and be a college professor did not match my grade point average. And as the product of a working class family, I knew nothing about the unwritten rules of the academy as both an undergraduate and graduate student. I was stuck between two worlds: I was not part of my extended family network and I was not privy to the inner workings of the academic environment. I certainly felt like an imposter who found it "hard to believe that they deserve any credit for what they may have achieved and, whatever their outward appearances, remain internally convinced that they are frauds" (Pedler, 2011, p. 90). My first-hand experience with imposter syndrome was evident in my interactions with family members and my assumed positionality in various educational institutions. Originally defined as a phenomenon, the term "imposter syndrome" was coined by psychologists Pauline Rose Clance and Suzanne Imes in the late 1970s (Gravois, 2007). Over the past 40 years, the term was firmly grounded in social sciences literature. Imposter syndrome can be defined as "individuals' feelings of not being as capable or adequate as others perceive or evaluate them to be" (Brems, Baldwin, Davis & Namyniuk, 1994, p. 183-184). My nihilistic response to these realities led to feeling like an imposter both inside and outside the academy. By all accounts, I still suffer from imposter syndrome in different spaces within the ivory tower.

But my relationship with my cousin Ari was slightly different. During several family functions, he would openly support my pursuit of a terminal degree and never outright question my educational training. When my family members would question why I attended "college" for longer than the typical 4-year period or make comments about my taste in music, Ari would always remark, "It's all good, cuz" or "Keep working hard cuz. You know I'm proud of you." In Ari's presence, my authenticity was never questioned—which was not always the case in the academic world. In the final years of his life, he was an avid reader and spent his last days researching ways to fight the multitude of injustices that plagued our communities. We even discussed our interpretations of Cornel West's "Nihilism in Black America" when we considered the violence in the predominately Black communities in our hometown. Immediately following his death, my imposter feelings in life and academia were pushed to the forefront.

I turned to my students for advice and I asked for their support. I wondered if bell hooks (1994) would appreciate this shift in my classroom when she asserted, "Professors who expect students to share confessional narratives but who are themselves unwilling to share are exercising power in a manner that could be coercive" (p. 21). We opened the course using this hooks's text and I asked students about their most meaningful educational experiences. Many students argued that there were pre-

established boundaries and barriers between themselves and their professors due to titles, classroom expectations, and perceived roles in the classroom. But when I read hooks's discussion of "vulnerability" inside the classroom setting, I reflected on my own teaching style. While my courses were discussion-based, I usually refused to be fully transparent with many of my students. In turn, some of my former students read me as unapproachable. In late February, my students conducted a critical media examination of the acclaimed documentary *Boys of Baraka* (2003) in preparation for their midterm examination. I looked forward to this date on the syllabus since this was the first time I had the opportunity to discuss my own scholarly interests. While watching the film, I could not help but wonder what destiny were these young men headed towards. *Could they be the author of their own futures, goals, and dreams?* I watched the film in a sober state but was reminded that injustices both inside and outside school settings were multi-faceted and uniquely intertwined. However, after Ari's death, I had to grapple with the very ideas that had become the foundation I set for this Multicultural Education course.

My deep commitment to a student centered classroom environment seeped into my imposter perspective. I began to question my teaching strategies and the syllabus I created several months prior. For instance, during our February 24th discussion of Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate's (1995) seminal work on Critical Race Theory in Education, I was called to consider the types of work I support and the type of educational training that my students received. I wondered if I was teaching a Multicultural Education course that supported "Multicultural paradigms [that] are mired in liberal ideology that offers no radical change in the current order" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 62). I questioned whether my students would be able to participate in discussions on educational reform for historically under-represented students. But it was my hope that our discussions of injustice and police brutality, and my transparency in light of Ari's death, would produce a critically minded student who could begin to deconstruct the mainstream American educational system. In our discussions of course materials on justice and educational reform, I shared my unanswered questions with students. Three days after I received the news of Ari's death, I asked my Multicultural Education students, *"What does culturally relevant pedagogy look like for an 11-year-old girl whose father died in police custody?"* In her critique of the flawed American educational system, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) defines culturally relevant pedagogy as a practice "designed to problematize teaching and encourage teachers to ask about the nature of the student-teacher relationship, the curriculum, schooling, and society" (p. 483). But discussions of culturally relevant pedagogy must

acknowledge the nuanced perspectives of student identity while teachers "develop their cultural competence and critical consciousness" (Kim & Pulido, 2015, p. 19). But what exactly does critical consciousness look like in the face of injustice? If we cannot even actively incorporate culturally appropriate lessons for students of color inside mainstream educational classrooms, then how can scholars discuss the complex intersections of student identities in the face of traumatic experiences? As the instructor for this Multicultural Education course for some future teachers, I was embarrassed that I did not have all the



