

# The Skin I'm In: An Ecological Exploration of Motivation for an African American Male

Lamar L. Johnson  
*Miami University*

*This paper utilizes an autoethnographic account to investigate factors that influenced my motivation for academic and personal success as an African American male English teacher. I draw upon Bronfenbrenner's (1974) bioecological model of human development and the role of the environment in shaping individual growth. This conceptual lens, in tandem with reflexive autoethnographic methods, permits a strong depiction of linkages between my personal experiences, multiple identities, and sub-cultures while considering how factors such as peers, family, school, and community contributed to the development of my identity. Paramount to my story is the influence of literature, particularly narratives centered on Black males and the African American experience. This account offers a complex view of how my motivation was impacted by a personal encounter with racism from a White teacher; and, I illustrate how an African American female teacher rebuilt my racial identity through literacy. I conclude with personal and transformative recommendations for educators.*

*Keywords:* Autoethnography, African American males, race, literacy, textual lineage

Imagine a typical little boy consumed by the loud bangs and booms of a video game, the plastic structure of a Wal-Mart brand G.I. Joe, and the wooden train set tracks filled with miniature racing cars. I was a typical little boy. Nevertheless, the simplicity of endless pages bound to create a vision within a book stood as my foundation of amusement. The intricate linking of words to create images, the use of grammar to convey a message and just the simple beauty of language, itself, gave me what I would like to call a great love and appreciation for education and for knowledge.

However, many young Black men are marginalized and ostracized by society. Due to these circumstances, some young men are not able to manifest their destiny. Constantly, I research and ponder why some Black males are able to dodge the impact of the tumultuous waves while others seem to drown. Some Black males have made it successfully even though they encountered numerous obstacles along the way. While some of these men dealt with poverty, verbal and physical abuse, the absence of a parent, drug misuse, and drug dispensing, still, some of these men had the momentum, the drive, and the support to make it successfully. I

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Lamar L. Johnson, 210 E. Spring Street, Department of Teacher Education, Miami University, Oxford, OH 45056. Email: [johns700@miamioh.edu](mailto:johns700@miamioh.edu)

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consider myself to be a successful Black male with a story to tell.

This article illustrates one teacher's journey of personal, professional, and academic success in order to positively impact other teachers who teach African American males. I first situate my experience in the literature that relates to the major themes of my journey to becoming a secondary English teacher. As I have reflected upon my own environment, experiences, and the literature incorporated in the classroom, two streams of research offer a conceptual lens for analyzing my motivation as a student: ecological system theories and the ethic of care. I then offer a description of how I autoethnography as a methodological tool for this study followed by my journey and experiences as an African American male student and teacher. I conclude with recommendations for personal and transformative practice.

### Literature Review

The nexus of my inquiry focuses on two inter-related topics- the shortage of African American male teachers and the import of textual lineage to academic development. I recognize there are not many teachers who are like me. Black male secondary English teachers are not an everyday occurrence in traditional university-based teacher preparation programs or in United States (U.S.) public schools (Jay, 2006). Thus, my route into the profession is important to understand.

#### Shortage of African American Male Teachers

Recent data show Black children roughly comprise 20% of the public school population. Conversely, African American male teachers constitute 1% of the teaching profession (Lewis, 2006; National Education Association, 2007). It is a well-documented fact that the teaching force in the U.S. is mainly comprised of White women (Jay, 2006). The students who sit in the desks are diverse but the teaching population is not. Furthermore, the lack of academic success for Black males in kindergarten through grade 12 (K-12) schooling lessens the available pool of potential Black male educators. Only 50% of Black males graduate from high school (Children's Defense Fund, 2007), and according to the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (2005), subsequently only 36% of Black males graduate from college. More specifically, if these young Black men are not graduating from high school, they cannot enter college; therefore, the percentage of Black males in the teaching profession will remain disproportionately low. Young Black men in K-12 schools and at the post-secondary level are failing under our watch.

Barriers that dissuade African American males and females from entering the teaching force include inequities in standardized tests, cultural and social factors, low wages, opportunities in other profitable professions, and institutionalized racism in the school setting. Due to such inequities, the retention rate of African American male teachers in the K-12 setting is low. Once they are hired, they encounter a culturally incongruent curriculum, discriminatory work environments, and angst about raising issues of discrimination and racism (Jay, 2006).

