

MIAMI UNIVERSITY - THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
CERTIFICATE FOR APPROVING THE DISSERTATION

We hereby approve the Dissertation  
of  
Kamara Sekou (Paul D. Collins)

Candidate for the Degree:  
Doctor of Philosophy

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Richard Quantz, Director

---

Raymond Terrell, Reader

---

Peter Magolda, Reader

---

Yvette Harris  
Graduate School Representative

## ABSTRACT

### RITUALS OF EMPOWERMENT, DISEMPOWERMENT, AND CRITICAL TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP AT A SCHOOL IN TRANSITION

by Kamara Sekou (Paul D. Collins)

Despite over forty years of integrated public education in the United States of America there has continued to be an unsatisfactory outlook on education for increasingly large numbers of children of African descent. This issue has led many educators, parents, and concerned citizens such as those at The Marva Collins Preparatory School of Cincinnati (MCPSC) to implement alternative strategies in order to provide quality educational spaces within their communities. Independent schools have been one of the avenues used by African-Americans in pursuit of better educational opportunities in a complex and ethnically pluralistic society.

Specifically, this study explores the ways that parents, students, administrators, teachers, and school support staff at an independent day school ritualize aspects of critical transformative leadership in their transition to an independent boarding school. This study focuses on an elaboration and exploration of distinguishing characteristics of critical transformative leadership as well as how these characteristics manifest in this educational setting at such a critical juncture in its development.

This study is organized into three parts for a more coherent and accessible document. Part one (I) provides an introduction, a review of related literature, and the theoretical and methodological frameworks guiding this study. Part two (II) encompasses the historicizing of blacks and education in the city of Cincinnati, as well as “inside stories” on daily life at MCPSC during the 2000-2001 school year. Finally, part three (III) entails a critical analysis of the research data with implications and recommendations for the significance of this study.

With the above stated in mind, theories of leadership in the United States of America have been articulated, discussed, and debated in the field of education for as long as schools have existed in this country. Much of the discourse usually stemming from technocratic, business models of administration have been thoroughly scrutinized leading to very different ways of conceptualizing what educators such as Thomas Sergiovanni refer to as “leadership for the schoolhouse” (Sergiovanni, 1996). Recent educational leadership discourse on transformative leadership have offered new hopes and possibilities to educational leaders and theorists who are interested in practicing a critically oriented, ethic of risk for the betterment of America’s schools. Studies of this critical ethnographic nature are vital in an epoch in which Carlson and Apple (1998) have identified as “these unsettling times” in American education.

RITUALS OF EMPOWERMENT, DISEMPOWERMENT, AND CRITICAL  
TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP AT A SCHOOL IN TRANSITION

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by

Kamara Sekou (Paul D. Collins)

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Kamara Sekou (Paul Collins)

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-Kamara

## **PART I**

### **Situating the Study**

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Teaching is a noble profession because you are a change agent. You must care about the child's mind, body and spirit... We teach the children how to sit; how to dine; and how to behave around other people. It's not about mediocrity. It's about making *leaders*. (italics mine)

President/CEO of MCPSC, in Greater Cincinnati  
African-American SHOPPER'S GUIDE for Community-Based Businesses,  
Aug.–Sept., 2000 Vol. 2, Issue 4

Despite over forty years of integrated public education in the United States of America, there has continued to be an unsatisfactory outlook on education for increasingly large numbers of children of African descent. This issue has led many educators such as those of The Marva Collins Preparatory School of Cincinnati (MCPSC) to implement alternative strategies in order to provide a quality education for African-American students. Independent schools have been one of the avenues used by African-Americans in pursuit of better educational opportunities in a complex and ethnically pluralistic society. As with independent schools, there is a certain level of academic autonomy in reference to the many guidelines and requirements that state, public schools must adhere. These schools' independence of the many requirements mandated by the state, public educational system help to play a major role in shaping how schooling is carried out on a daily basis.

Bearing in mind the aforementioned context, the lead-teacher at MCPSC provides poignant words filled with a sense of commitment and struggle. I use Mrs. Jawanza's<sup>5</sup> narrative, thickened by years of hands-on experience, to represent one of the multiple voices and interpretations of those in this school community. She introduces the school stating,

[On MCPSC's creation]... it was like even in the first interview, I remember that... it was an old tiny desk and... well I was with public schools for three years up to that point... and so I was kinda used to some of the better schools as well as the run down schools. Well, this was the basement of a church you know (she laughs lightly)... so that was kinda a first and there was Dr. Mariama sitting there at a desk and there was really nothing, but it just didn't matter to me because I... I just felt like... I'm gonna get in on this and I'm gonna help in whatever way... I'm gonna make this...you know... I'm gonna do what I can to make it work... And so that was just kind of the feel, it was almost like not so much coming into school just to teach children, but it was almost like a business I wanted to help see grow...

And, just even within the year we saw the growth... you know, we just took whoever we had to take... whomever would come, when you starting out you can't be picky... But to see children starting out really with all these different kinds of handicaps, that's most of the people we got because nobody generally

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<sup>5</sup> All names used in this study are pseudonyms so as to protect the anonymity of all participants.

comes to something new that they are unsure of unless their child has had so much failure elsewhere... It's like well let's try this (her voice peeks as she imitates a frustrated parent searching for a good school for his/her child)... and that's what had happened in most cases... We had some who just believed in Mrs. Collins' methodology and wanted to see... and if that's what we're doing, they wanted their child to be up on it that first year.

Then that second year... and I started out with first through sixth... I had em' all! (she raises her voice)... but yet it was only like forty-three students or so... but it ranged in those years because like I said we had to take what we could get... but then that next year we had a few more teachers and that meant I didn't have to do all six grades... So in that right it made it easier, every year it has become easier and easier because I started at the bottom (her voice deepens with emphasis on "the bottom")...

On shouldering the burden:

...Then every year got easier because it started out so rough... But it wasn't rough because I was so excited (getting excited) you know we're gonna make this work... and you know... and so there was a different... the momentum was different... because you felt like everything was on your shoulders but it wasn't a burden it was like, it was excitement...

See after we went to Mrs. Collins' training we saw what she did... So you were able to say well "if she did it in the ghetto and we're not in the ghetto!" (her voice raises)... you know our kids aren't gonna be that rough, they had to go to uniforms because the gangs were ripping the clothes off the kids... they took the gym shoes off 'em... you know and all that kind of stuff. So, we're looking at it as, well we don't have it that bad... We can make this work... and that's why to me every year has been better and better because I started with no books (stressing no books)... totally no books... And then we didn't even have a copier machine... and you know, so much we didn't have so every year we got something else, something else... and now we're in this building... you know carpet! (her voice raises as she laughs) books for every subject... and somebody to teach Science, somebody to teach Math and I'm not teaching it all... And that's with that appreciation whereas maybe some would be complaining so much, I remember virtually having nothing... with the worst set of kids... and under the worst predicaments because we were in the basement of a church and every Friday we had to help break stuff down so it could go back to Sunday school for church... Then Monday building back up... you know... physically doing stuff... But we did it because we had a goal... and you know Dr. Mariama saw this from day one (referring to the new higher grades boarding school campus)... So we had a goal that we were working towards... Now the goal is a new goal and we're trying to have this International Boarding School. So, the goals just get higher and expand more and more each year...

Educational boarding institutions have surely not been the most popular schooling idea historically amongst most of North America's citizenry. These institutions have usually been reserved for the politically powerful and financial "elite" (typically male) of European descent in the United States (see, Cookson & Persell, 1985; McLachlan, 1970).

In my spheres of social interaction throughout life I have experienced very little discourse on institutions of this nature, which causes me to wonder if many in our society are even cognizant of their existence. Thus, bearing in mind the historical atrocities levied on many Africans snatched from their homeland and relocated along the eastern seaboard of the U.S., the concept of independent boarding institutions primarily attended by African-American children seemingly falls even farther out of the realm of U.S. consciousness. Nevertheless, MCPSC represents one such school in the making.

In this study, I will explore the ways that parents, students, administrators, teachers, and school support staff at an independent day school ritualize aspects of critical transformative leadership in the first year of their transition to an independent boarding school. This study will focus on an elaboration and exploration of distinguishing characteristics of critical transformative leadership theory as well as how these characteristics manifest in this educational setting at such a critical juncture in its development.

A framework of critical transformative leadership has been articulated and this conceptual framework, which outlines specifics of critical transformative leadership must be laid out against the daily practices of contemporary schools in a way that allows for the democratic transformational possibilities that may be inherent when theory and practice are perceived to be inseparable. For, in this context, this empirical study offers the possibility of new insights and the advancement of theory in the field of education through the testing of a conceptual model of leadership in a school setting.

Bearing in mind the aforementioned, theories of leadership in the United States of America have been articulated, discussed, and debated in the field of education for as long as the existence of schools in this country. Much of the discourse usually stemming from technocratic, business models of administration has been thoroughly scrutinized. Recent educational leadership conversations around issues of transformative leadership have offered new hopes and possibilities. Studies of this critical ethnographic nature are vital.

There has been much commentary on independent day schools developed for and attended entirely or predominately by children of African descent in America (Akoto 1992; Collins and Tamarkin 1982, 1990; Dixon 1994; Douglas 1981; Hoover 1992; Lee 1992; Lomotey 1992; Wilson 1998). Yet, a review of the literature indicated that there has not been a published study that examined the discourse of transformative leadership in independent schools attended predominately by African-American students. It is clear that anytime an educational institution takes on an endeavor of this nature there are going to be culturally complex and interconnected ethical, power, and related issues of leadership that will require thorough analysis at such a critical juncture in this school community's educational development. Information gathered in this study may help in developing further research and discourse around the issues of leadership as it pertains to transformative educational practices and independent African-American institutions developed for and attended predominately or entirely by children of African descent in America.

In a study of this nature there are obvious ontological as well as epistemological issues that must be delineated in order to elicit a sound and coherent methodological approach that undergirds educational claims to knowledge. A major methodological discourse of critical social theory and research has been constructed by academics as an

educational inquiry approach that will help to clarify the epistemological and ontological claims to knowledge as well as serve as a measure of the criterion of goodness implicit in this particular study. For, critical discourse seeks to understand the subjective and intersubjective meaning-making interactions of the researched juxtaposed to the historical/material world. Therefore, knowledge is located in “praxis” the emersion of the cultural and material through demystification and critical understanding, which leads to emancipatory and transformative possibilities.

In exploring the complexities inherent in a process of this nature the question becomes, how does Marva Collins Preparatory School appropriate critical transformative leadership in its ritualized interactions thereby legitimating and/or delegitimizing various voices that make up this educational community? I will explore the above question through critical discourse as the major lens of inquiry.

### **Problem Statement**

While there was not a single clearly defined hypothesis that guided the initial observations in this study, the broad theoretical framework of critical transformative leadership provided general guidelines of initial inquiry. The study began by asking one specific question. In what ways does The Marva Collins Preparatory School ritualize critical transformative leadership in its transition from an independent day school to an independent boarding school?

There are a number of other questions that this study raises and seeks to explore allowing for a clearer, more precise understanding of the various aspects of critical transformative leadership as conceptualized in this study. This approach helps us understand the complex power relations between those involved in the discursive daily practices of this educational setting when confronted with the critical transformative question of, *leadership for what moral as well as political aims?*

In reference to *racial/ethnic group dynamics* critical questions must be asked such as: what are the political conflicts among groups in educational communities over which cultures should be approved and legitimated or disapproved and delegitimated? Which specific racial/ethnic group culture(s) are promoted and advocated more than others in schools? Why are this/these groups promoted more than others are? Who in this educational community has the power to promote this/these racial/ethnic group cultures over others in this school? Are there other groups within the school that want other racial/ethnic group cultures promoted and advocated but do not have the power to do so?

In reference to *class tensions* critical questions must be asked such as: whose socio-economic group lifestyles; such as lower, middle, or upper class gets promoted and advocated more than others in schools? If so, why are this/these groups promoted more than others are? Who has the power to promote this/these group lifestyle(s) over others in schools? Furthermore, *gender politics* provokes such questions as: what are the differences in the roles and expectations of girls and boys in schools? Who in these educational communities has the power to promote this/these roles and expectations over possible alternative roles and expectations? Are there other groups that want other roles and expectations for girls and boys but do not have the power to do so?

The critical transformative notion of *democratic authority* invokes questions such as: what role does the conceptualization of democratic authority (i.e., understood as the legitimating of power, which unlike authoritarianism, promotes symmetrical relationships

and is legitimized based on both process and consequence) have in schools? In addition, *leadership at all levels of the community* provides further context of school politics by posing such questions as: what is thought of the leadership process in terms of empowering followers to become leaders? In addition, how do the particular school leaders get to practice leadership?

Accordingly, *a language of critique* focused on transformative praxis is of importance. Questions such as: are there discussions which seek to provide a critical understanding of and pinpoint the global, national, and local barriers, which work against the achievement of a more democratic society? Furthermore, are these discussions serving as mechanisms that allow for the possibilities for schools to work actively for the alleviation of undemocratic societal barriers within their sphere of influence? Finally, the critical transformative notion of *civic responsibility and an ethic of risk* remains essential posing such questions as: what are some risks that those in school leadership positions have to take in reference to those who have the economical and political power to adversely affect them?

The aforementioned underlying interests and assumptions of critical transformative leadership theory help to clarify the theoretical framework of this study.

### **Specifics of the study**

The research site was an independent day school in its first year of transition to an independent boarding school facility in Cincinnati, Ohio. This educational institution has historically housed pre-kindergarten through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade at one intimate campus location. During the research process the newly (many parts still under renovation) boarding school facility allowed for the separation of the school into two campuses—the old campus housing the school's lower grades (pre-k – 3<sup>rd</sup>) and the new boarding campus housing grades (4<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup>). Data was primarily collected on the new higher grades boarding campus in fourth, fifth/sixth, and seventh/eight grade classrooms as well as the school's dining area, monthly Saturday parent/teacher meetings, and the school's "Prepping for Power" Sunday events. Conducted over a period of one school year, this study made use of observations of the school's President/CEO, teachers and students in classrooms as well as other school settings. Interviews were conducted with parents, teachers, the President/CEO and when possible, students. The specific research methods included participant/observation, structured and unstructured interviews, as well as the examination of archival documents and records.

### **Limitations of the study**

#### **1. Researcher bias**

As in all ethnographic studies, by choosing certain details to emphasize, selectively reporting these, leaving out or slanting others, a particular point of view is always communicated to the exclusion of others. Although not particularly a weakness, the researcher bias inherent in this study is consciously acknowledged.

#### **2. Lack of parent participation in formal interview process**

This study highlights many subjective as well as intersubjective aspects of parental interactions in the MCPSC school community during the course of the school

year. Nevertheless, the low number (4) of formal parent interview scripts that I was able to retrieve from parents, after three attempts, represents a limitation of this study.<sup>6</sup>

### **An Overview of the Study**

This study is organized into three major parts. Part one (I) provides an introduction, a review of related literature, and the theoretical and methodological frameworks guiding this study. Following this introductory chapter, the second chapter discusses African-American Schools (*Independent and Boarding*), “The Marva Collins Way”, as well as the concepts of ritual, critical transformative leadership theory, and power. This chapter explores how African-Americans have been historicized in the broader literature in reference to independent and boarding school education. Also, there will be an exploration of the commentary of how the philosophical approach, which has come to be known as the “Marva Collins Way” has impacted U.S. educational discourse. In addition, this chapter examines the complexities located in the politics of culture through ritual performances by reviewing relevant tenets of ritual and power in the literature. Finally, with a clear conceptualization of how ritual and power will be used in this study, I will elaborate on the historicity of the theoretical construct of transformational leadership in education leading to theorized principles of critical transformative leadership as outlined in the broader literature.

Following this discussion, chapter three presents the theoretical and methodological frameworks used to collect the ethnographic research data around which this study is constructed. It includes a discussion of qualitative research and critical ethnographic design. Chapter three will also elaborate on data collection and methods used for the study by situating the ethnographer in the context of the research site as well as how the data was gained and recorded.

Part two (II) of this study historicizes blacks and education in the city of Cincinnati, as well as provide a three phase approach (re)presenting “inside stories” on daily life at MCPSC during the 2000-2001 school year. The initial chapter in Part II is chapter four that provides *The Setting*, which is situated through historicizing Cincinnati, as well as education and African-Americans in the city. This discussion will lead into the founding and development of the Marva Collins Preparatory School of Cincinnati (MCPSC). Then, chapter five, *Phase I: Inside Stories on the First Term at MCPSC* entail the new school campus’ opening days leading to the school’s winter holiday break marking the end of the school’s first term. Chapter six, *Phase II: Weekend Rituals* provides insights into regular weekend school events such as “Prepping for Power” showcases and monthly parent/teacher meetings. Finally, chapter seven, *Phase III: Inside Stories on the Second Term at MCPSC* provide ethnographic (re)presentations of the school’s second and final term of the year. Part (II) of this study, which thickly describes various aspects of the school setting through the systematic observation of all stakeholders, will serve as a basis for interpreting this school’s rituals. Thus, this chapter highlights the complexities of power relationships during this transitioning process.

Part three (III) entails a critical analysis of the research data with implications and recommendations for the significance of this study. Chapter eight, *Critical Transformative Leadership Theory and Curricularizing*, entails a critical analysis of what “I” have witnessed in a year of participant/observing at the research site. Also, I

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<sup>6</sup> See, Obtaining and Recording Data in Chapter 3 of this study for further elaboration.



juxtapose the theoretical lens of critical transformative leadership to this school's first year of transition from an independent day school to an independent boarding school. Chapter nine, *Ethnographic Themes*, elaborates on the overarching themes that became apparent through the research process. This study's ethnographic themes help to present further, vital interpretive insights into this school community's historical/material reality. Thus, these chapters situate the conceptual framework of critical transformative leadership within the context of the research setting.

The last chapter presents implications and recommendations for this study suggesting several areas in which the study has potential significance. A discussion of humility as expressed in the African communitarian ethos is presented through the connections of Signitia Fordham's conceptualization of the "black fictive kinship system and W.E.B. Dubois' work in regard to Booker T. Washington. Further elaboration on the implications for critical transformative leadership are presented and a curricular alternative which may allow the school to interrogate, eliminate, and build on the present positive qualities of the Marva Collins philosophy. Finally, I present a case for the vital necessity that calls for the creation of more independent schools for blacks. The implications of creating more independent schools to service African-American children is inseparable from the issue of wealthy white funding and finance which will also be discussed. Thus, chapter ten serves the multiple purposes of providing specific suggestions for this school community as well as other independent institutions and/or those in the process of being created.

## CHAPTER 2

### **A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON AFRICAN-AMERICAN SCHOOLS (Independent and Boarding), “THE MARVA COLLINS WAY”, RITUAL, TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP, AND POWER**

#### *African-American Schools (Independent and Boarding)*

The literature surrounding independent schools owned and operated primarily by African-Americans presented in the literature stem from organizations such as, the Council of Independent Black Institutions (CIBI), independent neighborhood schools, Black Independent Schools (BIS), and the Institute for Independent Education (IIE). Many of the ideas espoused through the varied nomenclatures presented above in many ways overlap thus highlighting the developing nature of such institutions, even in their identifying representations.

The concept of independent education for African people in America can be traced to as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These institutions manifested largely due to a great desire for some form of education and the non-admittance of blacks into white systems of schooling. With the inception of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century civil rights era, and the court mandated integration of public schools in the south came the networking of independent black operated institutions nationwide. Much of these organizational efforts were in part to counter the white supremacist ideology that African-Americans faced in the newly integrated public schools of this country (Carruthers, 1999).

Early group work on independent African-American school organizations can be traced back as far as 1968. The National Association of Afro-American Educators galvanized the momentum to create new educational processes for the self-realization of African-American students. The organization’s mission in defining educational goals for African-American children took into account these primal questions: Who they are? Where they came from? Where they are going? And, how will they get there? (Ratteray, 1990).

The term “independent Black institutions” (IBIs) has been in use for at least 30 years. The Congress of African People used the term in the early 1970s as they dialogued on blacks and education (Satterwhite, 1971). Spurning from the idea of IBIs, the Council of Independent Black Institutions (CIBI) was formerly created in the summer of 1972 at a national meeting in Frogmore, South Carolina. At this meeting, members representing 14 independent Black institutions confirmed the initial mandate and outlined principles, policies, and programs of the organization (see, CIBI, 1987 in Ratteray, 1990). Presently CIBI operates as a technical assistance and teacher training organization. These schools often espouse a “Pan-African” orientation, which grew out of the concerns of educators, parents, and others about the need to have community control over public schools. Lomotey and Brookins work on independent black institutions exploring cultural implications differentiate between “traditional African-American private schools and independent Black institutions (IBIs) by pointing out that IBIs focus on dealing with African-American culture as a basis for curriculum development (Shujaa, 1994).

Ratteray and Shujaa (1994) introduced the term “independent neighborhood schools” to describe a broad range of schools located predominately in urban communities. In exploring these independent schools Shujaa asserts,

These schools represent “neighborhood-based, self-help responses to educational needs” in specific ethnic and cultural communities. Significant differences exist among independent neighborhood schools... There is a cross-cutting distinction among the schools that reflects the extent to which emphasis is placed on building a cultural base and countering Eurocentric hegemony. In some independent neighborhood schools the cultural foundation is considered essential and in others it is essentially ignored. (Shujaa, 1994, p. 362)

In her study on parental choice, Carter (1987) introduced the term Black Independent Schools (BIS) adding once again to the evolving independent African-American schools nomenclatures.

Finally, The Institute for Independent Education (IIE) has also engaged independent schooling for African-Americans. Founded in 1984 IIE, like CIBI, is an organization devoted to technical assistance and policy development. As a non-profit entity IIE documents, promotes, and raises funds for various activities of independent schools with majority ethnic minority populations. The Institute conducts basic research, explores public policy issues, operates technical assistance programs, and trains teachers (Ratteray, 1990). In a study conducted of 200 independent schools, IIE highlighted the fact that many independent schools are just that—independent. These institutions have never appeared in the literature and are very disconnected from mainstream academia in reference to published studies as well as not being connected to the major independent school organizations for African-Americans (Shujaa, 1994).

Even more isolated and absent from mainstream academia in reference to the literature is the tradition of Black/African-American boarding schools. There are four historically African-American boarding schools currently in operation in the United States; The Piney Woods Country Life School on the outskirts of Jackson, Miss., Redemption Christian Academy of Troy, NY, Lauringburg Institute of Lauringburg, NC, and Pine Forge Academy of Pine Forge, PA. The Piney Woods School’s website alludes to the fact that “historically, there were at least 83 schools of this nature, but with public school access of the 1950’s and 60’s through the integration movement, most of these institutions were closed” (see, <http://www.pineywoods.org>). A review of the literature revealed absolutely nothing in reference to the eighty-three extinct schools as well as the four in operation with the exception of The Piney Woods School.

In 1955, Beth Day published *The Little Professor of Piney Woods* that tells a story of Professor Laurence C. Jones, the African-American man who founded the school in 1910. It is interesting to note the success rate of the one African-American boarding school with available information. According to the Piney Woods website:

Forty-five (98%) of the 46 graduates in 1999 are enrolled in colleges and universities throughout the state of Mississippi and the country. This percentage of graduates going on to higher education has been consistent in the 1998, 1997, and 1996 classes. One hundred percent (100%) of the 1995 class was accepted into more than 270 of the finest colleges and universities with scholarship offers over \$1.5 million. (<http://www.pineywoods.org>)

There is clearly a need for more study of these institutions. Dr. Charles H. Beady, the school’s current president has published two small motivational literature documents, which speak to education and the Hip Hop generation (see, Beady 2000; Beady 2000). With this dissertation’s focus on the evolvement of The Marva Collins School of

Cincinnati into an international boarding school, one more independent African-American boarding institution will be in operation and a part of this growing scholarly literature.

*“The Marva Collins Way”*

Much has been said about the renowned African-American educator, Mrs. Marva N. Collins in the public media in the past two decades. Much less has been presented in the scholarly literature of refereed journals although there are two books outlining her life’s story and the evolution of her teaching philosophy to her credit (Collins & Tamarkin, 1982, 1990).

With the insertion of “Marva Collins” into an internet search engine, one can be guided to a plethora of information on Mrs. Collins starting with her homepage, which highlights Marva Collins Seminars, Inc ©. Along with a brief biography, Marva Collins Seminars, Inc © offers details on how to schedule and participate in her three-day seminars that have been attended by more than 30,000 teachers and superintendents from the United States as well as many foreign countries. Travel instructions, seminar fees, and hotel accommodation prices are presented as well. Hotlinks to Marva Collins products such as books, and video/audio tapes along with their price listings are all at the tip of your finger.

Other hotlinks lead to Cable News Network’s (CNN) text adaptation of a special report on Democracy in America: Private Schools/Public Money, which aired Sunday, September 17, 2000. The CNN hotlink explores the controversial Milwaukee school voucher initiative. The story focuses on how private schools such as Milwaukee’s Marva Collins Prep are raising the standards bar for the public schools now that 8,000 students have been able to use vouchers at schools of this nature.

Etta Ruth Hollins (1982), in *The Journal of Teacher Education* revisits the Marva Collins philosophy through a lecture presented at the Wesley Methodist Church in Austin, Texas on October 2, 1981. She also shares impressions based on the CBS television production of Mrs. Collins’ story. Hollins argues for “cultural congruence as a significant factor in Mrs. Collins’ success... referring to the relationship between the curriculum and the pupils’ cultural experience outside the school” (p. 37). Pointing to the instructional activities, motivation, and instructional presentation practices by Mrs. Collins, Hollins concludes,

Traditional classroom instruction is based on an idealized Anglo middle-class learning mode that is often inaccessible to many children. An examination of the Marva Collins story in many ways supports the notion that learning is facilitated through congruence between instructional activities and the pupils’ cultural experiences. (1982, p. 39)

Once again the “how” (methodology) of the Marva Collins Way is highlighted as the magic of Mrs. Collins’ approach. Hollins even alludes to the “what” (content) as being very much in line with the status quo which has led to higher standardized achievement test scores for “obvious political and economic reasons;” a more attractive school (p. 37).

On a more orthodoxed note, Nash (1997) has pinpointed Mrs. Collins as representing what he considers a “neo-classicalists” philosophical orientation. This conversation in many ways moves us from the “how” of Mrs. Collins’ philosophy to an analysis of the “what.” As educators all over the nation struggle with what education is

and why is it so vital to the future of America, many educators have decided on the ideas and values that they feel are needed in the nations ideological diet. Robert Nash in his book Answering the Virtuecrats does an excellent job of framing the ideological views of various educators in reference to Neo-classicalism and character education. For the purposes of this study the worldview and perspectives of the “neo-classicalists” will be of importance. The worldview of the “neo-classicists” allows for an understanding of the school of thought in which Marva Collins’ ideas and perspectives so closely parallel. Nash (1997) offers these words of description in reference to the “neo-classical” worldview:

As upholders of “traditional moral values,” the declinists (believers of the fact that American culture, and education in particular, are in a period of grave, near-catastrophic moral decline and in desperate need of a massive virtue infusion to save them) are self-declared ‘neo-classicalists’ who extol the traditional virtues of Western civilization, especially those embodied in the cultural legacy of the ancient Greeks. (p. 18)

In presenting the neo-classicalist saturation of ancient Greeks in their works Nash goes on to state,

Kilpatrick (1992) refers to Plato and Aristotle a whopping 22 times in a book devoted exclusively to an analysis of contemporary education. And Marva Collins (1990) speaks frequently of the ancient philosophers-particularly Plato and Aristotle-both in her more general analysis of the education of ghetto children and in the personal account of her actual, day-to-day teaching in a private, inner-city elementary school. She cites Plato and Aristotle, and a variety of other ancient authors as well, at least 50 times in a relatively short volume aimed at the general reader. (pp. 18,19)

Therefore, it becomes clear that the neo-classicalist perspectives on education are deeply rooted in the philosophical frameworks of Western Classical discourse.

Exploring deeper into the neo-classical character educators beliefs on educational issues Nash states,

Generally, they believe in an essential human nature that conduces all children everywhere, regardless of class, ethnic, racial, and gender difference, to want to know the truth and to lead the morally good life. They stress the importance of the Western cultural heritage in embodying this universal truth and the responsibility of the school to transmit this truth to all children. (p. 21)

Neo-classicalist such as Marva Collins also have unique perspectives on curricular issues and student learning and achievement. Nash reveals these comments in reference to Marva Collins’ Way and her neo-classical approach to educational curricular issues:

Marva Collins (1990), a self-professed Platonist who believes in a world of timeless truths and an invariant moral order, is harshly critical of “curriculum experts” who are obsessed with “relevance.” As both a founder and principal of a Chicago private school, Westside Preparatory, and as someone who has taught there for more than 20 years, Collins, an African-American, believes that a “relevant” curriculum serves only to

undermine the fundamental purpose of education: to “expand children’s horizons.” (pp. 24-25)

In the prologue of The Marva Collins Way, Tamarkin makes very profound comments in stating that much of the media attention Marva Collins received focused on *what* she taught- on the fact that she had seven, eight, and nine-year-old ghetto children reading and reciting William Shakespeare and Geoffrey Chaucer (Collins & Tamarkin, 1982). These are very profound words that also warrant an analysis as to the cultural ramifications of what is really being stated. Tamarkin also continues to make it clear that Mrs. Collins was indeed lauded by many as a teacher to be recognized as well as publicized when she stated,

Marva Collins had come to the public’s attention. From the ivy-covered walls of Princeton to the grade schools of Wyoming, educators clamored to attend her workshops, and they flocked to her classroom from as far away as Germany and Spain to observe her technique. Publishers were after her to endorse textbooks; manufacturers wanted her to advertise educational products. A Hollywood producer planned to make a movie about her, and a group of entrepreneurs tried to set up a franchise of Marva Collins schools. Distraught parents sought her advice, and politicians solicited her help. Weeks before I met her, she had been offered the post of Los Angeles County superintendent of schools as well as a seat on Chicago’s Board of Education. Within the year, she would be invited by President Carter to a White House conference on education and be tapped for a cabinet spot in then President-elect Reagan’s administration. (p. 14)

It is clear that many educators as well as political leaders laud the accomplishments of Mrs. Collins and her philosophy for educating inner-city African-American youth.

I always find it very interesting when the European-American dominated media as well as other public figures such as the President find just the right African-American around which to rally. As Tamarkin stated above, it was clear that the media focused and approved of *what* (the content) it was that Mrs. Collins was teaching. I am quite sure that authors such as Shakespeare and Chaucer could offer much to the understanding of certain values that are good for children. But, at a deeper level I am forced to ask why Shakespeare? Why Chaucer? Who are they that these inner-city African-American youth must recite and memorize?

In conclusion, Nash outlines key and clear connections between The Marva Collins Way and neo-classical perspectives on ethical education. After exploring the perspectives of other neo-classicalist such as Kilpatrick, Bennett, Wynne, and Ryan. Nash states,

Finally, Collins (1990) is considerably more detailed than most character educators in explicating her classroom teaching methods for imparting the virtues at Westside Prep. Throughout *Marva Collins’ Way*, she gives innumerable concrete examples of how she inculcates virtues in her classroom. Everything Collins does in the classroom is calculated to teach her poor, inner-city children the virtues for “self-reliance and self-respect... to teach them the importance of learning, of developing skills, of

doing for themselves” (p.54). Her overarching mission is to “develop a child’s character, to help build a positive self-image” (p.58).

### **Ritual, Transformative Leadership, & Power**

Through the conceptualization of transformative leadership, the position of research and writing has undergone a reorientation within the discourse of leadership (Burns, 1978). The implications for leadership as contextualized in education becomes clear when transformative leadership is articulated by Foster (1986), as “the playing out of the political process in ways that are satisfactory to both leaders and followers” (p. 96). Implicitly, the process of politics brings forth the arrangement of complex power relations located in the interactions of the leaders with the followers, the leaders with the leaders, as well as the followers with the followers. I believe that the political process that Foster allude to can be located in those complex power relations ritualized through the interactions, perceptions, as well as speech acts of those at MCPSC. An analysis of this nature must be researched through a deep and critical understanding of the culture of the aforementioned educational institution, teasing out the complex, discursive practices thereby exploring their implications in reference to a discourse of transformative leadership.

Moreover, the complexities located in the politics of the culture inherent in MCPSC’s transition from an independent day school to an independent boarding school will be explored through its daily ritual performances. Since ritual is so important and a major factor in understanding culture in this particular context, it is imperative that some important theoretical positions be postulated in this study. First, I will examine relevant tenets of ritual and its implications to a discourse of transformative leadership and power. Then, I will examine some theorizing on the discourse of transformative leadership to better understand the complexities of empowering or disempowering those who are a part of the daily rituals of this educational community in its transition from an independent day school to an independent boarding school. Finally, I will examine the literature surrounding the conceptualization of power as it applies to understanding the positionalities of various theorists who have written on this concept.

### ***Ritual***

There has been much effort devoted to answering precisely the question of what ritual actually “is.” Some contemporary theorists exploring the conceptualization of ritual have argued that it only takes a short time to realize that arriving at a definitive empirically validated definition of what ritual actually “is” will be a futile exercise (Magolda, 2000; Quantz, 1999; Quantz and Magolda, 1997). In speaking to the ontological positionality of ritual Quantz states,

There is no longer a need to develop an analytically pure concept of ritual derived from empirical evidence. I do not mean by this that we do not want to construct a *clear* definition of ritual. We do. What I do mean is that when we construct our clear definition, we no longer assume that the concept of ritual has an ontological existence outside of our intellectual use of it. While congruent with our empirical understandings of the world, our concept is not merely a reflection of them. The long debate on what ritual “is” has made the assumption that ritual exists “in the

world” and that our job as scholars is to describe it... The typical call for empirical justification is misguided. (Quantz, 1999, p. 494)  
“Luckily, in this postmodern moment, the task of discovering precisely what constitutes ritual is no longer necessary” (Quantz, 1999, p. 494). Nevertheless, ritual theorists of the past typically sought the empirical justification of the concept. These arguments can be found in statements such as:

Definitions of ritual and religion as “symbolic” of social relations have the disadvantage, not only of being hampered by the ambiguities involved in the term symbolic, but of seeming to assert as a general principle precisely what is required to be demonstrated in each particular case. (Goody, 1961, p.161)

Statements like the above express the modernist, empiricist interest in ontologically discovering what ritual is as a fact to be analytically validated and located in the empirical world.

The literature surrounding the conceptualization of ritual as conceptualized from a modernist, empirically oriented perspective is worthy of acknowledgement. Nevertheless for the sake of examining its relationship to transformative leadership and the qualitative, ethnographic nature of this study the more interpretive usefulness of the concept is appropriate. A conceptualization that is not focused on a right or wrong definition of ritual but of its usefulness in helping us to understand the socially constructed world in which we live (Kertzer, 1988). Quantz’s work also helps in elucidating the “interpretive usefulness” of the conceptualization of ritual which he appropriates as *formalized, symbolic performance* (p. 495). In focusing on the performance aspect of ritual, “we can begin to recognize that the actors in these ritual performances must carefully make-up and costume themselves for their parts” (p. 507). This becomes clear upon recognizing that in this conceptualization, performance becomes “an action intended for an audience (even if the audience is oneself)” (p. 506).

Therefore, we are connected to the performance inherent in this conceptualization of ritual, for it speaks to how we want to be perceived by others as well as perceived by ourselves. The inescapability of ritual performance is clear. “Whether we are a teacher who is attempting to dress “as a professional,” a teacher who is trying to dress in “solidarity with the students” or some combination of both...”(p. 507), we are inevitably performing our identities. McLaren (1983) also allude to this inclusive nature of ritual purporting,

None of us stands outside of ritual’s symbolic jurisdiction. Rituals are natural social activities found in, but not confined to, religious contexts. As organized behavior, they arise out of the ordinary business of life... ritual is always and everywhere present in modern industrial life: its orbit of influence permeates all aspects of our existence. We are all inveterate ritualizers and ritual employing beings. (1983, p. 9)

Second, when exploring the symbolic connected with the performance of ritual Quantz speaks to Bernstein’s notion of “meaning over and beyond the specific situational meanings” (p. 508). Therefore, ritual does not have to be a set of carried out performances regardless of the context. For example, an African custom of eating “fufu” may be due to a certain availability of vegetables (plantain and cassava) that is both inexpensive and filling when boiled and added to soup. Conversely, in the United States



it may become both a ritual of ethnic pride and identity for African-Americans symbolically returning to their African heritage.

Finally, the use of the term “formalized” adds a bit more conciseness to the term ritual when explored as a formalized, symbolic performance. “Here the term “formalized” refers to the idea that a ritual has an expected form: that witnesses to a ritual bring certain expectations as to the appropriate and expected temporal and spacial organization of a ritual” (Quantz, 1999, p. 509). Therefore, ritual is not conceptualized as just any symbolic performances but formalized in the sense of the expectations that witnesses bring to symbolic performances, which serve as that contextual container in this sense of the concept.

Thus, Quantz’s appropriation of ritual to the more mundane ritualistic performances of school life through the conceptualization of formalized, symbolic performances meld nicely with devices offered by McLaren which seek to examine the seemingly mundane, repetitive behaviors in school learning contexts. Murthadha-Watts (1994) in her dissertation, *A Case Study: Communitarian Ethical Challenges Confronting The Developers of an African –centered School* reiterates the usefulness of McLaren’s work on ritual that is not as overt as formal ritual behavior. Murthadha-Watts asserts,

Other devices, not as overt or stylized as formal ritualized behavior, permeate the school as well. McLaren (1983) offers a way to conceptualize seemingly mundane, repetitive behavior in the learning context as “rituals of instruction,” “rituals of revitalization,” and “rituals of resistance” (McLaren, 1983, pp.189-190). Rituals of instruction include the micro ritual (individualized lessons), the macro ritual (individual lessons examined collectively over the course of a day), and the grand ritual (major school rituals enacted throughout the year). Rituals of revitalization are defined as “a processual event that functions to inject a renewal of commitment into the motivations and values of the ritual participants.” Rituals of resistance respond to refract authority and preestablished codes of conduct. (cited in Murthadha-Watts, p. 143)

The connections of McLarian and Quantzian conceptualizations of ritual become powerful tools for analyzing educational settings through the formalized, symbolic performances used to explore the educational “rituals of instruction,” “rituals of revitalization,” and “rituals of resistance” in a school setting.

