

AND JUSTICE FOR ALL: ALIGNING THE GOALS OF THE ACADEMY AND *BROWN V. THE BOARD OF EDUCATION*

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To pull the stone up
It takes believing
To change directions
Signals deceiving
To tell the truth is what they fear
All of us here
Can change tomorrow

To have a vision
We all must stand still
Simple decision
To kill the lie, to kill the lie
To stop the clock is what they fear
All of us here
Can change today

Be who you are
Be who you are
Be who you are
Say what you're feeling
Say what you're feeling

To let the stone down
Means we are failing
To let the truth be
Ever revealing
To stop the slavery we all feel
All of us here
Can change right now.

– Richie Havens, “Pulling Up the Stone,” from *Grace of the Sun*, 2004

In much literature, we read about the value of diversity. Recent works about college life, including Richard Light’s *Making the Most of College*, continue to point out the advantages of preparing students to live in a multicultural world. Valora Washington and J. D. Andrews, in *Children of 2010*, point to the

demographic reasons why we need to plan for more diversity and thus to include multicultural perspectives in our teaching and learning programs. Their research and that of their colleagues in the social sciences also tell us of the value of diversity in kindergarten through college, particularly in preparing all of our students for larger civic responsibility, for employment, and for opportunity and achievement. Critical theorists Lisa Delpit and Theresa Perry point out the value of transcending our racist and classist tendencies in order to bring about a world in which all people's strengths make that world more creative and productive.

Related theorists, like Keith Gilyard, Tom Fox, Victor Villanueva, and Gail Okawa, to name some, talk about the ways in which people of color can transform (*and thus do not need to be transformed by*) the academy. In the political world, Cornel West argues, in *Race Matters*, that if DuBois is correct—i.e., “the problem of the twentieth [and now, with the Katrina debacle especially, the twenty-first] century is the problem of the color line” (xxiv)—then we need “race-transcending” leadership. And in the book, *The Miner's Canary*, Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres use the ideas of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Native American law to outline a plan for “race-transcending” leadership, asserting that people of color should join with poor and working class whites who suffer from the same social injustices to overcome those injustices.

Some of this assumes a world in which the goals of *Brown v. the Board of Education* have been realized, or are in the process of being realized. However, two recent studies—“Racial Segregation and Educational Outcomes in Metropolitan Boston,” by Chungmei Lee, and “Race and the Metropolitan Origins of Postsecondary Access to Four Year Colleges,” by Joseph Berger—and a fall 2005 Boston NPR report, entitled “Reading, Writing, and Race,” demonstrate a strong correlation between current racial segregation and academic opportunity and achievement. Moreover, Charles J. Ogletree, Jr., in his new book *All Deliberate Speed*, writes, “despite the perceived advances made by the courts, Boston schools are falling back into a pattern of segregation” (263). Upon closer examination, we may acknowledge some of what I related above to be a wishful, even an uncritical, assessment of where we are poised to go regarding educational opportunity. While we are literally diverse, we may not currently embrace the kind of diversity the *Brown* decision wanted to make possible. Eric J. Cooper, President of the National Urban Alliance (NUA), pointed out an even more grim reality about public education in America last April during the *Life After Brown Conference* at Eastern Connecticut State University: Persons of color—African Americans, for the most part, Cooper said—are placed in lowest academic courses, receive punitive school discipline more frequently than do those who are white, and are assigned to worse schools than their white counterparts! To further emphasize these observations, Lee, Berger, Orfield, and others explain that all Metro Boston schools designated as needing “corrective action” are located either in the City of Boston or in the urbanized satellite cities, and most of these schools have even higher shares of children of color than do the districts of which they are a part. Further, these researchers note, less than half of the students in schools with high concentrations of poor and minority students are estimated to graduate on time, compared to more than three quarters of their peers in low-poverty and low-minority schools.

In academic institutions like Rivier, there are many ways in which racism has been covered up so that we are blind to see it. Rhetorician Victor Villanueva has explained this phenomenon recently, pointing out how the four master tropes—**metaphor** (race becomes something else: ethnicity, identity, culture), **metonymy** (a reduction, something drops out, as in race becoming culture), **synecdoche** (representation of more than what is: races become cultures, civilizations, *national identity*), and **irony** (dialectical, engaging with what is opposite, as in being *color-blind*)—“tell us something about what is happening now, like why it becomes increasingly harder to speak of racism to those who aren't the

apparent victims of it . . . “(np). Despite how hard it is, we all need to take a hard look at our administrative offices, our faculty, staff, and student body, the ways in which we hire new faculty and staff, the ways in which we recruit new students, and the capacity for as well as the *will* to become more culturally diverse.