In my own personal experience in K-12, I faced the same situations that prevent Black boys from doing well in school; however, as you will read in the following sections, throughout my K-12 experience, I had a strong teacher mentor and family mentors, all of which helped me to matriculate to college. Because of my teacher mentor and family mentors, in college, I was focused on pursuing my love of English and literature and education. Now, I am in the profession, and I too face the same barriers as I faced as a student. I have second-guessed my career

decision, but my principal, an African American woman, has supported, pushed, and molded me to become a successful teacher.

### **Textual Lineage**

Tatum (2009) defines textual lineage as literature that is significant to readers. He draws upon scholars (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 1999) who focus on the importance of using students' culture, prior experiences, strengths, and language in the classroom as mechanisms for building cultural competence, academic achievement, and sociopolitical consciousness. Textual lineage enables teachers to use historical texts from previous generations and parallel these stories with modern-day texts, a teaching approach which allows Black males to connect the literature to modern-day societal situations. Textual lineage is more than using texts for reading strategies and skills; it is the apparatus that enables Black males to learn more about their history, culture, and world, which in turn allows African American males to build academic achievement while building their cultural identity. Tatum (2009) argues that we need to rejoin African American males with texts in order to begin molding a positive and effective life trajectory for them. Literacy should be utilized and recognized as an important component for personal and social growth. Consciously, teachers strategically select texts that will engage students. When the African American male student can see himself, his history, his language, or his culture in the text, the student feels as though he is part of the curriculum, "they [students] must be enabled and engaged by texts mediated by educators who use these texts to broker positive relationships and improve their lives" (Tatum, 2009, p. 55). I agree with Tatum that people and books can make a difference in whether a student is swept under by life's waves or makes it safely to shore. In my own life, having people, especially teachers, who cared for me, and at critical junctures and exposed me to books and thus allowed me to envision what was possible for me helped me to develop and grow with a strong sense of positive cultural identity.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This article draws upon Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ideas about the ecological systems in which young people function and the ethic of care in which teachers develop robust relationships with their students (Gilligan, 1982). Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological model captures human development over time explains the role of environment in shaping individual growth. Bronfenbrenner's model delineates several layers of the environment and depicts how each layer has an effect on the individual (Addison, 1992). These layers are interdependent and interwoven, and they all function cohesively. An alteration in any part of the system impacts the system as a whole as well as parts of the system. The individual's development is influenced by four environmental systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Bronfenbrenner's theory refers to personal characteristics, parent involvement, and achievement in school, which may merge and impact one's development. This model offers important assumptions about the ways background and social psychological traits (e.g., self-perspective [microsystem]), family-level deviations (e.g., parent involvement [mesosystem]), and school-level influences (e.g., perceptions of teachers [exosystem]) interrelate and impact individual level outcomes such as personal and academic achievement (Strayhorn, 2010). I employ Bronfenbrenner's framework as one lens to analyze my own experiences and propose that it may be an effective tool in setting the future agenda for maximizing the success of Black students.

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Brofenbrenner's model reminds us of the need to view each student as existing within a system. If one part is weak, for whatever reason, other parts can compensate.

Teachers who care are integral to the success of the ecological model. The ethic of care is often associated with Feminist theorists and women, but men, too, are able to adopt an ethic of care. Although Gilligan (1982) provides one of the earliest theoretical discussions about the ethic of care through a feminist lens, there are other scholars (Bartell, 2011; Mora, Pang, & Rivera, 1999; Noddings, 1992) who expand Gilligan's work and place culture, race, and power at the forefront of a teacher-student care relationship. When schools and teachers create care-centered learning environments and resources for students, the students' emotional, social, and academic needs are at the nexus of learning (Mora et al., 1999).

Care is a personal decision. It is about the human being, and it pertains to the concept of self. Reciprocation is an essential component in a caring environment, requiring the teacher and the student to contribute to the development of relationships. More specifically, teachers need to care and, by their example, teach students how to care for themselves and other races, cultures, and ethnicities. This notion of care is not bounded by homogeneity. Each child is different, and he/she brings various components to the table. Teachers must care and develop robust relationships with the whole child. The care-giver (teacher) must know the care-receiver (student) culturally, racially, and politically (Bartell, 2011). Teachers who care teach students how to critically explore their identity and culture while engaging the students in critical dialogue about the issues of race, which enables them to build a sociopolitical consciousness. Teachers must be willing to step out of their comfort zone and eradicate the deficit model of thinking, which means they cannot view students' culture, language, and race as deficiencies or weaknesses but as strengths. The care-giver must have an open-mind, but more importantly, an open heart.