In connecting the conceptualization of ritual to a historical/cultural orientation for African people globally KaMau (1998) states,

The foundation of the “plan” is the creation and enactment of a specified ritual lifestyle. At the individual level, this means that each brother must begin to entertain ideas that result in activities that are engaged on a regular basis which lead him to cultivate the ongoing development of his spiritual and psychological connection with his inner God. There will be behaviors to enact on a daily basis, while some will be weekly or monthly, and others will revolve around the seasons. (p. 119)

Building on the work of Williams (1987), Kamau espouses seven rituals that serve to help marginalized groups maintain a pattern of re-programming in the face of the dominant culture’s daily, weekly, and monthly hegemonic rituals. These rituals include 1) an activity(ies) of study, 2) fellowship with like-minded associates (especially with an older black man/woman knowledgeable and dedicated to emancipatory possibilities), 3)

personal Inventory (daily self-reflection on actions of resistance, cultural allegiance, and cultural misalignment), 4) meditation, 5) erection of an ancestral alter (done to maintain a constant connection to the ancestral realm), 6) synchronizing with the seasons (re-evaluating the celebration of European holidays and their symbolisms while simultaneously celebrating African-centered occasions which are more symbolic of emancipatory possibility), and 7) working with others to develop relevant educational/cultural institutions.

Along the same lines as Kamau, other theorists have explored marginalized groups and the implications of ritual, in reference to systematic racism and its institutional symptoms manifest in the personality formation of oppressed groups (Fanon, 1963; Hilliard, 1995; Wilson 1998). These theorists argue that the personality formation of the oppressed by their oppressors must be countered by “re-ritualizing the mundane” (Wilson, 1998) activities of their daily experiences. This re-ritualizing or re-programming is achieved through systematic counter-hegemonic tactics, which must be a part of the socialization of the marginalized.

Hilliard (1995) explores certain tactics, which produce certain behaviors that affect both the oppressed and the oppressor. The tactics of domination manifest through the systematic suppression of group memory, the systematic suppression or prevention of having a group practice its culture, the systematic denial of group identity (which by the way is one of the United Nations criteria for genocide), the systematic teaching of European/white supremacy, and prevention of accumulation of group wealth.

Fanon (1963) and Hilliard (1995) both argue that in varying and complexly related ways, the above stated factors affect the personality formation of both the oppressor and the oppressed. Ritual, as Kamau (1998) suggest is what must become central to the daily functioning of both the oppressed and the oppressors. The rituals must, for the oppressed be counter the negative affects manifest through the above mentioned oppressive tactics outlined by the above theorists.

An exploration of the various conceptualizations of ritual greatly helps in a deep, critical ethnographic exploration of transformative leadership and its implications for empowerment and/or disempowerment in an educational setting. I will now turn to an exploration of the literature surrounding transformative leadership.

### *Transformative Leadership*

Since its inception, the concept of transformative leadership has reoriented the research and writing on leadership (Burns, 1978 cited in Quantz, Rogers, and Dantley, 1991).<sup>7</sup>

James MacGregor Burns extended the debate about what comprises leadership by conceptualizing it as occurring in two forms, transactional and transformational.

He arrived at this conclusion through analysis of the leadership functions of such political figures as Mahatma Gandhi, Franklin Roosevelt, and Mao Tse-tung.

(Shriberg, Lloyd, Shriberg, and Williams, 1997, p. 212)

Burns desired to, by taking a historical look at the field of leadership, work to conceptualize a discourse of leadership, which unite the previously unconnected roles of leaders and followers.

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<sup>7</sup> Transformative leadership is sometimes referred to as transformational leadership in the field of leadership studies; I will use the terms interchangeably in this work.

The image of transactional leadership has been pervasive in the literature in the field of leadership research since the time of the industrial revolution (Quantz et al., 1991). In exploring the historical development of the field of leadership studies in reference to transactional leadership, Heifetz (1994) states,

The field of inquiry soon expanded into the specific interactions between leaders and followers -- the *transactions* by which an individual gains influence and sustains it over time. The process is based on reciprocity. Leaders not only influence followers but are under their influence as well. A leader earns influence by adjusting to the expectations of followers. In one variant of the transactional approach, the leader reaps the benefits of status and influence in exchange for reducing uncertainty and providing followers with a basis for action. In another variant, bargaining and persuasion are the essence of political power, requiring a keen understanding of the interests of various stakeholders, both professional and public. (p. 17)

Transactional leadership is a barter or exchange of wants between leaders and followers. Transactional leaders recognize what it is that followers want to get out of their work and assure that followers get what is warranted (Bass, 1985). They help followers achieve their goals; thus, we follow the transactional leader because it is obvious to us that it is in our own best interests to do so (Kellerman, 1984).

Transformative leadership, by contrast, goes beyond the notion of exchange (Shriberg, Lloyd, Shriberg, and Williams, 1997). Burns (1978) proposed that transformational leadership include two essential elements: 1) it is relational, and 2) it deals with producing real change. "Transformational leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (p. 20). Leadership for Burns was an engagement that transformed the lives, attitudes, behaviors, and institutions to higher moral and ethical dimensions.

Mahatma Gandhi, in particular, epitomized Burns's ideal of the transformational leader. Gandhi's leadership was *causative* in that the nonviolent and egalitarian values he espoused changed people and institutions in India. His leadership was *morally purposeful*, because his objective was to win individual liberty for his countrymen and women by freeing them from the oppression of British rule. His leadership was *elevating* in that he raised his followers to higher moral ground by engaging them in nonviolent activities to achieve social justice. In so doing, Gandhi asked for sacrifices from his followers rather than merely promising them goods and favors. (Shriberg, Lloyd, Shriberg, and Williams, 1997, p. 215; italics theirs)

In continuing with exploration of the literature of transformative leadership, William Foster's (1986) groundbreaking work further advanced the concept in the field of leadership studies. Foster espoused the idea of "critical" transformative leadership as a way of further advancing the conventional view of transformative leadership. Foster's notion of critical transformative leadership raises the question of "Whose vision is it?" while at the same time recognizing the symbiosis between leaders and followers and the promise of moral purpose between followers and leaders (Quantz, et al., 1991). He asserts that critical transformational leadership is not "a special or unique occurrence, one that is found only in certain grand moments of human history. Rather, it happens in everyday events, when commonplace leaders exert some effect on their situations"

(Foster, 1989, p. 52). Therefore, commonplace leaders must be those followers who are empowered through the transformative process to become leaders (Foster, 1989; Quantz et al., 1991; & Shriberg et al, 1997).

The work of Quantz, Rogers, and Dantley (1991) is helpful in understanding the advancement of the concept of critical transformative leadership. They offer several points of discussion to help clarify their understandings of the concept. The first component of critical transformative leadership surfaces around the idea that “schools are arenas of cultural politics” (Quantz et al., p. 98). Therefore, schools are not to be understood in systematic terms with a common interest. Transformative leadership from this perspective allows for a deep analysis of complex sites of cultural conflict as well as the notion that school is not a unidimensional force acting on helpless victims. Therefore, this approach offers “the possibility of emancipation within the forces of domination” (p. 101; also see Willis 1977).

In speaking to the remaining aspects of transformative leadership as conceptualized above, Quantz et al. (1991) elaborate that “instead we must understand schools as arenas of cultural politics which will remain arenas of cultural politics even after transformation to a democratic organization” (p. 113). Additionally, building on Foucault’s concept of power and Giroux’s understanding of emancipatory authority, Quantz et al. assert,

We reject the traditional understanding of emancipatory authority. We reject the traditional understanding that leadership is embedded in administration and instead argue that leadership can and should occur throughout the organization. We reject, as a false dichotomy, the idea that leadership implies followership and replace that dichotomy with the idea that leadership begets leadership. We suggest that democracy can only result from a discourse of critique and possibility fostered at all levels and leading to the critical acceptance of responsibility by all members of a school. (Quantz et al., 1991, p. 113-114)

In addition, in outlining the final implication of transformative leadership, which calls for not only the development of critical literacy and a commitment to democracy, but also the “civic courage” espoused by Giroux. The importance of this final aspect of transformative leadership should not be lightly brushed over, as:

Too often we have watched while people naively support democracy because it seems a nice thing to do, democracy is, however, about restructuring power and those who work for democracy must develop the courage necessary to fight the inevitable resistance by those whom democracy threatens... The transformative leader must develop the strength of community necessary to support those who risk the wrath of the dominant elite. (p. 114)

These ideas are essential for transformative leadership and a deep understanding of democracy.

### *Power*

The literature on the concept of power is vast and sometimes conflicting. Wilson (1998) states,

Few, if any of us, doubt the reality of power and the tangible affects its application engenders. Our confusion as to its exact definition more likely flows from the fact that power, depending on context and circumstances, assumes

ubiquitous shapes and forms, varying degrees of transparency and visibility.

Power is a chameleon; it takes on the texture of its environment. (p. 5)

The ever-present implications of power are essential for all living things. Humankind, in particular, has been cast on this barren crust of earth millennia ago with the hope and the requirement that survival is maintained. Nevertheless, they find that they must use their powers and confront opposing forces at every point in their struggle with the earth and with their fellows (May, 1977).

Power is one of the central phenomena of human social life. Power, in and of itself, can be both a detrimental and a beneficial aspect of life. In exploring the detrimental aspects of the all-encompassing nature of power Wilson (1998) asserts,

The oppressed and downtrodden, having been traumatized by the abuse of power by their powerful oppressors, often come to perceive power itself as inherently evil, as by nature corrupting and therefore as something to be eschewed, denied and renounced. The pursuit of power is viewed as unworthy of virtuous persons, and the desire to possess it as sinful. Therefore, many among the powerless and poor feel compelled to find in their powerlessness and poverty the emblematic signs of their Godliness and redemptive salvation. How convenient a precept for rationalization and maintaining the power of the *haves* over the *have-nots*! As the result of their ideological manipulation by the powerful and their own reactionary misperception of reality, the poor and powerless have been made to perceive the pursuit, possession and application of power in their own behalf as unbecoming to themselves. (Wilson, 1998, p. 7)

Whartenberg (1990) also adds clarity to the concepts of “power over” in contrast to “power to.” In a discussion of the concept of “power over” he states,

An agent who acts in a context in which someone else has power over her is not able to do as she wishes, but faces a situation in which the structure of her action-environment is in the control of someone else. She is therefore not in the normal circumstances of human action and, as a result, her responsibility for her actions is modified. (Wartenberg, 1990, p. 86)

Quantz, Rogers and Dantley (1991) explore the Weberian notion of power as juxtaposed to a Foucaultian notion of the concept. They state,

For Weber, “‘Power’ (Macht) is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests.” (Weber, 1978, p. 53)...

Michel Foucault, on the other hand, provides us with a very different understanding of power. Foucault (1980) suggests that power is not a characteristic of a person or position but of a relationship and is embedded in the “discursive practices” that organize our world. The discourse and practices that prompt some questions and subdue others, that reveal certain relationships but obscure others, that define reality and becloud hopes, that legitimate certain truths and deligitimate others, become the most powerful forces in the creation of social life. (p. 103)

On a more conflictual level theorists explore the existing tensions between compliance and resistance in power relationships. Foucault (1980) has located power in the political, economic, institutional regime of truth production. Therefore, “truth according to Foucault is found in the struggles of everyday politics and the “wars” of

institutional practices” (Quantz, 1992, p. 466). Thus, “knowledge is always formed through power and power is always located in knowledge” (p. 466). Foucault (1980) wrote,

Knowledge and power are integrated with one another and there is no point in dreaming of a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power; this is just a way of reviving humanism in a utopian guise. It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power. (p. 52)

The power/knowledge conceptualization and the notion of the all-encompassing nature of power by Foucault have been nicely contextualized in his “machine” metaphor. In a discussion of various conceptualizations of power, Rhoads (1995) states, “Foucault describes power as “a machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise power just as much as those over whom it is exercised” (p. 309). Also, the manifestation of power in reference to the body is conceptualized as relational according to Foucault. By relational Foucault offers discussion of the relationship between the social power-over-bodies and power-of bodies. These power relations are discursive, complex and contextual depending on the hierarchal positioning of the socially constructed individual and their institutional context in reference to others.

Giroux (1983) and Giddens (1979) highlight the relational aspects of power, which are akin to Foucault’s (1980) “machine” metaphor. Power is not one directional but instead is something to which all groups has access to, at varying levels (Foucault, 1980; Giroux, 1983; Giddens, 1979). Giddens notes that “[p]ower relations...are always two-way, even if the poser of one actor or party in a social relation is minimal compared to another” (Giddens, 1979, p. 93).

A feminist approach along the same lines as the poststructural, relational approach to power is a discussion of “power over” or “power with” (Follett, 1924, 1942; Rogers, 1983; Starhawk, 1982; cited in Welch, 1990). In a poststructuralist tone, Welch (1990) asserts,

I celebrate people claiming their own power and creating new mechanisms of power. On the other hand, the ethic of risk has a very different meaning for those “in control.” It challenges them to relinquish “power over” others, even as a means to accomplishing some commonly accepted good. It invites them to participate in “power with.” (p. 6)

## CHAPTER 3

### THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS GUIDING THE STUDY

First, though, a small digression—a word about wording.

Social policy advocates are prone to talk one way and write another. They speak with compassion and empathy but write like academic prisoners of statistics and bar charts. We cerebral activists are innocent victims of our very traditional training. Oftener than not, there is no pain or joy, no hope or despair in our writing... Objectivity is the object. We liken its straight lines to high intellect.

Randall Robinson, in *The Debt*, 2000

#### Methodology: An Overview of Qualitative and Critical Ethnographic Research

The research methodologies used in this study are qualitative in nature and critical in their orientation to educational inquiry. Therefore, I borrow to a large degree from what has been described as “naturalistic inquiry” and critical ethnography as theoretical frameworks to both guide and support this study.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) provide several descriptors of a “naturalistic inquiry” approach stating,

(1) reality is multiplicitous and socially constructed and therefore must be examined holistically; (2) the researcher and the research subject interact to influence one another; hence, the knower and known are inseparable; (3) the aim of inquiry is to develop an interpretive understanding of social experience; (4) because social phenomena are highly interactive, cause and effect are difficult to ascertain; and (5) the various choices made by the researchers reflect the values they hold. (pp. 37-38)

“Naturalistic inquiry” strongly leans towards qualitative methods due to the flexibility available in addressing multiple realities. Rhoades (1995) states with reference to Lincoln and Guba’s descriptors, “the researcher is far from a mere bystander and instead actively engages research participants in the creation of meaning” (p. 31).

Many of the concepts, methods, and values that undergird qualitative research can be traced to anthropological and sociological research in which ethnography has been a major method of inquiry (Murtadha-Watts, 1994; Hammersly, 1992). Yet, social researchers have begun to point out the limitations of using a strictly ethnographic approach to inquiry. Eisner (1991) asserts,

Ethnography, even taken as a whole constitutes a limited repertoire of meaning structures. Thus, to regard qualitative research as solely ethnographic is to limit what qualitative work can be... we can also look at schools through the perspectives of political science: as power structures, as institutions that foster particular ideologies, and as loci for negotiations, treaties, and political coalitions. (cited in Murtadha-Watts, 1994 from Eisner, p. 230)

Moreover, researchers such as P. Carspecken (1996) as described by M. Apple have found the discussions in the field of qualitative research to be wanting (editors intro., p. xi).

Therefore, this dissertation's focus is not only to understand how an educational community makes meaning of how it constructs critical transformative leadership. This study also entails the use of critical ethnography and its methodological underpinnings to bring critique to how this educational community makes meaning of its situation when juxtaposed with the historical/material world in which they exist. Moreover, it suggests emancipatory possibilities where ideology has distorted the complex, sometimes contradictory, manifestations of asymmetrical power relations that may exist in this educational community.

There have been many statements that attempt to characterize the criticalist orientation to educational inquiry (Anderson 1989; Lather 1991; Carspecken and Apple 1992; Quantz 1992; Kinchloe and McLaren 1994). The work of Kinchloe and McLaren (1994) provide a somewhat broad, yet not all-inclusive characterization of this approach. They state,

We are defining a criticalist as a researcher or theorist who attempts to use her or his work as a form of social or cultural criticism and who accepts certain basic assumptions that all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations which are socially and historically constituted; that facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription; that the relations between concept and object and signifier and signified is never stable or fixed and is often mediated by the social relations of capitalist production and consumption; that language is central to the formation of subjectivity (conscious and unconscious awareness; that certain groups in any society are privileged over others and, although the reasons for this privileging may vary widely, the oppression which characterizes contemporary societies is most forcefully reproduced when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary or inevitable; that oppression has many faces and that focusing on only one at the expense of others (e.g. class oppression versus racism) often elides the interconnections among them; and finally, that mainstream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender oppression. (cited in Carspecken 1996, p. 4)

Yes, that is one sentence and the criticalists at their best!

In critical discourse an ethnographic study must examine the relationships between the material and the cultural. This approach, referred to as praxis, is an effective means of working towards the elimination of the theory/practice dualism. Quantz (1992) suggests that praxis requires material transformation of "the particular and concrete history of the people being studied" (p. 466). Although there is no consensus amongst ethnographers as to when transformation or praxis should occur (be it during or after the research), it is clear that praxis is a major intentionality. (see Carspecken, 1996; Lather, 1991; & Quantz, 1992).

### *Data Collection, and Methods*

A critical ethnography was undertaken to explore, understand, and demystify the implications of critical transformative leadership through this educational community's



meaning-making process as juxtaposed to their daily interactions with the historical/material world. This study was designed to take place through the process of an in-depth, long-term engagement of one school year. Based on the methodological strategies of interpretive and critical qualitative inquiry, empirical evidence was collected using a variety of techniques, including formal and informal interviews, participant/observation, and document analysis.

### **The Ethnographer**

As an outsider and researcher, I recognized that I was in a privileged position and that my role could exert influence on the research process. I critically analyzed and attempted to demystify the socially constructed meaning-making processes of this educational community in reference to the historical/material world in which they interacted. Thus, my pursuits were not to be objective nor assert an emphasis on maintaining a “disinterested attitude.” As previously outlined in this chapter, my ethical positionality is in concurrence with the criticalist orientation. My mission is essential and it involves exploring the emancipatory possibilities that can help people demystify the empowering as well as disempowering aspects of ritualized institutional processes. Thereby, acknowledging the implications of critical transformative leadership in such a process becomes imperative in helping to construct more democratic possibilities.

### **Research Site**

The site for investigating the ritualistic empowering and/or dis-empowering implications of critical transformative leadership discourse is very important. Therefore, The Marva Collins Preparatory School of Cincinnati (MCPSC), an independent day school transitioning to an independent boarding school served as an excellent location for a deep and critical analysis of the aforementioned phenomenon. I believe that a critical ethnographic study is best suited for exploring and analyzing the research question raised for this particular study.

### **Gaining Access to the Research Site**

During the fall of 1995, I had the opportunity to complete a student-teaching internship at MCPSC. While participating in the internship, I was informed by the school’s administrator/President/CEO of the possibilities of the Marva Collins School transitioning from an independent day school to an independent boarding school in the future. Approximately 3 years later, I entered Miami University’s Educational Leadership doctoral program in Oxford, Ohio. Within the first year of studies at Miami University, I contacted the Marva Collins School and received news that they had purchased the building for the new boarding school campus. At that time, I had become familiar with much of the literature on educational leadership and knew that this school’s President/CEO had been cited for exemplifying what scholars have conceptualized as transformative leadership (see Shriberg, Lloyd, Shriberg, and Williams, 1997). Thus, with my scholarly interests in aspects of ritual, power, and transformative leadership theory in relations to the field of education, I figured this educational community’s transition would be an excellent potential research setting to explore. I called the school’s President/CEO, told her the nature of my research and was informed that I could

conduct my research at their institution and that hopefully this project would serve as beneficial to all willing to pursue endeavors of this nature.

### **Obtaining and Recording Data**

This study unfolded in four phases. During *phase one* (June, 2000 – September, 2000) I began to explore general historical documents related to the city of Cincinnati which led to a more specific emphasis on the historicity of blacks in the city. I also continued with an already in process extensive review of the literature highlighting concepts pertinent to the study.

During *phase two* (September, 2000 – December, 2000) I attempted to get acquainted with the daily functioning and operations of the research site. I also continued the extensive review of documents pertaining to the creation of the school and its philosophy to help historically situate the research setting. I participated in the daily routines of this school including attending events held during non-school hours such as weekend parent/teacher meetings, holiday events and “Prepping for Power” events (held on most Sundays throughout the school year). The goal was to participant/observe, collect, sort, analyze, and become intimately familiar with the history and current workings of the Marva Collins Preparatory School community. As I observed daily events, they were recorded in a composition notebook. Further comments were often jotted down in the notebook in a nearby park immediately after leaving the research site. Approximately one hour of travel time from the research site further allowed for dictations into a hand-held recorder as a part of the evening logs that were “flushed out” while incidents were fresh in my mind.

During *phase three* (January – June, 2001) I continued to participant/observe and analyze the daily routines of this independent day school in its first year of transition to an independent boarding school. In addition, I formally interviewed parents, students, and faculty. I had informal discussions with students and teachers lasting anywhere from 2-15 minutes continuing to help form impressions of the school community. These conversations were followed by the formal, structured interviews with fourteen students lasting from 20 – 35 minutes. All teachers were formally interviewed as well. My goal was to understand the ways that members of this school community discussed the concept of leadership.

Due to the lack of one-on-one access to many parents, a formal interview script to be filled out was passed out to parents at the fourth, and 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade “Prepping for Power” March, 2001 event.<sup>8</sup> I received no responses from parents on this first attempt to gain their perspectives. Thus, with the school President/CEO’s permission, I followed up with another form to each student at school requesting that they give the form to their parents to fill out and return, to no avail. Finally, in a third effort I mailed a copy of the interview script to every student’s household with an accompanying self-addressed stamped envelope only to receive four returned and completed scripts. Nevertheless, a 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade parent that videotaped many of the school’s “Prepping for Power” events was willing to share footage with me for duplication.

During *phase four* (June – December, 2001) I concluded my participant/observations with the ending of the school year, while continuing with the analysis of field notes, interview scripts, and school documents. I began to write and

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<sup>8</sup> See appendix A

complete the study as well as share drafts of the study with respondents to solicit their reactions.

## **PART II**

### **A Three Phase Description of the Setting and Daily Life of Stakeholders at the Marva Collins Preparatory School in Their Transition to an International Boarding School**

## CHAPTER 4

### THE SETTING

On a warm, summer's evening in the heart of downtown, I sit at Fountain Square listening to "1230 The Buzz" on my small radio and absorb a taste of what *Places Rated Almanac* has rated as one of the most livable cities in the United States. The heart of downtown "Cinci" presents a myriad of what seems to be city locals shopping, coming from work, or headed to one of the downtown taverns for an evening relaxer. Also, tourists with cameras around their necks capture my attention as they look up at superstructures like the Carew Tower, Cincinnati's largest building, which as legend has it was built in less than a year during the Great Depression as countless eager workers chipped in on the labor. People of all kinds seem to fill the streets on this Saturday evening. From all directions I can see the young and old, familiar ethnic looking individuals and others of whom I have no clue, the corporate America business types and the casual dresser-downers, the baggy hip-hop kinds (not only African-Americans either), and those of the elderly golden years. People are all over the place! I just sit and watch as people go about their business, the leisurely horse carriage slowly strolls by as I watch the sunset behind the city's symbol, the Tyler Davidson Fountain—wondering who on earth was Tyler Davidson? For that matter, who was Carew of Carew Tower?

Randall Robinson's work, *The Debt*, a groundbreaking treatment of African-Americans and reparations, highlights how the symbols and larger than life statues at the Mall in the nation's capital seem to make for an interesting kind of European-American ancestral worship. A type of ancestral worshipping ritual that was created and is preserved with every segment of multiethnic America's tax dollars. I wonder if I am witnessing the same thing on Fountain Square as I look at the sculptures here and there, or the quite foreign names on the buildings. Is this myriad of local taxpayers going by in every direction on this nice summer's evening suffering the same plight through their state and federal tax contributions? Let us not even mention the Ohio city taxes which take Mr. Robinson's constant reiterations of "*They have taken my tax dollars and bought only what they need,*" to another level (pp. 54 - 56).

As I am observing the diversity around Fountain Square and wondering about the lack of equity in the distribution of tax dollars, my mind drifts to the state of affairs in the city's educational system. I begin to wonder about the failure of the State legislature to twice meet the Ohio Supreme Courts ruling for an equal and fair system of funding for the state's public schools over the past several years. While, during the same period of time, the general assembly passed two bills that were signed into law by the Governor further raising academic standards and accountability in the inequitably funded schools. The radio announces that the most recent police killing of an African-American male is the fifteenth African-American male killed by the Cincinnati police in the past 5 years. One of the "most livable cities in America" is about to explode in anger.

#### Greater Cincinnati/ The Tri-State

Just a few blocks to the south of downtown "Cinci" flows the Ohio River that attracted many early Europeans to the area. Now, with a bustling population, Greater Cincinnati has come to be known for its big city flavor with a small town feel. From a

geographical perspective, the city of Cincinnati actually lies snug in the southwestern-most area of Ohio, the northern-most area of Kentucky and the southeastern-most area of Indiana giving rise to the popular “Tri-state/Greater Cincinnati” identifier. Sitting more than 500 feet above sea level, the Tri-state/Greater Cincinnati area in sum total consists of eight counties, many smaller cities, unincorporated townships, and incorporated villages. I have heard many of the nomenclatures for the place – from plain ole’ “Cincinnati,” to “Cinci,” to “The Queen City,” to “Porkopolis” or as I learned from students doing research at The Marva Collins Preparatory School, “The Nasty Nati.” As a whole, this region covers almost 4000 square miles and includes close to 2 million people making it the second-largest city in the state of Ohio.

The city of Rome is said to be built on seven hills near the Tiber River, and so it is with Cincinnati and the Ohio River. Actually, Cincinnati has 15 “hill” communities and there seems to be no consensus as to which seven came first. These communities are: Bond Hill, College Hill, Crestview Hills, Greenhills, Indian Hill, North College Hill, Oak Hills, Paddock Hills, Park Hills, Price Hill, Seven Hills, Villa Hills, Walnut Hills, Western Hills and Winton Hills. And by the way, let us not forget the “Mount” communities of: Mount Adams, Mount Airy, Mount Auburn, Mount Carmel, Mount Healthy, Mount Lookout, Mount Repose, Mount Washington and Mount Zion.

To gain an even clearer picture of a very complex place, Greater Cincinnati can be geographically divided into seven areas: “The City,” Central Suburbs, East Side, West Side, Northern Suburbs, Northern Kentucky and Southeastern Indiana. Keep in mind that these seven broad geographical areas only provide a peek into really understanding this multifaceted, many times complicated place, as I will outline in the several paragraphs to follow.

“The City” typically denotes the downtown business district, some of the “Hill” communities such as Price Hill, and the West End. The West End encompasses the city’s low-income Over-the-Rhine district and Laurel Homes, which is the site of the United States largest public housing project. The Central Suburbs encompass low-income areas like Lincoln Heights, which at one time represented an economically thriving and prosperous African-American community as well as some of the wealthiest communities such as Glendale and Amberly Village, a historically predominant European-American Jewish area. On the West Side, not to be confused with the West End, are places like Mount Airy, known for its forests, and Mount Echo. Historically, the West Side was the most affluent section of Cincinnati until those who could afford it headed to the hills running from the industrial hustle and bustle.

On the East side of the Tri-State/Greater Cincinnati is the largest collection of upper socioeconomic communities such as Anderson, Mount Lookout, Madeira, and Indian Hills. On a side note, it should not be too surprising to find these area schools with some of the highest standardized Proficiency Test scores in the state—a high stakes accountability measure used in Ohio’s public schools. A large growth in business districts, shopping malls and service industries led to upscale homes built on what was formerly rural farm land to the north of the “Tri-State” creating the Northern Suburbs area. Growth in this area including communities like Mason, West Chester, and Symmes has forced new schools to almost appear overnight.

The Northern Kentucky area of the “Tri-State” is known by many as the south side of Cincinnati, as either side of the river doesn’t seem to matter much to some of

these residents in one of the areas largest growing suburban areas. Yet, to enslaved Africans crossing the river meant the difference between “freedom and slavery.”<sup>9</sup> To the west of the Northern Kentucky area lays the Southeastern Indiana section of the Tri-State/Greater Cincinnati. Known for its rural living and riverboat gambling casinos, many Southeastern Indianans seem to prefer the country-style atmosphere.

For the newcomer, the above geographic introduction will help but only to a certain extent as Cincinnatians tend to use the very specific community identifiers found within the seven broad areas in pinpointing where they reside. For example, I have never heard someone declare “I live in the Central Suburbs, the Northern Suburbs, etc” but I have always heard, “I live in Lincoln Heights, Mason, West Chester, etc.” The former being the neighborhoods located within the seven major areas that comprise Greater Cincinnati. I have also been told jokingly by a colleague native to the area that, “Cincinnati is nothing more than a bunch of bordering neighborhoods masquerading as a big city—a bunch of different worlds. So, get a passport for all of them.”

Greater Cincinnati hosts several higher educational institutions, located in various sites throughout the area. The area offers everything from the second largest educational institution in Ohio to a dozen or so smaller colleges both public and private. Among the largest institutions is the University of Cincinnati, which employs more people than three of the major goods and service producing industries in the city: Proctor & Gamble, Chiquita Banana, and Kroger. Mid-sized in comparison to UC is Xavier University, a Jesuit institution established in 1831 by the first bishop of Cincinnati. Other smaller institutions such as Cincinnati State Technical Community College, Hebrew Union College, and the College of Mount St. Joseph also provide viable educational opportunities for the city’s inhabitants.

As for local K – 12 public schools, and based on the way this city is geographically situated, the complexities of the more than 50 public school districts, a diocesan Catholic school enrollment of more than 56,000 students (which is 6,000 more than the public schools) and over 250 private schools become imaginable.

#### Historicizing African-Americans and education in Greater Cincinnati/The Tri-State

Following the American Revolutionary War, four primary European groups began to make claims against the indigenous natives for the lands immediately north of the Ohio river: the New Englanders to the northeast, the Pennsylvanians in the central section of the state, and Virginians and Kentuckians to the south. Other foreign born immigrants entered the area coming from Germany and Ireland. After going through several name changes such as Ft. Washington and Losantville the area was finally declared Cincinnati by General Arthur St. Clair, then governor of the Northwest Territory, in 1802. Carter G. Woodson (1875 - 1950) brings light to this same period’s post American Revolutionary War temperament of those of European descent towards Africans around the Northwest Territory. He states,

As the reaction following the era of good feeling toward the Negroes during the Revolutionary period had not reached its climax, free persons of color had been content to remain in the South. The unexpected immigration of these Negroes into this section and the last bold effort made to drive them out marked epochs in

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<sup>9</sup> See, Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* for Pulitzer Prize insights into what the crossing of the Ohio River meant to enslaved Africans.

their history in this city. The history of these people prior to the Civil War, therefore, falls into three periods, one of toleration from 1800 to 1826, one of persecution from 1826 to 1841, and one of amelioration from 1841 to 1861. (excerpt in Dabney, 1988, p. 31)

Born the son of ex-slaves, Woodson was able to enter high school at the age of twenty moving on from W. Virginia to Berea, Kentucky for undergraduate training. Woodson went on to become the second person of African descent, after W.E.B Dubois, to receive a Ph.D. in history. As a Harvard graduate and founder of National Negro History Week (now black History month) Woodson explored African people in Cincinnati:

Situated on a north bend of the Ohio where commerce breaks bulk, Cincinnati rapidly developed, attracting both foreigners and Americans, among whom were not a few Negroes... Exactly how many persons of color were in this city during the first decade of the nineteenth century is not yet known. It has been said that there were no Negroes in Hamilton County in 1800. It is evident, too, that the real exodus of free Negroes and fugitives from the South to the Northwest Territory did not begin prior to 1815... (Dabney, 1988, p. 31)

Based on Woodson's account, we can make inferences in respect of the earliest possible inception of Cincinnati's role in the enslaved African freeing institution, "the underground railroad."

Along with Woodson's general assessment of this epoch's human temperament, Macke (1999) becomes quite instrumental in further problematizing his three general historical periods. For, as Woodson explored the general European/white temperament, Macke delved into the two groups differing geo-cultural backgrounds stating,

"Typical" attitudes towards their colored brethren could be described as: New Englanders tended to be tolerant of Negro migration; many Quakers from Pennsylvania, as well as some of the southern states, opposed slavery and tolerated the presence of people of color; and southerners from Virginia and Kentucky were, for the most part, quite hostile and anti-Negro because many were small farmers who had left the south to avoid the competition of slave labor. German and Irish workers also feared competition from Negro labor. (Macke, 1999, p. 4)

Taken as a whole, the combination of Woodson (1916) and Macke's (1999) snapshots of post-Revolutionary – pre-Civil war Cincinnati becomes even clearer when contextualized with the newly forming legislative policies of the day. Woodson speaks to these policies stating,

The question came up in the Constitutional Convention of 1802 and provoked some discussion, but reaching no decision, the convention simply left the Negroes out of the pale of the newly organized body politic, discriminating against them together with Indians and foreigners, by incorporating the word white into the fundamental law... in 1804 to calm the fears of those who had more seriously considered the so-called menace of Negro immigration. This body enacted a law, providing that no Negro or mulatto should be allowed to remain permanently in that state, unless he could furnish a certificate of freedom issued by some court in the United States. (Dabney, 1988, p. 32)



Now, pointing the new policy “finger” at the sympathetic whites of the region, the legislation went on to state,

No man could employ a Negro who could not show such a certificate.

Hiring a delinquent black or harboring or hindering the capture of a runaway was punishable by a fine of \$50 and the owner of a fugitive thus illegally employed could recover fifty cents a day for the services of his slave. (p. 32)

And if the above was not absurd enough, as the years passed, the legislature went further. Woodson goes on reporting,

As the fear of Negro immigration increased the law of 1804 was found to be inadequate. In 1807, therefore, the legislature enacted another measure providing that no Negro should be permitted to settle in Ohio unless he could within twenty days give bonds to the amount of \$500, guaranteeing his good behavior and support. The fine for concealing a fugitive was raised from \$50 to \$100, one-half of which should go to the informer. (p. 32)

With the above stated in mind, the new “free state” legislature also provided white protection from Negro evidence while simultaneously depriving persons of color of jury duty privileges. Finally, these provisions, which came to be known as “The Black Laws,” made it policy to prohibit the education of Negroes at public expense in 1829.

Even with the unjust “Black Laws” of the land, African people persisted in providing forms of education for themselves. Historian John B. Shotwell (1902), alludes to this fact stating,

According to John I Gains, the first school organized for colored people was in 1825, by Henry Collins, a colored man who began in an old pork house (some say carpenter shop) on the south side of Seventh Street, between Broadway and Deer Creek. The school did not last a year. The colored population of Cincinnati at that time was about 250. (excerpt in Dabney, 1988, p. 100)

Also, in exploring the early to mid-nineteenth century several African-operated private schools briefly appeared then disappeared with ill equipped teachers but a strong desire for some form of education. Alluding to such a strong desire for knowledge Macke shares,

It was not until 1834 that the first successful Negro elementary school was established by Owen T. B. Nickens, from Virginia. One historian later noted that “tuition was \$1, none turned away for lack of payment.” Nickens taught in this school until 1849 when he became a teacher in the newly established public schools for colored children... (1999, p. 11)

Pushed to the margins of the city in shanty wooden tenements, the people of what came to be known as Bucktown and Little Africa, continued to struggle in the “free” north.

The “let’s help them go back to Africa” sentiment was also present in white Cincinnati during the early to mid-nineteenth century and many blacks seemed to have seriously considered. Shotwell (1902) in sharing insights into the ideas of John McMicken, son of Charles McMicken founder of the University of Cincinnati states,

... urged to do something for the education of colored youth. He responded by paying for a tract of land containing 10,000 acres, lying north of Liberia, between that republic and Sierra Leone, called it “Ohio in Africa,” and told them to go there and settle. (Dabney 1988, pp. 100 - 101)

In explaining the fate of those who took part in this “Ohio in Africa” expedition, I am compelled to quote the historian at length:

Baker Jones was summoned to Cincinnati and efforts were made to induce him to lead such a colony. He was willing to go, but being refused what he demanded in the way of preparation, he went back to Mercer County, his home. Peter H. Clark (who later became a prominent African leader, educator and principal) was then selected to go as an explorer to this “Ohio in Africa.” But when he reached New Orleans he refused to embark in the dirty lumber schooner that had been chartered to carry him and one hundred and nineteen other persons. The others started.

Before getting out of the Gulf of Mexico the unfortunate emigrants were attacked by smallpox. The captain finally put into Charleston, S.C., for medical help. Here all the well ones were put into jail for coming into the state in contravention of law. After lingering there three months they were freed and set out again on their journey. In less than six months ninety per cent.[sic] Of them were dead.

Having done so much, Mr. McMicken inserted a clause in his will prohibiting colored youth from sharing in the benefits of and educational facilities he might provide for the youth of the Queen City. (Dabney, 1988, p. 101; brackets mine)

Some white abolitionist leaders and philanthropists of the dominant group did provide invaluable assistance to the growing Negro population of Cincinnati leading to the middle of the nineteenth century. Yet, there remained a continued need for struggle in the arena of educational policy from the state down to the local level. This assistance helped create a new level of leadership amongst the black community of Cincinnati. In reference to this point Macke states,

Within the social context of the city and the legal context of the state, black leaders struggled to gain educational opportunities for their children, beginning in 1830 when colored children in Ohio were specifically denied access to funding for public education, to 1849 when Ohio legislators voted to allow public support for colored children. (p. 2)

The Africans of Cincinnati and their leaders continuously fought within the limits of such unjust human constructed laws for access to the educational arena, even with seemingly insurmountable odds. Blacks were being regarded as intruders by white citizens, denounced as idle and criminal, kept out of hotels, theaters, and all public places frequented by white residents.