In my own field, the writing center, as far back as 1998, in the lead article for the Fall/Winter *Writing Center Journal*, Patricia Stock tells us that writing center workers are agents of the kind of change about which Richie Havens sings—a change that might reverse the trends occurring in Boston (and nationwide) and in our academy. As such, Stock argues, they must assume leadership roles in the academy. I want writing center workers to be the change agents Stock wrote about eight years ago, to, once and for all, make their risky move. In assuming leadership roles, therefore, writing center workers may indeed lead the planning in the academy to construct true multicultural understanding. In this piece, I want to tell you about how I believe the work of the writing center is aligned with the ideals of *Brown v. the Board of Education*. I will state the problem (*what many are calling resegregation*), provide three models that both demonstrate the efficacy of the Brown decision and speak to a writing center pedagogy, and assert that such a pedagogy—a *pedagogy of hope*—can complete the *Brown* project if that pedagogy is practiced kindergarten through college. As Parker Palmer writes, “Community and its abundance are always there, free gifts of grace that sustain us. The question is whether we will be able to perceive those gifts and receive them. That is likely to happen only when someone performs a vulnerable public act, assuming abundance but aware that others may cling to the illusion of scarcity” (138). The “vulnerable public act” may well start with tutoring in the writing center. That’s because writing center tutors practice rhetoric, which will inevitably compel them (and us) to examine the language of the writers with whom they work, to see, as Villanueva termed it, *the material reality of racism*. Stock’s challenge that writing center workers take up the role of change agent and Villanueva’s challenge to writing center tutors to practice rhetoric are not incompatible with Ogeltree’s challenge to all of us—not to “be deterred from achieving what so many of our forefathers achieved [a ruling, *Brown*, aimed at true equality and integration], in the face of even more formidable challenges”—a challenge “we must face with unrelenting dedication and commitment, and when we do so, we will not fail” (316).

The Problem

. . . I have come to understand that power plays a critical role in our society and in our educational system. The worldviews of those with privileged positions are taken as the only reality, while the worldviews of those less powerful are dismissed as inconsequential. Indeed, in the educational institutions of this country, the possibilities for poor people and for people of color to define themselves, to determine the self each should be, involve a power that lies outside of the self. It is others who determine how they should act, how they are to be judged. When one “we” gets to determine standards for all “wes,” then some “wes” are in trouble!
(Lisa Delpit).

On January 13, 2005, The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University announced a new study, entitled “Disparity in Nation’s Schools: Race and Poverty Linked to Educational Inequality and Higher Dropout Rates,” by Erika Frankenberg, Gary Orfield, and Chungmei Lee. Their report demonstrated “that public school students across the nation are increasingly segregated by race, poverty, and educational opportunity. . . . The report [also] finds that an alarming disparity remains in our nation’s schools. . . .”(np). Frankenberg, Orfield, and Lee conclude that “[s]egregation is intense and much of its

harm is based on the strong link between poverty segregation, racial segregation and school failure” (np).

The report underscores a problem: in our public schools, there is a wide achievement gap between white and non-white students. Many, like Frankenberg, Orfield, and Lee, are now writing that there is a “disturbing trend toward resegregation” caused, in part, by “white flight” to the suburbs and by the Supreme Court’s decisions (*Grutter v. Bollinger*, *Gratz v. Bollinger*, *Missouri v. Jenkins*, and *Board of Education of Oklahoma v. Dowell*) that “radically altered the standard for freeing school districts from desegregation orders in 1991 [and 1995]” (np). Sadly, although there have been some gains, the promise of *Brown* has not been fulfilled. “Schools have become significantly more segregated [during] the last 15 years, particularly in districts emerging from judicial supervision” (np). In the Southern states, in 1988, 56.5 % were in schools with students who were mostly of color; while, in 2001, the percentage rose to 70 %. In the Midwest and West, there were similar trends as above. In the Northeast, in 1968, 66.8 % of minority students were in minority-dominant schools; while, in 2001, the percentage rose to 78.4% (Frankenberg, Orfield, and Lee np). “In Boston,” writes Ogletree, “the average black resident lives in a neighborhood that is 75 percent black, compared with the average white person, whose neighborhood is less than 30 percent minority” (263). Ogletree also presents changing demographic trends, all to point out how far away we still remain from reaching the *Brown* mountaintop:

“... Boston’s minority percentage of the population grew from 9.8 percent in 1960 to 40.8 percent in 1990; its black population increased from 67,873 in 1960 to 145,993 in 1990. In the same period, the white population dropped to 360,920. In the last decade of the twentieth century, Boston neighborhoods were increasingly segregated, with the majority of blacks living in Mattapan and Roxbury. This was also true for the minority population at large, which found itself concentrated mostly in five of the city’s neighborhoods” (263).