### **Methodology**

Drawing upon reflexive autoethnographic methods allows for a strong depiction of linkages between my personal experiences, multiple identities, and sub-cultures while considering other influences such as peers, family, school, and community (Baszile, 2003). All research tells a story; however, an autoethnography tells a story from a first person account. This methodology enables one to view oneself through several lenses. Through one lens, the researcher examines his/her life as an outsider or as an agent being acting upon, and through the insider lens enabling critical analysis of personal experiences, identities, culture, and sub-cultures. Using a reflexive autoethnographic methodology allows me, the observer, to become both the instrument and the object of observation (Whitehead & Conaway, 1986).

In this case the notion of self and environment are pertinent. Simultaneously, the researcher is the participant and the object of observation. Engaging in this particular methodology provides the researcher with the opportunity to interrogate and analyze his own experiences. Throughout this particular research process, self-learning is occurring. A reflexive autoethnographic methodology is executed through personal narratives, and it distinguishes itself from "mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation" (Chang, 2008, p. 43). In brief, autoethnography is "the lived experience of the ethnographer" (Quinney, 1996, p. 357). However, there are some limitations with this type of methodology. An autoethnography is one account. It pertains to my experiences; therefore, there is an issue of validity and generalizability. Therefore, I attempt to address the issues of validity and

generalizability through the implementation of theories and an extant review of literature. Although this methodology only focuses on my personal and lived experiences, there is still a space for recommendations and practices that educators, parents, policymakers, and scholars can use in order to ensure the highest level of learning with all children (Gabriel & Lester, 2013). Through conducting this research, I gained a better understanding of my multiple identities, my culture, and the significant impact my environment had on me. I use this method as a guide and model for others to build upon. I found this methodology to be beneficial because it enabled me to be reflective, and it allowed me to construct new information pertaining to my experiences as a Black male in order to ignite and inspire other researchers and educators.

Next, I describe portions of my schooling experiences as an adolescent, while focusing on all aspects of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model and the ethic of care. I also draw connections to my teaching experiences and professional journey with culturally relevant pedagogy and textual lineage. I conclude by providing recommendations for personal and professional transformative practice. These recommendations specifically address the needs of African American males.

## **Personal and Professional Journey**

### **The Layers of My Environment**

When my students look at me, they see a young African American man standing alone at the front of the class, teaching. They cannot see the people who have surrounded me all my life with a hedge of protection. They only see the man in the mirror, not what is behind me that pushed me forward. They cannot see my inner strengths, my relationship between the people who protected me, and my schooling experiences that led me to choose the path of the learner over a life in the streets.

The intrinsic motivation I had for learning was influenced by outside factors, not just me. My environment impacted my motivation for education. People, along with the characters and words from important books, nurtured and sustained me, which helped me gain a better understanding of my identity and who I was as a person. The more I learned about myself, the more my intrinsic motivation increased.

I saw plenty of my friends, who were young Black males, go to jail, and I would wonder why they were participating in counterproductive behavior such as fighting, gang activities, robbery, and drug dispensing. They did not have support and care at home and they did not get support from their teachers at school—so, the streets became their home, their family, and their support. Growing up, my biological father was not in my life. He and my mother separated when I was two months old. During this time, my mom met my stepfather, and he is the man I have called Dad all of my life. Since I can remember, my parents have always been advocates for education.

My parents were invested and involved in my education. They attended parent-teacher conferences and any extracurricular activities I was involved in. During football season, my dad would work the concession stand, move equipment for the marching band, and drive the bus for the school field trips. I was impressed by my parents' involvement in my education, because they explicitly showed me how much they cared: "Most studies show that the value of education is impressed upon students when they see their parents and other family members involved in the school program" (Anfara & Mertens, 2008, p. 60). However, from first grade up until my

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seventh grade year, I considered myself to be a mediocre student. I could play the game of school, but I was not learning.

There was a point in time when I was unreceptive about being a young Black man, which impacted my identity. I did not possess nor receive my race willingly. I viewed being Black as an impediment. During this point in my life, I believed I was incapable of excelling because of my skin color. For two years, my ignorance perpetuated. My fifth grade year, I had my first encounter with racism. One of my peers was turning ten, and he was having a birthday party. He brought invitations to give out to his classmates, and he gave each child an invitation. Like any other child, I was thrilled. I went home and told my parents that I needed swimming trunks, because I had been invited to a pool party. The next day, the boy came to class and uninvited all of the Black children, but I did not know exactly why he had uninvited us. I was confused; I could not understand why he rescinded his invitation to the Black kids.