During the same period, the Presbyterian influenced Lane Seminary was founded in 1832. Lane Seminary “got the ball rolling” towards progressive ends as students of this school formed the Anti-Slavery Society. Directed by Lyman Beecher, father of Harriet Beecher Stowe, there began to be much debate over unjust slave ideology. Nevertheless, the strong anti-African dissent of the day squelched those tendencies forcing many sympathizers to transfer to Oberlin institute on the condition that the school would admit Negroes.

The primary instruction of Augustus Wattles and the help of four women from New York responding to a newspaper advertisement spearheaded the former Lane Seminary students. The group began to provide tutelage in various subjects including religion, grammar and natural philosophy to hundreds of Africans in Cincinnati. In

referring to an observer's reports on the rapid levels of learning at the school Macke states,

Lest one think that the anti-slavery workers were exaggerating their claims, the Putnam report also included an observation by a Mr. F. A. Sayre, a teacher in the local common schools for nine years, who investigated the schools and found in the boys schools "good order and attention to study... and affection with which they regard their teacher, Brother W. [Wattles]... I have never been acquainted with [such] ... rapid progress in the different studies pursued... nor have I ever seen so much good feeling in the intercourse of teacher and pupils." Herein lies an essential ingredient in the success of the students – a feeling of connectedness between the students and the teacher... (pp. 16-17)<sup>10</sup>

Thus, throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, the dim light of finding themselves in Cincinnati between "rocks and hard places" former enslaved Africans began to improve educationally as well as economically. We can begin to conceptualize an even clearer Cincinnati during what Carter G. Woodson labeled, "the periods of persecution (1826 to 1841) and amelioration (1841 to 1861)." For during both periods persecution and amelioration occurred simultaneously - depending on the group of European/whites in question.

Thus, with the help of the liberal minded white segment of the city, a new leadership emerged amongst the African community. This era clearly displays an understanding by the blacks of the need for some type of formal education by 1835. According to Woodson (1916), "Prior to this period they had been unable to make any sacrifices for charity and education... In 1839, however, the colored people raised \$889.30 for this purpose" (excerpt in Dabney, p. 38). Also,

... the first state Convention of Colored Men was held in Cleveland. As an outcome of the discussion of the problems of the colored people of Ohio, the group organized the School Fund Society and selected a state agent to solicit funds while lecturing throughout the state. Within a few years the School Fund Society had purchased lots and built school houses in Cincinnati, Columbus, Springfield, and Cleveland... (Macke, 1999, pp. 18- 19)

Unfortunately, within two years Cincinnati members had disengaged themselves while still maintaining political links as the group fought to repeal the unjust Black Laws of the land.

Within a year of the \$889.30 school finance campaign Woodson further alludes to the African desire for some form of education stating,

In 1840 Reverend Mr. Denham and Mr. Goodwin had in their schools sixty-five pupils each paying \$3 per quarter, and Miss Merrill a school of forty-seven pupils paying the same tuition. In all, the colored people were paying these teachers about \$1,300 a year. The only help the Negroes were then receiving was that from the Ladies Anti-Slavery Society, which employed one Miss Seymour... (Dabney, 1988, p. 38)

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10 Macke's quote continues to validate Ray McDermott's (1977), observations of "caring relations" as a vital mechanism in the educational process, as well as debunk much of the African natural inferiority, shiftlessness ideology of the day, which is still being debated by some contemporarily.

Woodson goes on to state, "It was in fact a brighter day for the colored people. In 1840 an observer said that they had improved faster than any other people in the city" (p. 39).

Springing from the new upswing in momentum Africans were assisted once more by a son of an area banker and Yale graduate anti-slave proponent, Rev. Hiram Gilmore. For a brief five years (1844 – 1849), the creation of the African attended Cincinnati High School under the guidance of Rev. Gilmore produced some of the more notable African leaders of the day such as:

... P.B.S. Pinchback (Lt Governor of Louisiana); John M. Langston, (Congressman from Virginia and dean of Howard University Law School, and Minister to Haiti); Thomas Ball, artist; Monroe Trotter, United States Recorder of Deeds under President Cleveland... two notable graduates who later attended Oberlin: Peter Clark and John I. Gaines. Both men were leaders in the battle for education for colored children in the 1850s. (Macke, 1999, p. 22)

Much of the success as well as failures of Africans in the city of Cincinnati leading the mid-nineteenth century had occurred outside the School Tax Fund Law of 1829 designed for white public schooling but surely not for the benefit of Africans.

Moreover, most whites of the epoch wanted their schools "pure"! There were black property owners at this time. Property owners who paid taxes as well as the scam-like \$500 dollars "good faith and support" bond money just to settle in Cincinnati within 60 days of their arrival (the original time frame was 20 days but the blacks appealed for 90 and was given 60 by city officials). Yet, the white supremacist ideology and institutional force of the day created the illusion in most whites' minds that it was "moral" and "decent" to not allow Africans to benefit from public education, even if they were taxpayers. These whites wanted their schools "pure" to the point of having mulatto purges, ala witch hunts, to make sure that only "pure whites" got the benefit of public funded schooling. For example:

In 1849, certain parents complained that children of color were being admitted to the public schools, and in fact there were in one of them two daughters of a white father and a mulatto mother. On complaining about this to the principal of the school in question, the indignant patrons were asked to point out the undesirable pupils. They could not; for, says Sir Charles Lyell, "the two girls were not only among the best pupils, but better looking and less dark than many of the other pupils." (Dabney, 1988, p. 44)

Nevertheless, although other "Black Laws" remained intact, by 1849 at least the educational aspect of these unjust laws had been successfully repealed and a split between the Whigs and the Democrats in the Ohio General Assembly yielded favorable legislation for the Africans. Woodson (1916) states, "Abolitionists, Free Soilers and Whigs fearlessly attacked the laws which kept the Negroes under legal and economic disabilities" (Dabney, p. 43). According to Macke the legislation mandated,

School districts to establish separate common schools for black children if there were twenty or more black children in the district and if the district officials felt it inadvisable to admit the Negro children to the existing schools serving white children. The law required school districts to compile tax lists for Negro residents and to take a census of Negro children. Taxes collected from black taxpayers would be used for the support of schools for their children. (p. 28)

This legislation provided the first glimpse at a form of public schooling for African children in Cincinnati at public expense. This act was followed by more legislation which provided that the new public schools for the Africans be self-governed by black male property owners in the community. "In other words, colored people, through representatives of their choice, would have the [sic] spend public funds, choose teachers and decide curriculum" (Macke, 1999, p. 29). The representatives were not totally of their choice as African women were automatically eliminated by default. This legislative provision allowed for the choosing of six black trustees for the initiation of two African school districts.

White Community members along with the white school board clearly opposed such state legislative actions. In capturing their temperament Macke states,

The Board of Education vehemently opposed local control of the colored schools as outlined in the law. They argued for control of the colored schools on the grounds of: 1) the link between the Board of Education and City government, 2) a public duty, and 3) moral and intellectual superiority. (Macke, 1999, p. 30)

The white school board resisted the protest by blacks for almost a year spearheaded by Peter Clack, John Gaines, and the new trustees attorney, Flamen Ball. "The case was contested by the city officials, even in the Supreme Court, which decided against the officious whites" (Woodson, excerpt in Dabney, 1988, p. 44).

Thus, with Supreme Court backing, 4 teachers (three black, one white) and the rented rooms in two churches, the process had begun only to be thwarted after three months of operation as the City Treasurer continuously refused to release the schools funding of \$2,177.62. After appealing to the School Board on the issue, the board passed a resolution of "having no control" over the City Treasurer on the matter and declined to interfere. A week later the Board voted to "respectfully suggest and recommend that the City pay the teachers and the rent (total of \$204.50) out of humanitarian good will" (Macke, 1999, p. 35). Clearly, bending to the will of a strong anti-African, white supremacist force, by 1853 the Ohio Assembly had repealed the Act of 1849 and the Africans in Cincinnati had lost the minuscule control of their schools to the local white School Board.

This "topsy-turvy" struggle of black resistance to white domination yielded, for a short time, the re-transferring of the control of black schools into the hands of the black board of trustees. Although the record is not clear on how long it took for the African people to wrestle control of their schools from the white community and School Board members, there is clarity in the fact that by 1874 "the colored board was abolished never to be re-established" (Shotwell 1902 excerpt in Dabney, 1988, p. 108). In elaborating on the creation of Gaines' High School (1866) and its faculty during that brief twenty-one year stint (1853 – 1874), Shotwell (1902) gives insight into just how much was accomplished by African people in such a short time:

...in September the school was opened under the title of Gaines' High School, with the following faculty: Peter H. Clark, principal; L. D. Easton; Alice V. Carter; R. Dempker, drawing; J. C. Christine, German; W. Schiele, music... June, 1870, the first class of six graduated. The following studies comprised the curriculum of the school: Algebra, geometry, trigonometry, astronomy, higher arithmetic, bookkeeping, physics, physiology, botany, chemistry, geology,

history, literature, rhetoric, mensuration, Latin, German, drawing and music.  
(Dabney, 1988, p. 108)

Nevertheless, the black school board was abolished in 1874, “and in 1887, when the Arnett law went into force, separate colored schools as a class were abolished, for the law now permitted colored children to attend schools for whites... The results need hardly be told” (p. 108). By this time, the record seems clear that some African people were going to stay in Cincinnati and fight for equality and justice with new access to white public schools. At the same time it also seems clear that as early as the 1850s, other blacks were looking for “a better kind of freedom.”

To the tune of “Oh, Susanna” one African man fleeing slavery but also experiencing the unsafe world of Ohio in the mid-nineteenth century wrote,

Ohio's not the place for me;  
For I was much surprised  
So many of her sons to see  
In garment of disguise.  
Her name has gone throughout the world,  
Free Labour, Soil and Men- -  
But slave had better far be hurled  
Into the Lion's Den.

Farewell, Ohio!  
I'm not safe in thee;  
I'll travel on to Canada  
Where colored men are free. (Macke, 1999, p. I)

Throughout the remainder of the 19<sup>th</sup> century battles of this nature continued yielding black victories followed by white backlash in a continuous effort to keep Africans in “free” Cincinnati “in their place.” Although, the first constitution of the state of Ohio in 1802 upheld the 1787 national Ordinance that prohibited slavery in the area, it seems clear that the level of African/black subordination to European/whites remained prevalent. Even from the mid to late nineteenth century many of the Cincinnati powers that be were unable to “practice what was put on paper.” Reflecting back on the various European groups and their varying temperaments toward Africans in Cincinnati, it seems as though anti-Africanist sentiments were clearly the most forceful. Africans, along with the help of more progressive, abolitionist oriented, European/white groups seemed unable to hold sway against other anti-African white groups on long-term substantive policy issues at the state and local levels.

Nevertheless, late nineteenth century Cincinnati, in many ways, represented the first taste (although bitter-sweet) of possible freedom for many enslaved Africans considering the “slave state” status of neighboring Kentucky during the pre-Civil War era. Nevertheless, for Africans of any time period during the 1800s, the magic wand of crossing the Ohio River often times presented quite grim forms of social and political oppression and subordination. According to Macke (1999):

For much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century free black residents of Ohio lived as a caste, in a social and political purgatory, dangling precipitously between bondage and citizenship, on a line controlled by white civic elites. In order to cross this dark abyss, black residents had to have the political support of influential white

citizens but, more importantly, they needed the strength to slowly and laboriously pull *themselves* across. (p. I; italics mine)

For, as the early and late migrations of Africans from the south to northern parts of the country were not absent of the white supremacy temperament of the day – a general American temperament of socially constructed whiteness over blackness be it in a northern liberal or a southern conservative nature. John Malvin alluded to this forceful white supremacy temperament – even in a northern state proclaiming,

I thought coming to a free state like Ohio, that I would find every door open to receive me, but from the treatment I received by the people generally, I found it little better than Virginia. I found that every door was closed to the colored man in a free state except the jails and penitentiaries... (Macke, 1999, p. 8; Malvin, 1879, p. 11-12)

The historical contextualization of African-Americans throughout the nineteenth century helps in putting into focus blacks and education throughout the twentieth century in the city of Cincinnati. For, by the turn of the twentieth century, the fight for just educational opportunities was by no means over. The Arnett Law of 1887 had provided the legislative means to African access of tax funded public education, but as history has clearly demonstrated, public policy doesn't easily erase the socialized contempt and hatred created over generations of irrational privilege and prosperity. For just a few years earlier in *The Independent Weekly* of New York, Frank Quillan reported, "Samuel J. Tilden, Democratic candidate for the presidency in 1876, called Ohio a "d-----d" nigger state'" (excerpt in Dabney, 1988, p. 74).

Frank Quillan (1905) addressed the continued pervasiveness of race prejudice in Cincinnati as a Ph. D. candidate in the history department at the University of Michigan. Quillan's early twentieth century perspective on race in Cincinnati provides insights into the social climate of the city, a climate to which the arena of education is intricately interwoven. For even in the light of legislative policy mandating blacks be educated in the same schools as whites, after exploring Quillan's observations of this era, one must wonder about the humanness of white/black interaction in the schools at this epoch.

By 1905, no colored man had been allowed to enroll in the University of Cincinnati's Medical College or any other facility of medical training in the city. In reference to African men, Quillan highlights the fact that:

If he leaves the city and secures his training elsewhere and then comes back again, he finds the door of opportunity closed. The colored doctor, no matter what his training has been or what his ability and standing may be, is not allowed to operate in the large City Hospital, a public institution maintained by taxation to which the colored people contribute their share. (Dabney, p. 74)

Furthermore, blacks reluctantly treated in segregated wards of the public City Hospital were not allowed, by default, the opportunity of being treated by another African person as their employment in the public facility was non-existent.

From an ethical standpoint, one has to reflect on the efficacy of public schooling institutions during this era. This type of reflection becomes even more imperative considering the treatment of blacks when it came to the more dangerous occupations of the city like fighting fires. Quillan reported, "There is not a Negro to be found in the city fire department, which employs hundreds of men, all, of course, paid out of public taxation. The reason given for their absence is that white firemen will not work with

them...” (p. 74). The Municipal Bath House, Mechanics’ Institute (probably the largest of its kind in the state), popular parks such as Chester, The Lagoon, and Coney Island were “off limits” for Africans. The hotels and restaurants were off limits. “The Bartenders’ Union has passed a resolution forbidding its members to wait on a colored person...” (p. 75). Even the black established Y.M.C.A. was forced to change its name to the Y.B.C.A. – with the B indicating “Boys.” So, just how warm could the public schools be, now that they were opened to all by the Arnett Law some fifteen years earlier? A large portion of the answer lies in this assertion by Quillan, “Not one is employed as a teacher in the public schools...” (p. 77).

Nevertheless, few Africans had been able to participate in postal work, and a small number had become proficient in the learned professions of law, ministry, and medicine for the benefit of helping other Africans. Interestingly, Quillan shared his perspective on the cause of all that he had observed in the city of Cincinnati stating, “The one big cause is that – “well, *just* BECAUSE” (p. 77). White supremacy/racism was, and still is, simply irrational from the point of view of the oppressed, yet a seemingly rational organization of social reality for their oppressors.

Along with the irrational “well, *just* BECAUSE” race based finding, Quillan (1905) also shares other findings on the virulent race prejudice in Cincinnati stating,

The other causes are:

- (1) There are a large number of ignorant colored people coming in from the South, seeking the land of the free, where they can have “their rights,” many of whom mistake liberty for license.
- (2) When a Negro commits a crime the newspapers always emphasize his race connection by such headlines as “A Big Black Burly Brute of a Negro” does such and such and the whole race gets a share of the blame while if the crime is committed by a white man, race is not mentioned, and the individual gets the blame.
- (3) The mixing of the lower classes of the two races causes jealousy and ill feeling in the very classes, and much revulsion of feeling and fear in the higher classes.
- (4) Cincinnati has always catered to the Southern trade and still does; therefore she adopts much of the South’s attitude toward the Negroes.
- (5) An unusually large number of Cincinnati’s population very probably has been in the South for a time and then returned to the North. It is almost the universal observation that such people, after their return, forever despise the Negro.
- (6) The white people constantly complain of not being able to depend upon the Negro; they say he is shiftless, careless, and too prone to appropriate little things belonging to other people.
- (7) The Negro more and more is entering politics as a Negro, and demanding rewards for the Negroes, in the way of positions and public offices. Naturally they are meeting with strong opposition and much secret resentment. (pp. 77-78)

With a few exceptions, Frank Quillan’s observations still linger contemporarily.

Living in shabby rundown tenements known today as The West End (of “The City” in reference to the 7 geographical areas discussed earlier and not to be confused with the West Side) poor Africans continued to strive for a better life against “persistent racial segregation, poverty, and political marginalization... In the 1930s and 1940s, the West End was the site of the first public housing project in Cincinnati funded by the



Public Works Administration: Laurel homes and the neighboring Lincoln Court Homes” (Gaston, Kelley, Knight-Abowitz, Rousemanaire, & Solomon, 1999, p. 1). Curiously, neighboring the two housing projects sits the central Cincinnati police station both to serve and protect.

In further historicizing the African people situation throughout the mid-to-late twentieth century, Gaston et al’ (1999) appeal to statistics stating,

Census statistics tell part of the story. In the 40 years following 1950, the percentage of Cincinnatians who were African-American more than doubled, from 15 percent in 1950 to 38 percent in 1990. Of the city’s white population in 1990, 44 percent of whites attend some sort of higher education, as compared with only 27 percent of African-Americans. Cincinnati is a city of neighborhoods, and these neighborhoods work to further define the ethnic and economic segregation of the city. Poor African-American families living in the poorest neighborhoods... (Gaston et al., 1999, p. 3)

They go on to reveal some facts that if not put into historical perspective might be seen as startling adding, “today, the West End remains a primarily poor, African-American community. According to the 1990 census, 67 percent of families in West End lived below the poverty line, 76 percent of families were female-headed...” (p. 4). The public, tax funded institutions of the city have, throughout its history, barred these people from the benefits and privileges due them based on their tax contributions. The statistics above should not be startling to anyone who has ventured to take a cursory look at the city’s history and race relations. The Africans, historically saturated close to this area, simply never had a chance.

The African-American population in Greater Cincinnati/The Tri-State has grown exponentially with post-civil rights housing mobility to historically non-black areas of the city. However, the post 1950’s era appears to be a microcosm of the state of Ohio in general when historicizing the issue of African-Americans and education. Furthermore, in broader perspective, the acknowledgment of disparities between wealthier and poorer school districts brought the issue of socio-economic class along with race into clearer focus during this era. The current system of public education’s funding policies have been called into question by a multi racial/ethnic contingency of Ohioans for not only discriminating against the disenfranchised racial/ethnic groups but poorer school districts where even whites in the area attend as well. The system also seems to discriminate against taxpayers all over the state by putting varying loads of taxes against them to support an inequitable public education in their communities. These are problems germane to Greater Cincinnati.

Public school funding and finance has sparked a great deal of controversy. Public outcry on this issue became pervasive when in December of 1991 The Ohio Coalition for Equity & Adequacy of School Funding leveled a lawsuit against the state’s school funding system. This group consisted of 587 of the state’s 611 school districts all coming together as a coalition. The issue initiated much discussion on decrepit and sub-par schooling conditions for many students around the state. By July of 1994, Perry County Common Pleas Judge, Linton Lewis Jr., had ruled the state system unconstitutional and by 1997 the Ohio Supreme Court had upheld Justice Lewis’s orders for a total overhaul of the schools’ funding system that would provide “thorough and efficient” schooling opportunities for every child in the state. Unfortunately, as the years have gone by,

substantive change in Cincinnati's public schools has been a grindingly slow process making the city a prime target for the "hot" voucher initiatives currently being explored in other places in the state and around the country.

After exploring Frank Quillan's 1905 observations of racial issues in the city and the growing school funding and finance dilemma affecting poorer whites as well, *Race In Cincinnati*, a report commissioned by The Stephen H. Wilder Foundation, was published in 1994. The reporters of this study wasted no time as the first line of page one reads, "Racism *is alive and well* in Cincinnati" (p. 1; italics mine). This study revealed several key insights into the general social relationships of Cincinnatians in which the educational system is a microcosm.

In the midst of the city's professional baseball team owner Marge Schott, sharing with the world that she had a "million dollar nigger" (referring to an African-American players on her team) and the now yearly erection of the Ku Klux Klan's cross in the city's Fountain Square, the report highlights,

... African-Americans generally perceive whites as having greater advantages in life and as being "sheltered from most of life's difficulties". Meanwhile, white respondents perceive a significantly lower sense of work ethic among blacks.

Both races, however, strongly agree that white families envision a brighter future for their children than black families. (p. 1)

The polarization of life perceptions by those identified as either black or white in the study seem to be a typical reaction of this country on issues of this nature. Another example of this phenomenon could also be witnessed after the polls were released on the guilt or innocence of O.J. Simpson in the recent "trial of the century;" while looking at the same televised trial, blacks overwhelmingly voted innocent, whites overwhelmingly guilty.

Now in April of 2001, in the same month as I write this manuscript, the city of Cincinnati has gained international attention for a rebellion (some refer to the situation as thugs rioting) in the city stemming from the killing of an unarmed black nineteen year old male by a white police officer. The city has been declared in a state of emergency, and the mayor to curtail the rebellion, protesting, and looting has initiated a citywide curfew – everyone in by eight! It is as though the 1994 *Race in Cincinnati* report could have predicted it. In outlining the perspectives of blacks the study stated,

... we can say safely that blacks in the city see racism as a much bigger problem than whites. Blacks are much more concerned about areas where they feel they are not treated fairly. They have strong perceptions of white people having advantages or privileges that they do not have. And they feel that whites are not terribly interested in talking about racism or seeing things change. (Simurda, 1994, p. 21)

In another of the study's findings, Simurda alludes to whites asserting,

Whites, on the other hand, see a problem with a much smaller scope and are not as clear about its source. They see racism as less pervasive than blacks. And they indicate that blacks need to work harder in order to overcome any disadvantages they might have. While they acknowledge those disadvantages and some of the other effects of racism, they are not particularly interested in taking responsibility for them. (p. 21)

Simurda's study seems to highlight the white privilege that many researchers have studied and documented (see, Macintosh 1989, Delgado & Stefancic 1997). The recent racially motivated unrest in the city surely, and partly, stems from the attitudes of Cincinnatians identified at the beginning of the nineteenth century as well as the twentieth century's closing.

Bearing in mind the historical treatment of African-Americans in education and in general throughout the history of The Tri-State/Greater Cincinnati, independent schools, religious and secular community based initiatives have always been considered and implemented. The Marva Collins Preparatory School, created in 1990, is perhaps one of the latest educational manifestations created, operated, and attended overwhelmingly by African-Americans in the city. An institution brought into existence by the turbulent historical relations of various groups in this place called Cincinnati.

#### The Marva Collins Preparatory School of Cincinnati<sup>11</sup>

A school's mission statement represents that essential directive of group cohesion. I agree with Carl Glickman when he claims,

Any successful organization, whether it is a community or a religious, social, business, or educational group, has a set of core beliefs that holds its individual members together. That set of beliefs transcends any one person's self-interest. In the long run, the core beliefs help the group accomplish its mission and fulfill the needs and aspirations of individuals. (1993, p. 15)

Thus, in an attempt to critically understand The Marva Collins Preparatory School of Cincinnati (MCPSC), it becomes imperative that I begin with an elaboration of its mission. The school's mission statement provides the initial compass bearings, which lead to further insights. The Marva Collins mission statement reads as follows:

#### MISSION STATEMENT

The Marva Collins Preparatory School is a non-sectarian school based on the Marva Collins philosophy of education, which seeks to develop within each child the ability to think critically and to communicate feelings and ideas freely and effectively.

The Marva Collins Preparatory School, its governing board, its administration staff, teachers, and parents seek to establish an academic and social environment conducive to academic and moral development.

The Marva Collins Preparatory School is a scion of Westside Preparatory in Chicago, and is characterized by its dedication to the pursuit of academic excellence and ethical principles.

The Marva Collins Preparatory School believes that goals can only be achieved through academic programs implemented by a dedicated faculty, supportive parents and moral leaders.

The Marva Collins Preparatory School seeks to perpetuate a universal awareness through the study of diverse cultures and religions.

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<sup>11</sup> Pseudonyms are used throughout the study in referring to any student, faculty member, or parent.

The Marva Collins Preparatory School believes in the empowerment of parents by eliminating professional elitism.

The Marva Collins Preparatory School seeks to change negative and impulsive behavior to positive and rational behavior.

January of 1990 marked the collective stirring of ideas by several concerned African-American citizens to create a more viable and effective educational opportunity for African-American children in the city of Cincinnati. In the same month, these concerned citizens, all aware of and interested in the Marva Collins philosophy and approach to education, established the school's first board of trustees and secured permission from Mrs. Marva N. Collins for the usage of her name in identifying their brainchild. By March of that same year, The Marva Collins Preparatory School of Cincinnati (MCPSC) had been incorporated as an independent school. All executive board members resigned by July of the same year with the exception of Clara Mariama, the first board's secretary, who then became its President/CEO on July 17, 1990. The first group of executive board members resigned to move forward with the project and dismantled due to diversionary issues with Mrs. Marva Collins on the school's philosophy and initial direction. On October 1, 1990, with the consultation of Mrs. Collins of Westside Preparatory in Chicago, Dr. Mariama along with three teachers, parents, and members of Olivet Baptist Church opened the school's doors to provide a form of education to grades pre-K (age 3) through eighth in the church's basement.

During this period Dr. Mariama nearing retirement at local Western Hills High, a city public school, seemed to be perceptive enough to recognize the future fate of Cincinnati's public educational system and the ramifications for the children being served in that system. For, some seven years after the opening of MCPSC, the Ohio Supreme court had ruled the state public school system of funding and finance (heavily based on local property taxes) unconstitutional stating that all students in the state were not receiving the resources necessary to provide a thorough and efficient public education. On numerous occasions of conversation during my yearlong tenure of fieldwork at MCPSC, Dr. Mariama has voiced her thoughts on the issue. In her office, she once shared with me "the public school system in this city is a sinking ship... and the charter schools that are popping up are nothing but rafts with holes in them," drawing on her Titanic metaphor. These sentiments clearly highlight her position in reference to the city's public and charter school institutions.

By the opening of the 1994 school year, MCPSC had made a transition from the church's basement to a circular architecturally styled building, a former European-American Jewish owned Yeshiva in the Roselawn neighborhood of Cincinnati. Vivid recollections of early impressions of the facility resurface as I spent many days as a fledgling college intern at the school during the fall of 1995. The building seemed to be small for a school as I drove up in the early mornings of September, the beginning stage of my internship that year. Yet the building's circular design with its classes on the circumference always seemed to distort my sense of direction making the place seem quite large once inside. From an aerial view, the building is probably reminiscent of a miniature U.S. Pentagon building with its five sharp edges smoothly chiseled away. I

always found myself going the long route of the school's circular hallway in attempting to reach any destination in the building. There seemed to be no north, east, south or west when in the building, just locations on the circumference of the circular hallway.

With the classrooms situated around the circumference, the dining area was located in the center of the school. Actually, the dining area became multipurpose in the fall of 1995, becoming both the dining area and the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom. This structural change was implemented when the city fire codes' Marshal inspected the school and threatened to shut the building down the next day if changes had not been made upon his arrival the next day. There were few minor changes but the major change was the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom, which the Marshal had judged overcapacity. I clearly remember the determination and pride I felt that day as the President/CEO and the lead-teacher (then my supervising teacher) seemed unaffected by the threat of being shut down. We interns and the staff all stayed until after dark that evening rearranging the dining area into the new 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom.

The next day, the inspector returned as promised finding the school in compliance meeting all of his specifications. My reflections are poignant as these seemingly "nitpicky," microscopic type inspections continue even at the new upper-grades boarding facility contemporarily. The staff at MCPSC clearly felt that the "powers that be" did not want an endeavor of this nature to succeed in 1995. Although never specifically identified, seemingly systematic, these same "powers that be" in many ways still make for similar sentiments some 5 years later. Comments to the tone of "it's always something" referring to some code violation in the new boarding campus building or "we know they are watching us" have been heard on occasions throughout the year. Putting the whole situation in perspective the President/CEO typically exclaims, "But they can't stop us, because it's not even about us, this is God's work...and they can't stop that – now can't they"? This seems to be a one-answer question in her mind – for who has the power to destroy an endeavor commissioned by God?

Despite bureaucratic roadblocks, the future looks bright as the doors for the school's higher grades boarding facility opened in September of 2001. This year marks the separation of MCPSC into two campuses—the lower grades (pre-k – 3<sup>rd</sup>) and higher grades (4<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup>) campuses. The higher grades boarding campus is located in Silverton, one of the affluent socioeconomic Central Suburb communities in the city. Exploring the motives behind the opening of The Clara Mariama International Boarding School campus Dr. Mariama states,

We decided to start the boarding school because of the requests we have gotten from people across the state and across the nation asking that we establish a Marva Collins Preparatory School in their cities... Establishing schools in all of those cities is physically impossible, but establishing a boarding school for people from other cities and around the world is possible... Boarding schools help children build discipline, responsibility, self-reliance and independence. African-American youngsters especially need to develop responsibility, discipline and respect for themselves and others (Shoppers Guide for Community-Based Businesses, 2000, p, 16)

On other occasions, such as a school promotional video created through the efforts of the school's board, she adds more context to the reasoning behind the need of a boarding facility and contends that:

... The idea came because we had a number of children who started with Marva Collins School and we lost them back to what I call “their environment.” We thought with those children if we could just have had a place to keep them...all day, evenings and they did not have to go back to their neighborhoods, we could have saved more children. (Marva Collins Promotional Video, 1996)

In the end, I am assured, based on experiences at MCPSC, that this educational community has even more good and valid reasons for embarking on such an endeavor. An endeavor that even an optimist such as I thought was far-fetched five years ago when the school’s President took me and another intern to the then for-sale boarding school site and shared her future plans with us as interns. Who would have thought that I would be doing major research in the very building that I had, in my own mind, relegated ready for the demolition crew just five years earlier? Many of the building’s windows were boarded up due to being broken by neighborhood vandals or “little punks” as the President/CEO referred to them in disgust at their wanton behavior. The grass was pretty high in places around the building. I mean, who would have known that just five years later this place would be refurbished and open for business?

MCPSC is founded on the notions of instilling the values of academic excellence, self-esteem, self-reliance, self-determination, perseverance, integrity, and respect for self and others.<sup>12</sup> These philosophical values are a part of the school’s major four pronged agenda of schooling.

### *On Schooling The Children*

Encapsulated in the school’s agenda is the belief that books are windows to the world. Thusly, mainstream traditional trade books such as “See Spot Run...” are replaced by classics such as “The Odyssey” or Shakespeare’s “Macbeth.” For, the lead-teacher is known for stressing the point, “why just teach children simple words like “big” when they could just as easily learn words such as “huge,” “gargantuan,” or “enormous?”” Therefore, at MCPSC an emphasis on strong vocabulary skills are of immense importance. The school’s written agenda in reference to students at MCPSC is clear on its stance in reference to recess or “down time”—it should be nonexistent. The school’s promotional brochure states, “Not one minute of valuable classroom time is wasted—there is no recess, and lunch is eaten at the desk.”

Rhythm is an important aspect of schooling at MCPSC. Lessons should be performed in a sing-song fashion whenever possible – “this makes the lesson stick.” The lead-teacher for the lower grades campus shares her belief that the children at MCPSC typically come from a rhythmic environment, surely alluding to the overwhelmingly African-American student population. Thus, the school’s use of rhythm only taps into what is already “natural” for the students (Video, 1996).

Finally, MCPSC has dedicated itself as an educational institution to the principle of producing future leaders. And, as soon as a student enters the school they are inundated with a plethora of opportunities to verbally express themselves in public forums: such as their classrooms, weekend “Prepping for Power” showcases, and citywide performances. Thus, the ability to articulate ideas and communicate effectively in public settings is deemed central to the schooling process at MCPSC.

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<sup>12</sup> See chapter 2 for further elaboration of the Marva Collins philosophy as well as Mission Statement above.

### *On Schooling The Educators*

The school's promotional brochure "gets right to the point" in reference to teacher roles stating,

Traditional teaching methods and education parameters don't apply here. There are no extra-curricular activities to take away from the reasons we're here – to learn. When a teacher comes to us from a public school or even from another private school, it takes time for them to learn our style. Every teacher must truly love these kids and be willing to buy in to our methods, or they don't teach at MCPSC. (MCPSC brochure)

On teachers and classroom size, the MCPSC agenda alludes to the notion of classroom size not being of paramount importance. On this agenda item, an old teaching cliché seems quite appropriate; "if you can teach five, you can teach one hundred five." In other archival material, documentation can be found in reference to ideally a 1:20 teacher-student ratio with teacher understudies and teacher assistants available. The teachers at MCPSC are charged to teach pride, allow no disciplinary problems, and accept no excuses for students not doing their best at all times.

### *On Schooling The Parents*

As the third prong of the MCPSC schooling agenda, the aspect of schooling parents seems to be one of the battles of persuasion in which the faculty had to win after several years of getting the parents to buy into the school's philosophy and methods. The agenda states that parents must not harbor perceptions of powerlessness when it comes to making a "real difference" in the education of their children. Parents are expected to attend the school's Parent Meeting on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of each month during the school year.<sup>13</sup> At these meetings, students' assignments for the month are to be collected by their parents in the child's classroom. Finally, an emphasis on the school/home dichotomy is expected to be understood by the parents as being inseparable. The MCPSC agenda states that the values taught and practiced in school should also be reinforced at home and everything the child does.

### *On Schooling The Public*

The fourth and final prong of the MCPSC agenda is a bold statement of just what the school is and its purpose. The school's promotional brochure proclaims,

We are truly non-conformists. Because our school does not operate according to the same "standards" as more traditional systems, new observers are skeptical when they experience our typical daily activities for the first time. Where most classrooms are quiet and subdued – not unlike the atmosphere of a library, ours are loud and boisterous – more like a songfest or a revival. Where other students may work individually at their desks, ours are often standing at the front of the room reciting verses from Shakespeare.

Schooling the public seems to be the one agenda item charged with finally setting the record straight on what this educational institution is and what it is all about. This is a

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<sup>13</sup> In the future, this is a practice that may have to be re-evaluated once the institution begins to house boarders. As, the school's first year served only as a day schooling campus.

school community that seems not to mind sharing its pride in what they consider and perceive to be a non-conformist approach to schooling.

### *The Students and Staff*

September 5, 2001 marked the official first school day for Marva Collins students at The Mariama Clara Mariama International Boarding School campus. Although the combination of both MCPSC campuses puts the total student attendance above 200, my yearlong participant-observations were with the 75 – 85, (about 61% female and 39% male) students and staff on the new higher grades boarding campus (that number fluctuated between 75 – 85 students throughout the year).

For MCPSC's seventy-five to eighty-five students, (depending on when in the year the total count is being made) the school day begins as they disembark from public school buses or cars for those being dropped off by caretakers. Public busing was granted several years after the lower grades campus, which housed all grades at the time, secured this privilege through the allocation of some auxiliary funds at the state level. The students live in many different areas of the city making access to public school busing a blessing. A school day begins at 9:00 A.M. and ends at 4:00 P.M. The teachers typically arrive at around 8:00 A.M., sitting in the dining area with early drop-offs, and they are known to leave well after 4:00 P.M.

The students school uniform for boys is a white, collared button-up shirt with navy blue argyle patterned straight necktie, navy blue blazer, khaki slacks and casual neutral-colored tan or black shoes. Girls uniforms consist of a white, collared button-up blouse with navy blue argyle patterned cross-styled necktie (similar to those worn by cowgirls in country western movies), navy blue blazer, below the knee-length khaki skirt and casual neutral-colored tan or black shoes. All students are encouraged to purchase the school's emblem patch to be tailored into their blazer's left pocket. Teachers check the school uniforms daily and the President/CEO whenever she is on campus.

The President/CEO is an African-American female. A retired high school English teacher, she now serves as administrator of both campuses as well as fulltime instructor in the Communications Department of a local university. The lead-teacher, an African-American female, has been teaching at MCPSC since its inception in 1990. She teaches the largest group of students, the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade, which topped out at 41 students at one time during the year. The two other classroom teachers of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 7/8<sup>th</sup> grades at MCPSC are both in their first years with the school. Their classroom sizes have fluctuated around 20 students throughout the year. The 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher is a male from South Africa and the 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher is a European-American Jewish female retired from the city's public school system. Other staff members consist of the Spanish, science and math teachers (Hispanic female, African-American female and male respectively) who are on campus part-time, a full-time multipurpose assistant, and school janitor/hall monitor. As a participant/observer, I assisted in multiple ways at the school, which was one criterion for gaining acceptance to the research site. In trying my best to explain the nature of doing a critical ethnography, I assured the school's President/CEO that I did not intend to spend an entire year at the school voyeurizing, and observing them as though they were "fish in a bowl" (Becker, 1967). As such, I had many opportunities to engage and interact with the students and staff, some more than others at the school as will be elaborated in the study.



The school's Teacher Recruitment Packet outlines the expected dress code for teachers. MCPSC male teachers are expected to wear slacks, blazers and neckties and women are expected to wear dresses, skirts, and blouses. School policy notes that men do not wear earrings, gold chains, nor gym shoes at the school unless otherwise noted by the administration.