That *Brown* helped lead to desegregation in the 1950s and to successes socially and in education we must view as significant. That, in the last twenty years, Supreme Court rulings and the inability of the federal government to fund desegregation programs at an adequate rate have encouraged the resegregation of public schools we must view as frightening. Even the *No Child Left Behind Act* emphasizes standardized testing, which contributes to resegregation, according to many who see such testing as measurements of race and class rather than achievement.

The struggle for integration and equality continues. “Separate but equal,” which the *Brown* decision ruled illegal, has apparently returned through what some see as resegregation. The desegregation movement has been stalled and is regressing after making “a great leap forward” with *Brown*. America’s students do not have equal chances, equal opportunities, equal access, equal entry, equal resources, and equal outcomes to education. So much for *Brown*’s “with all deliberate speed.” When Thurgood Marshall was asked for his definition of “equal,” Marshall replied as follows: “‘Equal’ means getting the same thing, at the same time and in the same place.” Sadly, the reality for public education 50-odd years after the *Brown* “compromise” (Ogletree xiii) is as follows:

- There are unequal opportunities and unequal educational outcomes.
- Attaining access to our nation’s prosperity is less likely for persons of color.
- The high school dropout rates for persons of color are higher and their graduation rates are lower.

- Less money for salaries brings less qualified teachers and support personnel to public schools, resulting in fewer teachers of color as role models.
- Tracking assigns persons of color to lower-level programs and whites to higher-level programs.
- Persons of color are not commonly assigned to honors or college-level classes.
- Many students of color are placed in special education and also identified as behaviorally difficult.

When it comes to the specific project about which I am speaking, literacy, which is the business of the writing center worker, Catherine Prendergast argues in *Literacy and Racial Justice: The Politics of Learning after Brown v. Board of Education* “that the ideology of literacy has been sustained primarily as a response to perceived threats to White property interests, White privilege, the maintenance of ‘White’ identity, or the conception of America as a White nation” (7). There’s plenty more, as the events of the past hurricane season illustrated in dramatic fashion, but let this suffice for a description of the problem.

Three Models

... I was most narrowly watched. If I was in a separate room any considerable length of time, I was sure to be suspected of having a book, and was at once called to give an account of myself. All this, however, was too late. The first step had been taken. Mistress, in teaching me the alphabet, had given me the inch, and no precaution could prevent me from taking the ell.
(Frederick Douglass)

Frederick Douglass, the great nineteenth century orator and African American abolitionist, learned to read and to write by studying models, of course, but also by enlisting the help of his *peers*, white kids his age who lived, he tells us, “on Philpot Street, very near Durgin and Bailey’s ship-yard” (144) and whom he cajoled to help him develop his literacy acumen. They helped him to understand and to master the language he ended up using so persuasively. Such *collaborative learning among peers* empowered Douglass by giving him the literacy understanding he needed to apply his oratorical gifts in support of abolition.

In the next century, Malcolm X became literate by writing out, by copying, the dictionary while in prison—an interesting happenstance, to be sure— and then reading everything he could, which pointed out to him how history had been whitened. Like Douglass, he also became a powerful orator, intellect, and leader. Malcolm X made this transformation, in part, by debating with others, *entering into the kind of dialogue that brings about social change and cognitive growth*.

We remember how Maya Angelou describes her graduation in Stamps. She makes us think of Keith Gilyard’s analysis of African American rhetoric, emphasizing the notion of liberation. Angelou, hearing her classmate sing the songs of his ancestors, advanced for all of her readers the understanding that it is a liberatory pedagogy which will inspire literacy and understanding *and justice for all*.