Devastated and depressed, I went home and explained the situation to my parents. They became outraged, and my mom called the boy's mother. I was hurt because the boy's mother was my second grade teacher, and I thought she adored having me as her student—at least that was what she told me. My mom explained to me how the boy's mother, my second grade teacher, had disinvited me because of the color of my skin. I can remember my mom on the phone with my past teacher, and I can recall her asking her, "How can you call yourself a teacher, and you are behaving like this? You are supposed to love each and every child no matter what his or her skin color is."

My parents explained how the boy's mother did not want us there because of our race. This triggered something in me. The immoral and malevolent racism oppressed me. Due to my encounter with racism, I questioned my culture, race, and Black peoples' places in society. My outlook on White people changed. I began to view them as superior to Blacks. I thought they were more intelligent than Blacks, and I thought they all came from privileged backgrounds. I was embarrassed of my culture, my community, and my identity. Due to this issue, I went from being an extrovert in class to an introvert. I did not want to say the wrong thing in class, and I did not want White people to think I was incompetent. This issue had a tremendous impact on my development. I had lost all hope. I devalued my culture and the people within my community; therefore, I devalued myself. I thought I was incapable of succeeding as a Black male. However, my parents, family members, and community members were still behind me, forcefully pushing me to become a successful Black male.

My seventh grade English language arts teacher, Ms. Ryans, introduced me to the importance of literature. When I was in the sixth grade, I can remember riding the bus and hearing the older kids talk about the popular Ms. Ryans and what a great teacher she was. Ms. Ryans was one out of the six Black teachers who taught at my middle school. She was a native of the school district; therefore, she understood the community, the demographics, and most importantly, the students. She invested her time, care, and love not only on me, but also on other kids from other races. She positively transformed me in a way that I began to see the importance of my identity and my culture, "any knowledge about man and society that schools can give him should be assimilated into the stream of his actual life" (Rosenblatt, 1996, p. 3).

I began to see how I could use books as a vehicle to learn more about other cultures, the world, and myself. She provided me with my first book where I saw my culture, language, and experiences take center stage. I became engrossed with literacy all because of one book, and this particular book transformed me. Jo Ann Burroughs's (1999) novel *Johnathon* had a profound impact on me. Johnathon was a first grader who came from an abusive family. He was

neglected and unloved. His first grade teacher became his success coach, and she provided him with the nurturing and the unconditional love he did not receive from his home environment. Johnathon was put into foster care, and he moved to another city. Years later, the first grade teacher became ill. She was rushed to another city to have major heart surgery performed by a renowned heart surgeon. Right before her surgery, she saw this tall Black man with big brown eyes and a round face. In a slow, solemn voice she says, “Johnathon.” The man replies, “Teacher” (Burroughs, 1999, p. 121).

I was not a neglected or unloved child, but there was something that made me connect with Johnathon. Johnathon inspired me. He gave me hope. He became this renowned heart surgeon, and he surpassed numerous obstacles along the way. Sitting in my seventh grade English language arts class, I thought to myself how I too could be like Johnathon. His success motivated me. I wanted to be the teacher in the book—I developed this hunger and thirst to save lives through education. I was motivated to do well in school, because I knew if I wanted to save lives, I had to obtain a higher education. Teaching became my passion, and students were my focus. Reading became my drug, and it had me hooked. Ms. Ryans pushed and challenged my human psyche. At the time, I wondered why was she pushing me, because I was only a middle school student. Due to her hard work and her rigor, she was helping me become more self-determined and intrinsically motivated not only to do well in school, but also in life. Ms. Ryans genuinely cared for all of her students, and she explicitly showed each student how much she valued them. Ms. Ryans found something special to love in each child.

There were times when I encountered obstacles, and I wanted to give up. The 2000 presidential election had an immense impact on my environment. I was a seventh grader, and I did not fathom how important the presidential race was, and how it would affect me. My family, along with other members of my community, would discuss how important this election was—they were terrified they would lose their manufacturing jobs, which meant they would not be able to support their families. My mom worked for a manufacturing company. Before the election, she worked extensive hours, but she never worried about being terminated from her job. Months after President Bush was inaugurated different factors in my life changed. My mother’s place of employment began to fire people and lay them off. Fortunately, she did not lose her job, but there were times when she was laid off from work. This changed things at home because, when my mom did not work, my family depended on my father’s income. My parents slowly began to fall into a financial pit. I could see the worried looks on my parents’ faces. My mother’s patterns of communication changed with me. She was not the joyful and exciting person she once had been. I was appalled at how much the world—my world—had changed due to this election. Like Richard Wright’s (1945) main character in the novel, *Black Boy*, during this time, I read as a way to cope with the issues I faced at home:

It had been only through books—at best, no more than vicarious cultural transfusions that I had managed to keep myself alive in a negatively vital way. Whenever my environment had failed to support or nourish me, I had clutched at books. (p. 283)

As a child Richard Wright used books as a means of escaping from his environment. When he needed the support or special attention, he went to books. Like Wright did as a child, I too performed the same acts. Like Wright, I used literature as a tactic to become knowledgeable about the world, to fathom the human soul, and to gain information about my own life.

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Even though I was dealing with difficulties at home, Ms. Ryans continued to be my support system. She was my coach, helping me to develop the skills to be an effective critical thinker, a critical learner, a critical reader, and a critical writer. Every child needs a coach, and Ms. Ryans was one of the reasons I did not give up. Her support and encouragement of my academic self transformed my life. From her demonstrations showing how much she loved books and learning, I became infatuated with the world of language and literature. Ms. Ryans not only helped me to see the importance of education, she also validated my interests and intellect in the classroom. I wanted to show other young Black males the importance of reading and writing and how an individual can mentally grow and develop from these vital tools. I knew then I wanted to teach, and I knew then I wanted more for myself. I strove to be a Black male that went against the negative images in my peer group, community and school. Together, my parents, church members, family, literature, and teachers all supported and nurtured me, which created an ecosystem of hope.

There were many critical incidents that impacted the layers of my environment. Elements of an ecosystem are interdependent, and when an event happens in one layer, the other layers are affected in some way. The events that occur in the ecosystem serve as a way to understand human functioning. Some of the events I encountered in my environment had a negative impact on me. However, other factors of my environment such as my parents, my community, and my schooling positively operated together, which molded me into the person I am today.

### **Teaching for a Purpose**

As a teacher, I constantly reflect and draw upon my experiences as a student and as an African American male. Looking back on my K-12 experience, I had only one teacher who took interest in me as an intellectual and practiced some form of culturally relevant pedagogy. I believe it is important for teachers to show students how much they care, “their guiding purpose—must be to establish and maintain a climate of continuity and care” (Noddings, 1992, p. 115). It makes a difference when a child knows his teacher cares about him. When I saw how much Ms. Ryans cared for me, it made me want to excel as a student, a brother, a son, and a Black male; she was not genetically related to me, and she did not have to care for me, but she did. It is pertinent that teachers show every student how much they care.

As a first year African American male English teacher, I strive to convey care and position my students as intellectuals capable of reading and writing their world. In my classroom we are all learners, and all of my students are teachers. I plan each lesson with a transformative curriculum in mind. I teach in an urban high school where most of my students are African American. Often, they come to me as reluctant readers and writers.

Enabling the text through textual lineage (Tatum, 2009) is one of many instructional methods I use in order to engage my students in literacy. Enabling the text allows my students to see their cultures, beliefs, values, experiences, and knowledge in the curriculum. I have young African American males who tell me how much they like my book choices and my teaching methods, because they can relate to the material, and they see themselves in the books, which makes them want to read more. They love how they have a voice and choice in my classroom, and they know they matter.

All of my units are planned thematically; therefore, I bring in a variety of supplementary texts that correlate with my theme. For example, in a unit titled *Social Justice, Acceptance, and*

*Tolerance*, I taught Walter Dean Myers' (1999) novel *Monster*. I also incorporated Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s (1963) *I Have A Dream* speech into the unit. The students and I read and analyzed the speech. They created three dreams focused on the inequities and injustices that are prevalent in their communities and the world today. Students then had to explain their plan for combating the different injustices and inequities. This type of analysis and critical thinking transcends the classroom. In deep and thorough classroom discussions, my young Black males saw the issues and stereotypes they face in society. Due to enabling the text, culturally relevant pedagogy, and a transformative curriculum, these males have gained a greater sense of consciousness about these issues, and they have begun to raise awareness.

As a teacher, I have discovered the critical need for mentorship of young Black males. Many of the Black males whom I teach come from single-parent homes, and usually the father is absent. They constantly explain to me how I am the first positive black male they have encountered, which saddens me. They need to see more positive African American males who are excelling in life. If they cannot physically see these men, they need to hear and learn about these men. I explain to them the importance of education and how they must not perpetuate the status quo.