## CHAPTER 5

### PHASE I: INSIDE STORIES ON THE FIRST TERM AT MCPSC

#### *Introduction*

This phase of the research explores the daily interactions of the MCPSC educational community during the first months of the academic year of 2000 leading to the school's winter break, which also marked the end of the first term. Initially, I employed a rather random observational schedule during the first several weeks of my fieldwork. To get a feel for the research site I visited various places of congregation. Eventually, I implemented a more systematic approach to gather stories, descriptions, interviews, and informal discussions in reference to classroom culture in the three base classes, in the dining area, and during recess, which brought to life a (re)presentation of the underlying rituals and inherent power play created through such interactions. My visitations to the school lasted approximately two hours and thirty minutes on Tuesdays and Thursdays of the school week and six hours on Wednesdays. I also attended the school's weekend functions such as the Parent/Teacher monthly Saturday meeting and Sunday "Prepping for Power" showcases whenever they occurred.<sup>14</sup>

#### Getting Out of the Gates: The First Day of School

My day began by embarking on the fifty minutes to an hour drive, that was affected by the movement of traffic, into the city of Cincinnati. Little did I know at the time how invaluable this lengthy drive to and from the school would be; it helped me to both clear up and make better sense of my experiences during the year that I spent at MCPSC. I wanted to arrive at the school by 8:30 A.M. bearing in mind the school day began at 9:00 A.M. Early insights would be pivotal in understanding and getting a feel for the community's initial interactions, especially on the first day in a new school setting. None of the teachers had ever taught in this building nor had any of the students ever attended the school. Furthermore, many students never experienced any other physical school setting besides that of MCPSC's lower grades campus. However, some of the students in each grade had been a part of the MCPSC family since pre-kindergarten.

The school's President/CEO, Dr. Mariama, had expressed to me a few nights earlier over the phone, that many technical things would have to be worked out in reference to the students starting school at the new facility. The new, higher grades boarding campus, unlike the much smaller, lower grades campus is a former Catholic nursing home. The building is two stories with approximately 105 rooms and a basement large enough to house the school store, all classrooms, and the school's dining area. The basement is, for the most part, where the actual day-to-day interactions of the school took place. Moreover, for the first day, many logistics were going to have to be worked out as the "rubber was about to meet the road" and the new school year was about to begin.

I had volunteered countless hours to help renovate the building throughout the previous summer and wanted to do all that I could to make sure that the school was off and rolling on the first day. Fate must have been on my side as on this morning the university cancelled all classes, including a class I teach for pre-service education majors

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<sup>14</sup> See Chapter 3, Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks Guiding the Study for further elaboration.

every Tuesday at 8:00 A.M. Whatever the reason, I give thanks to my creator and the ancestors for the semesterly Mon. – Tues. switch day.<sup>15</sup> I was off as far as teaching on this particular morning, which turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

As I turned onto the private street approaching the new higher grades boarding campus on that cool and misty fall morning, the first thing that I noticed was the newly built nursing home. The modern looking nursing home sat next door to the much older and stoic looking former nursing home that is now the higher grades boarding campus. The two structures, separated by about 60 yards and a row of newly planted hedges clearly showed which building is the elder. The older building, now known as The Marva Collins Preparatory School/Clara Mariama International Boarding Campus, is the very large two-story red brick building. Its grass was now nicely cut and the weeds and bushes were neatly trimmed which provided a pleasant image of a physical structure no longer abandoned.

I usually entered by way of the streets that led to the back of the school. Construction crewmember cars and company trucks were still parked outside the building. These were the same cars that were in the parking lot during those hot summer days when I drove down to help paint and clean the interior of the building as a volunteer.

I can recall earlier in the summer during the month of July talking with one of the construction workers, an African-American male who appeared to be in his mid-to-late twenties. He was very enthusiastic about the school's opening and the fact that African-American students would be the primary student population attending this institution. He obviously admired the school's President/CEO, as I would hear him inquiring about the school as though he was an interested parent when they had conversations. When he conversed with Dr. Mariama and the other elder African-American women who volunteered during the summer, he never forgot to say "yes maam" or "no maam" symbolically humbling himself as a gesture of respect.

Even in his great excitement over the possibilities and potential of the school, the construction worker thought that it would be a stretch to assume that the school would be ready to open in early September, just about two months away. I recall sharing his sentiments with the President/CEO of the school assuming that as one of the workers who saw the building plans daily, who would have known better than he when the facility would be ready for operation. She promptly dismissed the notion and asserted, "that's his problem, he has a limited vision."

What MCPSC's President/CEO promptly dismissed as a lack of vision was a profound indication of her strong convictions and visionary capabilities. Sometimes her visions seemed quite unrealistic to the optimistic observer of some of her feats—even to those such as her husband who surely knew her better than most. To illustrate this point a particular experience during the summer before the opening of MCPSC is worth noting.

During the summer leading to the official opening of the higher grades boarding campus, the school President/CEO had plans to host and entertain over fifty guests who would be visiting from South Africa. The South Africans had invited MCPSC's students, staff, and parents to their country during the previous year and now it was their turn to reciprocate the gesture. The South African guests were to live at the boarding school campus during their visit, which seemed to be far from ready to house anyone during this

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<sup>15</sup> A university scheduling mechanism that balances the total Monday, Wednesday, Friday classes with the Tuesday, Thursday class sessions for the semester.

stage in its renovations. Overall, the building was not up to the city's safety codes and it seemed as though far too many things needed to be done with far too little time. Many tasks had to be accomplished—electricians had to repair and replace light fixtures and wiring, beds needed to be assembled in some rooms, rooms had to be scraped and painted, carpet had to be laid in various areas and bathrooms needed plumbing and had to be scrubbed, just to name a few. The President/CEO's strategy was to get as many willing hands as possible: parents, friends, European-American sorority groups from her university, as well as the 20/20 program.<sup>16</sup> Her goal was to get one wing of the first floor ready to accommodate their guests. Just pulling that part of the plan off seemed unreasonable with only weeks before the guests were to arrive.

Standing to the back of the school during one of those laborious days of renovations, her husband and I both shared some laughs as we reflected on the feat that seemed impossible to both of us but not to his wife. He told me that his wife is both "strong minded and strong willed" and, as such, he and their only son who is now a practicing medical doctor, had come to the conclusion that to slow her down is to make her miserable. "All she know is how to go, go, go," he would say as we both laughed partly in confusion or shall I say shortsightedness of why she worked the way she did and partly in admiration of her undying will to see things through. She dreamed bigger than most and did not mind putting forth the effort to make things happen.

Her husband and I both seemed to privately agree that the boarding school building was in bad shape and maybe she should have invited the South Africans on a later date. Needless to say, and to our surprise (at least mine), by the time the South Africans arrived, the west wing of the building had passed all of the city safety code inspections. With brand new electrically illuminated emergency fire exit modules throughout the west wing halls signaling "come on in, its safe and ready," that portion of the building was prepared to receive their guests. I still puzzle over the level of planning, organizing, and directing that was necessary to pull off such a feat. I even heard some of the contracted, construction crewmembers speaking highly of the President/CEO in reference to the accomplishment.

Although travel did not allow me to witness and interact with the South Africans during their visit to MCPSC, upon my return and inquiry, I learned how joyous the occasion had been. The chatter around the school was that the South Africans loved their stay and the hosts comprised of MCPSC's parents, staff, and students loved having a place where they could say, "come on in, we have a room for all of you."

If looking at this stoic, colossal structure (aged yet still looking to have at least another hundred years worth of life) from a bird's eye view, the building would resemble a block styled capital letter "E". As I approached MCPSC on the first day, some of the windows in the upper stories of the building were still boarded and being repaired by construction workers, because someone had vandalized several areas which made parts of the building still appear as if it were condemned.

I entered the school through the back door taking the stairs up to the chapel. I immediately noticed that the first floor of the building, where the chapel is located, was quiet, but the building was not empty as I also noticed classroom lights on down the hall in the basement. The two newly installed glossy wood doors that flapped open leading into the chapel immediately caught my attention. Clearly, this room had been designed

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<sup>16</sup> A program for juvenile delinquents doing court mandated community service hours.

as a part of the building architecture for worship services for the elderly who formerly occupied the building when it was a Catholic nursing home. The windows to the right and left were stained cathedral style with pictures reflecting the themes of Roman Catholicism and symbols of the Crucifix. The chairs of assorted colors, some of which were the foldout metal types and others that would suit a dining room set, were parted down the center thus giving clear view to the slightly elevated pulpit area.

I began to reflect on how the politics of religion would manifest in this room throughout the year. This location in the school already had all of the structural trappings of a Christian persuasion emanating from its symbols, organizing setup, as well as its name—the chapel. Would there be any collective or individual motivation for the chapel to be renamed? Volunteering parents as well as the President/CEO constantly referred to this room as the chapel throughout the summer renovations. What would this mean to the non-Christian student population at MCPSC since, after all, the school is non-sectarian? I could not help but ponder the question, what if the building was formerly owned by Muslims or another religious group and the current chapel area had the physical structural trappings of a mosque, or synagogue, or temple? What would these symbols mean to this educational community in the realm of leadership, power, and education? Such reflections and questions are important because this independent educational community has the power to name and rename as it sees fit. Nevertheless, “chapel” seems to fit the bill at this point representing the accepted demarcation of this particular school space.

MCPSC’s first day of school started in the chapel. I returned to the chapel after wandering throughout the building admiring the west-wing and the newly painted walls in the basement. I heard the school’s back door opening and slamming shut as well as the lead-teacher, Mrs. Jawanza, directing parents and students to the chapel for the morning’s assembly. Students exiting the buses had already filed into the chapel, directed by other teachers as they chatted with old classmates, gazed at their new assembling area, and helped one another straighten out neckties and fold down shirt collars.

Some MCPSC parents who seemingly were happy to accompany students in the chapel on their first day of school sat at the back of the room as the students were all directed to sit in their appropriate sections, which were marked by grade levels with their new teachers who stood by the grade level markers. Class section demarcations in the chapel were some of the first structures created at MCPSC, and they gave the students a sense of direction, at least for the first ritual of the day. I took the end seat on the front row of the room and attempted to model what I knew the teachers would want the students to do as they entered.

The first morning of school opened with the lead-teacher requesting that one of the larger, older looking, fully uniformed girls lead the school in prayer. The girl asked all students, staff, and others to bow their heads as she chose to recite *The Lords Prayer*, a prayer taken from The Bible. Afterwards, a chorus of individuals joined her in the concluding “Amen.” Morning prayer was to be a daily ritual, which meant that the conception of God would be central at MCPSC.

The lead-teacher moved into action by welcoming everyone and then focused attention on explaining the new MCPSC morning routine structure—coming in quietly and an opening prayer were givens with no need for reiteration. She gave directions to a room of students who would not know where to go or what to do if released into their new school environment. With a quick signal to the other teachers, they began to

distribute copies of the morning poems including the Marva Collins Creed. Many students declined to take the papers indicating that they already had everything committed to memory. In the midst of this minor commotion the lead-teacher signaled the students to rise chorus style to recite the creed with her assuming the directress role. She asserted, "We will start with The Creed... go!" The students all in unison began with a recital of The Creed.

"The Creed by Mrs. Marva N. Collins.

Society will draw a circle that shuts me out, but my superior thoughts will draw me in.  
I was born to win if I do not spend too much time trying to fail.

I can become a citizen of the world if I do not spend too many energies attempting to become local.

I will ignore the tags and names given me by society since only I know what I have the ability to become.

I will continue to let society predict, but only I can determine what I will can or cannot do.

Failure is just as easy to combat as success is to obtain.

Education is painful and not gained by playing games, but I have seen failure too destroy millions with promised hopes and broken dreams.

While I have the opportunity, I shall not sit on the sideline bitter with despair and wish later that I had become a literate lifter of this world instead of a failing leaner.

I will use each day to the fullest. I promise that each day shall be gained, not lost, used, not thrown away. Yet it is my privilege to destroy myself if that is what I choose to do. I have the right to fail, but I do not have the right to take my teacher and other people with me.

God made me the captain of only one life, my own. Therefore, if I decide to become a failure, it is my right.

We are all promised a pursuit of happiness, and that is what I must do, pursue happiness and success for myself. No one will give it to me on a proverbial platter, and no one will care as much about me as I must care about myself. But I must be willing to accept the consequences for that failure, and I must never think that those who have chosen to work while I played, rested, and slept, will share their bounties with me.

I will wave my flag signifying that I am a failure by choice. But I will never envy those who have selected to wave their unfurled banners announcing their success.

My success and my education can be a companion, which no misfortune can depress, no crime can destroy, no enemy can alienate, no envy or names can hurt me.

Education and success can be a lifetime solace. It guides goodness, it gives at once grace and genius to governments, communities, cities, townships, villages, homes and palaces. Without education, what is a man? A splendid slave, a savage, a beast, wondering from here to there believing whatever they are told.

God is not some cosmic bellboy who comes at my beckon and call. If I want to achieve, the first step must be my own undertaking. Likewise, if I want to fail, that too is my choice. Time and chance comes to us all. Whether I decide to take that time and chance is indeed my own choice.

I can either be hesitant or courageous. Life does indeed maroon the hesitant and inspire the brave.

I can swiftly stand up and shout, “This is my time and my place. I will accept the challenge, or I will let others make my decisions for me.”

During this impressive recital, I noticed many students loosening up as the words of The Marva Collins Creed rang familiar after the summer break. Some students added hand and body gestures at key moments that they remembered from previous years. Others spent time peering around trying to become acquainted with the new environment. While others even peeked onto their neighbor’s paper realizing that they should have accepted a copy of The Creed the teachers distributed moments ago.

Without hesitation, the students transitioned directly to another poem—an indicator that there were many returning MCPSC veterans in the room. This particular poem appealed to the school’s strong work ethic, which is a valuable and honorable MCPSC trait. In unison once again came a loud,

Be Strong by Maltbie Davenport Babcock

Be strong!

We are not here to play, to dream, to drift;  
We have hard work to do, and loads to lift;  
Shun not the struggle—face it; ‘tis God’s gift.

Be strong!

Say not, “The days are evil. Who’s to blame?”  
And fold their hand and acquiesce—oh shame!  
Stand up, speak out, and bravely, in God’s name.

Be strong!

It matters not how deep entrenched the wrong,  
How hard the battle goes, the day how long;  
Faint not—fight on! To-morrow comes the song.”

Once again in unison, the entire school transitioned to the final poem of the morning. By this time, the lead-teacher had begun distributing copies of the speeches to new students and those returning veterans who were not participating and had declined copies earlier, so that they could begin to both read and recite with the rest of the school. It was becoming obvious which students did not know the words or had the recitations committed to memory. Some students were seemingly suffering from “if you don’t use it you lose it” indicative of not constantly practicing these poems at home over the summer. The next poem had started.

A Great Somebody by Adrienne Sealy Hardesty

I am a serious child...

I am a serious child with serious goals.  
My life is destined to be filled with positivity.

I am a worker...

If it takes hard work to reach my goals  
I will do it.

I am a sensible somebody...  
I will never steal and I will always be for real  
I won't take dope and give up hope  
Because my life is too precious to waste.

I am a clean somebody...  
I know that if I lie down with hogs  
I can come up with mud so I work to keep  
My mind, my body, and my character clean.

I am intelligent...  
My brain is a storage place. I will fill it  
To the brim with knowledge and look  
Forward with hope of what tomorrow will bring.

I am a child hero...  
I don't spend time wasting time  
Because there is room at the top for me!

I am a great somebody...  
Start leading me now. Start guiding me now  
And Start praising me now and you will see me rise  
To the highest heights!"

The poem was a great self-esteem booster as the students both read and recited the lines in a personal manner. At this point, the lead-teacher directed all students to have a seat. As the students seated themselves, silence filled the room, and she took advantage of the opportunity to reiterate that this morning's behavior is how students at Marva Collins should behave every morning during whole school chapel time. As she continued with comments about student uniforms by calling exemplars to the front of the room where she stood, the President/CEO entered the chapel walking expeditiously with a strong sense of purpose straight down the center aisle toward the front and stood next to the lead-teacher. The lead-teacher halted her comments as she and the President/CEO privately conversed.

Obviously, the conversation must have been one of "getting on the same page" in reference to the procedure for directing students to their new classes in an orderly manner. After nodding in agreement to the lead-teacher's inaudible lip movements, the President/CEO instructed parents after apologizing for arriving late due to getting the lower grades campus started this morning. She told them "I know that many of you parents have not been down in the basement area to tour the new school, but I am going to ask you all to wait in the chapel until the students and their teacher have been dismissed and are working in their new classrooms. Then, I can take those of you who want to see the new school on a tour." Spur of the moment decisions of this nature characterized much of what happened at MCPSC throughout the school year. Flexibility, the ability to troubleshoot, and thinking quickly on your feet were necessary in such a new educational setting where structure was being created and re-created daily.



As I descended the stairs leading to the basement following the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade students who had been instructed to walk in the middle of the hall in absolute silence, we turned and headed down the east wing of the basement; the students complied. As we entered the basement, I noticed that it was rather pleasing to my eyes. Long hours of work over the past year had rendered this place complete with all of the trappings of a traditional modern school hallway. The walls were freshly painted in the two-tone lighter and darker beige that emanated a neutral and not-too-stimulating feel of a red or some other intense and vivid tone. The floor appeared to be both buffed and polished, which added a pleasing, “final touch” to the total ambiance needed for a walk down the hall on the first day of school in a new school building.

Straight ahead as we moved down the east wing of the hallway was the fourth grade classroom, which was about fifty yards down at the end of the hallway. The 5/6<sup>th</sup> graders in front of what appeared to be a rather long line veered left at the end of the hallway into the largest class of all—the lead-teacher’s new “stomping grounds.” If one veered to the right, one would head into the Spanish classroom, which was located at the opposite end of the hallway facing the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade class.

As I stood toward the end of the long 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade line, not yet reaching the end of the hallway, I noticed a vacant room to the right, which with a tour of the basement this summer I was told would be the site of the future school store. Opposite the future school store is where the maintenance/cargo drop-off area is located; it is identifiable by a small painting beside the door indicating “Maintenance Area.” Adjacent to the maintenance area are the girls and faculty’s restrooms. As I walked further down the hall, keeping pace with those students walking quietly toward the back of the line and in the center of the hallway, I passed several vacant, unfurnished classrooms. Further, down the hallway to the right was the Science room followed by the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom, whereas the lab was across the hall.

All students entered the classroom and located their desks, which were designated by the name labels and positive phrases such as “Always Try My Best,” “Be Strong,” etc. By this time I could hear the quiet commotion of the other classes beginning to enter and settle into their new classrooms prompting me to exit as the lead-teacher explained the school’s locker room procedures. As I exited, the lead-teacher selected a small group of students to go into the locker room to choose a locker for the year. The locker room was filled with lockers behind the front wall of the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade classroom.

Standing in the hallway, I could clearly hear all three teachers as they were the center of attention, and the students all sat quietly as if at attention on the first day of a military’s basic training “boot camp.” Each teacher’s door was open as I could both hear and see the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher from the hallway sharing with his students their morning routine as they all focused on his tall, slim frame and South African accent.

We will keep our things here with us until the other classes have gone to the locker room, then we will go. I am very excited to be here and cannot wait to get started with our school year... How many of you had the opportunity to visit the schools in South Africa last year...?

He continued talking sustaining the students’ full attention as he paced up and down the three rows of desks that matched the neutral beige walls of the classroom and hallway.

I could also hear the fourth grade teacher asking questions and explaining classroom protocol. The seasoning and experience of enough years to retire from the

city's public schools emanated from her voice as she talked to her students for the first time.

Keep all of your things beside your desks for right now... we will go to the lockers when it is our turn, then you can put your things away... I expect everyone's attention when I am talking and no talking in our class without permission... permission is granted by raising your hand and being acknowledged by me... raise your hand if you already know The Creed by heart...?

The school was "out of the gates" and a new year at the MCPSC higher grades boarding campus was underway. This morning encompassed the type of energy created when the time finally came; everyone was physically occupying the place, and space long talked about, dreamed of, and imagined. The energy of the school felt exciting to me, like the first day of vacation or orientation at summer camp or a trip abroad. This school day represented in part the fulfillment of all of the work and effort of those who had toiled to make this place an educational reality. The school was "out of the gates."

### In the classrooms

With the traditional Marva Collins opening of the school day taking place during morning chapel, entering the classrooms marks the beginning of the school workday.

### Phase I

#### Fourth Grade Classroom

Although only in her first year at MCPSC, the fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Goldstein, brings decades of public school experience to her classroom. A long time city native, Mrs. Goldstein is also the campus' only European-American and Jewish faculty member. Years of public school teaching experience, many in the predominately African-American populated Over-the-Rhine area, must partly explain Mrs. Goldstein's straightforwardness and no-nonsense demeanor in a school where she is in many ways the "other." During an interview, she shared her understandings of MCPSC's history as well as how she came to be affiliated with the institution.

From what I understand, the Marva Collins School was originated ten or twelve years ago in the basement of a church... the idea of Dr. Mariama (the school's President/CEO) and I guess the name, the namer of the school, Marva Collins was to be her methods and I believe that it has just grown from there... from the basement of a church at first... to the one primary school and now to this one... you know to become a boarding school eventually, one day.

On her becoming affiliated with the school she shared,

O.K., I was a Cincinnati Public Schools teacher... I am a retiree now, but Dr. Mariama did a career day at my school... I was teaching at [name of elementary school] at the time and she came to the school to give a talk... and told me about her school...and told the kids and everything about her school. I was really interested because I sort of had read some information about Marva Collins and the method that she used... I thought that that was the correct... I mean I thought that her methods were excellent. So, I told Dr. Mariama at the time that when I retire well I'll give you a call... and I did and she hired me and I am here.

K.S.(P.C.): About how many years ago was that?

Goldstein...: That was about maybe fifteen years ago...maybe ten years ago.

K.S. (P.C.)...: Wow, maybe ten years ago?

The school's President/CEO articulated her visions of the school about ten-to-fifteen years ago in a quite convincing way. As, with just one encounter, Mrs. Goldstein vowed to one day be a part of the school's vision. Dr. Mariama's ability to stand out in peoples' mind seems to be one tool used to win both the hearts and commitment of those who first learn about MCPSC. For example, about seven years ago, I had my first interactions with the school and Dr. Mariama's vision sparked not by her (the President/CEO) but by a student attending the school at the time and his mother. The student's self-confidence, demeanor, word articulation, and his mother's enthusiasm about the school surely won my heart and commitment. Thus, as a fledgling Elementary Education major, I eventually arranged to complete student-teaching/internship requirements at this school some 1000 miles away from the university of my attendance in the state of Florida. My decision was based on a first impression similar to that of Mrs. Goldstein's.

My first experiences with the fourth grade class surely helps to shed light on operational dynamics at MCPSC during its first few months as a functioning educational institution. By the second week of school, I arranged to visit Mrs. Goldstein and her class; she happily gave me permission and asserted, "Anytime, just let me know."

Coincidentally, my first scheduled day, as I rounded the hallway getting ready to sit in on Mrs. Goldstein's class, I bumped into the President/CEO of the school. Standing outside the fourth grade classroom door, she greeted me with her motherly smile simultaneously asking if I could cover for the fourth grade teacher who had to leave early on this day. I knew that I was headed to the class to observe but also knew that there would be no one to cover the class besides the President/CEO if I had chosen to say "no." In all honesty, I also did not think that an answer of "no" would have been wise bearing in mind I would be probing around her school for the rest of the school year.

Dr. Mariama told me, "I have so many things to do but I can stay and watch them if you have something else to do." I knew that there were only the teachers and no support staff at the school in the form of aides during this period, and that the part-time staff came in and departed at certain scheduled times. Even when the part-time staff worked, they could not function as support staff because they taught specific subjects such as Math, Science, and Spanish—they had their own responsibilities. The school's President/CEO conveyed full confidence in my ability to "hold down the fort" as my first interactions with children in the role of teacher took place during my student-teaching/internship several years ago at MCPSC. She was also cognizant of the fact that I had returned to Florida to do both graduate work and teach in the public school system upon completion of the internship at their school instead of taking up a job offer to begin my professional teaching career at MCPSC.

I recognized that in Dr. Mariama's mind she remembered me well enough, as she typically introduced me to adult visitors interested in the school for their children or to guests who pondered possible donation contributions. For example, when introducing me she would say,

This is one of my former interns, who has returned to do research here at our school as well as help us out this first year... he is the only intern to ever return to

us after completing college... he is now working on his doctorate degree over at Miami University.

While “floating” around the school along with visitors and guests throughout the year, I was always introduced enthusiastically. It added another dimension to the caliber of people and endeavors going on at the school—a good marketing tool that she used well.

Without giving her request of me to monitor the fourth grade class much more thought, I said “sure” entered the class where I received enough instructions for the class’s final forty-five minutes or so from Mrs. Goldstein as she packed her bags. The instructions were basic as in have the students quietly complete their daily assignments and use whatever remaining minutes to start on their homework. “Don’t worry, they have more than enough to hold them over,” she told me as she hurriedly exited. I assured her that everything was under control.

As I entered the room and the teacher left, the students continued to quietly finish their daily assignments. I walked the aisles of the room as the President/CEO stood in the hallway subtly sending the message to the students of her proximity. These combined factors set the tone of “don’t even think about getting off task.” The students quickly got the message. This allowed me the opportunity to jot down cursory fieldwork notes and make initial observations on the “lay of the land.”

The room was rectangular in shape with the chairs lined four to a row and six deep. The 21 students in this class were all dressed in the school’s uniform with the exception of a few students (both boys and girls) missing their ties. Not having classroom closet space, the teacher utilized the window ledges to hold Kleenex and some extra books. The students worked quietly, occasionally testing their boundaries with a whisper as time wore on. I conceded that much as I continued to observe the physical layout of the classroom and the students completed their seatwork. They always behaved their best as I slowly passed by their area jotting down notes.

Pictures of the U.S. Presidents on the wall faced me as I walked in one direction of the narrow classroom aisle. To the right of the U.S. Presidents’ pictures were even larger pictures of famous women of African descent. Although I knew many of the European-American male presidents gracing the wall, other than Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and maybe one or two others, the black women faces were unfamiliar. I had never heard of or remembered much about the ten or so other women—strong indications of being a product of a patriarchal, sexist, male valorizing society and public educational system.<sup>17</sup> Between the pictures hung quotations and proverbs from African-American men such as Paul Robeson and Dr. Benjamin Mayes.

On the walls of the doorway to my immediate right and left were the Greek letter alphabet, world and U.S. maps, wall cards with the English alphabet and pictures used for phonics—must in Marva Collins schools. One school desk was turned toward the students and probably used by the teacher when the time permitted. None of the teachers had traditional teacher’s desks in their classrooms. On the chalkboard were all of today’s assignments with five students’ names in the corner.

Throughout much of the thirty to forty-five minutes of the class Dr. Mariama stood outside the classroom door conversing with one of the students’ fathers on his way to pick her up—surely an unplanned, spontaneous conference. The students worked quietly, some asked to use the restroom, and others raised their hands for clarification on

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<sup>17</sup> For an in-depth discussion of schools and gender equity see Sadker and Sadker (1994).

problems assigned for homework. I got a peek into at least the physical structure of the classroom and reflected on almost an hour of well-conformed behavior. The structures of my physical presence and the vested authority conferred on me both by Dr. Mariama and Mrs. Goldstein in the presence of the students, along with Dr. Mariama not far away in the hall, helped in creating an optimal MCPSC classroom climate. At this point in the year, Mrs. Goldstein's class was the least resistant of the three classes at the school to the evolving structures of acceptable behavior two weeks into the new school year in a totally new school building.

Over the next several months of observing the fourth grade class from the back of the room, it became clear that Mrs. Goldstein's temperament dictated the rhythms of a well conformed, no-nonsense, structured classroom. The classroom's long, narrow rectangular shape created the general feeling of "we are at capacity," although it consisted of only twenty-two students (15 girls/ 7 boys). Seemingly, just the physical shape of the class rendered Mrs. Goldstein far away from those students toward the back many times allowing for off-task behaviors such as drawing and being on the wrong page during whole class reading lessons or fumbling with pencils as the class worked math problems on the chalkboard. This was one of the downfalls of sitting at the back of a classroom when the teacher up front seems so far from the back due to its rectangular shape.

During these early months of my visitations to Mrs. Goldstein's classroom, students would be neatly uniformed, and for the most part, quite attentive to classroom lessons. Typical student attempts at violating classroom decorum, such as whispering to a classmate during whole class reading lessons, or "talking back" when reprimanded, yielded little or nothing in the power play between the particular student and Mrs. Goldstein. A sharp "[student's name] close your mouth," "pay attention" or "do we need to make a phone call home today," typically resolved minor discipline issues. Most students knew that Mrs. Goldstein was no neophyte and had "been around the block" a few times even though she was the only European-American faculty member. She made clear who was in charge and resistance to her dictates was minimal. There was not much "give" in her tolerance for inappropriate behavior, something that I noticed early in the school year.

On certain occasions, a student would suffer Mrs. Goldstein's ultimate wrath. "Get your things and go next door to Mrs. Jawanza's room, now!" Going to Mrs. Jawanza's room, the lead-teacher, typically meant sitting out in the periphery away from Mrs. Jawanza's class while silently completing classroom work—an out of class timeout. Mrs. Goldstein's seasoned maneuvers of on-the-spot disciplining were met not by the typical conformity by those students who would get put out, but by whining and complaints of "it wasn't me," or "she/he was talking to me," or "I didn't do anything," and the smacking of teeth. If a sharp "just close your mouth" by Mrs. Goldstein prompted more "whining" as she described the behavior during conversations or if the "whining" or "trying to get their way" persisted, the student would be guaranteed a ticket next door.

In a conversation in reference to two particular boy students Mrs. Goldstein shared with me that "it's not Limbaugh's behavior so much as it is his whining and defiance when I catch him in the act," referring to one of them. "I just can't deal with his whining when all Limbaugh has to do is get his act together... typically that's why I send

him next door... it sets a bad example for the others.” She informed me that the other boy’s mother is on drugs and that he lives with his grandmother. “Akil sometimes just looses it and won’t do anything I say, that’s when I have to send him out... and he’s also a bully as well, I’ve noticed.”

#### *Fourth Graders and Poetry (Phase I)*

Poetry is central to the Marva Collins philosophy and the daily curricular activities of the fourth grade class. Typically, the fourth grade classroom had an aura of silence and the protocol of “raise your hand” for permission to speak as students completed morning bookwork or when the class checked a written assignment together. Students rarely yell out answers anymore knowing they would suffer the wrath of not only Mrs. Goldstein but also evil stares from peers who knew the answer and followed classroom procedure. The evil stares are especially strong from those students who do not just raise their hand, but aggressively wave and bounce in their seats sending a strong message of “me, me, me”!

Nevertheless, Poetry alters classroom decorum changing acceptable parameters. Standing, animated vocalizations, and overt gesticulations are acceptable during Poetry; it is a time for students to express themselves in a daily routine in which many of the students have been participating since pre-K at MCPSC. The following are excerpts from fieldwork on the Poetry ritual.

#### **September 19, 2000**

Poetry is one of the major subjects emphasized at the school, for it is where students learn to recite poems for Sunday “Prepping for Power” showcases.<sup>18</sup> The students also learn the meanings implicit in poems so as to not simply regurgitate rote knowledge. Positive self-esteem and character development was usually the poems’ focus.

The poem for this lesson was entitled “I Celebrate Me,” and it was compatible with the school’s mission statement that promotes the cultivation of high self-esteem and positive character traits. The class discussed each stanza of the poem, led by the teacher who probed students with questions such as “Dalila, what does that line mean to you?” The fourth grade girl replied in a confident tone, “That line in the poem means I must always think about the positive things in my life and remember not to dwell on the bad things all the time.”

The teacher, about to transition to putting gestures with the poem for the class presentation at a “Prepping for Power” showcase or a performance if requested by the President/CEO for guests, stated, “Donna and Angel, you are going to be responsible for putting hand signals to the first stanza.” The two girls smiled and gladly accepted the responsibility placed on them by their teacher. “You can work on the hand signals when we go to lunch and afterwards when we are outside.” Both girls are veterans at MCPSC and have proven to be enthused and reliable once commissioned to do a task by Mrs. Goldstein, even if it’s during lunch or recess. The school’s philosophy is intellectual stimulation with teacher involvement throughout the entire day except perhaps at lunch, which is thirty minutes.

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<sup>18</sup> I will discuss the Sunday “Prepping for Power” ritual in an upcoming section of the study.

After assigning three of the five stanzas to girls, Mrs. Goldstein said, “what about a young man.” There were murmurs of “no” by some of the girls who wanted remaining parts as well as some of the boys who were not willing to volunteer. None of the boys seemed as anxious to add hand signals, as did the girls.

Finally, in closure of the poetry lesson the teacher called students to the front of the class to read or recite a stanza as best they could at this early point in their learning process. She selected two young men to recite a stanza even though they were reluctant to put hand signals with the stanzas. “Jihari, come up to the front and read the first stanza. Class, what do we tell her”? In unison, students loudly shouted, “give it your best shot,” as she came to the front of the class. After she finished, students again shouted, “we like the way you do it J-i-h-a-r-i” as she headed back to her seat with a look of satisfaction on her face.

The encouragement of “give it your best shot” and “we like the way you do it” had an essence of sincerity in the fourth grade class. For them, the ritual reaffirmed that everyone supported you in their class, something the students learn as a part of the Marva Collins philosophy. These students had not reached the level of the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class, in particular, where the ritual was invoked less often, as many of them were in the “cool” stage of life—adolescence. Furthermore, it appeared too un-cool to say “corny” things like the “little kids” such as “give it your best shot” or “we like the way you do it.” Typically, when Mr. Sipho, the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher invoked the ritual, the older students pervert it with sarcasm or nonchalance, not the sincerity and enthusiasm of the fourth graders.

“O.K. lets put away our poetry and take out our reading; do it quietly.” “O.K. let me see who is ready,” were Mrs. Goldstein’s comments as she headed toward the back of the room while peering over as many students as she could. Once the class appeared ready, which was a transition that took no more than three-minutes, the assignment began as they picked up where they had left off on their weekly vocabulary words. “The first word is lure,” “What does that word mean”? Students’ hands shot up eagerly. This time young men were as excited about answering as young ladies. The class reviewed the list by a word being stated and then they responded to the teacher with a definition in the same fashion throughout the lesson. They were all sure to respond to the teacher in complete sentences, which is another pedagogical expectation of MCPSC’s teachers. I exited after witnessing students reciting numerous reading definitions quite impressively, and they were eager to answer as the teacher probed them.

#### Staff Assistant Fills In For Mrs. Goldstein (Fourth Grade Phase I)

There were no support staff assistants at the higher grades boarding campus during this early phase of the year and more human labor power was in need in order for the Redefining Room to become fully operational. The Redefining Room was a small, isolating room envisioned to let students “redefine themselves” if they encountered behavioral or attitudinal difficulties in their regular classes during the day. Although not fully functional, the physical space has been designated and the room was strategically located across from the President/CEO’s office on the first floor of the school.

Other than morning assembly in the chapel, which is down the hall separated by doors typically kept closed, the Redefining Room would be the only reason for students to be on the first floor. This gave the first floor an aura of being out-of-bounds for

students. Furthermore, the forbiddance of any student to visit the top/second floor created a special kind of fear of the unknown as rumors of “the top floor has ghosts,” and “it’s blood on the floor up there from when those old people lived here” had already begun to circulate as part of student conversations.<sup>19</sup>

At this point in the year the President/CEO’s rhythm was a constant in and out of the building—going to teach at the university, heading to her office at the lower grades campus, meeting parents, touring guests, etc... and students could be sent to the Redefining Room only when she was in the building. The Redefining Room functioned only when she was in and the more perceptive students were quick to notice this dynamic. On many occasions during this early phase of the school year, I heard students ask others, “did you see Dr. Mariama’s car out there”—referring to the parking lot where her older model, blue Chevy Nova hatchback was usually parked indicating that she was somewhere in the building.

Mrs. Nzinga, a staff assistant whose current assignments landed her on MCPSC’s lower grades campus, had been slotted to fill the role in the Redefining Room in the near future. Yet, she was needed more on the other campus at the time. There was also conversation in the air of Mrs. Nzinga transferring to the higher grades boarding campus because of her no-nonsense demeanor in which the lower grades teachers were finding sometimes overbearing and also at times a bit too “strict” on the younger children.<sup>20</sup> The President/CEO thought of Mrs. Nzinga as a good fit for carrying out the objectives of the Redefining Room. Furthermore, she did not mind telling the staff and warning students, “she’ll be perfect to run the “Hot Box” once I can get her over here.”

In an interview with Mrs. Nzinga, I gained insights into how she became affiliated with MCPSC as well as some of her educational perspectives.

[on affiliation]...Oh...I guess maybe ten years ago...it was some time back I was watching 60 Minutes and they were interviewing Mrs. Collins...and she was talking about predominately black kids...that they need an education and a lot of people... they, they don’t really love black kids! And... I understand that she came up with this program to help kids get an education because she knew without an education, you won’t reach your potential... So, therefore, you know, I was impressed... I thought wow... So years later, I heard that Dr. Mariama was starting a Marva Collins school...

[On meeting the President/CEO]... My sister,... was going to [University where President/CEO teaches] at the time and whenever she would take a class, she would always tell me what happened in class—this professor did this, said that... it was really a lot of fun. And the one person she talked about constantly was Dr. Mariama... and I thought who is this lady because everyday... and I had gotten to the point where I would say “well what did Dr. Mariama say today...what did Dr. Mariama do today...what happened today with Dr. Mariama in her class... Dr. Mariama, Dr. Mariama, Dr. Mariama...

Finally, I thought I have to meet this lady... So, I was going to [another city University] at the time and I decided well I think maybe I’ll just transfer to

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<sup>19</sup> The latter rumor was initiated by several students who had had the opportunity to go to the top floor while helping in renovations over the summer volunteering with their parents.

<sup>20</sup> In a discussion about this issue, Mrs. Nzinga informed me that she felt that her approach “did make a difference in some children’s behavior.”