I have invoked these three particular models for two reasons, which I hope will become clear. First, I wanted to describe—albeit briefly—and to recall the literacy histories of three prominent African Americans of letters in an attempt to point out why Marshall, Warren, and others fought so hard to consummate the *Brown* decision. Indeed, literacy is the great leveler. Second, the process I have just described in the description of how Frederick Douglass, Malcolm X, and Maya Angelou became literate—

i.e., peer interaction with persons of all colors, dialogue, and an awareness that results in liberty—is a process writing center workers have long valued. *So, let's talk a little about this second point.*

The Writing Center Model

The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them. (Albert Einstein)

Almost exactly like that described by the great Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, who emphasized that *dialogue within and among culture groups would lead to critical consciousness*, one of the writing center field's early leaders, Kenneth Bruffee announced in his *Short Course in Writing* that “a necessary intermediate step on the way to effective independence is effective interdependence . . .” (xv). Bruffee's program promoted that *conversation among knowledgeable peers* would bring about something like, though by no means exactly like, what Frederick Douglass, Malcolm X, and Maya Angelou experienced. For more than twenty years now, the field has argued how far and with whom we should take that program of peer collaboration and conversation and its modifications. Some have opted to stay on the margins, cautious about being co-opted, secure in the rarefied air of their *idea* of writing center work, and then offering complaints about that marginalization. Others have accepted the challenge of becoming institutionalized—albeit in fits and spurts. Rather than being silent or timid, I would argue that, fifty odd years after *Brown*, the only way writing center workers can deal with the systemic problems of race and class is systemically. To me, that means the field needs to advance its writing center *pedagogy of hope*.

Pedagogy of Hope

“Why they be cutting our thumbs off if we learn to read—if that's all it is?”

“‘Cause to know things, for us to know things, is bad for them. We get to wanting and when we get to wanting it's bad for them. They think we want what they got.”

I thought of what they had. Fine clothes and food. I heard one of the house workers say they ate off plates and had forks and spoons and knives and wiped their mouths like they wiped their butts. “That's true—I want it.”

“That's why they don't want us reading.” (Paulsen, *Nightjohn*)

Cooper points out that, in America, we practice a *pedagogy of despair*, particularly for persons of color. Such a stance, very much like the oppressive banking approach to education that Freire described and denounced almost forty years ago, is marked by the following:

- Lower quality curriculums, larger class sizes, and fewer technologies and science/language laboratories;
- Overcrowded classrooms and rundown buildings for schools populated by persons of color;
- A lack of basic supplies as well as antiquated school books and materials;
- Inequities in staffing, student assignment, and transfer options;
- Concerns about school safety and violence;
- Testing that relegates persons of color to lower-achieving classes;
- Learning measured by standards erected by whites;
- Questioning discouraged;

- Testing mastery praised.

Fortunately, Cooper also advocates a *pedagogy of hope*, which can promote literacy and enlightenment for those, like the young slave girl, Sarny, in Paulsen's *Nightjohn*, who "want it." It is like our writing center pedagogy, a problem-posing pedagogy in which learners become teachers and teachers become learners—face to face in writing centers, collaborative classrooms or in cyberspace parlors to which everyone contributes and in which everyone participates. By practicing such a pedagogy, as Freire maintained, people "develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (71).

Can we really replace scarcity with abundance?

The divide of race has been America's constant curse. (President Clinton, 2nd Inaugural Address)

If writing center workers take up Stock's challenge, they will help other academy professionals to see what they should be doing to realize the *Brown* promise, illustrating for us in this century how to bring about the equality in education *Brown* was supposed to legalize in the last century. I want writing center workers (and all of us in the academy) also to take up the challenge of the NAACP: "the work of the social engineers of the 21st century will truly define whether *Brown*'s historical legacy will best be framed by the hope and promise that it inspired or the progress that it delivered" (np). Then, we may replace scarcity with abundance. Consider what Cooper has placed as an epigraph on his website: "When we are able to break the glass ceiling for inner city children and see achievement gains go way beyond system expectations that is when I am the proudest. To seize the opportunity to create hope out of despair—commitment out of frustration . . . change rather than inaction . . . hard work leading to huge gains (not easy simplistic answers, but focused commitment)—to see children and teachers' eyes light up, with expectation and awareness that they can teach and learn complex concepts . . . wow!"