ELISABETH IRWIN H.S. STUDENT HOLDING A "HANDS UP, DON'T SHOOT" SIGN (IMAGE: KALLI JACKSON)

answers. In these moments, I truly felt like a student inside the classroom; I quickly learned that justice does not happen overnight and that my limited conceptualizations of justice were the result of my outsider perspective on movements like #BlackLivesMatter. Like many Americans, I commented about what I *would do* if I were a relative of one of the many martyrs who became the faces of this 21st century social movement. But when confronted by this reality, my ideas about justice shifted. I felt like an imposter because I did not have the answers to many questions and, in my grieving period, I still felt like an outsider in a predominately white academic space.

## Stage #2: Public and Private Faces of Pain

The public images of people of color, who have become synonymous with the #BlackLivesMatter movement, portray them as criminals, as thugs, and as unruly youth who somehow earned their fates. Soon after the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag was created (after the murder of Trayvon Martin), the American public watched as this teenager was put on trial more so than the assailant, George Zimmerman. Zimmerman's defense team suggested that Martin was shot in self-defense since the latter's "autopsy revealed traces of THC, the active ingredient in pot" (Capeheart, 2013). Many of the widely

disseminated images of Trayvon Martin in print and social media depicted him as a youth who *deserved* to die. A similar picture was painted of Michael Brown, a recent high school graduate in Ferguson, Missouri. During the first police press conference after Brown's body lay in the street for several hours, CNN repeatedly showed a clip of Brown allegedly assaulting a convenience store owner. These examples, in particular, put these young men on trial after their murders instead of questioning the motives of the shooters. Black people who suffered from a form of police brutality were put on trial in public for their imperfect public personas. But organizers in the #BlackLivesMatter movement challenge this mediated agenda by circulating personal stories and supporting the families they left behind.

In February and March, Ari was also tried in the "court of public opinion" after his death in police custody. A final image that accompanied one news article from a local newspaper showed an officer pulling his locs from his face with a gash under his right arm. These public images did not match the person I grew up with or the man I knew. My cousin was not the "combative jail inmate" as described in newspaper accounts nor was he the man who *deserved* to die as was implied by commentators (Remoquillo, 2016). Rather, Ari was a proud father and a family man with a serious passion for cooking. At public events, he was the first person to sit next to me and make sure I felt supported and loved. He was always by my side—smiling, laughing, and sharing his wit. My memories of Ari directly challenge the public representations of Ari as a monster, a killer, and a threat to society. And once the local news outlets began to discuss his arrest and subsequent death in police custody, I knew that the fine line between my public and private domains as a professor would eventually be crossed.

***Although I subjectively identified as a woman of color, I wondered if the course material taught students how to question the American educational system instead of stereotyping the students in it.***

In graduate school, I always believed that the epitome of teacher professionalism was the ability to separate your public (teacher) image from your private battles. My sensitivities to the public and private domains of teaching were certainly heightened by the various facets of my intersectional identity. For instance, as a new tenure track professor in a new interdisciplinary program at my liberal arts college, I was keenly aware of the pressures placed upon new faculty to perform well inside the classroom setting. But as a 29-year-old Black woman who was fresh out of graduate school, I recognized that my public image conflicted with the public views of the professorate and academia. Popular anthologies like *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia* (2012) support these views and describe the successes and lived struggles of women of

color in the ivory tower (Gutiérrez y Muhs, Niemann, González, & Harris 2012). I was self-conscious about my identity in this particular setting, especially while teaching a pilot Multicultural Education course, the first of its kind in the recent history of the school. Although I subjectively identified as a woman of color, I wondered if the course material taught students how to question the American educational system instead of stereotyping the students in it.