[the University where the President/CEO teaches] because my sister was taking this communications course and she was learning all these different things... and how to do things and say things...how to speak. So... I signed up for Dr. Mariama's class and... the very first night she spoke and gave us our syllabus and I liked her... I thought wow, I see why my sister fell in love with Dr. Mariama... K.S. (P.C.)...about how long ago was this?

Mrs. Nzinga...maybe fifteen to twenty years ago...

Once again, this long lasting effect and ability to win people's heart and commitment seems to be apparent in the President/CEO's interactions with Mrs. Nzinga. Just as Mrs. Goldstein had remembered their interaction in a way that said, "I want to be a part of this person's vision," Mrs. Nzinga obviously had similar sentiments. In retrospect, Dr. Mariama and Mrs. Nzinga's first interactions were years before the inception of MCPSC, which opened in 1990.

While attending college, Mrs. Nzinga simultaneously took early retirement from a major corporation in the city. And, after a year of "doing nothing" as she described it, "I began to get bored." This led to volunteer work in hospice services, insurance, and law offices, as well as tutoring and mentoring in the city's public schools.

A regular church going African-American woman who attends the oldest African Methodist Episcopal church in the city, Mrs. Nzinga attributes a church sermon to influencing her to become a part of the MCPSC community.

Mrs. Nzinga.: One day I went to church and we had a really, really nice service about giving of yourself... If you have something to give, give! You don't want to take it to your grave with you. So, I thought after I had heard this nice service at church you know what Dr. Mariama at Marva Collins... I believe in that system... I think I'll send my resume to Dr. Mariama... I sent it to her home... and one night at about eleven o'clock I received a telephone call and Dr. Mariama said... I don't believe this... I am looking for somebody and you sent your resume to my home... She said "meet me tomorrow at eleven and we'll talk... and today here I am.

After a long career in business, Mrs. Nzinga's moral and ethical roots of "giving back" stemming from the black church and her previous interactions with the school's President/CEO influenced her decision and career path.

In another conversation, Mrs. Nzinga relayed, "you know, they think that I'm mean over at the other school... but I'm not mean, I just demand respect from these kids." I had an opportunity early in the year to observe Mrs. Nzinga's interactions with students as at this point, she took the approximately ten minutes drive from the lower grades campus to the higher grades boarding campus to fill in wherever necessary. The following are excerpts from fieldwork, which highlight the interactions between Mrs. Nzinga' and Mrs. Goldstein as well as the fourth grade students.

### **September 27, 2000**

The students worked quietly as Mrs. Nzinga, one of the assistants from the other campus, acted as their substitute. One student sat with her desk empty which prompted Mrs. Nzinga to say, "do you have all A's?" "Get something on your desk and get busy." She observed another student peering at his neighbor's paper. "Stop looking on others'

papers, you cannot just look on other peoples' papers, that's called c-h-e-a-t-i-n-g." You could hear a pen drop in the class as the students worked in silence.

"Get your stuff and get out!" go over to Mrs. Jawanza's room and sit... Hurry, get your stuff and get over there!" The boy did not waste any time as he hurriedly packed his belongings and exited. I could not tell what he did, the class was silent and he was sitting up front, but whatever it was she was not tolerating it.

Another boy, Limbaugh, was headed for the same fate but instead of just packing and leaving he pleaded in a very helpless tone, "I'm reading not talking." Mrs. Nzinga retorted, "Then read silently" and let him stay. A girl slammed shut a book that she was reading making a loud sound that resulted in her dismissal as well. As the girl packed her belongings, Mrs. Nzinga began to speak. "You children are going to learn respect... what your teacher has been telling me is not nice." She looked to the girl who was packing, "hurry up and get over there!" The students were as quiet as mice.

This class had obviously had a bad day or at least a portion of the day had been bad and their teacher must have not been pleased with them as she left. This was one of the more disciplined classes in these first few weeks of the term, and upon my arrival, I wondered why the substitute teacher was treating such a well behaved group in this manner. Mrs. Nzinga had obviously not liked what Mrs. Goldstein had told her before leaving and was quite disappointed in the class of all African-American students. The students were in violation!

Later as the students stood waiting for their buses, I asked the girl her reasoning for slamming the book. She told me:

I knew she wasn't gon do nothin' but put me out... I wanted to get out of her class anyways 'cause she was just gon keep yellin' at everybody and it wasn't everybody that was bein' bad today.

This scene reminded me of scoldings I experienced by elder African-American women teachers during my elementary school years when my usually all African-American classes had not behaved appropriately. These women could transform with ease from the nicest people in the world to your worst nightmare depending on how we as students behaved in and outside of their presence. This type of teacher takes bad reports from others about the students personal, as if the students had done something to them. A bad report was not simply a reflection on students; it seemed to reflect negatively on the teachers as well—even African-American people in general.<sup>21</sup>

Dalila, a traditional teacher's dream student had a unique approach to resisting Mrs. Nzinga's admonishments of the entire class. She clearly did not plan to be put out of the class but still wanted to respectfully make her case. She quietly raised her hand and Mrs. Nzinga acknowledged her. Dalila said in a humble voice, "Why are you punishin' everyone because some students have been actin' bad today? Everybody wasn't bad and I don't think it's fair to yell at me because other people have been actin' up." Dalila sat straight in her chair with a direct focus ahead as she spoke in order to avoid any "facial contact" with Mrs. Nzinga. Mrs. Nzinga replied in a manner that indicated she knew this particular student was one of the MCPSC future exemplars, and that there was probably some truth in her statement:

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<sup>21</sup> For further elaboration on African-American collectivity and fictive kinship, see S. Fordham, 1996.

Mrs. Goldstein, told me it was the class... and I know that it wasn't everybody so if you know it wasn't you just act like I am not talking to you, but others of you... and you know who you are, you are the ones that I am talking to. The girl seemed to be satisfied with her response of truce, which created a comfortable space for the truly innocent students.

The children were as quiet as mice when Mrs. Nzinga said, "O.K. everybody stop what you are doing." She continued, "What is an odd number?" One of the students timidly replied to her question. "Did you all hear that, say it louder so that everyone can hear you." The boy repeated his answer and she said "great job, excellent," in a tone more in line with that of a drill sergeant loosening up a bit on the cadets. The tension in the class eased just a bit when a parent arrived at the door. Mrs. Nzinga and the parent stood near the door and talked quietly as the students worked. The parent looked in at me as I sat in the back row in a desk and remarked loud enough for the entire class to hear, "he must have been held back a few years?" I smiled as both the students and the substitute chuckled a bit, which relieved the classroom tension even more.

With the door opened and the students working quietly, I could hear the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade classroom starting a poetry lesson. "Repeat after me," said Mrs. Jawanza as she began to recite a line from a poem for memorization. This prompted the substitute to close the door which caused the parent to be left outside. Mrs. Nzinga continued to question the class on even and odd numbers. "You all need to listen to me, I don't ever want to hear another bad report like I heard today from your teacher." She spotted a girl slouching in her desk and commanded, "sit up like a lady." The girl sat up in the desk as though she wished she could have stayed in the slouched position. I overheard her murmur under her breath so that Mrs. Nzinga could not hear her, "I ain't no lady."

She gave them one more mini lecture, "your teacher should not have left here upset today. You all can do better and I don't ever want to hear what I heard today from your teacher again. Do you all understand me?" A few of the students responded in a quiet and respectful tone, "yes." Mrs. Nzinga, not satisfied with the number of responders remarked "I can't hear you." It prompted a somewhat louder "yes" from more students.

#### Mrs. Goldstein and Teacher Solidarity (Fourth Grade Phase I)

Early in the school year, the teachers' interactions revealed their recognition that they would have to "stick together" at MCPSC. Staff assistance was minimal, and the three teachers depended on one another which made isolation almost impossible. The following excerpts from fieldwork shed light on this bonding process.

#### **October 3, 2000**

As I entered the school through the lead teacher's back door entrance, I noticed the classroom, which has enough desks in it to seat a class almost twice the size of hers, practically filled. Six students from 7/8<sup>th</sup> grades filled the seats that were usually vacant as the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade class worked on the other side of the room. The lead teacher stood in front of these 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders with the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher discussing an issue that now involved me. She looked at me with the look that I had grown to interpret as I/we need your help and are glad that you are here as she was visibly frustrated about something that had happened before I arrived. We had discussed my need to have certain times at

the school for uninterrupted research where I could sit and observe, but instances such as the following would occur ever so often pulling me into the fray.

The 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher from South Africa had to leave school to take care of immigration matters. There was no on site support staff and the support that was available for instances such as this were in the form of Mrs. Nzinga, an assistant from the other campus or Dr. Mariama. The new school had a limited staff: the three teachers with their respective classes; the Science, Math, and Spanish teachers who were part time; and myself who agreed to help whenever possible. Obviously, anytime a base teacher had to leave the building an interesting dilemma occurred because class coverage became an issue.

As the more than thirty 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade students busily worked on seatwork, Mrs. Jawanza asked me to cover up until lunch for Mr. Sipho. It was around noon and lunch was at 12:30, thus, I agreed to cover. Decisions of this nature were never easy. Everyone knew that I was conducting research, but I was quite sure they knew little about an ethnographer. Frankly, these teachers (especially the lead-teacher) had so many responsibilities that they knew little about my research agenda during the early part of the year. The lead-teacher stayed at the school past six o'clock on many nights just to stay above board. Thus, my probing was not even on her radar of concerns.

Moments later the rest of the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade students entered Mrs. Jawanza's class after they returned from math and it brought the overall class size to approximately fifty students. After devising a plan to free the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher to attend to immigration issues, I became aware of the lead-teacher's frustration. Not only was the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher leaving for a few hours, but also the students in his class had been having a horrible day. With a look of disappointment, Mrs. Jawanza turned her attention to the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders and spoke with them about their inappropriate behavior. She had taught many of them since third or fourth grade and now they were "actin' up" in Mr. Sipho's class. Some of the students had apologetic looks on their faces while the clear majority seemed not to be affected by her admonishments and appeals of "you all can do better."

As the two of us stood in front of the school's oldest group, Mrs. Goldstein exited her classroom just next door as if she had had about enough of the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders. She spoke candid words on just how this group of students' behavior had begun to affect her class. I was yet to see this side of Mrs. Goldstein and she surprised everyone in the room. The class was filled with African-American students, two African-American adults, and at that point the fourth grade teacher, a first year European-American Jewish woman who began to admonish the 7/8<sup>th</sup> students. Mrs. Goldstein's class was the youngest group and based on my observations thus far, the least challenging as far as adjusting to the new school, the new rituals, and structures that are still evolving. She walked to the front row of 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders, pointed at them and declared,

A lot of people talk about this school and how it is such a good school with excellent students, but you know, much of the things that I have seen from you all this year would never be tolerated in the public schools... Some of the things I've heard you say to her (referring to the lead-teacher) would not be tolerated; you would have been gone by now! Your behavior across that hall has begun to affect my students over here and with the noise you all were making today, I can't teach my class because of you all out in the hall.

Then she went to a litany of comments showing solidarity with the lead-teacher:

Now I've had about enough of some of you and you should never talk to any teacher the way some of you have been trying to do. It is just inappropriate and disgraceful and *we* are not going to stand for it anymore. Mrs. Jawanza doesn't deserve it and neither does any other teacher or adult at this school. She tries her best to be good to you all and you are unappreciative. Most of the time, she is here until six o'clock trying to prepare so that your classes can be exciting. Your behavior is just unacceptable and we are not going to tolerate it anymore!

She then turned and headed back into her classroom.

The 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade students were visibly embarrassed and everyone in the room looked somewhat surprised. Their facial expressions of defiance quickly changed to looks of remorse and sadness. The 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade students appeared to be caught between the circumstances of wanting to just stop working and look or mock the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders, but they instinctively knew the consequences opting instead to keep their pencils moving and acted as if nothing were happening.

At this early stage in the school year, I had never observed the fourth grade teacher admonish any class of students in that manner besides her own. Mrs. Goldstein was expanding her wings under the banner of teacher solidarity. Then, Mrs. Jawanza looked at the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade students and said, "you know, that really hurt... what Mrs. Goldstein said about us and the public schools really hurt." The lead-teacher appeared to feel that same kind of pain Mrs. Nzinga must have felt after hearing the bad report on the fourth grade class on an earlier observation. She then told the few 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders who went to Science to depart and she prompted me to take the others to class. We left in absolute silence.

Incidents of the aforementioned nature in many ways forced the teachers to come together, especially to help one another cope with trying issues and in times of need. If MCPSC was to survive its first year, it was imperative that they pull together. Especially, when the students (typically the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class at this point) pushed the limits of the school's structures to the point of affecting others classes.

#### *Fourth Grade Gets Two New Students (Phase I)*

##### **October 12, 2000**

My entering the school through Mrs. Jawanza's back door always allowed me an opportunity to observe which students had been put out of their regular class for time-out. The other teachers typically sent students for these occasions, and Limbaugh and Akil had been dismissed again, as I passed them working separately. I continued pass the boys and headed to Mrs. Goldstein's class.

As I opened the fourth grade classroom door, I quickly noticed two new students in Mrs. Goldstein's class, a European-American boy and girl. Lance and Leeanne were the first European-American students to attend the new boarding school campus although there are a few other European-American students at the lower grades campus. The brother and sister became the focus of my observations.

I sat in the empty desk next to the boy who seemed quite confident in his abilities as he sat up high with one foot curled under his buttocks and raised his hand often to answer questions. His sister, sitting farther toward the front of the class rarely raised her hand as she sat quietly with a perfect studious composure following the math lesson that the class was both reviewing and checking. I could not help but notice how all of the

students were actively engaged in this activity, including the new European-American students, especially Lance.

The two new students' presence did not cause any new disturbances in class. Actually, the new students fitted right in with the rest of the class and were obviously quick to assimilate the class' strict behavioral culture in both discipline and academic work. Lance raised his hand to speak, explained himself, answered questions or to be selected for a turn at the chalkboard to work on math review problems. Leeanne, though not as aggressive in her demeanor and willingness to answer questions, sat quietly not distracting anyone.

At lunch, I learned that the two new students were actually MCPSC veterans who had just returned to the school. Their mother was a staff assistant at the lower grades campus. I never learned the reason for their sudden return to MCPSC, but they appeared comfortable as new students.<sup>22</sup>

After completing the math check and review the class transitioned to Note Taking (copied from fieldwork as teacher displayed them on the board):

Students Name

Date

School

#### IV. Math

A. fraction –  $3/4^{\text{th}}$

B. denominator – bottom number of a fraction

After copying his notes, the boy who was sitting behind me and everyone else in the class walked up to the teacher and interrupted her writing by whispering in her ear. She replied loudly, "Oh, yes take him his book, he can do yesterday's as well." This boy was helping Mrs. Goldstein to make sure that one of the boys who was sitting in the lead-teacher's class on time-out had what was needed to keep up with the rest of the class. Moreover, he was making sure that Akil's dismissal did not become a mini-vacation next door because, like those students who were not put out of class, Akil also needed to work.

#### *A Tough Situation: Mrs. Goldstein Falls Ill (Phase I)*

I can vividly recall the ease of calling in sick as an elementary public school teacher several years ago. Even the seemingly simple technicalities like having substitute teachers available and on call created structural dilemmas for MCPSC. In (re)presenting a situation of this nature, the seemingly small things that outsiders typically never ponder become vivid in respect of the daily decisions and reality of this educational community.

On this particular day as I headed pass the fourth and  $5/6^{\text{th}}$  grade classrooms, I encountered one of the many issues affecting this school in its first year of transition. The fourth grade teacher handed me a note to give to the lead-teacher. I gave Mrs. Jawanza the tape-sealed letter and then headed back toward the science lab, where I had been working with some  $7/8^{\text{th}}$  grade students on individual out-of-class projects. Moments later, as I sat in the Science Lab jotting down notes while talking with  $7/8^{\text{th}}$  graders, one of the lead-teacher's students entered the room and handed me the same note. I opened the note and it read,

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<sup>22</sup> By mid-year, Leeanne had begun to go to school at the lower grades campus leaving Lance as the school's sole European-American student for the remainder of the year.

Mrs. Jawanza.

I'm sorry but I'm sick I will not be here tomorrow lesson plans are on my little desk I will be here Fri. – I'll call you tomorrow

*Mrs. Goldstein*

The writing from Mrs. Goldstein was in red ballpoint pen but the note to me was in red permanent marker written across some of Mrs. Goldstein's writing. The note to me written slanted across the paper read,

Can you come early tomorrow, I need you to substitute Thurs. for Mrs. Goldstein, O.K.?

*Mrs. Jawanza*

This situation reminded me that there is not a substitute teacher pool waiting in the “wings” if a teacher became ill. I had never given this issue thought until this point. What if two teachers became ill? Actually, my help around the school eased outsider/insider dialectical tensions in better understanding the school's daily rituals and interactions as a researcher. The students as well as the teachers made me feel as though I was one of the family, which I knew would continue to yield good fruit as far as “the school going about its business.”

I also knew that I could not cover the class because I taught a morning course at the university, which meant that I got to the school just before noon for fieldwork on university teaching days. I also knew that she was “up to her neck” in responsibilities and this latest dilemma was just an additional burden. I would have done it if I could, it would have been consistent with the critical ethnographer's agenda. If I could be available what would I do, take fieldwork notes in the back of a class somewhere in the school while the lead-teacher taught two classes? As an intern five years ago, I had seen her do it during periods of the day when a new teacher could not manage his class.

Informing her of my inability to cover the class, Mrs. Jawanza simply said to me in her usual we will get it done tone, “don't worry, I'll take care of it... What time will you be over tomorrow?” I replied, “I'll get here around noon and do what I can to help out.” I left the school wondering about the next day. How would they resolve this tough situation? I got the feeling that this was not something new at this school—only new to someone who has not thought deeply about what it “really” takes to operate an independent school.

#### *Mythology and MCPSC's Pedagogy (Fourth Grade Phase I)*

Mythology! Greek mythology in particular seemed to be the fourth grade class' major reading focus at this point of the year. Days at MCPSC revealed a strong ethos of admiration and respect for the Greek classical tradition and the literature of that era in human history. Moments in the life of the fourth graders as they interacted with one another and Mrs. Goldstein during quiet reading lessons shed light on the structures of this particular reading ritual, which typically operated around Greek classical themes, values, virtues, and lessons. The following are excerpts from fieldwork.

#### **October 24, 2000**

“Get your eyes on the book and start paying attention now!” was what I heard as I opened the door to enter the room. Both Kiswana and Akil were already “dismissed” to

the outskirts of Mrs. Jawanza's class. The fourth grade class was reading *Pandora's Box*, in their reading textbook. The format was very much like the whole class reading lessons that I experienced in elementary school in which everyone pays attention and follows while one person reads a paragraph aloud or two if a good reader.

As I sat in the back of the class observing this lesson, it was clear that these students knew the script and performed their roles almost to perfection with the exception of the girl who was scolded as I entered. No one else violated class expectations for the next twenty-five to thirty minutes. Most of the students seemed to like the ritual as the majority of them eagerly raised their hands to read the upcoming paragraph. An opportunity to read aloud or speak before an audience is one of the things that this school prides itself of and it is instilled into the students. This process starts at an early age and rarely do you find a student at the MCPSC who cannot read texts aloud at his/her grade level.

I think that reading proficiency and the enjoyment of speaking aloud helped to make this ritual scene work. The other component seemed to be the fourth grade, European-American veteran teacher of more than 20 years who I had come to perceive as a good disciplinarian of this class. The ritual worked and the students all participated and followed along or at least acted as if they were as most followed the lines of the text with their index finger.

Other fieldwork continues to add clarity to an understanding of the fourth grade class interactions, Greek Mythology, and pedagogy during phase I of the research.

### **November 7, 2000**

The classroom has a crowded feel even with 21 students in total.

- students quietly round robin reading "The Voyage of Odysseus" (Greek Legend)
- "[student name], one paragraph" student reads
- students raise hands but not necessarily who teacher will choose to read next.
- Girl nodding off, some following w/ their fingers, one obviously working on another assignment every time the coast is clear and teacher not looking up.
- very typical traditional classroom setting in the sense of students reading when teacher prompts, followed by class discussion of questions at the end of the section.
- I remember these stories so well "Putting out Cyclop's eye" "Cunning trickery of Greeks such as Odysseus fooling the Cyclops" "and the Trojan horse story"

Questions at the end of section for discussion posed by the teacher:

"What happened to the Greeks after the fall of Troy and why did they not reach home safely?"

"How could the Lotus fruits be dangerous to Odysseus's men?"

"In what ways did Odysseus show his cleverness?"

- one girl gets caught with gum, has to sit with teacher at lunch and see her outside at recess
- one girl has to take work that she didn't finish earlier to lunch and work on it in the dining area.



Dr. Mariama's Surprise: A Spontaneous Guest for the School  
**November 16, 2000**

Today brought forth an interesting set of events as the President/CEO requested that I connect the new television and VCR in Mrs. Jawanza's class. This event led to an interruption of the normal school day ritual. One student bubbling with excitement came to get me from down the hallway. He talked as he approached but in a failed whisper to me he said, "we need your help!" His sense of urgency sparked thoughts of a fight or some other sort of emergency in another part of the school.

It turned out that the President/CEO of the school had invited a local university professor to speak about his life to the entire school. What was to transpire in the next hour held the entire student population's attention as all seventy-five or so students sat comfortably (some on the floor) in the lead-teacher's room. This presentation went through the students lunch period, and most of them seemed not to be visibly concerned with eating an hour later. In addition, Dr. Mariama's spontaneous supplements to the school's curriculum overrode regular schoolhouse activity.

Dr. Mariama introduced the gentleman once the entire school was quietly seated in the room. The professor of African Haitian descent showed the school a large picture reminiscent of those that hang on museum walls for show. The picture was of a girl and he asked, "What do you have in common with this little girl?" Students' hands went up sporadically, but before anyone was chosen someone yelled out, "she's black!" This was the only answer given to the presenter's first question as some began to snicker about the "black" remark. "What does this mean," he went on but elicited no answers from students. After no other student attempted to seek similarities he asserted, "yes this girl is black and she is also from Haiti."

He went on to ask another question, "now, how did she get to Haiti?" Some students raised their hands once more in the customary way as others blurted out as though the school ritual of raise your hand before speaking now did not apply in this case. "She flew from America?"... "Train?"... "Boat?" The professor shook his head signaling "no" until he heard "boat" come from the crowd, which caused him to focus on the area from where the answer had come, "Yes, by boat!" He went on after hearing a satisfactory answer, "How many of you have heard of slavery?" Many students raised their hands as he nodded in approval moving into lecture mode. Below is a paraphrase of the lecture as I attempted to capture the essence of the presentation by sitting in the rear of the crowded class:

Around the 1600s our ancestors were brought over to this part of the world... Christopher Columbus went to Haiti sent by his queen... The people in Haiti at the time were not Africans like the girl you see on the picture, the people there were Indians like the Native American Indians that you all learn about... Columbus forced Indians into slavery in order to take their gold and valuables... Later the French took over and brought black people who they kidnapped from Africa... A lot of slaves were dropped off in Virginia and other places such as Haiti... You see this girl could be a descendent of the same place in Africa as your ancestors were and you are... But while there was still slavery in the United States, Haiti had a revolution. "What is a revolution?"

Limbaugh, a fourth grader, sitting in front with the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade class responded, “when someone wants to take over the government and sometimes they fight others.” Limbaugh was now actually in the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade class because Mrs. Goldstein and Mrs. Jawanza had worked the switch of classes for him. Mrs. Goldstein informed me during conversation that she just could not put up anymore with Limbaugh’s “whining” and “these little noises he make in class” anymore. I could see Dr. Mariama, as she stood by the door, nodding and smiling in response to Limbaugh’s answer to the professor’s question. Limbaugh was representing the school in a way that met her expectations. The professor continued his discussion:

Haiti had a revolution in 1804 and America had one in 1865... Then later slavery was re-introduced in Haiti but on children... (He refers to his picture) The little girl on this picture with the mud floor and broken wood for walls parents can’t afford to take care of her so they made a deal with those people in Haiti with money to educate their children in return for the children’s labor... The children are supposed to come back to help out their parents after their education and servitude is over, but what happens is the children never come back to take care of or help out their parents... They are kept as slaves... I was one of these children... My mother died when I was very young and my family sold me to this lady—I became a slave child... There are approximately 400,000 slave children today in Haiti... So, how did I get here? The people who owned me came to America when I was 14 years old... They then sent for me so that I could be their slave in America... They made me do all of the chores, clean, wash, everything for them but someone told them that they would get in trouble if they didn’t put me in school... So, they didn’t want to get in trouble and put me in a high school... I had a third grade education at this time.

He then passed around a leather strap that is used to beat the children before reading from a book that he had written on the experience. The students passed the leather strap around, as some of them winced at the thought of being hit with it. He went on:

I had a favorite teacher who was a white man that tutored and worked with me so that I could catch up with my peers... I was able to graduate and go to the Army with this teacher’s assistance... From the Army, I went to a university in Florida, and then here to this city to attend one of the local universities... At this point, I wrote a book entitled REST AVEC,

He wrote it on the board:

The title means, “to stay with” because the children are not staying with their parents in Haiti. I brought along a video made by UNICEF to help me in getting rid of slavery in Haiti. The video title is, “They Call Me Dog.” He inserted the video into the newly installed classroom television.

After a quiet viewing of the video, the students asked several questions which led to intimate responses from the professor. The professor talked about his first birthday celebration which occurred during his adult life; in addition, he clarified parts of the movie that some students did not understand. I asked the teachers if they would share any assignments related to the professor’s visit with me that the students had done. I

received a set of revealing reflections from Mrs. Goldstein's class that shed even deeper light on the fourth grade class.<sup>23</sup>

## Phase I

### *5/6<sup>th</sup> Grade Classroom*

For both the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade students and Mrs. Jawanza, the school's lead-teacher, "getting out of the gates" were in many ways intricately intertwined with the fourth and 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade classes. The close physical proximity of the three base classrooms and an early recognition of a necessity to depend on one another, made classroom interactions amongst the students and teachers practically inevitable. Mrs. Jawanza's class was "home base," a central apparatus in which much of what happened at the school spun. With both Mr. Sipho and Mrs. Goldstein being new to the school community, Mrs. Jawanza represented a type of veteran wisdom that had been gained through earned stripes from years of experience at this independent school. Furthermore, she had taught most of the students at the lower grades campus before the opening of the boarding campus this year. During this early phase of the school year, she was typically called on to "put out the fires" and hold things together, especially when the President/CEO was away from campus.

Mrs. Jawanza's affiliations with MCPSC are far reaching. Obviously, a dedicated African-American woman whose vigor and dependability earned her lead-teacher status at the school, Mrs. Jawanza was described in this year's salutatorian graduation address as "the teacher of teachers." Reflections on the school during an interview with Mrs. Jawanza helped to crack open a window into her reality and the way in which she perceived the school based on her experiences.

...I think it's kind of interesting... I was working in Cincinnati's public schools... as a long term sub. (substitute teacher) so I had done a position that I had been at for about six months or five months or something... and one of the teachers who ... was actually related to one of my best friends had pulled me to the side and said "you know, you... you do so well with the students and there's this school that's starting... Marva Collins, you heard of the Marva Collins in Chicago and they're trying to start up" [she digresses] and this is before everybody was... you know coming up with schools everywhere... Marva Collins was the first in its time to be trying to start a new school... and she was telling me, "you know I think it's good to get in on the foundations of it"... and that's what first sparked my interest... when I looked in the newspaper then I saw the advertisement for it. [about the advertisement]...and what did strike me was that they required a Liberal Arts background but did not want people who were looking for a job but looking for... either a career or more like missionaries. And, I said, well you know... I didn't know if I had all of the credentials for it... because I was working on my Masters in Education at the time and I said well I'm going for it anyway and I'ma try... you know... and that's really how it was... I was inspired

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<sup>23</sup> For a perusal into some of the fourth graders' thoughts on the issue of slaves in Haiti as well as a glimpse at their writing styles, refer to Appendix B. A yellow sticky note from Mrs. Goldstein stated... If you see them mentioning Timothy, it relates to the book we are reading in class.

by the fact that she (referring to the President/CEO) was looking for missionaries more than she was looking for just someone who wanted a paycheck. Seemingly attracted to both the emphasis and zeal of an educational missionary, Mrs. Jawanza's particularly long days (typically ten hours or more) at the school speak volumes.

Participating and observing in Mrs. Jawanza's class during the first three months of school allowed me an opportunity to experience and observe the class' early relational interactions. The students found themselves in a new environment and the same was true for Mrs. Jawanza. Just the navigation of the physical structures of the class presented initial freedoms and parameters. On the other hand, the unseen ideological freedoms and parameters of the classroom dictated by Mrs. Jawanza helped my understandings of the early evolving culture and power relations of the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade class. The following fieldwork excerpts during this phase of the research provide clarity in understanding their world.

#### September 12, 2000

Most students after seeing me around seemed rather unconcerned with my presence. Nevertheless, several students occasionally refocused their attention from the lesson of the day, to me. A boy waving "hello" prompted a reprimand from Mrs. Jawanza. I turned my head to politely ignore him and to signal that he return to the lesson but it was too late. From the front in a calm, rational voice came, "we know better than to get off task when we have a visitor." She digressed from the lesson thus turning the situation into a teachable moment:

There are news cameras and guests in our school all the time and you should know by now how to conduct yourself smart boy...when people come in here, you let them notice you and not the other way around so turn around and focus. The boy and the other unprosecuted guilty quickly refocused their attention on the lesson. I felt a tinge of guilt bearing in mind my presence helped create such interactions.

The class sat quietly as Mrs. Jawanza discussed a reading assignment and worksheets students had completed earlier in the day. Mrs. Jawanza has the largest classroom in the school, a room able to house approximately fifty desks without being cluttered. Slotted to double as a teacher training room as part of the school's plans for future staff development, Mrs. Jawanza was quite happy in her new space. During a beginning of the year staff meeting she joyfully told me, "this is one of my rewards for persevering throughout the years."<sup>1</sup>

Although the class enrollment was approximately thirty-five students, only nineteen were present during this particular lesson. Mrs. Jawanza referred to them as "Group A" as she gave directions and disseminated future assignments to be covered over the next several days. Through discussions on the organization of classes during the beginning of the year staff meeting and the first several days of the school year, I had come to learn that both Groups A and B would help to divide the classes into two proportional groups.

Group designation typically determined who would attend Math, Science and when they would go. Group compilation was predicated on a combination of factors

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to Appendix C, for a complete overview of the general foundational school routine format distributed during the meeting.

such as past CAT V (California Achievement Test) scores, length of time at the school demonstrating academic ability even if test scores were not so great, and past classroom behavioral performance. Only Group B had the privilege of attending Spanish class. This form of grouping the students also allowed for the adjustment of class size when, for instance, Group B would go to Spanish leaving only Group A with their base teacher for instruction. This process was the same for the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class.

Group A represented the students who were either unproven and new to the school, student who had been at the school and not typically the best conformers to school rules (challenging behavior), students with low standardized test scorers, or students with any combination of these three factors. Early participant observations seemed to highlight a tacit, structural element in the school's culture. New students would have to learn the culture of behavioral acceptability and willingly demonstrate their understanding of and acquiescence to its freedoms and parameters if they wanted to move to the more privileged, Group B. Returning veteran students currently not selected for the higher Group B needed to do likewise. Finally, those selected for the higher Group B had to continue demonstrating both their understanding and willingness to comply with the school's academic and behavioral expectations. As Mrs. Jawanza usually made clear to Group B members who tried to push their boundaries to unacceptable limits, "if you can't handle it, you will find yourself in Group A," Group A meant, no Spanish among other things such as the many pizza parties that the Spanish teacher worked into her curricular plans.

In class today, all students wore the school's required uniform. The girls wore navy blue or tan khaki skirts with white collared blouses. The boys wore tan khaki slacks, white collared shirts with plaid or solid colored ties, and some had on their navy blue blazers. Mrs. Jawanza also wore a uniform that was styled in the same fashion as the girls' uniform. While the class was split and Group B was out to Spanish, Group A participated in a Grammar lesson. "They have to demonstrate that they can master English before we can send them to Spanish," was one of her often-uttered explanations of the matter pertaining to who could and could not attend Spanish class.

The cracked windows in the classroom allowed the early September day breeze into the classroom. Positive affirmations; such as "Be Strong," "If It Doesn't Kill You, It Will Only Make You Stronger" covered the walls. To the right of the chalkboard was the Greek letter alphabet. Often during the day, I could hear the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade students singing the rhythmic Greek alphabet song that is used by black Greek letter fraternities and sororities in various public solidarity chanting rituals. Above the chalkboard was the English alphabet (the wall cards) depicted in cursive style with words that go with the letters pasted beneath.

The lead-teacher moved through the Grammar worksheet with the students posing higher order thinking questions. Some students waved their hands eagerly to answer the questions while others were less eager and more laid back. Mrs. Jawanza called on waving students to answer questions while simultaneously verifying the answers. Many students semi-quietly celebrated with a low-toned "yes!" to having the correct answer. This was an example of acceptable behavior during a whole class check and review exercise because, a loud answer of "yes!" to a posed question would be inappropriate, "out-of-bounds" and surely reprimanded.

Afterwards, the class transitioned to a worksheet that explored context clues. “Read the directions for us Morris” directed Mrs. Jawanza to one of the laid back students. The boy raised his body a bit in his chair, now almost in the traditional schoolhouse studious posture, he began to loudly read the directions. After reading the directions, many of the students began once again to raise their hands and were anxiously prepared to give the answer to the first problem. This prompted Mrs. Jawanza to employ a more democratic pedagogical technique from her “crafty bag.”<sup>24</sup> She announced, “I’m going to start right here (pointing at a boy in the far right of the front row) so that everyone gets a chance to read and answer.”

The students were involved in the checking of the assignments, yet as time wore on restlessness began to set in now that they no longer needed to eagerly wave to give an answer. The new protocol was everyone gets a chance, as Mrs. Jawanza picked students in order moving down the row. This decision took away the hand waving, unpredictable “me, me, me” structure by replacing it with predictability. The excitement diminished as one girl began to play with an object on her desk. “You’ll never get it if you keep playing, start to focus smart girl.” Then, Mrs. Jawanza moved her comments to the class in general, “everyone stay focused, read number 5 Steven, quickly... What’s the answer?” She began to accelerate the pace.

Sensing students’ waning interests, she implemented yet another pedagogical strategy “O.K. if you think the answer is A, put 1 finger in the air; B, 2 fingers; or C, 3 fingers.” This strategy increased student involvement. “Well, if you put up 2 fingers then you are correct!” The students semi-quietly celebrated with a “yes!”

After completing the self-check of their papers, the lead-teacher announced, “put minus how many you have wrong over 12 at the top of your paper and pass them to the front.” The class then focused its attention on the next worksheet. “Read Morris,” prompted Mrs. Jawanza Morris. Morris began to read the directions once more. With a glance from the answer key, she noticed that a student had not gotten his paper and book out. “Where’s your paper and book, Carl?” He answered, “It’s in my locker” in an unconcerned tone. “Remember to bring all the materials that you need from your locker in the morning, smart boy.” This time Mrs. Jawanza’s use of “smart boy” carried a tinge of sarcasm. He did not reply; instead, he sat through the lesson without his assignment. Across the room, two girls were admonished for playing with a bottle of white out, which Mrs. Jawanza threatened to take if they did not learn its proper use.

After reviewing and checking the final assignment, the lead-teacher began to assign homework. She quieted students, as their grammar lesson concluded. “Get your homework down, this is your key to eating lunch, get it down... Some of you are obviously not hungry.” She had just invoked the don’t work, don’t eat aspect of the Marva Collins philosophy. These words served as one of the more powerful invisible, ideological parameters of coercion at the teachers’ disposal.

Throughout participant/observations over the first several months in Mrs. Jawanza’s class, students in Group A—the reading/grammar/phonics group—could be found interacting with their teacher in much the same manner. Much eager waving and fanning to answer questions by some students, some nonchalance by others prompting the teacher to overlook the eager students getting them involved, as well as jittery endings prompting comments to the nature of, “if we don’t get finished we don’t eat.”

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<sup>24</sup> For further discussion on teaching as a craft practice, see Collins (2000).

Often, I would find a fourth or 7/8<sup>th</sup> grader (or two) sitting close to me working alone because that student had been “kicked out” of Mrs. Goldstein or Mr. Siphos class. In reference to Mrs. Goldstein’s students, by the third month there was a pattern of the same two boys and one girl. There were occasional others but these three had become regulars. This was one disciplinary practice which required the teachers to really rely on one another.

Consistent on-call support staff was non-existent as the President/CEO was frequently in and out of the building. When the President/CEO was in the building, things were noticeably smoother. She would roam the hallways and problem students were directed to her office instead of Mrs. Jawanza’s class. Her office was a bit more than a time out, a place none of the students cared to go.

### 5/6<sup>th</sup> Grade (Phase I) Flexibility and Patience

With no bells to ring, a traditional signal of the changing of classes, synchronized watches guided class sessions at MCPSC. Furthermore, with some students going and others staying (depending on their Group designation of A or B), watches did not always synchronize, and chaotic moments occasionally occurred directly behind the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade class, especially during locker room activity. Getting the kinks worked out of these transition periods required much flexibility and patience by both staff and students. For example, when one of these moments occurred students in Group A may be in the process of working through a reading, phonics or grammar lesson with the teacher facing them while sitting in a student desk at the front of the class.<sup>3</sup>

On this particular day, the class was reading from a textbook that explored the traits of the characters in a story. Behind the teacher, a girl student erased the morning work from the chalkboard. This was a way of rewarding a student for paying attention during the lesson. It must be noted that, not just anyone got the opportunity to erase the board; erasing the board represented a student privilege.