### **Recommendations for Personnel and Professional Transformative Practice**

In my experiences as a K-12 student, most of my teachers did not create a relationship-driven classroom, they did not provide students with emancipatory literature, and they did not teach us how to recognize power and privilege. I experienced these with Ms. Ryans, my seventh grade teacher. Fortunately for me, the experience with her was powerful enough to sustain my academic achievement, culture, and identity. However, children, especially Black males, should not wish to be so lucky to have one good teacher, but all teachers should be inclined and prepared to provide students with the tools that will put them on the trajectory toward success. Thus, I conclude with recommendations and practices I implement throughout my curricula and instruction as a secondary English teacher. While these recommendations and practices are especially critical for African American students, they are important tools to use with all students.

### **Create a Relationship-Driven Classroom**

“Good morning Servio, how is everything going? Are your classes going okay?” “Good morning Mr. Johnson, why are you asking me that? You don't care how everything is going. We know teachers just act like they care, but they really don't.” I (a first year teacher) stood at the door of my classroom in disbelief. I was flummoxed, disheartened at this 15 year old student's comment. Subconsciously, I thought, this is another marginalized male who has encountered the negative connotations and stereotypes about his race, identity, language, and culture. This is the excruciating cry from another young man whose voice has been silenced—another young man who has not experienced a relationship driven classroom. Teachers must form trusting, collaborative, and supportive alliances with students. In a relationship driven classroom, a sense of belonging permeates the classroom, because the teacher understands the whole child well enough to monitor and adjust to the child's personal needs. A relationship driven classroom works to bridge the gap between home and school. Teachers must have the alacrity to step outside of their original frames and learn more about their students' environment, community,

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culture, race, and identity. In order to have a robust relationship with students, it must be an ongoing process; therefore, teachers cannot expect to learn the whole child during the first few weeks of school. Continuously, the teacher must learn about his/her students, the students must learn about each other, and the students must learn about teacher, which will create a system of trust.

### **Teaching Emancipatory Literature**

Emancipatory literature is literature that liberates the reader through the characters' experiences, trials and tribulations, and successes (Boutte & Jackson, 2009). Readers develop messages about their culture, race, identity, and positions in the world through literature: "Literacy is inseparable from the struggle for freedom because education interrogates power" (Boutte & Jackson, 2009, p. 110). For example, I created a unit where the students explored and analyzed American history through literature. My students analyzed and critiqued The Declaration of Independence and David Walker's (1829/1997) *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*. In the appeal, Walker interrogates and scolds the writers of the Declaration by challenging this notion of equality, which permeates the document. Walker counters this idea of equality by challenging Blacks to fight against racism and marginalization. After engaging in critical dialogue about both texts, the students create their own appeal about any modern-day issues and injustices. When the teacher chooses the right text for the right time for the right students, the students gain a sense of self and emancipation through the literature, which is one tool that can promote universal love. Universal love equates to equity, concept of self, freedom, and love for all humanity, and, through effective literature, these components can lead to emancipation.

### **Recognizing Privilege and Power**

Earlier, it was stated how White teachers constitute most of the teaching force. Moreover, White teachers must interrogate themselves, recognize their biases, accept and recognize their privilege. All of these factors can assist them to see the issues of race and racism. In W.E.B. Dubois's (1903) book *Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois illuminates the issue of double-consciousness—the struggle with being Black and American. In *White Teachers and Diverse Classrooms*, Landsman and Lewis (2011) elucidate this notion of possessing a single racial consciousness. There are some things that people who possess this individual consciousness can do that people with double-consciousness cannot do. Accepting the individual racial consciousness is the first step to not only becoming a multicultural teacher, but also a multicultural person. Privileged individuals have this fear of letting go of power. Hence, the privileged must eradicate the idea of the power to oppress and arrange coalitions that promote the power of solidarity, care, and love for all humanity.

In my classroom, I revamp my curriculum. I create a space for my students to recognize and interrogate power, which leads to critical dialogue about who are the oppressors and who are the oppressed. In my unit on social justice, students have the opportunity to analyze and examine the spaces of power and privilege within their own lives and connect these experiences to historical and current spaces.

There is power in the tongue; therefore, in order for liberation to transpire, critical dialogue must evolve. Transformation starts with self. Once the person has reached

transformation, the person must engage in critical dialogue with his/her family members, the community, colleagues, and friends about the issues of power and privilege, race, classism, sexism, etc. Participating in effective dialogue, unlearning biases, creating synergistic coalitions, and developing an open heart, together equal critical transformation.

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