During our class discussion of Critical Race Theory in Education, I privately questioned whether Ari's life would have been spared if he were a non-critical, unquestioning, non-threatening Black man. In his critique of *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954), Derrick Bell's (1980) interest convergence suggested that "the interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites" (p. 523). While this term was originally utilized in Bell's analysis of public education post-Brown, it is used contemporarily to discuss other significant moments in the racial progress of this nation. But privately, the scholarship that we read in our course made me question educational reform and the possibilities of a just America for all. In Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate's (1995) "Towards a Critical Race Theory of Education," they explain that "for the critical race theorist, social reality is constructed by the formulation and the exchange of stories about individual situations" (p. 57). I questioned how Ari's real commitment to justice for historically marginalized groups conflicted with America's master narrative of Black men as violent and destructive. While teaching the Critical Race Theory in Education unit, I found several pieces of journalism that portrayed Ari as a violent Black man who fit America's master narrative. Initially, I wondered if Ari's final images were selected to both fulfill a stereotype of Black male rage and also converge with the interests of the predominately white, rural police department. Additionally, I studied one of his social media accounts and wondered if the police department viewed his page before his untimely death. Ari spoke at length about police brutality, participated in #BlackLivesMatter vs. #AllLivesMatter debates, and fought against micro and macro forms of injustice. After my weekly classroom meetings, I considered the most painful questions of all: *Were the pre-selected, final images of my cousin a loose form of interest convergence? Will we ever be able to achieve racial equality before we can even think about racial equity? Was Ari's portrayal as a reckless, unkempt Black man who was committed to social justice and social action for historically marginalized groups a ploy by this police department to dissuade the public from questioning the real story? Did the public images circulated of Ari showcase the private, limited, and stereotypical perspectives of the police department?* Prior to this moment, I never considered how my external realities could seep into my identities as a teacher and scholar. I tried (to no avail) to keep my private life outside the classroom, but in these instances, the classroom scholarship spoke directly to my identities as a teacher and scholar in grief. At this point in the semester, my Multicultural Education students were amazed by the amount of theory in the interdisciplinary field of Education that they were not exposed to prior to this course. I

learned from other faculty in the Education Studies program that my students were now well-versed with terminology like “cultural capital” and “culturally relevant pedagogy,” and proudly debunked myths about Multicultural Education among other students. But I wondered if my students would be sincerely transformed by what they learned.

At the end of the semester, students constructed social justice lessons that became student action plans. According to the original course syllabus, I asked students to “create and deliver a mock, K-12 lesson on one of the following themes: state sanctioned police brutality (Tamir Rice), domestic terrorism (Newtown), international terrorism (9/11), homelessness (Skid Row), or privilege (the affluenza case).” In preparation for this assignment, I asked students, “*how would you discuss police brutality inside K-12 classrooms? For instance, how would you discuss Tamir Rice’s murder with 13 year olds in Cleveland?*” This assignment pushed us to move beyond hypothetical conversations about education, popular news stories, and social movements like #BlackLivesMatter. But, rather, it forced students to grapple with some of the real questions that K-12 teachers may ask themselves inside and outside their classrooms. Many of my students were preparing for a career in teaching and they questioned how they would structure their classrooms after learning about educational inequities and the experiences of culturally diverse students. By semester’s end, my Multicultural Education students no longer viewed K-12 classrooms as a safe place where youth are taught sterilized, white-washed forms of American history, but believed that our K-12 classrooms are spaces where America’s children should be pushed to critically assess inequity and justice.

## Acceptance and End of Semester Reflections

Prior to the start of the academic year, I would have never imagined that I would undergo a significant teaching transformation during my first year on the tenure track. I worked to be a better teacher who incorporated contemporary artifacts inside the classroom. Discussions about the Occupy movement and #BlackLivesMatter, in particular, resonated with my social media literate undergraduate students. But my constant self-reflexivity both inside and outside the classroom made me question my course materials and my constant references to contemporary social movements like #BlackLivesMatter. As a Black woman, I felt deeply connected to this social movement given my research on Black male students and their representations in American popular culture. I remembered my visceral response to the Zimmerman verdict, the Twitter retweets of Michael Brown’s body, and Sandra Bland’s final voyage in Texas. I spoke openly about this movement and felt deeply connected to the organizers and participants. But after Ari’s death, I became more reclusive. I could no longer listen to or even watch footage of men like Eric Garner or films like *Fruitvale Station* (2013). And, quite frankly, I did not desire to know about Ari’s final moments because the

stories would not bring him back. Each day, I wondered what my life would look like without his protection, his genius, and his example. But I could not predict how this experience would inform my teaching and my views on educational inequity.