“What is it called when a man is stealing and he already has money?” “Kleptomaniac,” replied the students. Wolette also replied as she erased the board. This question led to a reading dictation, which had followed the class reading discussions thus far. “Get out paper for dictation,” Mrs. Jawanza instructed as she pulled herself out of the student’s desk and proceeded toward the chalkboard. She began to create sentences based on the story and pronounced the words as she wrote them on the board. She thought, spoke, and wrote the sentences simultaneously and incorporated the students’ vocabulary words for the week with the traits of characters from the story just read. The students copied the sentences from the board. This was a dictation lesson as she told the students, “I am modeling for you, the thinking process so you can practice it with your words this week.”

Eventually, Mrs. Jawanza began to pick up the pace while sensing the soon return of Group B. She turned from writing on the board and noticed that one girl was not writing. She asserted, “you need to push, I know that you don’t feel well... do your best.” “Sit, smart boy, sit.” The boy was quickly cut off in mid-sentence, as he tried to offer an explanation for standing. “Talk to me once you have sat down and started.” The boy sat. The class continued to copy the sentences as she modeled the process while

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<sup>3</sup> None of the teachers have desks in the traditional sense as Mrs. Jawanza usually stood, sat on the arm of a student’s desk, sat in a chair, or sat in an empty students desk facing the students.

trying to complete the lesson. At the same time, Group B began to enter the room on completion of their Science class.

One girl, who entered with Group B, walked in the class directly to Mrs. Jawanza who was still writing dictation on the board for Group A. The girl tapped her on the back in the middle of her process of thinking, verbalizing, and writing. Mrs. Jawanza turned around and was displeased with the girl's decision to put her needs ahead of Group A's lesson. "That's very rude, please have a seat and raise your hand, smart girl," Mrs. Jawanza retorted sharply. The girl appeared baffled at Mrs. Jawanza's response as she headed to her desk and others snickered. "Group B come in quietly and get ready for your Science test." Students from Group B entered and some chatted as though nothing was going on, while others busily engaged in light horseplay as they moved toward their seats.

Mrs. Jawanza informed me later that day that the Science teacher's schedule at MCPSC had to be reworked since she had just started her first semester of graduate school at a local university and that her graduate class load was "tight." I thought this was probably an underestimation of a first year teaching commitment as well as first year graduate school requirements. Mrs. Jawanza subsequently reduced her hours at the school from everyday to every other day.

Now, the schedule had to be re-worked so that the lead-teacher gave both Groups A and B their Science test instead of them taking it in Science with Mrs. Delta. Test day at MCPSC was usually on Fridays, but the scheduling change made Tuesday the Science test day. This compensated for one of the rescheduled days that accommodated the Science teacher's graduate studies. Consequently, Mrs. Jawanza was left with added responsibilities such as the science group's weekly test.

During this change of class transition, some of the newly arriving students continued to their seats but were still talking to one another as Mrs. Jawanza attempted to bring Group A's dictation lesson to completion. The talking got out of hand and it prompted her to shout, "you know what, if you are talking just write 'F' on your Science test!" When pushed to the point of shouting, she could be heard clearly and forcefully in the other classes and down the hall. The horseplay stopped and the students quieted to murmurs as she wrote even faster in an attempt to complete the dictation lesson. Some of the students in Group A had stopped writing dictation as the whole class of over thirty students was together providing the needed camouflage and distraction. They began to write once more after she announced, "and those of you in Group A, I want to see your dictation for today before you go to lunch."

Meanwhile, the Science teacher, who had been standing at the doorway, handed the Science tests to Mrs. Jawanza and then departed. Mrs. Jawanza then prompted one of the boys who was sitting silently to distribute them. However, before exiting, Mrs. Delta announced to Mrs. Jawanza across the room, "they can't write on the test today, they must use their own paper." This comment reminded me that there was no copy machine available on the new boarding school campus and all copies needed must be put in for request with the receptionist at the lower grades campus. "Does everyone have a test?" She gave the one student who did not have a test her copy and students began to take their Science test with silence.

### *Temperature as a Classroom Factor*



Conserving energy and cleverly using classroom windows to wisely control seasonal temperatures was also a practice at MCPSC, because on several days in late September, the on-coming winter weather became a factor. I had on a sweater today and at about midday it was a little cooler than 70 degrees outside. Nevertheless, in the basement where the classrooms are located, it felt cooler. In reference to the basement of the building being air-conditioned, I heard the President/CEO tell a parent that there is no air conditioning in the basement. “The building holds the coolness of the morning by us opening the windows and closing them once the sun is fully out a little before mid-day. This helps us capture the morning coolness.”

This strategy is a good one for early fall and summer months but it remains to be seen what will happen in the winter to warm the building. Today the old red-stone building seemed a few degrees colder on the inside than it is outside. There were also two windows about halfway shut in the back of the room. They were blocked by the lead-teacher with one of her tote bags and posters of Martin Luther King and Ghandi to stop the cooler than comfortable breeze from entering the classroom.<sup>25</sup> Some students were reluctant to put on their uniform blazers—the solution posed by Mrs. Jawanza to any complainers about the cool room temperature. Students who did not wear their blazers to school were admonished as follows: “well, that’s why we continue to tell you all to wear your uniforms everyday.” Mrs. Jawanza did not appear to give a second thought to those students who seemed to rather freeze than wear their full uniform as class continued.

### The “Cool Boys” Emerge

As the various rhythms of the school day continued to evolve, and as student peer groups began to form, the interaction patterns of some 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade boys captured my attention. This group was not so rigid to the extent of not having some boarder crossers, as I learned later in the year. Early field note reflections are worth sharing in reference to initial revelations on the Cool Boys.

### **October 10, 2000**

I have dubbed four boys the “Cool Boys” because their antics in general separated them from the other boys in the class. These boys all sat on the four corners of the class, a strategic seating arrangement by the lead-teacher. Each of these boys was rather cognizant of the daily functions of the class and did quite well academically—when they chose to. The acting out of what I am describing as their “coolness” often led to confrontation with teachers. Their cool was in many ways “to die for.” These boys, unlike most students in this class, were not afraid of confrontation with the teacher, and on several occasions I observed them choose not to back down in order to save face with the other students. Although the vast majority of the students would not, these four boys pushed their limits of defiance to the point of occasional dismissal from class.<sup>4</sup> Continuous retorts such as “I don’t care,” “so, call my house,” “so, put me out I don’t care,” or the smacking of their teeth and attempts at ignoring Mrs. Jawanza seemed to not

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<sup>25</sup> I later learned that there was heat but not cool conditioned air, which warmed the building during the cold winter months.

<sup>4</sup> Typically they stood outside the classroom peeking in the door until she yelled, “Get away from the door!”

be problematic for these boys when a confrontation was at its peak. They stood their ground and argued their point to the end no matter how seemingly illogical and misguided their reasoning was.

On this particular day, all four of the Cool Boys were working hard to complete their work when the lead-teacher asked everyone finished with their test and copying their notes to line up for lunch. All four of the Cool Boys remained seated with three other students who needed to finish. The lead-teacher asked if I would sit with them and send them down to lunch when they finished copying notes from the board as she took the others to lunch. I observed the four of them peering at one another, one snickering as to indicate that it was O.K. to be left behind. Within the next three to five minutes they all finished the work one by one and headed out to lunch along with the other students, trying not to be last. The *Don't Work, Don't Eat* policy was powerful.

Some of The Cool Boys noticeably similar characteristics were: 1) They can physically coerce most students at the school, even many of the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders, 2) They will stand up to a teacher in a confrontation if they feel like their “coolness” is being compromised, 3) They can do the class work when they choose to, 4) They can be helpful if on the teacher’s good side for they are not afraid to report on any of the other students as the other students can’t threaten to beat them up or cause them harm for snitching on them, 5) They will get physical with another student if need be (which usually doesn’t happen because other students back down), 6) They are typically admired by the other students based on observations of their interactions.

To add even more context to this Cool Boy aura, as an elementary school teacher two years ago, I vividly remember the Cool Boy type in my own class. These African-American boys were not in any way intellectually deficient, often they tended to be some of the hardest working boys in the school when they chose to and their “coolness” was not being compromised. They also tended to have that certain style which made them popular in the eyes of other peers. These boys could in one teacher’s class be the school’s worst nightmare and in another’s class model students. They highly reminded me of the leader, Malcolm X, to the extent that if they are swayed on the right track their personalities and the way that other students followed their lead could really be quite a productive asset in the school setting. Nevertheless, if caring teachers do not sway them, they would be on a path to America’s prisons or cemeteries.

These African-American fourth grade boys in my class, for the most part, were not afraid of anything and in the beginning of the school year did not mind standing up to me, a 6’5”, 215 pound African-American male. I saw their potential in so many ways but also knew that these boys were not passive, conformist students who many teachers view as exemplary. Certainly, if these boys thought that you were an “uncool” teacher who had no clue about their world or lived reality, the problem was only exacerbated.

A truly memorable and telling moment was when one of the Cool Boy types in my class once told me smilingly, “I made my teacher cry last year—two times.” To not back down in the power play I quickly replied, “If there is to be any crying this year, I bet you cry before I do.” He looked at me with a stare of being up to the challenge and began to complete his morning assignments. However, neither of us cried that year. This same boy ended the school year as one of the class’ top students. Furthermore, he participated in several school-wide speech contests at my request.

### *Acting the Part: 5/6<sup>th</sup> Grade on Communism*

I had seen the books being used on this particular day in class all boxed up and ready to be shipped from the old school to the new higher grades boarding school campus. Actually, I packed and unpacked the books and can remember wondering what in the world was this set of novels about. My curiosity was satisfied today; it turned out that the book, *Anthem*, was the second in a series of novels on the politico/economical system of communism. I knew what *Animal Farm* was all about (the first book used on communism and socialism) because I had read the book in high school and also had my memory refreshed of its plot and theme through a recent rap song by Dead Prez, a popular African-American rap Group. Their song entitled “The Animal In Man” uses the theme of *Animal Farm* to highlight the fine line between human behavior and that of animals. But, I had never heard of *Anthem*.

The students in the class were alert as one girl read aloud to the class. The lead-teacher selected someone to read and once that student was selected, she would read as the student walked to the front of their row and faced the class. Once in position, standing in front of the class, the student would take over by stepping in for the teacher. This ritual served as the pedagogical approach as all of the students looked in their own novel and read along or played the part of conforming to the ritual. The lesson interested students and most were able to answer the teacher’s probing questions as she tied the book wonderfully with lessons that the class had learned in *Animal Farm*, and lines from The Marva Collins Creed.

In observing this scene, it never occurred to me that some students were faking it or “acting the role” of the attentive student following along. Actually, I stumbled into this realization as I moved next to a boy sitting close to me to follow in the book with him. To my surprise, he was on the wrong page. We had to get the correct page number from the boy who was sitting in front of him. What an interesting observation! How many others were faking it? This type of issue raised many other questions in reference to Mrs. Jawanza’s class size of over thirty-five students during parts of the day when she taught both Groups A and B as one large group.

For the next five to ten minutes, I read along with this boy and it produced a somewhat uncomfortable tension between us because I had mistakenly blown his cover. I felt like I had just walked into a public bathroom in a mall that was closed for the night stumbling across the janitor dancing in the mirror thinking that no one was around.

During lunch, I asked the boy about the incident. Still embarrassed he told me, “man, I don’t know... that book be good some times, then sometimes it gets borin’ and she keeps on goin’... I just fell behind.” Then laughingly he said, “and I wasn’t ‘bout to loose no lunch time over it ‘though.” The other boys at the table nodded and laughed in agreement with his comments.

### *5/6<sup>th</sup> Grade Gets New Student*

**November 8, 2001**

Today my attention was drawn to the presence of a new student in the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade classroom. I just had to stop and count the number of warm bodies in this classroom, which is a room large enough to hold two classes of 25 students with ease. There were thirty-seven students today and I knew that one student was absent. This tall, African-American boy sat and worked as if he were new to the school. During the entire time, he

found not much of what others snickered about, or found funny, or amusing. He acted the role of a new student—listening to the teacher, writing as she wrote on the board, and making sure to not break any rules unexpectedly as he got accustomed to the new environment.

I found out later that this boy was not new to MCPSC. He, too, had been at the school last year and his mother worked as an assistant at the lower grades boarding campus just as the two European-American students in fourth grade. During an informal conversation, Dr. Mariama, the President/CEO informed me:

I am more open and willing to let one of our former students back in after they have tried elsewhere...you see, they already know the culture...they know what we expect and can get right in with the rest of them. Plus, honey we can always use the monies that they bring as well.

### Phase I

#### *7/8<sup>th</sup> Grade Observations*

For the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade students and Mr. Sipho, “getting out of the gates” was in many ways the most complex of all three classes at the school. Adherence to newly evolving ideological parameters as well as freedoms dictated by Mr. Sipho and his understandings of “The Marva Collins Way” was generally met with resistance by many of the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade students. Although a general aura of resistance, observations revealed that some students resisted more than others did. Many of these adolescents were unenthused about the new physical structures that went along with the unseen ideological parameters in which they had to maneuver. The inherent cultural implications of Mr. Sipho’s recent arrival from South Africa met head on with the culture of a class of twenty-five to twenty-eight African-American early adolescents in a new school setting.

During an interview, Mr. Sipho shared insights into his understandings of MCPSC’s history and philosophy. His articulation was the resonation of a strong, distinct South African accent undergirded by indications of a life filled with interactions with the colonizing British:

Mr. Sipho...: The way I understand it was the fact that this school was to adhere to the principles of Marva Collins...which I understand to be a very unique way of educating children... in fact what I understood was that these children were actually... many of them were un-teachable. Now, un-teachable not in the sense of being learning deficient or behavioral problem children... just the fact that it appeared that there were children out there who were sometimes gifted and you needed the school that would take in gifted children and those who were probably learning deficient or who had a combination of the problems... and, this was my challenge to... to get to the Marva Collins method... and what I also understood was that every child would be able to advance at his or her own pace. This appealed to me because the British system is exactly like that... where children are never held back... But other than that I think that many of the aspects were going to be independent curricular development and this is what challenged me because I would be able to bring in African culture... African art... and it is still the excitement for me as it is today.

So the liberty of teaching in that way was what appealed to me in a big way... since there were many other offers in South Africa, in fact I was supposed to have gone out to North Carolina on a visitor information teacher's program for three years as well... I went to the interview and got the job... in fact the very day that I left for the states [referring to the U.S.] I got my papers that I could go... and I'd already then decided I was coming to Marva Collins because the gentleman, the American guy who did the interviews in South Africa listened to what I had been offered at Marva Collins... and the freedom I would have in terms of all of my experience and he said to me "don't even think twice, although I like this program, the VIF program, I would suggest you take up Marva Collins, although I am working for VIF"...

He then told me to call two or three people who had been in the program and ask them... ask the ladies what they found... and what they found was that they were stuck in the same rut that they were in South Africa... where they had to adhere to strict curriculums, they were often dealing with very assertive and aggressive principals on occasions and all that was expected of them was... come from South Africa and follow and teach to the best of your ability the content that we have... because a teacher could teach any content... and it is found that South African teachers were great at this... because they were hard working and this is a carryover from the apartheid days when we would just teach what we were told to teach... and although that had changed, they developed the skills to teach and present any topic... but there was excellent teacher education... So, it has been found that South African teachers are great at this...

No neophyte to the field of education, Mr. Sipho has many years of teaching and administration experience. During an interview, he shared the origin of his affiliation with the MCPSC community:

[On affiliation]... (he starts out laughing)... I suppose there is more than one story going around... mine is very simple... this is really where it started... I had been seconded from teaching at a normal school in South Africa...

[he digresses]...I think everything really should go to the Africa Focus group led by Mrs. Johnson...because they were the people who arranged everything for me... in fact, I picked up my recommendation when it arrived in the states. Mrs. Johnson gave it to me when I arrived here... and my face was just black!

Mrs. Johnson is the coordinator of the Africa Focus Group which offers internships to Africans for a period of about nine weeks anywhere in a number of states around here... She's African-American... in fact she's principal of the Harriet Beecher Stowe House...

...So, she got my application and said, "this is an excellent application... I don't know what this is... his surname [referring to Mr. Sipho's actual name, not the pseudonym used for this study] sounds Irish... but this photograph is just black!... I'm praying that he is maybe black or whatever... but I don't know what he is... So, I got the job and the internship went well and during that time [director of Africa Focus Group] introduced me to Dr. Mariama... and Dr. Mariama at that time...this place where we are now was an absolute mess!... by the word it was creepy... and she brought me and a friend of mine...[his name], a

teacher from South Africa, we came to this place and we had a look at it... and she said to me, ... I want you to teach African culture at my school when I start it. K.S. (P.C.)...: About how long ago was this?

Mr. Sipho...: This was three years ago... (he returns to the story) and she said “I just wanted to show you where you will live” and she took me into this place, we stepped over boxes... and wooden structures and things and finally got to my room... and she said, “this is where you are going to live... these are our living quarters”... and that’s where I heard about Marva Collins... I attended one or two classes of Marva Collins at that time... looked at the school and also... helped to arrange their trip to South Africa during which time I was principal of a British school in Nigeria... so when Dr. Mariama was in South Africa, I didn’t see her at all... I was in Nigeria. So, last year... this is the year 2000 [this interview was in March of 2001]...she called me I think around about April... and said to me, “well fly over here and you can start.” I said well I... I can have another year in Nigeria... so I would still have been in Nigeria now... but having faith and believing in what she had told me... she said, “come over the place I showed you is there and I want you to teach African Art, African culture... and world history and so on... come over” But, I was married! I had just gotten married at that time... she... she didn’t at all waver to still invite me and my wife and I came over in August and I did my training and things....

During this early phase of the research, Mr. Sipho’s class had between twenty-five and twenty-eight students. An approximate number is safe in this phase of the research, because his class size would become smaller as the school year progressed. In addition, during this phase, the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade students were visibly the most vocal in highlighting their perceptions of just how lacking MCPSC was as a new educational institution. Dr. Mariama typically appealed to their lack of patience through admonishments of the negative unappreciative aura created by their attitudes, which could have a potential ripple effect in the school.

During spats early in the year, Mr. Sipho sometimes appealed to Dr. Mariama for assistance which usually led to her coming in to give the students one of her famous (many times infamous from the students’ perspective) sermon/lectures. These sermon/lectures were not kind and seemed to be purposely, although spontaneous, crafted to articulate to the students just how blessed they were to be in a school like MCPSC. These sermon/lectures could go for forty-five minutes to an hour with ease, usually overriding the regular classroom schedule, because a more important business item was at hand.

The students had very little choice but to listen; Dr. Mariama’s physical presence signaled to them that there had better not be any signs of defiance during a stinging, chastising, yet wisdom-filled sermon/lecture. They all listened but a (loud/strong) minority, the “Dissenters,” typically referred to the school as being full of contradictions and not a blessing at all, when outside the presence of the President/CEO. The sermon/lectures were powerful and helped ground the students in a less distorted reality of their situation as African-American children in a society that many times ruthlessly devour the innocent and culturally naïve. Nevertheless, some of the students’ shells of understanding and patience in reference to the school’s infancy and imperfection were

harder to crack than others. For the Dissenters, in their pubescent adolescence seemed to want what they perceived to be perfection, even in their unrecognized imperfection.

The Dissenters, none of which had been MCPSC students for more than three full years with the exception of Diane, represented the school's early subversives. During early fieldwork, there were seven students who fitted the mold of a Dissenter: Asia, Johnette, Shawnette, Diane, Donte', Terrance, and Cobrero. These students typically took strong stances against authority, and sometimes made contradictory statements while defending themselves further highlighting their ambivalent adolescence.

During participant/observations, these students constantly attempted to subvert the evolving ideological culture of acceptability being created and re-created by the staff through highlighting what they viewed as contradictions or illusions in the school's practices. The "official" rhetoric surrounding the school's practices for them was a distorted tale misrepresenting what MCPSC really was. Through their eyes, what they perceived as the "*true* story" of the school served as a counter-narrative to the "official, legitimated" story, which was just a smoke screen used to impress both guests and visitors.

Furthermore, the Dissenters were having no parts of this *frontin'* as Asia and Johnette were known for saying, "they need to just *keep it real* 'round here and stop frontin' about how good this school is..." The Dissenters seemed to attack the MCPSC image, because during one classroom discussion the girl Dissenters led the charge against promises by Dr. Mariama of the school having Lacrosse lessons and possibly a Lacrosse team this year. In the middle of a poetry lesson during the school's first month, Johnette put what she viewed as a lie and an example of one of the school's contradictions out on the table:

When we gon' start practicin' Lacrosse... She [referring to Dr. Mariama] always talkin' 'bout what we gone do at this school... she always tellin' parents about we gon' do this and we gon' do that at Marva Collins... but do we do it? No! No-bod-dy is comin' here to teach us Lacrosse this year... I betcha that...

Many times this tactic stole center stage from Mr. Sipho and the lesson that he was attempting to cover. He tried to put out the potential fire with a sharp, "that is not what we are discussing here" attempting to keep the class focused on the poem. Yet, many times like this particular class, a statement like Johnette's effectively ignited the Dissenter fire.

"Un huh...and I bet we don't get no volleyball either like she said," came from Diane. Cobrero, acting the role of trying to help Mr. Sipho refocus the class yelled out, "Shut up, ain't nobody talkin' 'bout that!" His comments only sparked a barrage of "you shut up... you don't tell nobody what to do" from Johnette and Diane. "I do tell ya'll what to do... betta' shut up," retorted Cobrero prompting a strong, "no you don't!" in unison from them. "All of you be quiet, now we need to move on with the lesson," shouted Mr. Sipho having to raise his voice to a yell. The class finally quieted and was able to move on with the lesson.

The students resumed the conversation with similar rhetoric as they exited the class a few minutes later and headed down the hall to the dining area for lunch. This type of conversation always seemed to create an uncomfortable environment for those students who were clearly not Dissenters. The non-Dissenters knew that there were strands of truth in what the Dissenters said, but it was as if they "aired the school's dirty

laundry” too openly—too bluntly. Others would not venture into this territory, at least not in the presence of a teacher.

There were also the “Exemplars” in the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class, which were typically the students who had been a part of the MCPSC community the longest of all students at the school. The exemplars consisted of eight students: Bernice, Donyette, Missy, Sharon, Beverly, Leroy, Alonzo, and Ezekiel. The exemplars were the “tried and true” students at MCPSC. The faculty could always call on these students when the school needed a strong, positive image portrayal. Any of these students could be called on to recite a poem or The Creed on a moment’s notice. Most of them had been doing these things since first or second grade except Leroy, who began since pre-Kindergarten.

Some of the Exemplars appeared to be unafraid of defending another view of MCPSC’s image and the fact that the school was not perfect but getting better, when verbal attacks by Dissenters went beyond fair. Nevertheless, more often than not during the early days of the school year, the Dissenters were at least able to get the Exemplars to see the world their way by highlighting their perceived contradictions around the school. On many occasions I observed looks that said, “now, that’s a good point” on the faces of Exemplars as students like Asia or Diane (the two most forceful Dissenters) or Donte’ presented their perspectives on some flaw in the school.

Nevertheless, when the discussions (sometimes arguments) were over, and some contradictions were undeniable, the privileges of being an Exemplar, all of whom were in 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade Group B seemed to be too bountiful and too much of a risk for the Exemplars to follow too closely in the footsteps of the Dissenters by giving in to their rhetoric. For there were undeniable contradictions like the Lacrosse or volleyball lessons never manifesting<sup>26</sup>, or “how could they be gettin’ us ready for the future and we don’t even have computers?” The Dissenters had no patience for these things and called it as they saw it at the particular moment. They did not want to hear stories of “Dr. Mariama said we are going to get computers soon” that came from optimistic students; their issue was that “we don’t have them now!”<sup>27</sup>

### Acts of Subversion

Conversations with the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade students and their interactions with faculty helped me to get closer to understanding students’ perceptions of *their* world as the first term progressed. As with any new school, working out of kinks that lead to culturally rhythmic and harmonious human interactions was something many students did not comprehend or have the patience to endure. Although not representative of all students, the loud, strong, minority of Dissenters created a counter-narrative to the “official stories” which usually shaped the perceptions of outsiders. Another facet of what made the minority voice of the Dissenters so pervasive was their attempts to persuade other students to “see it their way”—the school was a farce. Sometimes middle-of-the-road students sided with them.

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<sup>26</sup> It is unfair to say that the President/CEO never explained the matter to the students as I was not at all places at all times throughout the school year.

<sup>27</sup> The school did get a shipment of over thirty new model computers during the second term of the school year. Unfortunately, most of the Dissenters were gone.



During the first month of school as the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders walked back to their base class after a Science lesson one Dissenter, Donte', an eighth grade boy who was one of the first to permanently exit the school told me:

I can do the homework that they give us... I do it, but um not gone turn it in... I ain't turning in no homework this year even though my family make me do it... I feel like I've done enough work with all the work they be givin' us durin' the day... I do enough work at school to count as homework.

This exemplifies Dissenter rhetoric. A rationale that, if the context were right, could make lots of sense to one of his middle of the road classmates whose parents might not closely monitor their homework.

Donte's pants were not the crisp navy blue type worn by a "sharply" dressed MCPSC student. His pants were aged, faded several tones, and they sagged. When Dr. Mariama was not around a blue scarf hung from his back pocket, which some of the younger students told me meant that he was a member of a "real" gang. His necktie was off most times as he usually wore a white collared shirt with three buttons at the neck and not the metropolitan business shirt that buttons from the bottom. He and his brother Terrance's appearance flipped the conservative corporate America look of the school uniform on its head and gave way to a more African-American Hip Hop body politic.

Donte' and his brother Terrance were what Mrs. Jawanza referred to as "street kids."<sup>28</sup> "Street kids" in the sense of just knowing too much about the wrong things too early in their lives, adult things in which children should be sheltered. She told me that these two boys had just been exposed to too many things, so by the time someone in their family cared enough to send them to MCPSC the damage was done. Moreover, the boys' lack of work ethic and resistance to schoolwork baffled Mr. Sipho as during a conversation he shared,

I just don't know what to do with them... they come to class and all they want to do is sleep or act out... they don't want to write... I can't even get them to even want to pick up the pencil!

Mr. Sipho's cognitive dissidence was evident as we spoke. This phenomenon must have been difficult to understand coming from recently colonized South Africa where children would probably give anything to attend a school like MCPSC.

Nevertheless, these two brothers had a special place in the heart of Mrs. Kemba, Dr. Mariama's older sister who was also the school's janitor/hall monitor. Mrs. Kemba felt sympathy for these boys and wanted to ensure their success. She overheard Donte' telling me of his feelings on doing homework and shared with me later that day:

He told me the same thing earlier... he was sitting on the steps of the school this morning and didn't want to come into the building... I sat out there for a while trying to reason with him, but I realized I had to turn this one over to God... So, we sat out there and I prayed with him and after we finished praying he come on in, but I know he wasn't feeling up to coming to school since early this morning.

Within the next several weeks, Donte' eventually refused to do the schoolwork and turn in any homework. Although rather quiet in comparison to the Dissenter girls, Donte literally did nothing, at least not acquiescing to the school's evolving culture of behavioral acceptability.

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<sup>28</sup> In all fairness, I must state that I have learned through a year at MCPSC, that she by no means felt that a "street kid" had no chance at the school or should be thrown away – just victims of their circumstances.

On another day of participant/observation, I met some of the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade students returning from a Math lesson. During this phase of the research, the students did Math with Mr. Haley, a long time colleague of Dr. Mariama who although retired from the city public schools, taught Math part-time. As they came down the hall, a group of the girls caught my attention imitating Mr. Haley. “Get out... I don’t care where you go... go to Dr. Mariama’s office... but you betta get outta hea” said Shawnette attempting to point her finger and gesticulate like an elderly man. “He always tryin’ ta be mean to people” came from one of the other girls as they headed in the classroom. I went in behind them, finally finding out what the imitations were all about.

Once in the class Mr. Siphon asked about the whereabouts of others and was told that Mr. Haley had sent them to Dr. Mariama. They did not mention the others who went around the corner and into Mrs. Jawanza’s class, usually the route to their lockers behind her classroom’s front wall. With only seven girls and one boy in the class, Dr. Mariama buzzed in over the newly installed intercom inquiring about the whereabouts of the other students. She was referring to those who went to their lockers after leaving Math, which made the class look emptier than usual. One of the student’s blurted out, “they at the lockers” prompting Mr. Siphon to peek out the door where he could see clearly into Mrs. Jawanza’s class. One girl was on her way out of Mrs. Jawanza’s class when he frustratingly told her to tell the others to come quickly.

Dr. Mariama came over the intercom once more, “They are not supposed to be at the lockers... I want them in class... they should be in your class or in Spanish by now.”

Along with the newly working intercom system, Dr. Mariama had gotten her office surveillance camera up and running. She had been monitoring the class via the new surveillance monitor, which was positioned next to her desk on the first floor. On many occasions, the school’s class changing transitions had not been fully ironed out and, like this locker room incident, students were coming into class late with a variety of excuses. “I was in the bathroom,” or “I went to my locker” were the two frequently used reasons for wandering into class sometimes as much as fifteen minutes late. Another lame but frequently used classic was, “I was talkin’ to Mrs. Kemba right out there... see,” pointing to the hallway where Mrs. Kemba usually sat.

The locker room eventually became off limits to the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders as an empty classroom down the hall became their storage space. This structural dynamic made things easier for Mrs. Jawanza and Mr. Siphon as the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders did not have to go in and out of her class to get to their lockers anymore.

As the remaining students straggled in, Mr. Siphon initiated a Poetry lesson using the poem, “I Celebrate Me,” the same poem being learned by the fourth grade class. As Mr. Siphon began the lesson, students were quite resistant. Asia, one of the boisterous girls blurted out, “We do this everyday!” She also talked off subject about how the other students, referring to Group B, received more privileges and was treated better than her group. Group B partook in Spanish next door. The teacher continued with opening remarks about the poem and then began to probe the class as he referred to specific lines. “There is only one \_\_\_\_\_,” and filling the blank with a student’s name. Again, with more emotion Mr. Siphon stated, “There is only one \_\_\_\_\_,” filling the blank with another student’s name attempting to get them involved. Then he told them to identify those traits that they want to change about themselves if they could. Johnette quipped, “I want to be more forgiving.” Asia blurted out in a negative tone, “It’s hard to forgive.”

The others ignored her as they pondered Mr. Sipho's request. All students except Asia began to actively participate in the discussion. After jotting down the things that they would change in their poetry notes, the teacher allowed them to proceed to the board to publicly share one idea. Everyone participated except Asia and Cabrero.

Interestingly, the two girls who sat next to the more resistant Asia seemed to be caught between two worlds. On the one hand, they listened to the teacher. Yet, they continued to talk with Asia who was often disengaged. One girl wrote on the board, "I want to change my excessive talking." Ironically, she returned to her seat and continued to talk. She wanted to do the right thing, but seemed unwilling to resist the peer pressure of Asia who was sitting next to her. The girl seemed oblivious to these dynamics as they pertained to helping her reach her goal of "not talking excessively."

Still unimpressed with the poetry lesson, Asia blurted out again, "um hungry!" Garnering a few snickers Asia looked over at the girl who aspired to control her excessive talking and asked, "Did Big Mamma die in the movie?" She was referring to the popular movie being aired at theatres starring Martin Lawrence called "Big Mamma's." The girl retorted back, "no." "Yes she did, Big Mamma did die at the end of the movie," Asia rebutted after asking the question and not wanting to hear the answer. This led to a "yes she did—no she didn't" debate which lasted about thirty seconds before Mr. Sipho yelled for them to stop it.

"Oh, I know what I would change!" shouted Asia. "Oh, is that Asia I hear over there?" blurted Mr. Sipho, hoping that she participates. "Let us hear what Asia wants changed everyone," as he eagerly continued to bring her into the conversation. She rattled off a litany of things that she wanted to change in her life's past starting with, "when my dad will die." She then informed the class, "He ain't dead yet but I don't know him that well and want him to live very long." Finally, she ended her comments with, "I want to know why boys are dogs?" A comment that prompted Cabrero to say, "that ain't even the question he asked you." Cabrero's comment elicited a sharp, "shut up" from Asia.

I highlight Asia and her temperament because it exemplifies a typical Dissenter's behavior. By the end of October, she had created enough problems for herself and those around her that she had to exit the school. She and Donte' were the first two to leave the school; four more Dissenters departed before winter break, which marked the end of the first term.

Other instances of a Dissenter in action would manifest in other ways like when Cabrero and one of the easier to persuade middle-of-the-road students added a physical fight scene to the end of a mini dramatization that they created in Language Arts class, so that they could wrestle each other to the floor. They both received a hallway time-out, because the fight had absolutely nothing to do with their script. Later, they shared the script with me. Following is the script:

Language Arts

Topic: Football

"Kenton, what is your favorite football team," asked Cabrero? The Tampa Bay Buccaneers," said Kenton. "Tampa Bay sucks, Titans is the team," said Cabrero. "If Tampa Bay is better than the Titans how come Tennessee made it to the Super Bowl last year and Tampa Bay didn't," said Cabrero. "Last year Titans were better than Tampa Bay," said Kenton. Let's see who are better this year," said Kenton.

[They shook hands and went home and watched their teams.] End of Script

Instead of shaking hands and going separate ways, they both began to wrestle each other to the ground over the disagreement of whose team was the best.

The 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class size did dwindle by the school's winter holiday break in December, as the first term of the school year ended. I could have predicted that someone was going to break if such student-to-student and student-to-teacher interactions continued. Either Mr. Sipho was going to be looking for a flight back to Africa soon, support mechanisms would be made available to help refocus many of the students after such strong Dissenter influence so early in the year, or some of the Dissenter students in this class would simply have to leave the school.

Two excerpts from field note observations add clarity to how I made sense of these complex and difficult school situations. These narratives capture the tone and temperament during trying times.

### **October 10, 2000**

Today, as I entered the classroom I noticed that there were only five students present. At the opening of the second month of school, the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom had been through quite a metamorphosis. The teachers and President/CEO of the school continued to look for ways to get the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class on the right track and accept the teaching and learning processes at MCPSC. The 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class groups were the most resistant to the evolving new school dynamics, which always alluded to certain expectations of them, which they are not fulfilling. In addition, the climate created by the new teacher from South Africa, new surroundings, and their own expectations created a very complex situation for the entire school community.

Today, one month after the school year's beginning this group of students had decreased in size. There are many reasons for the diminished number of students in this group that are just beyond my knowledge as a participant/observer at this time. The total class size for Group A is now eight to nine students as students rumored that three of the students in this group have been "put out." I was not surprised to hear this information as the three students (Asia, Donte, and Terrance) were by far the most challenging and resistant to the MCPSC philosophy. Few support systems are in place to assist students who might require professional expertise and attention beyond the counseling of Dr. Mariama and the teachers, but only when their busy schedules permit.

In adding reflexive context to why the issue discussed above is glaring at me when other experiences in my participant/observations could have been focused on and (re)presented, I recognize that my subjectivities are a part of why I understand their understandings and interactions in a certain way.

Approximately five years ago upon leaving my university in Florida to begin a student teaching internship at MCPSC, I vividly remember my initial perceptions of this school community. I had visited Cincinnati with a college baseball teammate (his hometown) during one of the college breaks. Like many college students, upon his arrival from our university in Florida it is customary that he go to visit all of his closest relatives to get hugs, kisses, and fill them in on his collegiate progress. I joined him when he visited his godmother's house to assemble a bicycle for his god-brother's birthday. His god-brother was a third grader at MCPSC's at the time.

I had both read and heard quite a bit about the Marva Collins Way through my course work at Florida A&M, a HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities). In my school's Education Department, Mrs. Collins was an icon, but I had never had the chance to meet her or any student who attended her schools. At the time, I did not know of a Marva Collins School in Ohio. Nevertheless, as my teammate and I tightened screws on the bicycle, I was impressed with the 7-year-old African-American boy's ability to articulate his perspectives. He was not shy or arrogant, just confident. He was knowledgeable about a few world events, which I thought unusual for a second grader. This led me to ask my teammate, "you all must have some pretty good public schools around here." He responded, "nah man, he goes to The Marva Collins School." This response surprised me bearing in mind that I only knew of the Marva Collins schools of inner city Chicago.

This whole affair ended with me inquiring about further information from the young boy's mother on how to get in contact with this school. When I returned to Florida, I began to explore the possibility of student-teaching experience at MCPSC. A student-teaching placement worked out nicely, and I secured lodging for the semester in a hotel a few miles from the school, at the President/CEO's expense. This reflection is important to understanding some of the complexities of the context of why the three students were either dismissed or simply exited the school in the first month or so.

As an intern in 1995, I met many people in this city. When I informed acquaintances that I was an intern at the Marva Collins School, something that I was quite proud of, I can vividly remember that some people reacted negatively. This is not to say that I did not receive a barrage of positive comments in reference to MCPSC. However, for a clearer understanding of the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade students' and the dismissal situation, I focus on one particular comment that I heard quite frequently. The comment was,

Those people over at that school do so good and have so much to brag about because they *put out* all children who they see as being problems... the only children who stay there are the ones who are the cream-of-the-crop, the ones who would probably make it anywhere.

Although I did not experience such a thing during my internship tenure, I was sure that students had been dismissed or exited the school because I had heard stories from students and teachers to this effect. Yet, this obviously puzzled me bearing in mind that MCPSC teachers worked occasionally without lunch breaks or ate lunch unhealthily fast. They could only plan before school in the mornings, which usually meant leaving school late in the evenings. These were some of the hardest working teachers whom I had ever encountered. They continuously made something out of nothing as far as stretching resources and providing for the children who attended the school. Nevertheless, some students had obviously not been MCPSC success stories.

On a more intellectual level, the critique by community members was the perspective of a few outsiders looking in.<sup>29</sup> This reflexive process forced me as a participant/observer to ask the question, "why do students leave when those at this school seem to care so much and much of their work is sacrificial?" Sometimes as my reflections led me to conclude, an ethic of care just was not enough.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The response came from African-Americans.