We may consider Cooper's epigraph to be wishful thinking and meeting the NAACP's challenge to be impossible. But let's turn a little to Parker Palmer's "Loaves and Fishes': Acts of Scarcity or Abundance," a helpful and hopeful piece that uses the gospel story of the loaves and fishes and talks about it in terms of scarcity, abundance, and leadership. Regarding scarcity, Palmer writes the following:

"The scarcity assumption pervades our institutional life by putting power into the hands of a few, and keeping it there. Hierarchies are always rooted in the belief that power itself is, or ought to be, a scarce commodity, rooted in the belief that few people are qualified to hold power, or that few should be allowed to hold it, lest the threatening abundance of power known as "democracy" come to pass. From the teacher who grades on the curve to the administrator who rules by fiat, the control of the few over the many is rationalized by the scarcity assumption." (126)

While scarcity is a powerful preserver of the status quo, *hence resegregation*, Palmer goes on to say that "community is the context in which abundance can replace scarcity. Even more important, the very experience of community is itself an experience of abundance. In the faceless crowd we experience scarcity—a scarcity of contact, of concern, of affirmation, of love. But as the crowd is replaced by community, an invisible sense of abundance arises long before the community produces any visible goods or services. True abundance resides in the simple experience of people being present to one

another and for one another” (130). This sounds, to me, a lot like what writing center scholars say can be done in the writing center. In fact, when writing center workers practice rhetoric in the writing center, they work “one with one.” In so doing, we are in the context of Palmer’s community, the context of “interpersonal abundance,” that will make possible a constructive dialogue about race. Finally, about leadership, Palmer is sage as well:

“When we approach community as a project that can succeed if only we have the right technique, the right setting, the right goals, the right people, we are on the wrong track. Community and its abundance are always there, free gifts of grace that sustain us. The question is whether we will be able to perceive those gifts and receive them. That is likely to happen only when someone performs a vulnerable public act, assuming abundance but aware that others may cling to the illusion of scarcity.” (138)

It seems to me that the writing center and those who work there assume abundance. Therefore, writing center leadership is absolutely necessary to help transform the academy, and writing center workers may have to undertake the risky action of talking about race until every community tells a different—an abundant—story about race, one that invites into our academic community colleagues from K-12, from Cooper’s NUA, from HBCUs, and the like. We should make these invitations, for abundance sake, because we do not have to be alone in the academy.

I have discussed two non-writing center thinkers and workers who might help us to see and to address the material reality of racism: Cooper and Palmer. Cooper’s is a loud voice, which I think we should bring into this dialogue. Palmer’s thoughtful discussion about *scarcity* and *abundance* can be related to this discussion, particularly to *despair* (which results from *scarcity*) and to *hope* (which results from *abundance*). I also think that what Palmer has to say in his eloquent voice about abundance is what all of us know about the academy: it is *that* place where people share what gifts they have and are willing to receive these gifts, adding to what they already possess cognitively and socially.

I heard another thinker at a recent workshop designed for staff, faculty, and students who belong to the New Hampshire Consortium of Colleges and Universities. Roberto A. Ibarra spoke about how to reframe the context of higher education. As you might surmise, Ibarra’s current research focuses on developing models for changing academic and corporate cultures. His latest book, *Beyond Affirmative Action*, is based on an ethnographic research project funded by the Ford Foundation to study Latino graduate students, faculty, administrators and non-academics across the country. That study uncovered a significant new approach to diversity (an active, collaborative learning, multi-contextual model) that is becoming recognized as a new paradigm for educational change. To me, what Ibarra has to say about “low-context” teaching is related to Cooper’s *pedagogy of despair* and to Palmer’s discussion about *scarcity*. What Ibarra has to say about “high-context” *teaching and learning communities* sounds like Cooper’s *pedagogy of hope* and Palmer’s thoughts about *abundance*. Ibarra has an impressive resume: From 1995 to 2001, he served as Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where his duties included supporting faculty initiatives for collaboration with Historically Black Colleges and Universities and with Tribal colleges. He was Dean in Residence for the Council of Graduate Schools in Washington, D.C., from 1994-95, where he conducted funded research on Latinos in graduate education and was a liaison to President Clinton’s Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans. He is a Senior Consultant at the Southwest Wing of Ibis Consulting Group, Special Assistant to the Provost, and Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of New

Mexico. Ibarra's voice would lead us to useful empirical data about how we can address the issues discussed in this piece.

Though it might seem that way sometimes as we all think about how to enter into the terribly important conversation about race and its concomitant challenges, Cooper, Palmer, Ibarra, Villanueva and countless others show us that we are not alone—in the writing center, the academy, our homes, communities, states, and even our nation. Didn't Robert Frost tell us this in "The Tuft of Flowers"? Haven't our collaborations shown us the significance of Frost's ending couplet in that poem: people "work together . . . [w]hether they work together or apart"? Together or apart, we should take the risk—in the writing center, the academy, our homes, communities, states, and even our nation—to give the gift of community. In so doing, we will provide "people a chance to penetrate the illusion of scarcity and touch the reality of abundance" (Palmer 134).

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