“Teachable moments” can truly transform the classroom environment (Spencer, 2009, p. 83). For instance, at the onset of my course, my students described how their educational experiences differed from those of historically underrepresented students in urban America. At the onset of the semester, I wanted to teach students about the foundations of Multicultural Education and the need for all future teachers to engage with scholarship from Paulo Freire, bell hooks, and James Banks. Over time we had more open conversations about #BlackLivesMatter and how this social movement connects to educational inequities like the “school to prison pipeline.” Specifically, I drew connections between the police brutality that occurs outside the classroom and the policing of culturally diverse students in our public schools. I showed students visual examples of alternative and new charter schools in Chicago and New Orleans that use force and security as key part of the “deep structure” of these public school settings (Banks & Banks, 1995, p. 154; VICE News 2014; OWN 2013). We also discussed the violent assault of a Spring Valley High School student by a school security officer (Newswen 2015). Later they began to create action plans and discuss how they, too, could work individually to transform our educational system. I never expected that I would undergo a transformation with my students. I was more transparent, more vulnerable, and more eager to learn from the example they each set forth. By late February, the classroom space shifted. The students asked more questions about educational inequities and regularly used terms like “educational injustice” to describe the state of the American educational system. Unknowingly, my undergraduate students interpreted contemporary educational inequities as a violation of human rights. By semester’s end, they recommended that this course become a requirement for all Education Studies students at the college. I strongly believe that our conversations about educational injustice may have been the result of their professor’s firsthand experience with loss and grief, and her personalized reflections on injustice.

## Works Cited

- Anderson, H. (1997). *Conversations, Language and Possibilities: A Postmodern Approach to Therapy*. New York: Basic Books.
- Banks, J. (1993). Multicultural Education: Development, Dimensions, and Challenges. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 75, 22-28.
- Banks, J., & Banks, C. (1995). Equity Pedagogy: An Essential Component of Multicultural Education. *Theory into Practice*, 34, 152-158.
- Bell, D. (1980). Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest Convergence Dilemma. *Harvard Law Review*, 93, 518-533.
- Brems, C., Baldwin, M., Davis, L., & Namyniuk, L. (1994). The Imposter Syndrome as Related to Teaching Evaluations and Advising Relationships of University Faculty Members. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 65(2), 183-193.
- Capeheart, J. (2013). Pictures put Trayvon Martin on trial. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2013/05/28/pictures-put-trayvon-martin-on-trial/>.
- Gravois, J. (2007). You're Not Fooling Anyone. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Youre-Not-Fooling-Anyone/28069/>.
- Gutierrez y Muhs, G., Niemann, Y., Gonzalez, C., & Harris, A. (2012) *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia*. Boulder: Utah State University Press.
- Hayler, M. (2011). *Autoethnography, Self-Narrative, and Teacher Education*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- hooks, b. (1993). *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self Recovery*. Boston: South End Press.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge.
- Kennedy-Lewis, B. (2012). When a Teacher Becomes a Researcher: Using Self-Narrative to Define One's Role as Participant Observer. *Theory into Practice*, 51(2), 107-113.
- Kim, J., & Pulido, I. (2015). Examining Hip-Hop as Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy* 12(1), 17-35.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465-491.
- Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. (1995). Towards a Critical Race Theory of Education. *Teachers College Record*, 97(1), 47-68.
- Maddrell, A. (2016). Mapping grief. A conceptual framework for understanding the spatial dimensions of bereavement, mourning and remembrance. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 17(2), 166-188.
- Newswen (2015, October 28). *Spring Valley High School officer suspended after violent classroom arrest*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IV9RpWJZE88>.
- OWN. (2013, February 16). *Student sick of being called ugly* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RkaKte79Fes>.
- Pedler, M. (2011). Leadership, risk and the imposter syndrome. *Action Learning: Research and Practice*, 8(2), 89-91.
- Puchner, L. (2014). Disruptions of the Self-Narrative: Musings on Teaching Social Justice Topics in a Research Methods Course. *Multicultural Education*, 22(1), 51-55.
- Remoquillo, S. (2016). Officials: Combative jail inmate dies at hospital. *Lancaster Eagle Gazette*. Retrieved from <http://www.lancastereaglegazette.com/story/news/local/2016/02/22/officials-combative-jail-inmate-dies-hospital/80769452/>.
- Shah, S., & Meeks, S. (2012). Late-life bereavement and complicated grief: A proposed comprehensive framework. *Aging & Mental Health*, 16 (1), 39-56.
- Spencer, R. (2015). Teaching Note: Mad at History. *Radical Teacher*, 101, 83-84.
- VICE News (2014, April 4). *Expelled from Every Other School: Last Chance High (Episode 1)*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-B kmAebbQ>.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



This journal is published by the University Library System of the University of Pittsburgh as part of its D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program, and is cosponsored by the University of Pittsburgh Press.