<sup>30</sup> For an in-depth discussion on the ethic of care, see Ladson-Billings (1994).

An interview with Dr. Mariama provides insights into the world of a MCPSC insider. Typically, the students' perceptions of a student being "kicked out" turned out to not be the case at all. Dr. Mariama's narrative at length is necessary to clarify this point: [thoughts on the students who had to leave MCPSC]... Well first of all, we found out from the parents that the children [referring to Donte and Terrance]... I had a conference with them... and they would come into class and they would sleep... you know they would sleep all the time... and they wouldn't do any work... First of all, if attending Marva Collins he is going to work... or you doesn't eat... I mean just that's... We expect students to work... and if they refuse to work, they will get put out this school faster than if you had a fight... because if I think that you had a fight, because somebody stepped on your toe, it's an emotional thing, I can soothe that, I can work with you on that, I can try to change your behavior... but if you're just so stubborn that you're not going to work in order to learn... You are rebelling against knowledge itself and I'm not taking your parents money... And so I tell them, you are wasting your parents' money because they are not learning... not because they can't learn... It's because they refuse to learn.

Now I held on to Terrance and Donte... his family will tell you that both of those boys made a 360 degree turn around in their attitude... but they were not coming from the place where academic learning was a joy for them... and when I talked with the parents about it, I found out that one of the reasons they were sleeping like they were... they were out at night smokin' "pot" in the street... with their neighbors...

Now if I had a boarding school up and running, I probably could have taken those two boys and extended their day and I would have had 'em there and there would have been no "pot" smoking at night and no running out with the gang at night... I may have been able to save those two boy.

But th-e-y were determined that they were not going to learn... that they were not gonna do any work... and they just made sure that they did anything they could to keep from working... they didn't mind going outside pickin' up trash... but they were not gonna learn... they were not academic people...

[Crocodile Tears]... I wish I had the money from buckets of tears that I could have caught in my office... If I had the gallon pails of tears and could trade it in for dollars... I would be rich... mother (referring to Terrance and Donte) sitting there weeping her eyes out and just as nonchalant, I don't care, I don't wanna do it (referring to the boys disposition)... it had nothing to do with the school, it had nothing to do with the teachers... He was just out there (now referring to Donte)... and the uncle was tryin' to save 'em... the mother couldn't afford to pay the money... the uncle was a retired man from (his company)... and he was paying.

[Saving some of them]... Now, some of them I've been able to help... you know... but I looked at those two boys, they were too far gone... the dredges out there that was pulling them into those streets was stronger than the power I had to hold them... and I told them that... I told them that if I let go honey, it's over...

cause no one in the world is going to do for you what I've tried to do for you... but I said, you can change and you can come back when you're ready to do the work... I mean, I a-l-w-a-y-s leave the door open for them.

[headed to jail]... she said, you goin' to jail (their mother talking)... that's all you gone do... she knew!... she knew!... she told me... we had kept him out (refereeing to Donte)... and she said (his mother talking) and your gettin' older and your gettin' older and we know... that... you know... they're gonna put you in jail... and we went on over there to a public school... and she called me about two weeks after he was gone and I said... we'll how is he doing?... she said (his mother talking), they had already put him out... I knew that because I had held on to him when he came in with that mean spirit... and he had a mean spirit over there and those people weren't gonna tolerate it...

So what he did, he got put out of there and the next time I saw him he was in 20/20<sup>31</sup>... and the next time I saw the uncle not too long ago he was saying that he was in lock-up... So when I let ya go honey! I have done everything humanly possible... and the only thing is... It's like I've been saying... your breakin' my back now... I think that the only persons I've ever just let go was those two boys... but the environment, like I said... they were in a terrible, terrible, terrible environment... and the school couldn't overpower it.

[On Asia]... Asia could have been saved... Asia's leaving had nothing to do with that... Asia's mother took her out because she couldn't afford to pay anymore... yeah... her mother kept telling her that if she didn't do such and such a thing... she didn't behave... she was gonna take her out, because she could not afford to pay for their schooling anyway... that's what her mother told me...

So, that made her angry... because since that time she had wanted to come back after she went to the public school... she wanted to come back to the school... she wanted to come back... she didn't like where she was... she wanted to come back but the mother just didn't (inaudible)...

It's like I was saying, her mother came down there at the school... she was crying and she said I wish I had the money Dr. Mariama... I said well she's savagable... but what it was, she was angry with her mother, because her mother didn't have the money to pay... she wasn't the quality of student that I felt that I could go out and beg somebody to give her the money... you see what I mean... So it was a "catch 22"... so her mother had to take her out because she couldn't afford it... but that upset her and that's why she was so mean... she wasn't always that way.... that's why she was so mean, she knew that her mother was having this struggle with her... so a lot of times it's family problems that exhibit themselves in so many ways with these children.... had nothing to do with us

A final field note excerpt helps to capture the tone at the end of the first term.

### **November 29, 2000**

The schedule had changed. There were a total of twenty-one students in the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class at this point. The school year started with twenty-eight students. There was

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<sup>31</sup> 20/20 is the same juvenile delinquent program that Dr. Mariama used for volunteer labor.

no more Group A and Group B because most of group A had left and only three or four students remained. The President/CEO was now determined not to let the students run the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher away. This was one of the reasons that some Dissenters had to exit the school. Some of them left for other reasons such as the lack of financial resources as was the case with Johnette who also had a sister of milder temperament in the class. They both left the school together.

Dr. Mariama had given several sermon/lectures on how much it cost to get Mr. Siphon to America and that she would put them all out of the school before they ran him away. Thus, the class dwindled and it appeared as if she had made her point to those students who were quite rebellious against the school's culture.

### Brighter Days Gotta Come

In regard to the craft of education, teachers struggled to balance the good, the bad, and the plain "out" ugly. And, by the second month of school, Mr. Siphon, with the help of Mrs. Jawanza, the other staff members, and Dr. Mariama continued to work to bring balance to the good, bad, and ugly. Certain strategic phone calls to parents by Mr. Siphon also helped students to refocus their priorities. I was privy to both participate and observe during several of the more promising moments like their Democracy unit where interactions between the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade students and their teacher were harmonious and the MCPSC culture of behavioral acceptability was apparent.

Often, I arrived at the school at a time when students were transitioning from one class to another. On several occasions, this gave me a chance to talk with the teacher as some students (Group B) headed to Spanish and others came from Math (Group A). Oftentimes, Mr. Siphon would fill me in on the progress of the class.

Today after a usual warm welcome by Mr. Siphon, he and I discussed how he had been working yesterday to set up panel discussions, meetings, and elections with the students. "We are moving into the segment of our course of study that focuses on democratic organizations and their functions," he told me. By this time, three of the six students had arrived from Math class and he proceeded to move toward the chalkboard and began his lesson.

A lot of his reiterating of things that the class had been working on served two purposes. First, it surely refreshed the students' minds on what they had been working on, especially with those who had made it back from Math in a timely manner. Second, this approach was done out of care for me as it provided the opportunity for Mr. Siphon to give me some kind of continuity although I had never requested it as part of my observations. Nevertheless, I did not mind this and obviously neither did the students who usually joined Mr. Siphon in the reiterations of the class' progress.

Mr. Siphon began a discussion about the role of the President of the United States. "Who was the one president in this country that was impeached for not being a good president?" Two of the girls in the class ran to the back wall where some of the American presidents and snippets of their biographies were posted. "Uh, it was... Nixon, yep Nixon," said Latasha enthusiastically scanning the pictures. Johnette blurted out in a tone indicating the shaky nature of the recent Clinton and Lewinsky international scandal, "un huh, yep Nixon but so was Clinton for messin' with Monica Lewinsky."



Mr. Sipho glanced over at me and smiled with a look of, I do not know if I should touch that one. Choosing not to, he redirected the conversation back to Nixon, “yes, I was looking for Nixon.”

Bringing me into the conversation and appearing happy for her Mr. Sipho announced, “Latasha has been selected as our class President by secret ballot.” Latasha, about the size of some of the fifth graders, was not a Dissenter or an Exemplar. I had come to view Latasha as the type of student who although small in stature, had a way of capturing others’ hearts. Latasha was not a follower; she just seemed rather comfortable with her own identity.

Mr. Sipho turned to Latasha, who must have been selected earlier today or yesterday and asked her, “Latasha, are you going to be that kind of leader,” which was referring to former President Nixon. “No, um gonna be a good leader for our class, you know dat,” she responded with the tone of—I can handle this job.

As I prepared to depart for the lunch area, I decided to stay a moment longer when Johnette, who had recently blurted out the Clinton/Lewinsky comment remarked, “I don’t know why we’re picking representatives and Presidents... she ain’t gonna let us do nothin’ (referring to Dr. Mariama)... she always picks Sharon and Donyetta them to do everythin’.”

Johnette had raised a very interesting point, which was also in the back of my mind. I pondered who had been selected as the new class President. The new class President was in Group A which is seen as a lower group in many aspects than Group B. Furthermore, many Group B students had been to the school for most of its existence. Johnette’s comments reflected her understandings of the fact that there were certain students who received certain privileges regardless of a secret ballot election.

Mr. Sipho comforted her nihilistic attitude toward who the class elected to represent them democratically by saying, “Latasha is who the class elected and whenever Dr. Mariama requests someone from our class for a leadership role or a diplomat, we will send Latasha.” Johnette remained unconvinced that Group A students were going to be representatives of the class or President if someone of this nature were requested by Dr. Mariama to be a diplomat for the school when potential contributors, news reporters, or other situations arose.

Finally, after thinking a bit longer on the possibility, she told Mr. Sipho, “she don’t even ask for a diplomat from our class... she just come and get who she want... and I g-u-a-r-a-n-t-e-e it ain’t gonna be no Latasha.” Mr. Sipho sensing words were not going to convince her quipped, “well, we’ll just have to see... now won’t we.” She seemed to want to believe him; and, at the same time, she was obviously wrestling with the power differential between Mr. Sipho and Dr. Mariama when the time came for an ambassador or diplomat.

On another of the brighter days, as I walked down the hall heading for the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom, I clearly saw two students, one unidentifiable woman, and Mr. Sipho’s wife and son standing in the class doorway. As I entered the classroom Mr. Sipho greeted me with one of his signature greetings, which always made me feel so welcomed into his classroom. The small crowd at the door dispersed as Mr. Sipho’s wife, son and the anonymous woman headed upstairs to the first floor where his family boarded. After following them to the stairwell, the two boys returned to Mr. Sipho’s class hyper as though the anonymous woman was of some high status. Moments later Mr. Sipho

excitedly told me, “You have just missed it the lady outside the door as you arrived was the principal from the Harriet Beecher Stowe House and had just finished speaking to our class (Group B).”

As it turned out, the two boys were actually following their guest speaker out of class further questioning her as she left. The rest of Group B had left them behind as the others had gotten their things and exited to Spanish class. Another student came in about two minutes later to tell the boys that they had better get to Spanish, as their teacher was concerned about their tardiness.

This moment gave me, the two girls in Group A who were back from Math earlier than the others in their group, and Mr. Sipho a chance to talk so that he could fill us in on all that we had just missed. As he talked, the remaining four students in Group A filtered into the room on their return from Math instruction. They sat and listened as Mr. Sipho capitalized on a teachable moment filling us all in on the visitor from the Harriet Beecher Stowe House.

The 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher always made connections between what he had been experiencing in his first few months at MCPSC and his work as a teacher in South Africa. Many times he prompted students to say, “well, this ain’t South Africa... you in America” while attempting to be smart-alecky. The few students in the class sat and listened as he talked directly to me sitting across from him in one of the student’s desk. I listened intently feeling like he knew that the students would be “nosey” enough to listen to our conversation as he simultaneously had their attention by default.

You know, what I have been witnessing here (referring to the school) is quite similar to the education that has been going on in South Africa. The lady who just left is one of the first people that we met here in the U.S., as a matter of fact she picked my wife and I up from the airport on our first visit several years ago. She had told us a lot about how things for African-American children needed to be changed as far as education and one example is what we experienced today.

He went on:

Everywhere you go, everyone knows of Anne Frank and her story, even in South Africa for heaven sake! This is a book that the lady here today told us is being critiqued for possibly copying information taken from the book *Slave Girl*. She shared with us how much the really provocative story of Anne Frank helps all of us understand the suffering of *her* people (referring to European Jewish people), but hardly any African-American students or African students know of *Slave Girl* and her trials and tribulations.

I agreed with Mr. Sipho as he spoke passionately on the issue. I knew hardly anything of *Slave Girl* other than what my African-American, undergraduate roommate had shared with me while on an educational research trip to Ghana, West Africa in the summer of 1999. The book was required reading for a Black World Studies course in which he had attended at the university. He told me that the book changed his outlook on life.

As I sat in the class, I could vividly remember my seventh grade teacher and the lengthy amount of time we spent as a class delving into the *Diary of Anne Frank*. I knew the story well and so did the six African-American students sitting in the class, but none of us knew anything about *Slave Girl*. Mr. Sipho continued,

This lady is a part of the people who are preserving the Underground Railroad sites around this area and was actually just here to pick my wife up and take her to Circuit City to purchase some electrical items. I wanted her to share some of the things with our students that she had shared with me before I became a teacher at this school. It was excellent and I am going to recommend to Dr. Mariama that we get a class set of *Slave Girl* to read first so we can then compare it with *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

The six students in Group A and I paid close attention to Mr. Siphó's every word. It was unfortunate that their group was out to Math when Mr. Siphó capitalized on a teachable moment bringing the woman into their class as she came to collect his wife.

### *Visible Signs of Staff Support*

The Redefining Room, the newly functioning in-school suspension facility took shape during the third month of academic year. Mrs. Nzinga, the staff assistant and aide in charge of this space, Terrance, a 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade Dissenter, and Sag, a 5/6<sup>th</sup> grader were spending a day in the Redefining Room. Mrs. Nzinga, an African-America woman represented a very "no-nonsense," "get-your-act-together," temperament when with the students, and they knew better than to play games with her. Mr. Henton, the one lifesaving substitute recruited by the lead-teacher from the other campus sat with them as well. Periodically, he dropped by the school and sat around with Mrs. Nzinga<sup>32</sup> or talked with the students when they were at recess or lunch.

Noticing Sag from Mrs. Jawanza's class, I later asked her about the Redefining room with Mrs. Nzinga. She simply said "Thank God!" As, she was already using the room on its first day of operation. Several days later, I gained even deeper insights.

### November 21, 2001

Question One: Read from page 130 to 134 in your OHIO book. Write down THREE (3) facts about each of the following countries:

- |                |              |
|----------------|--------------|
| A) France      | (p. 130-132) |
| B) The U.K.    | (p. 132)     |
| C) Germany     | (p. 132)     |
| D) Ireland     | (p. 132)     |
| E) Italy       | (p. 132)     |
| F) Scandinavia | (p. 133)     |
| G) Russia      | (p. 134)     |

Also write 10 lines on "How the immigrants traveled" (p. 135)

This day was no different as Mr. Siphó and the students worked through the above assignment projected on the classroom's back wall when he had to depart to meet with the President/CEO.<sup>33</sup> I did not know and neither did the students why he had to leave but it was obviously planned as the staff assistant, Mrs. Nzinga entered the class and kept the students working. As the students completed their assignment and sat

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<sup>32</sup> See fourth grade phase I for another observation of Mrs. Nzinga interactions with students at MCPSC.

<sup>33</sup> I found out later that he was having complications with his immigration papers and the U.S. Government

talking quietly waiting for lunch, I polled Mrs. Nzinga about the school's Redefining Room. This was a perfect opportunity to add to my understandings of the evolving school mechanism. The students enjoyed the freedom that our quiet conversation created, as usually she would be watching them even closer.

Dr. Mariama had already shared with others and I during summer renovations leading to the school's grand opening how she had planned to use the Redefining Room. She had already worked this room into her building blueprints on the first floor directly across from her office to deal with disciplinary issues. Nevertheless, due to lack of staff support the notion of a Redefining Room did not saturate the minds of the general student population until the beginning of November, a month before the school's first term ended. This was around the time Mrs. Nzinga began to work at the higher grades boarding campus instead of her usual work setting at the lower grades day school campus. Dr. Mariama warned students about the "Hot Box" as she had euphemistically named the Redefining Room, in reference to their behavior. Dr. Mariama would even occasionally have one or two students up on the first floor with her in the Hot Box on days when she worked in her office. This was obviously a start but in order for the students to understand the ramifications of such a disciplinary procedure, a fulltime staff member was needed.

As Mrs. Nzinga and I talked, several students chimed in. Some of them had visited the Hot Box for portions of the day already. Mrs. Nzinga, half laughing, listened as they described the place. The students commented, "we can't talk to anyone... we are in a room boxed off by ourselves... you be separated from your class all day... we get a phone call to our parents... we may get suspended... Mrs. Nzinga very strict, she don't play..."

I could not wait to get home and reflect on the stories shared during our conversation from both Mrs. Nzinga and some of the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade students who experienced this disciplinary component of the school. Below are some Hot Box stories that were told to me in about five to ten minutes as we all waited for the class' lunch time. Adrian spoke of being very scared the day she visited the Hot Box.

Man, I was so scared up there, it was so quiet. I just kept thinkin' 'bout how them other girls had told us 'bout the blood they had seen in those rooms up there this summer... I know one thang, I did do all my work while I was up there that day! Cabrero, who had already visited the Hot Box on several occasions elaborated on his experiences:

They got a bell on the outside of the door so they can hear if you try to leave out the room... If you mess with the door knob, the bell will make a sound and Mrs. Nzinga would be right there in a second... But some students, I ain't gone say no names, figured out how to get out of the room if they really want to.

K.S. (P.C.)...: Has anyone ever left the room?

Cabrero... Nah, nobody never left but they done peeked out in the hall and Mrs. Nzinga saw 'em and said "what you doing out of that room, get to work!"... see they don't know this, (referring to neophytes) but all you have to do to get out is open the door very slowly to the point where you can reach your hand out and grab the bell... then you hold that little piece inside of the bell so it don't make a sound with your finger so that you can open the door all the way... Then you out!

Mrs. Nzinga said nothing as she looked at me shaking her head as to indicate, “what are we going to do with these children?” The students as well as I found the story amusing. I admired his foolish bravery, as he was willing to share Hot Box schemes in the presence of the woman in charge of the facility.

Cobrero also conveyed that one of the 5/6<sup>th</sup> graders always complained of the room having a bad smell. How he would tell Mrs. Nzinga, “It’s stank in here!” He continued telling us of how on one occasion this particular student hid between the tables to fool Mrs. Nzinga.

When she came in the room, she couldn’t see ‘em and asked us, “where’s that boy?”... He jumped from between the tables smilin’ at her but she didn’t think it was funny... Mrs. Nzinga told em, “boy get back to your work before I send you across the hall!”

Those students who had never been banished to the Hot Box all paid attention and enjoyed the stories. Mrs. Nzinga also enjoyed the stories as we continued to look at one another with a complex mixture of emotions on our faces. Looks that said “wow,” “I can’t believe you all did that,” to “don’t you know that you are telling on yourself.”<sup>34</sup>

### Mr. Sipho Returns to South Africa

*December 5, 2000*

As I entered the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class, the students could not wait to inform me that “our teacher is gone!” He must have departed on the weekend after my visits the week before, and I had no early notice of this occurrence. I remembered the day when he had to leave the class and go downtown to complete governmental paperwork. I did not know if Mr. Sipho’s leave was permanent but the rumor mill had already begun to churn. Rumor #1, “He is gone but he’ll be back.” Rumor #2, “He’s gone but he’ll be back to America only not teaching at our school but at another school... cause he told us he had another job offer.” Rumor #3, “He’s gone and he’s comin’ back and work at a car dealership where my dad works... he went lookin’ for a car and my dad ended up helpin’ him get a job at the same car place.” Rumor #4, “He’s coming back but just won’t live at the school and work here... we ran him away but he still want to live in America, just not work at our school.” Rumor #5, “Dr. Mariama lied to him about teaching African Art and sports but he can’t teach ‘em... he have to teach us other stuff.” The President/CEO, the Science teacher and the staff assistant were the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade temporary teachers for the next week leading to the winter break, which marked the end of the school’s first term.

### Phase I

#### Down Time: Lunch & Recess

In regard to the regular classroom activities early in the first term of the school year, the kinks of dining protocol would have to be worked out over time. Participant/observations chronicling my (re)presentations of these aspects of the school’s

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<sup>34</sup> During lunch, Mrs. Nzinga went upstairs and bought a copy of the Hot Box form used as documentation for the school. See, appendix D for a copy of the form.

evolution and interactions helped to shed light on a segment of life at MCPSC outside classroom structures.

Although technically not to be considered “down time,” the level of first year support staff at MCPSC in many ways made both lunch and recess a necessary down time more so for the full-time teachers than the students. Initially, Dr. Mariama and the staff had the hour lunch schedule divided into two segments. There was to be thirty minutes of whole school lunch time which would be followed by thirty minutes of etiquette training. One of Dr. Mariama’s former university students trained and certified as a Corporate Etiquette and International Protocol Consultant was slotted to teach during the latter thirty minutes of lunch. However, this plan was never implemented, as the instructor signed on as a full-time teacher at the lower grades school during the final week of summer.

So, MCPSC opened its dining area doors with an hour lunch slot; one of the evolving structures that quickly changed as the students ate for approximately twenty to twenty five minutes and the dining room climate became unpleasant at points beyond. This prompted a reevaluation of dining time and the creation of recess.

The often teacher-centered pedagogical approaches of regular classroom lessons had to yield during both lunch and recess, as the culture of behavioral acceptability was evolving at MCPSC. The lunch/recess hour provided insights into the interaction patterns of both faculty and students. Ideally, the students were to have their thirty-minute lunch, followed by an intellectually stimulating recess activity where the teacher was expected to both be involved and interacting with the students. Mrs. Jawanza put forth a gallant effort during the first several weeks of school, planning activities connected with the academic themes of her class. When the class returned from lunch, she usually had an outside activity prepared such as the game with spelling/vocabulary words stuffed inside balloons, or some type of relay connected to phonics or other in-class concepts.

Nevertheless, as the days wore on during the first two months, many of the boys wanted out as the temptations of the newly erected basketball court gained their attention. Many of the girls wanted out as well as they begged Mrs. Jawanza to let them jump rope, or play “Four Square”—anything instead of her planned activities. Eventually, Mrs. Jawanza conceded relinquishing the whole class’ attempts at teacher-centered recess time opting instead for more strategic small groups of students, preparing for “Prepping for Power” performances.

Comically, as I would sometimes stand out near the basketball area Dr. Mariama, leaving in her car encouraged me to try and get the boys to do Math or something “academic” to tie into their game. I gave it a try with what I thought to be a decent idea. I told the boys that whichever team scored a basket had to answer a Math question posed by the other team in order for their points to count. Their unanimous reaction speaks to what they thought of the idea as they would ask the opposing team Math questions like, “what’s  $1 + 1$ ” or “what’s  $5 + 5$ ” or “what’s  $5 * 5$ ”—quickly moving on with the game. There was not going to be any pencil and paper manipulations during basketball—not even questions to ponder, as that would have taken time away from the game. I laughed to myself at their perversion of my idea and as the year went on we all had laughs about it. They simply wanted to play basketball for the approximately twenty short minutes, uninterrupted.

With the many other responsibilities of classroom teaching, Mrs. Goldstein did not attempt any teacher-centered recess activities opting instead to take her class to the front of the school and just let them socialize, drill on poems for “Prepping for Power” performances, and play. Mr. Sipho’s class typically stayed inside the school during the first term as many of the girls practiced dance routines in a vacant room. This practice began after several weeks of just standing around watching the boys (and two or three girls) play basketball. The 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade boys typically sat around in the dining area or came out to play basketball.

### Beatin’ Out a New Trail

Observations of the school community’s interactions based on the structures mentioned above were telling, like the third day of school when the bushy paths of behavioral acceptability in the dining area at the school had not been beaten into smooth, clear trails by daily routine. Exploring this school’s transition to a new boarding school facility required attention to these particular moments. Moments that also indirectly helped in understanding life inside the classrooms, because essentially these various aspects of the school were all intricately connected.

### September 7, 2000

I arrived at the school at noon. Students were busily working on assignments as I headed toward the dining area. As I entered, I could smell the tuna that Mrs. Tyler, the older aged African-American caterer planned to serve. Mr. Sipho’s wife helped Mrs. Tyler to get all of her items out and on the long, serving table sitting next to the wall directly opposite the double door entrance that led into the dining area.<sup>35</sup> Like everyone, the caterer was also getting familiar with her new surroundings. The students would be entering soon and the place needed to be both ready and organized.

I headed over to extend greetings to Dr. Mariama, dressed down today in her glossy, metallic gold, soft bottom shoes, housecleaning attire, and her hair pulled back into a ponytail. Dr. Mariama’s gold soft bottoms were the pair of shoes that female business professionals slip into once in their office relieving themselves of the high-hill pumps worn for “official” appearances. She informed me of her immediate aim and intent to explain the movement of bodies in the room. She was doing some trouble shooting around the school and had just had the seven or eight 20/20 kids add more chairs around the walls of the dining area. This was a day free from her University teaching responsibilities.

Sensing the soon arrival of students, I asked what could I do to help out and was told, “I have the 20/20 children bringing out chairs, but it would be a great help if you could get that round table out of the chapel closet on the first floor and bring it down here.” I proceeded to the first floor and grabbed a table that would provide seating for more students during lunch. There were not enough seats in the room for all of the students on the first two days as the school year began because all classes ate together. The dining area was packed and rather rambunctious; and, the lack in seating capability only exacerbated the sense of newness. Thus, after rolling the table down the stairs, I

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<sup>35</sup> Mr. Sipho’s wife was not a staff member, but she did help with lunch during the first month of the school year as their family lived on the first floor of MCPSC.

helped Dr. Mariama and the 20/20 kids to put more chairs to the tables that had been previously set to seat six or eight students.

As Dr. Mariama busily walked in and out of the kitchen area which preceded the wall behind Mrs. Tyler's table, my attention veered to the 20/20 boys and girls who were being commanded by the tall, bulky, African-American man who transported and monitored them as they completed community service hours. Instructions to the tune of, "hey... go see what she want y'all to do next..." "let's go (prompting them to speed up)... did you get all the chairs that she told you to get" and "man, hurry up... y'all better act like you wanna' work." The children, most looking in their early teens resisted moving around slowly like zombies. It was clear that some of them could care less about chairs being moved as Dr. Mariama seemed to work three times their pace. The 20/20 children provided labor power but a rather inefficient form, especially in reference to two of the three girls who refused to lift anything.

Soon, fourth grade students escorted by their teacher entered very quietly. By my estimations, the fourth graders had demonstrated the most appropriate dining room behavior over the past two days and were off to a good start with a quiet, straight line as they entered and waited today. Mrs. Goldstein stood to the edge of the serving table speaking with Mrs. Tyler simultaneously making sure that no one attempted to skip ahead in the line. She did not have to monitor much as several fourth grade students made it clear to potential skippers that there would be none of it, as they would signal Mrs. Goldstein by blurting out, "no no stop tryin' to cut... Mrs. Goldstein," which quickly pulled her attention to the situation.

Mrs. Tyler and Mr. Sipho's wife served students their food as they moved down the serving table one-by-one until they had received tuna pasta, a hand full of tossed salad, a covering of ranch dressing, two packs of crackers, plastic utensils wrapped in a napkin and a drink. Dr. Mariama waited for the first students with their lunch signaling the girls to sit together and fill in each table starting with the south side of the room farthest from the double door entrance. Dr. Mariama had a vision of how she wanted protocol for dining and how students should interact in this room, because there was no highly detailed protocol designating where to go once a student had his/her lunch during days one and two of the school year. On the first two days students stayed within class boarders sitting with their classmates but there was no "fill in each table" mandate.

The lack of very detailed structure over the first two days at lunch caused students to hurry to desirable tables where friends awaited. If there were one chair left at a table and two students desired the seat, an argument ensued immediately. Typically, Mrs. Jawanza made one of the students leave after asking those at the table who was at the seat first.<sup>36</sup> Since both students usually rushed simultaneously to the one vacant seat, those at the table picked whomever they preferred. The other student would angrily leave and sit at another table of classmates.

Nevertheless, today there was to be more structure and the bushy path was being beaten into shape by the dictates of Dr. Mariama. As the seating process continued, Mrs. Goldstein, obviously not knowing the protocol before hand seemed to be in agreement as she began to both monitor the students and make sure that no chair was left unfilled by a student who wanted to sit at another table. There was no choice on this particular matter

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<sup>36</sup> Usually, Mrs. Goldstein did not go outside the boundaries of chastising students not in her class unless the students had really blown it with her. See, teacher solidarity in fourth grade Phase I observations.



during the early days of the school year. Dr. Mariama did not seem to be concerned with student choice at this point after two days of general rambunctiousness, although later in the year, the process did allow higher levels of flexibility.

### Inside Voices

I tried to help teachers create a dining room atmosphere that favored casual conversation where students would be using what Mrs. Jawanza referred to as their “inside voices.” After the first two days in the dining area where she “shushed” the students to lower their voices constantly, on the second day I humbly shared a few suggestions. My suggestions to Mrs. Jawanza were a type of behavior modification system in which the teachers totally silenced the room by all standing with one hand raised every time the noise level rose above low casual conversation. If they started early with the approach, later the students would soon be able to monitor themselves. She liked my suggestions and encouraged me to pass them on to the other teachers.

Later, Mrs. Jawanza told me that in the past at the old school the teachers did not really take a lead on issues such as dealing with students in the dining area. She thanked me for both suggesting and sharing it with the other teachers telling me, “the teachers usually don’t say anything in situations such as this... I tend to be the only one... But, I understand... I guess they don’t want to overstep their boundaries.” I certainly did not feel that I overstepped any boundaries; but, I knew by the second day that they needed the help and took the initiative. After all, Mrs. Jawanza had approximately thirty-five students in her class and a little humble help at lunch might be beneficial; and, it was.

I got the impression that overstepping their boundaries meant disciplining a student not in one’s own class while one’s actual teacher was in the vicinity. Since the teachers had to eat with their students daily at this point, it could have also been their way of expressing a need to just sit and have lunch uninterrupted by students—at least other teachers’ students. This dynamic interested me bearing in mind Dr. Mariama’s request during the beginning of the year teacher meeting that the teachers treat every child in the school as if they were their own regardless of classroom affiliation. This was a task that at least in the dining area was easier said than done, as both Mrs. Jawanza and Dr. Mariama seemed to be the large group/whole school disciplinarians.

Nevertheless, today student interactions in the dining area came closer to meeting the expectations of both Dr. Mariama and the staff. The students all got their lunches in an orderly manner with the exception of two 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders (Asia and Cobrero) who were pulled from the line by Mrs. Jawanza for “horse play.” Mrs. Jawanza told them to go and sit in one of the chairs against the wall, a quick but seemingly befitting reprimand. Cobrero both acknowledged his guilt and accepted the consequences, and he headed over to one of the chairs against the back wall of the dining area. Asia, on the other hand, had another reaction. She quickly told Mrs. Jawanza while not moving like Cobrero, “you ain’t my teacher!” I suspected Mrs. Jawanza’s blood began to boil. Signaling with her finger, she told the girl in a stern but composed voice, “step out of line and come over here smart girl.” Asia headed toward her with her face puffed out in anger as if being unjustly persecuted. Once close enough, I could see her standing about the same height as Mrs. Jawanza. Mrs. Jawanza began to speak, “what do you mean, I’m not your teacher?” Asia, not backing down retorted, “you ain’t my teacher no mo’... and only my momma and my teacher tell me what to do” as if she had been adhering to her teacher,

Mr. Sipho's requests. Before, Mrs. Jawanza could reply Dr. Mariama had come from toward the kitchen area and pulled Asia by the arm toward the back of the dining room. Dr. Mariama, like most of us in the dining area had focused her attention on the scene. Then came the sermon/lecture:

Girl you had better get your act together around here... when someone around here tells you to do something, you betta' do it... you here me. I don't want to hear anything about you ain't my teacher... If an adult tells you to do something, you betta' do it... now sit your butt down in that chair and don't you move it... until I tell you to.

Asia slammed down in the seat crossing her arms with tears wailing up. The whole dining area was quiet at this point, as no one wanted to be served with the same fate. Dr. Mariama, walked back over to Mrs. Jawanza, her lips trembling with anger and told her, "h-o-n-e-y, we had better put a stop to this foolishness now... I don't know what she's thinking... let 'em eat last today." Dr. Mariama headed out of the dining area toward the kitchen leaving the entire room in silence.

For the remainder of lunch, the approximately eighty children ate their lunches occasionally prompting the teachers to halt their own dining and stand with their hands raised for silence. Some of the students and I even raised our hand as well seeming to enjoy the new environment. Mr. Sipho admonished Adrian, a 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade girl to a time-out chair along the wall for continuing to whisper during the absolute silence signal. She smacked her teeth and headed to the back. As the classes exited the dining area, the noise decibels again increased. By the time the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders were in the hallway, the students had once more become louder than pleasant.

My suggestion was short lived as several days later Mrs. Jawanza informed me that they would use the students' privilege of getting seconds as a deterrent instead of the constant absolute silence moments. I was fine with the decision and willing to help if a better solution were at hand. Yet, I felt a bit slighted as if my suggestion had not been given a longer trial. I wanted to suggest that she use both strategies, but they had come together and decided that the constant, absolute silences wore on them as Mr. Sipho told me that he liked the idea; it was just that they had to get up every five minutes or so. This was another one of MCPSC's new structural apparatuses, as the students already knew that if you did not work, you did not eat. Now, if you worked but acted inappropriately while at lunch, there were to be no extra, second servings.

#### October 11, 2000

The climate in the dining area improved over time. The newness of the school and the trial and error methods of maintaining reasonable noise levels in the dining area such as against the wall time-outs, and no extra, second servings were starting to pay dividends as today the fourth grade students quietly entered the dining area. The 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade Group A was already in the dining area eating quietly. Actually, I did not hear them until I got to the door, which was not the case in previous observations.

The caterer served pasta with beef and a mixed vegetable medley. The lunch menu is worth noting as it has been so tightly tied to the students' behavior in the dining area. This dynamic played out as the teachers decided to select quiet tables to be the first picked for seconds in extra lunch servings. Thus, if the students like what was being served, they act accordingly; if they do not, they tend to be rowdier for they do not care

for seconds. Today, first servings of the pasta with beef and mixed vegetable medley must have been good and it was clear that most students wanted seconds. The noise level was low and the students “shushed” one another, so that their table could go up first for seconds keeping the dining room’s culture of behavioral acceptability top notch.

### The Guests are Here

Toward the middle of the first term, the lunch routine seemed to have reached a level of consistency at the new school. The fourth grade students have been the most consistent thus far in priding themselves on walking quietly down the hall and into the dining room. I enjoyed going down to the dining area and small talking with Mrs. Tyler, the caterer and the school’s janitor/hall monitor, Mrs. Kemba who also helps the caterer. These are elder African-American women who always have kind words of inspiration and a “we’re just hangin’ in there” kind of energy as they prepare for the students coming to lunch. I noticed Mrs. Tyler’s habitual humming of church hymns as the two ladies worked together.

Insights from Mrs. Kemba, a God fearing woman and the only adult with “spanking” privileges always proved fruitful as she was able to provide even deeper insights into life at MCPSC as well as another perspective on her younger sister, Dr. Mariama. During an interview, in a slow, soft-spoken voice filled with compassion, Mrs. Kemba shared several insights into her values, beliefs, and affiliations with the school.

... oh... yes... I remember the school starting at the church... and I would go and help her clean the church... yes, I was helping her clean way back then... and my daughter had an apartment and we got this bed... a roll away bed and we brought that to the school for the children... so they’d have a place to lay down in the church...

[Giving the praise to God]... we can go to heights where God want us to be... and that’s who we should please everyday... our maker because he is about it all... he brought us this far... and I will never forget him, I cannot forget him... it’s my personal thing... because it’s God... it’s all about God... It’s not predicated on Dr. Mariama... God uses all of us everyday... each one of the teachers... and all of us...

Mrs. Kemba’s presence in the dining area comforted students as her patience withstood major issues affecting the students’ daily in their classes. A true optimist, she always saw light at the end of the tunnel, regardless of the situation.

Today as I observed the lunch scene, I noticed clearly a change or improvisation of the normal ritualistic script. Dining room interactions had been topsy-turvy depending on any of the number of factors mentioned above. Nevertheless, today the school had guests. Today provided the context for a new scene to emerge in the dining area, as Dr Mariama’s mere presence quieted the students to whispers as four guests entered. Today was a “tasty pasta dish day” and the students were cordial as the lead-teacher surveyed the room occasionally and announced while referring to a table that was louder than others: “I am looking for the most halcyon table, the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade tables are looking good” or “we know who won’t be first to get seconds.”

Dr. Mariama and the four school guests entered the dining area stopping at the double doorway. Students told their tablemates to quiet down or they “shushed” them. What was taking place was the initial moments of the “guest ritual.” This was the first

time during the school year that I had occasionally witnessed guests in the school escorted by the President/CEO although I had witnessed parents at the school. Today, I was to experience the self-referential nature of the students' behavior as a new script went into effect as soon as the President/CEO and her guests entered the dining room area.<sup>37</sup>

As the guest stood at the doorway with the President/CEO, most of the students stood up and a reverberating, "good afternoon Dr. Mariama" filled the room. This was the first time that I witnessed such a gesture although the President/CEO has come into the dining area on several occasions by herself. This formal greeting was reserved for special occasions such as the President/CEO touring the school with guests. This performance was not one of perfection but the group effect forced even those who seemed reluctant to at least rise halfway from their seats.

The President/CEO introduced her four guests: two women from a local news station (one European-American, one African-American) and two men (one African-American, one European-American). The two men are actually donors to the school as the President/CEO announced, "I am just showing them around so that they can see what their monies are doing here for our school." The African-American gentleman was also a former state House of Representatives member.

The four guests were offered the opportunity to speak with the students. Each guest with the exception of the European-American male seized the opportunity. They all offered words of encouragement and inspiration, I focused on how the students as well as the teachers performed their roles during the scene. Most of the students listened to the speakers, as expected. At one point a fourth grade boy laughed out loudly as he obviously had been trying his best to hold it in. This prompted a few sharp eyes by students, his teacher, and the lead-teacher who afterwards scolded him. This young man had obviously blown his part in the scene.

Other students whispered but they stuck out like "sore thumbs" as their peers would not respond or the lead-teacher cut a glance toward them that said, "you must be losing your mind!" The group effect surely worked for a successful ritual scene performance because, as the guest and the President/CEO exited and headed to the back of the dining area the lead-teacher began to compliment the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders for such excellent behavior.

On another occasion, I passed the President/CEO with two guests as I exited the building. The two guests were standing in the hallway with the President/CEO and they appeared to be of Asian descent. The day before, Dr. Mariama had been around to the classes telling both the students and teachers that guests were to visit during the week. This announcement was all that was required as the students in the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class began to tidy their class. Most students instinctively knew not to be "mediocre" when guests came to visit. The culture of the school socialized students to present the school in a certain way when guests were around because they knew from past sermon/lectures by Dr. Mariama that this could mean more funding for the school. Dr. Mariama and Mrs. Jawanza made sure that the students had a general understanding of the financial realities related to operating the school. Although not exact figures, the students knew that it cost millions—millions that Dr. Mariama had to solicit.

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<sup>37</sup> As a caveat, not all students totally succumb to the group effect of the "guest ritual."

The staff worked to socialize the students to understand the importance of these events. It reminds me of my family environment back home as a youth. When guests or friends were coming over to stay overnight, we got the house in extra special order for those occasions. Image and impression were so important to my parents as I am encountering here with this African-American school community.

Dr. Mariama introduced me to the two people as a gentleman who came over regularly to do both research and help. Then she asked me, “So how’s that dissertation going?” This question was loaded. I knew that that question conveyed to guests the caliber of people involved with the school. I could look at the guests’ facial expressions and tell that they were impressed. This is just one of the ways that the President/CEO “politics” when either potential donors or parents who may be considering the school for their children are visiting the school. She has a way of highlighting the good in the school in a way that is second-to-none. The 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade Dissenters and some 5/6<sup>th</sup> graders prefer to call this behavior “*frontin’*” and not *keepin’ it real*.” I immediately smiled thinking of a simple enough way to put it that achieved her goal. “Oh, it’s coming along grudgingly as dissertations do.” This line seemed to have worked well.

On another occasion, the President/CEO accompanied some donors in the dining area. They were seven people of European descent (3 women and 4 men). As I came in the building and headed to do observations, I noticed them sitting and signaled my usual good afternoon to her and a wave to acknowledge the guests as well. She called me out of the hallway and into the dining area to introduce me to the visitors. She shared with them how I had been helping with the school in its transition year to the new building in addition to working on my doctoral dissertation, a research project on the school.

One of the women asked me what my dissertation was all about which prompted me to give another of my coined answers to this question making certain to not be too theoretical and “ivory towerish”. I told them:

I am doing an ethnography of this school in its first year of transition to the new school. I want to tell this school’s story at least for a year and examine dynamics of leadership as well.

They all smiled and nodded as if they understood and thought it was a good enough idea.

Today the guests would dine at the school, which prompted a revised lunch protocol. Students had been unpredictable at lunch, better behaved on some days than others. This has been one of the aspects of the school that is still being ironed out and the President/CEO was not going to give the donors a taste of it. The donors’ table had been nicely set up with a beautiful, red tablecloth covering a table that usually was bare. There were also a tray of tuna on croissant sandwiches, potato chips in a nice clear glass bowl, and a glass bowl of punch ready to be served. The classes entered the dining area and ate one class at a time today, a change from the usual whole school routine. The dining area was such a pleasant place today as the students ate not with plastic but with the school’s finest silverware and on the school’s china. This new one-class-at-a-time protocol was announced just minutes before lunch and the teachers all acted accordingly.

The donors sat in the middle of the dining area, which gave them an opportunity to see each class, individually. The students were impressive as they pleased the President/CEO and donors with impeccable decorum and etiquette skills. I could see it on all of their faces; everything was going well. Finally, as the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class sat and ate, the donors were escorted back up to the first floor by the President/CEO and out to

their cars as we could see them through the window. Dr. Mariama came back in the building with a look of “job well done” on her face. She returned to the dining area and announced good news to the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class who was still eating.

Everyone, listen up... you see this is what I have been telling you about with your attitudes and everything... one of our guests today was so impressed with what we have going at this school until he asked me to name three things that I felt was important for this school in ranking order... I told him that the school needs scholarships, scholarships, scholarships for the students... you know... he thought for a moment and told me that he would give five full scholarships to student at this school...! Did you all hear me...? Do you all know how much money that is? That’s around \$25,000! You all didn’t know that those people have been supporting our endeavors the whole time and we should be thankful. Two of them received an award when I received my 1000 Points of Light Award from President Clinton in the White House last year.

The 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade students all sat and listened. No one said a word, as they knew that she was proud of them. Everyone enjoyed the moment.

After the dining area had cleared, I visited Mrs. Jawanza’s class. I was smiling and happy for the school making her eager to hear what had transpired. As she dismissed the students who had their homework completed to the outside area for recess, I filled her in on the gossip. Afterwards, she shared with me, “you know that news made my day” while smiling as we parted and I headed to the outside area.

### Recess

There is no such thing as recess time at Marva Collins... the students’ outdoor activities must always be connected with intellectually stimulating activities tied to what you are doing in your classrooms.

-Dr. Mariama

As previously mentioned, for the first three weeks the students had a one-hour lunch schedule. Nevertheless, this full hour lunch was shortened to thirty minutes due to the chaotic and disorderliness that ensued after the students finished eating. This situation led to the teachers deciding on giving students thirty minutes, following lunch, for outside intellectually stimulating activities connected to their in-class learning.

In retrospect, the intellectually stimulating curricular activity approach usually translated to a teacher-centered activity in which the students had to say a vocabulary word before they can race across the yard and back or some other activity of this nature, at least for Mrs. Jawanza. This pedagogy symbolically conveyed the values of the President/CEO. The teacher-centered activities during recess were constantly in contention with the students’ desire to freely play basketball on the goal nailed to the back of the school building, jump rope, or football in the school yard.

Allowing students to participate in an outdoor activity of their choice while overseen by the uninvolved teacher seemed to carry lesser value in the educational philosophy of MCPSC. Theoretically, this idea also served as a powerful recruitment component for parents looking for the more rigorous Protestant work ethic engrained in the educational approach being delivered to their children. The expectation of devising

new ideas daily that would be educational during a thirty minute “recess” proved no easy task.

Thus, the aforementioned expectation added another responsibility to a teaching staff with no regular consistent support staff. These teachers were involved with the students in some way most minutes of the day. This dynamic alone in many ways forced the teachers to relinquish the teacher-centeredness of their outside activities and let the students, in a sense, breath a little. Trying to get the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade boys to do a teacher-centered activity connected to that week’s vocabulary list was such a struggle for Mrs. Jawanza bearing in mind the temptations of the basketball court and football field were so pervasive. Much student resistance to the planned activities forced these teachers to rethink the boundaries of where the curriculum was in reference to activities such as recess.

### Keep That Skirt On

Today, as I interacted with the students during recess, my attention was drawn toward the basketball area. The designated basketball area is an open asphalt area in the back of the school building where no yellow parking lines are painted distinguishing it from the parking lot. The unmarked open black, asphalted area is more than enough space for a student to slow down without running into a staff member’s car while chasing the basketball. This area was also clearly visible to Mrs. Jawanza through her classroom windows, which were right at ground level due to the class being in the basement of the building.

On this particular day early in the school year, three 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade girls who were playing basketball took off their uniform skirts to have the freedom that comes with pants as opposed to a skirt while playing basketball. Two of the girls, Shawnette and Shawnetta, had worn denim shorts beneath their skirts making the transition from the school skirt to shorts that much smoother. The third girl, Latasha, had obviously slid on a pair of knee length beige pants after leaving the dining area for recess so that she could relieve herself of the skirt.

As I stood while talking with some of the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade students I noticed the other 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade girls who were standing around not playing basketball begin to focus their comments on the shortness of Shawnette and Shawnetta’s shorts. Comments to the tune of, “oh, y’all need to put back on them skirts” prompted me to move closer. After a moment, I began to notice the motives of the girls standing around making the comments. I realized that the girls’ suggestions were not because they were overly concerned about the school’s policy. These girls had become MCPSC’s fashion police and the denim short pants were in violation of their fashion code.

Shawnette and Shawnetta were the only twins at MCPSC and Shawnette was definitely a Dissenter. Her sister Shawnetta, based on early observations before both girls soon departed the school did not fit in as a Dissenter or an Exemplar. Nevertheless, both girls along with Latasha were out at recess today with their skirts off, which prompted at least the twins to become the center of attention.

Aiming her comments at the twins as they tried to play basketball with the boys while simultaneously tugging on their upward sliding pants, Sharon told them:

Oh, if ya'll only knew what ya'll looked like with those too short hot pants on... What ya'll need to do is put back on them skirts... those shoes don't even go with those short ole pants... girl, ya'll look a mess wit dat on... ooh!

The girls had on black, hard soled dress shoes reminiscent of the 1960s hippie type with the extra stack of rubber on the sole; but, the shoes made them look taller and their legs longer. The shoes seemed appropriate with their long uniform skirts, but the fashion police were on duty and writing tickets for the too short, denim pants and the flashback 60's high soled black dress shoes.

The girls ignored the group of fashion police as they continued to play basketball with Latasha and the boys. Others made comments similar to Sharon's putting the spotlight on them as they ran while pulling even more on the pants that just would not come down any lower.

After a few minutes, Mrs. Jawanza sent word over to the basketball area for all of the girls to put back on their uniforms immediately. Latasha, who had slid on her below-the-knee length basketball pants, was quite upset at the message feeling as if the twins had blown it for them all. "Ya'll always copyin' somebody," she told them with her nose up in disgust. "Comin' out here with those too short pants on... know she gonna say somethin'... ya'll make me sick," she blasted as she headed over to retrieve her skirt. The two girls said nothing as they walked behind her to get their skirts as well. Sharon, the more vocal fashion police of the crowd exclaimed, "thank God" as the three girls collected their skirts.

On another occasion several days later, the same issue surfaced around MCPSC's girl uniforms during recess. Interactions between the students and Mrs. Jawanza around this issue offer another glimpse into both Mrs. Jawanza's and Latasha's realities. Latasha believed that the twins and their too short denim shorts were the *real* reasons that she had to put her skirt back on during basketball time and not Mrs. Jawanza's adherence to the school's dress code policy. As on this day, Latasha started recess without her skirt and this time she was playing in a pair of pink full-length pants. She and Adrian were the only girls playing with the boys on this day and Adrian kept her uniform skirt on.

On this occasion Mrs. Jawanza did not send a message by another student, instead she yelled across the yard admonishing Latasha once again for having her uniform skirt off; she instructed her to put the skirt back on. Latasha, frustrated and clearly baffled at Mrs. Jawanza's reprimand retorted back across the yard, "but the boys have on pants, and I can't dribble between my legs with a skirt on." Her response was to no avail as Mrs. Jawanza replied categorically, "put back on your uniform. You can wear shorts beneath your skirt but you can't take your uniform off." Latasha was both visibly upset and confused over her perceived illogicalness of Mrs. Jawanza's actions. For after all, the boys did have on pants and a between-the-legs dribble is practically impossible with the uniform skirt, which extended below her knees.

A few days earlier, Latasha had worn knee length basketball shorts and today she wore full-length pants. Yet, in both cases she had to put back on the skirt. With tears of anger and frustration overloading her eyes, she retrieved and put back on the skirt. Nino, a boy from Mrs. Jawanza's class feeling her pain told Latasha, "man don't worry 'bout it... she crazy like that sometimes."

At that point, I felt quite powerless regarding how to at least help the confused and upset girl who obviously simply wanted to play basketball in clothing that was more



conducive to this type of activity. All of the boys on the court felt her pain; she was trapped in the dilemma of wanting to play basketball but having to wear a skirt because of the school's rigid uniform policy. I wanted to pull her to the side and tell her something, but I surely was not going to "step on Mrs. Jawanza's toes." I wanted tell her to take off the skirt anyway which was my first burning instinct as in the two days I had seen this girl sincerely try to do what was appropriate. She was even willing to wear long pants just like the boys.

Finally, after about four of five minutes I called her over as I stood near the basketball area. She had stopped playing after putting back on her skirt. I asked why she would not give it a try with the skirt on. She told me, "I already did, I can't play if I can't dribble between my legs... they keep stealin' the ball." She was still upset over the incident. I dug deep and said to her, "you know some rules that we have to follow in life are sometimes weird, but we still have to follow them... you did the right thing by putting your skirt back on." This was obviously not what she wanted to hear at this point as she looked at me with a look that said, "you called me over here for this." I thought even deeper and out came a better explanation from the annals of I don't know where. I went on, "you know how when sometimes you pull up to a traffic light and the light is red but no cars are in sight for miles in all of the other directions?" She looked at me puzzled and said "Yeah" keeping her anger but trying to work with me. I said, "even though there are no cars coming you still have to sit at that red light until it turns green. Now that's one of those weird rules like the skirt thing you and Mrs. Jawanza are going through." She smiled at me either grasping the analogy or tickled at my effort. Once I noticed that she seemed to lighten up a little, I went on attempting to show her a level of sincerity:

I feel you on this one, I'll try to talk with 'em (the President/CEO and Mrs. Jawanza) about this rule and see if we can get it changed. I'm not saying that they will change it but I am gonna try for you.

She looked at me, smiled, and replied, "Yeah, I feel you" and walked away. I wanted so badly for her to just be able to play in her pants but the traditions of this school sometimes disregarded context creating complex situations such this.

October 10, 2000

*Conversation with Terrance*

I had noticed that one of the three students who had been dismissed from the school in the first month had returned. He was more disciplined in his behavior in general and now responded to the requests of the teachers—something that he seldomly did before being dismissed. I had frequently observed this young man wandering the hallway as he had been put out of his class to stand by the door. He threw food in the dining area on several occasions and did as he pleased for the first few weeks.

Nevertheless, he returned to the school and was doing a much better job of controlling himself. Today as I stood outside the school with the rest of the teachers and the students who were actively involved in after lunch outdoor activities, the President/CEO drove by departing the campus and asked if I would try to get this boy engaged in an activity. She noticed that he was just wandering alone in the schoolyard. She rolled down her window and requested, "Get Terrance to go play football or something for me" as I stood beside the road between her car and the boys playing

football. Her request prompted me to look at her with a curious grin as I knew from previous encounters that Terrance may or may not come if you request his presence. She smiled back at me and said, “go ahead, call ‘em.” And I did.

“Terrance come here,” I yelled across the yard wondering if the boy was going to comply. He looked over and saw me standing next to Dr. Mariama’s car, turned reluctantly and came as she pulled off headed away from the school. I asked him, “Why don’t you go and play football with the others?” He shook his head signaling his disinterest and sat on the edge of the road next to where I stood looking as though he was in deep thought. I sat beside him and asked him “where is your brother?” He replied, “My brother ain’t goin’ here no mo.” Terrance’s older brother, Donte’ was one of the students who had been dismissed from the school earlier in the year. His brother had a quiet demeanor but was unwilling to apply himself in class. He would not interrupt the class but would also not participate in practically any of the school’s curricular activities. His interest in this school was almost nil and was validated by his very standoffish, “mean streak” as Dr. Mariama described his temperament.

As we sat on the edge of the road he looked down in the grass avoiding eye contact. I finally asked him, “didn’t they kick you out too?” “Yeah, but my momma talked to Dr. Mariama and she let me back in,” he replied. “Why?” I asked. “Cause I promised that I would straighten up and get my act together if she gave me one more chance,” he said almost as if it hurt to acknowledge that he had made such a promise. I went on “what did your mom do to you for getting kicked out?” “She put us under some strict rules, like we have to be in the house before 9:30 on the dot... we can’t go outside for a long time and we have to clean up and do a lot of stuff at home.” I joked, “boy I bet you be in way earlier than 9:30 huh more like 9:00,” which made him smile. Then I asked, “So are you going to straighten up?” In a serious tone he replied, “yeah I’m gonna get it right this time.”

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **PHASE II: WEEKEND RITUALS**

#### ***Introduction***

This phase of the research explores the interactions of the MCPSC educational community during the school's scheduled weekend activities. Fieldwork notes based on participant/observations during Sunday evening "Prepping for Power" showcases and monthly parent meetings will provide a contextual narrative elaboration on the setting and climate of individual speech, actions, and group interactions. MCPSC weekend rituals allow an opportunity to explore school culture outside the confines of the three base classes, the school's dining area, and during recess. The aforementioned were, largely, the basic structures of regular day-to-day school interaction throughout the school year. Based on the context created during these weekend activities, underlying rituals and the inherent power play created through such interactions are further explored and highlighted.

***Phase II***  
***Inside Stories: Weekend Rituals***  
***“Prepping for Power”***

5/6<sup>th</sup> Grade “Prepping for Power”  
Spirituality  
October 24, 2000

Dear Neighbors,

We at Marva Collins Preparatory School will be having a “Prepping for Power” program. Our principal, Mrs. Clara Mariama has worked very hard to put this school together; this will be our 10<sup>th</sup> year. We have put a lot into this program so please join us. We {5/6 grade} will do various performances such as:

Praise Dance

Stepping

Recitations

Etc.

Performed By: 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> grade

When: October 29, 2000

Where: (School’s Address)

Time: 4:00 P.M.

Thanks,  
Marva Collins Preparatory School

Flyer created by 6<sup>th</sup> grader—Jada

Today the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade class ventured out into the community to solicit possible guests for the school’s first “Prepping for Power” performance of the year. Although, the lower grades campus first and second graders had performed a week earlier, the upcoming week represented the “kickoff” for the higher grades boarding campus students. I was informed by Mrs. Jawanza that traditionally, the “Prepping for Power” performances were scheduled in sequence based on grade levels, but her class was to go first this year in order to set the tone for the other base classroom teachers, both in their first year of teaching at MCPSC. Mr. Sipho and Mrs. Goldstein were neophytes to the process of preparing for such performances, and both teachers had requested that Mrs. Jawanza’s class perform first so that they could acquire a sense of what a “Prepping for Power” showcase entailed.

Taking a group of approximately fifteen students out into the quiet suburban neighborhood surrounding MCPSC as her remaining students partook in recess monitored by the other base classroom teacher’s and/or Mrs. Nzinga, was a practice specific to Mrs. Jawanza’s class. The group of students and Mrs. Jawanza would expeditiously head out down the street as she commanded, “come on, let’s go... we only have fifteen minutes to go out and get back here.” As the students walked in groups of two Mrs. Jawanza would hand a flyer to the next group in line and send them, “go put this in their mailbox” or “put this in the crevice of that house’s door.” The students would blast off heading up the stairs to the neighborhood houses and back to the sidewalk catching up with the group. Pairs of students would be going up to one house as two

others would be hurriedly dashing down the stairs of another as if playing a “firecracker” prank on the residents and fleeing the scene before the spark had met the gunpowder.

Many of the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade students seemed eager to participate in the upcoming “Prepping for Power” ritual. They also seemed ready to live up to all of Mrs. Jawanza and Dr. Mariama’s often—publicized expectations that surrounded the event. On occasions in the dining area, Dr. Mariama would probe the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade students on their progress in getting ready for their campus’s first “Prepping for Power.” Excited and optimistic retorts of “our class gonna be ready” or “I already know my speech by heart,” served as typical responses from many of the students as I observed Dr. Mariama go from table to table inquiring on the class’s readiness. Dr. Mariama would often correct the students telling them, “our class is going to be ready... not, our class gonna be ready... Always practice using your proper English skills.” She also told them:

You all know that you will be setting the standard by presenting first this year. I want a sharp and crisp performance... you should be already working hard to have all of your lines memorized. People will be there and they are always watching us, and no telling whom I may invite—it may be a congressman or one of our millionaire donors. So let’s show them what we at Marva Collins School are made of and what we are aspiring to be—future leaders. You all know that don’t you? And, future leaders must know how to stand in front of an audience, express themselves, and articulate well. You can’t lead if you are too shy and can’t communicate effectively... it just can’t be done. You may be smart but no one will ever know it.

After performances, Dr. Mariama would share the school’s philosophy for engaging in Sunday evening “Prepping for Power” rituals, which approximately twice per semester called for commitments by MCPSC staff that stretched beyond the regular school week’s responsibilities and obligations. In her closing remarks after the higher grades boarding campus’ first “Prepping for Power,” she shared other aspects of her rationale for such an event with the parents:

This school is about preparing leaders who can go out and accept the challenge. We want them to be able to stand and speak in front of the President of the United States if called to do so—or a legislator. We want them to be able to speak well and express themselves so that when they go on to other institutions they will get the role in a play or be chosen for the chorus. I’ve watched many children miss out on opportunities to perform in plays and other things because they had to audition and could not win the roles that they wanted. Our students will be prepared and will be able to make the cut.

“Prepping for Power” performances took place on Sundays and there was no extra monetary pay for MCPSC teachers fulfilling this role—simply another aspect of teacher life at the school. Actually, the events were an integral component of the teachers’ basic responsibilities. Nevertheless, this powerful ritual seemed to be a vital component of what in many ways made MCPSC a unique educational institution.

Kiesha, a “Prepping for Power” extraordinaire, was one student who had gained the respect of her classmates and many parents through her performances at “Prepping for Power” events. In addition, during the school’s first performance, a parent leaned over to me announcing, “That girl’s definitely an extrovert.” During praise dance scenes or stepping routines, Kiesha seemed to put all of her energy into her roles. Many times,

as she danced, stepped, or recited parents would yell out from the audience phrases such as, “you go girl” or “alright now” activating to the call and response tradition so prevalent in black churches and audience/speaker settings as the audience dialogically interacts with the preacher/minister during a sermon.

Furthermore, Kiesha’s fellow classmates as well as the staff began to notice her ability to “get the audience into it,” as she was often called on to be a part of many of the dance, stepping, and recital groups formed by her classmates. She was also, one of the students Dr. Mariama saw fit to take with her as a performing representative of the school to such places as the citywide school fair.<sup>38</sup> Kiesha seemed to enjoy the spotlight of these events, always giving her all as she presented. Clearly excelling at the school’s “Prepping for Power” ritual in which the President/CEO believed “prepared the children to take up the mantle of leadership,” Kiesha shared her own individual, subjective perspectives of leadership with me during an interview.

When asked to identify people in her school community that she considered leaders, Kiesha identified four girl classmates and her base classroom teacher, Mrs. Jawanza.

K.S. (P.C.)...: What do they do that makes them leaders?

Kiesha...: O.K. take Ivonna, she’s hard to distract—Lena too... and all of the girls that I named never get in trouble for talkin’—they know how to keep their mind on their work.

K.S. (P.C.)...: What about your teacher, you named her?

Kiesha...: Well, Mrs. Jawanza is a good teacher. She’s not like some other teachers that I had when I was at the school before I came here... she never gives up on her students even when we be gettin’ on her nerves. She keeps her mind on her work too... she believes in us.

K.S. (P.C.)...: Give me an example of staying focused... you said those girls stayed focused and that made them leaders.

Kiesha...: O.K. (she pauses to reflect for about five seconds) One time there was a fourth grader who had a seizure when Mr. Henton (school’s only substitute during this study) was their teacher. So, that meant that Mrs. Jawanza had to stop teaching and leave out of our class a lot to call the ambulance and the police because we don’t have a nurse or doctor or nothin’ like that at our school. While all this was goin’ on all the children went crazy, panicking and stuff like that... but when I looked at Ivonna, she was still doing her work when everyone was acting out of control. Myra and Jada was tryin’ to get her attention but she just ignored them and kept lookin’ in her book. You know it’s hard to do that when all of your friends are trying to get you to do something. Lena is the same way... she always focuses on her work and is quiet all the time. Nobody talks about her.

K.S. (P.C.)...: What about Carla, you mentioned Carla as a leader?

Kiesha...: Yes, Carla is very focused too. Like, sometimes when we are in class people will pass gas or make a funny sound... everybody will be laughin’ like it’s so funny. (she digresses) Sometimes it is funny. And, when Mrs. Jawanza will be tryin’ to calm us all down, Carla will be still workin’ or readin’. One time I saw somebody, Myra, put a note on her desk and she just knocked it on the floor ‘cause she didn’t want to be in that mode.

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<sup>38</sup> See Phase III of this chapter.

Although, scheduled throughout the school year, “Prepping for Power” performances were heavily saturated in the school’s first term as the fourth and 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade classes performed twice and the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders performed once. During the school’s second term, major whole school performances such as the Martin Luther King Celebration, Seniors Week, and the Shakespearean Festival served as the school’s vehicle for students performing and convicating in mass school functions with large audiences. Yet, one “Prepping for Power” performance displayed a combination of both the fourth and 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade classes.

I gained further insights into this particular ritual and the student/student/staff interactions that manifested in the process through being a part of these events. Particular excerpts from field notes help to (re)present these Sunday evening school functions shedding even more light into the world of MCPSC.

### **October 29, 2000**

The 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade students had spent time during the previous week passing out flyers in the neighborhood surrounding the school and the school assembly auditorium was practically full. I was unfamiliar with many of the adult faces. I could not ascertain if the African-American adults were parents or people from the neighborhood. I venture to say that most of them were parents and other family members, bearing in mind the neighborhood is not overwhelmingly African-American, as the chapel crowd was. In addition, the eventual recognition of visitors also helped clear things up. Mrs. Jawanza personally thanked visitor. She spoke directly to the two elderly European-American women in the audience as they nodded their heads in acceptance of the gesture of thanks. I assumed that these women were either from the neighborhood or from the neighboring nursing home.

The program began at 4:16 P.M. according to my watch, and with a theme of “spirituality,” I observed, listened, clapped and sang in participation with twenty-seven 5/6<sup>th</sup> graders in their “Prepping for Power” event during the Sunday evening. There were only seven or eight students absent. This, the first “Prepping for Power” performance proved to be one of the most attended showcase of the year by both students and those in the audience and I thought served as a positive sign in reference to parent participation in such events.

Mentally, I was constantly overtaken by the nostalgia of childhood and the youth day programs that occurred several times throughout the year as an integral part of my southern Baptist church’s tradition. These programs gave many of the youth in our church an opportunity to act in the roles of the adults during regular church Sundays. Furthermore, with the “Prepping for Power” performance taking place in the former nursing home’s Catholic designed chapel with christianized stained windows, the mini pulpit, and the mini choir area behind the pulpit still in tact, my nostalgic feelings of Youth Day church services were heightened even more.

In a seminar just several weeks ago, two professors in our Educational Leadership Department discussed their research interests surrounding the notions of schooling and spirituality. I really appreciated many points of their discussion with the exception of my reservations of almost all people that I know seeming unable to separate “spirituality” as a concept from “organized religions.” Furthermore, I contended that many people, especially religiously oriented African-Americans tend to view the two concepts as

synonymous. Thus, the “Prepping for Power” program with the theme of “spirituality” represented a clear example of the merging and reducing of the concept of spirituality into an organized religion, which in this school’s case was mostly Christian. One will be able to discern through an exploration of the events program the strong religious overtones that were so pervasive throughout the students’ performance. The event’s program read,<sup>39</sup>

5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Prepping for Power  
Marva Collins Preparatory School  
October 29, 2000 – 4:00 P.M.

Prelude.....	Musical Variations by Students
Procession.....	Girls – “I’m a Soldier in the Army of the Lord”
Master & Mistress of Ceremonies.....	A boy and girl student
The Lord’s Prayer.....	A boy student
Meaning of Prayer.....	From Quran by girl student
Welcome.....	girl and boy student
Books of the Bible.....	All students
Proverbs.....	girl student 9:9 and boy student 19:18
True Man.....	boys
Pack Away Your Troubles.....	2 girls
Attitude.....	3 girls
“Here’s A Shoulder You Can Lean on Me”.....	7 girls
Tomorrow.....	3 girls
Morning Song.....	group of boys and girls
Abou Ben Adnem.....	girl
Psalms.....	a boy Psalm 100 a girl Psalm 103
“Stepping For Jesus”.....	choreographed & led by a boy
Your World.....	2 girls
Proverbs.....	2 boys Proverbs 21-23
Matthew.....	2 girls ch. 28: verse 18-20
John.....	a girl ch. 3: verse 16
“Trouble in My Way”.....	Male Chorus of 5-6 grade boys
Four Things/No Frigate.....	group of boys with 1 girl
“A Great Somebody”.....	1 boy 2 girls
“Melodies From Heaven”.....	all students
Still I Rise.....	3 girls
Keep A Goin’.....	2 girls
The Creed.....	3 girls and 1 boy
Ecclesiastes.....	2 girls
Be Strong Finale.....	all students
Remarks.....	By School Director & Lead-Teacher

With the opening preludes of “Yes Jesus Loves Me” and “Kumbaya My Lord” song by three girls, the program began. From the back of the chapel I was able to observe the students dress as they entered the chapel from different doors all singing,

<sup>39</sup> Student names have been omitted from the program.



“I’m a Soldier in the Army of the Lord.” Some of the students wore their school uniforms minus the blazers while others wore denim jeans and white shirts to accompany their upcoming choreographed dance and stepping routines. Mrs. Jawanza was dressed as if she had chose to not change from her church-wear draped in a very nice ivory colored formal dress of the style typically appropriate for most African-American churches. Dr. Mariama was dressed in the same nature and as I listened to both women greet and speak with entering parents I overheard comments in reference to their respective church services earlier in the day.

Several scenes, in addition to the above, specifically gained my attention and are worth sharing. One of those scenes was the eleven 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade boys presentation of “True Man.” This was an excellent recitation in which the boys of the class stood reverberating qualities of a “true” man with their fists pumped in the air reminiscent of the popular gesture used during the Black Power era of the 1960s. I was impressed with the number of boys present at their class’s first “Prepping for Power.” For, as the time drew near I had overheard some of these boys begin to rumor that they were not going to come. The boys had been held in from part of recess to practice their song, “Trouble in My Way,” on the Thursday before the performance, and after being freed to recess by Mrs. Jawanza, Nino headed to the basketball court announcing, “man, I don’t wanna be up there singin’... that’s some gay stuff.” Bishop chimed in, “we can practice all we want... I aint comin’ Sunday, um skippin’ out.” Morris led the charge as he, Nino and several other boys started to hit and pull on Bishop in a playful manner yelling, “you better come... you better come!” Other boys also began to consider Bishop’s idea announcing that they were going to try to “skip out” and miss the performance as well.

Morris, was a 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade boy with a sister in the same class as he. Furthermore, based on most of the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade girls’ enthusiasm about “Prepping for Power” events, which included his sister, he would probably not be able to “skip out” of the performance due to his sister coming from the same household. This might partly explain his playful aggression toward Bishop, who was planting the seed of “skippin’ out” of the performance in the minds of other boys. In hindsight, Morris seemed to be one of the few boys who actually seemed to enjoy the performances as often he and his sister would arrive late, causing the both of them to hurriedly enter the chapel taking off their hoods and sweaters while rushing to join a group poem being recited or stepping routine already in progress.

I also had the opportunity to learn more about Morris and his subjective perceptions of leadership during an interview session. When asked to identify people in the school community that he considered leaders, Morris identified Mrs. Jawanza, his base classroom teacher, Dr. Mariama, Mrs. Delta, and one classmate, Kiesha.

K.S. (P.C.)...: What do they do that makes them leaders?

Morris...: K.S. (P.C.)...: Well, Dr. Mariama always brings people to the our school to visit us like Danny Glover them... she’s nice... she helps us out. My teacher, she teaches us a lot and listens to us... she lets us do group work too. Plus, at my old school that I went to before coming to Marva Collins, those teachers would put you in the back of the class if you didn’t want to learn. Mrs. Jawanza don’t do that. She talks to everybody and if you don’t want to hear it then just don’t listen—but she still be talkin’ to everybody.

K.S. (P.C.): Give me an example of when you experienced some of these things that you are telling me about. Do you have any examples?

Morris.: Well, last year I got into a fight with this boy at school. I don't remember his name... he was only here for a few days. He had hit my sister and she told me, so when I went out to the lockers, I asked him why he hit my sister? Everybody was boosting me to fight him but I just pushed him against the lockers and said forget it. After that, he started beatin' on the lockers and Dr. Mariama came and got him. She came and got me and my sister too. When we were in her office she asked us who started it and I told her what happened. The boy said my sister hit him first, so she started it. Dr. Mariama gave us a chance and told us if we were caught fightin' again, we will be put out the school. She gave me a second chance even though this year I had a fight with Steven for pickin' on me. She must have forgot about last year because she told me that she was gonna suspend me for the rest of the year if I got into a fight again.

K.S. (P.C.): Why Kiesha, that's the only student you picked?

Morris.: Kiesha always get picked to go and do stuff with Dr. Mariama. Mrs. Jawanza always pick her to do stuff too... she have a bunch of parts in everythang our class do. She don't care if she have to act crazy in front of a room full of people, she don't care—and they (the audience) be liken' it when she do that.

Most of the boys did come and sing their song and present in other aspects of the show such as the "True Man" recital, even Bishop who spoke of "skippin' out." Steven had been designated, lead singer of the boys'. He sung in monotone as if he'd rather not, "Jesus will fix it" as the other boys chimed in "all the time." This song became the joke of the following week, as when out of Mrs. Jawanza's presence, one of the boys would blurt out in a squeaky, monotone voice, "Jesus will fix it." Someone else would say, "all the time" prompting a ton of laughter as everyone knew that this joke was aimed at Steven and his lead singing skills. Steven was rather embarrassed about the whole ordeal. He later informed me:

They just tryin' to make jokes but all of them was scared to lead the song. I know I can't sing that good but, it's all good, I just said I'll do it for Mrs. Jawanza.

They be jokin' 'bout it, but Mrs. Jawanza was proud of me—she said it.

The praise dance musical was also very interesting. This was a presentation in the genre of "Praise Dancing" done to the tune of popular African-American Christian singer/producer Curt Franklin. To the melodic tunes of "Here's my Shoulder, You Can Lean on Me," the small group of five girls swayed their audience through silent, choreographed gestures reminiscent of mimes. Parents rocked back and forth to the rhythms appearing to be rather pleased with the girls polyrhythmic performance accented by gospel tunes.

Praise Dance is a form of presentation that has begun to gain acceptance in many African-American churches and has contemporarily begun to be widely used at African-American weddings and other ceremonies. When I was a youth, no one dared think about doing any type of dancing in the church with the exception of "shouting due to being overtaken by the Holy Ghost." Nevertheless, with the contemporary creation of praise dancing, students were able to polyrhythmically move their bodies to the newer post-1990s upbeat Christian rhythms. Interestingly, implicit in the school's unwritten does and don't's of praise dancing, the students never ventured to create a praise dance to any

other music besides that of the Christian persuasion. Also, this particular form of presentation proved to be exclusively reserved for girls, as if the boys seemed to have an unwritten rule against participating.

At the end of the program, I could feel and see the appreciation of the audience. The students had put on an amazing show of courage, talent, and memorization. They had for the most part conducted the entire program—including Master and Mistress of ceremony. To add to the concluding emotionally high energy in the room the students presented the President/CEO with a flower and balloon, which read “Thank You.” Dr. Mariama, surprised and thankful, then gave her speech on the purposes of such an event. Those in the audience seemed to agree with her motives as they smiled and nodded their heads. Mrs. Jawanza ended the program thanking Dr. Mariama for allowing her to work with such an excellent group of students this year. She also highlighted two students who had worked on posters to hang as visuals. A girl student had created posters gracing the entrance door that read, “Marva Collins Preparatory School = Power.” From where I sat, I could not clearly see the boy’s poster drawn in pencil but she encouraged everyone to push him in continuance with his pursuits in art concluding, “if you all would come up and see this piece a bit closer, you will know that we have an artist on our hands.” The particular boy was absent from the “Prepping for Power” performance, yet Mrs. Jawanza obviously wanted to tap into his talents.

The program officially ended with a song that the lead-teacher announced, “please join us if you know the song. For, it in many ways has become the theme song for our school.” The song was a song that I remembered so clearly from my childhood and African-American churches in the south. Mrs. Jawanza led the song as others joined in singing, “Look Where God Brought Us From”—a tried and true Negro spiritual.

#### *The Fourth Graders “Prepping for Power”* *Building Good Character Traits*

It had been without a doubt a seven day work week for the school’s President/CEO who always opened any of the school’s large functions by making sure that the microphones and speaker system was up and running. If one’s class was not performing on a particular day, as a teacher, one had the choice of coming out to see the other classes perform. On this particular “Prepping for Power” occasion, both Mrs. Jawanza and Mr. Sipho were present in the audience, which signified a level of staff support for Mrs. Goldstein during her class’ performance.

I arrived just before 4:00 P.M., the scheduled start of the event. Yet, as parents straggled in bringing students, the show was delayed a short while starting at 4:30. Dr. Mariama, who I had observed to be a stickler for promptness and time, came to the front announcing to Mrs. Goldstein, “we can’t wait any longer, improvise with the students that you have and those students who are coming in late will just have to join in.” With that Dr. Mariama headed to the microphone and started the event. The auditorium was about half full with Mrs. Goldstein and her students neatly dressed in their Marva Collins uniforms sitting in the front rows and the parents seated behind them.

The performance opened with Dr. Mariama’s invitation to someone from the audience to open the event with a prayer. An African-American male volunteered and gave the opening prayer representative of his Christian faith. Dr. Mariama then

transitioned into a brief historical discussion, which highlighted the rationale for such an event.

Prepping for Power is an activity that we at the Marva Collins School really believe in. This is an opportunity for our children to practice speaking in front of large crowds so that they will be prepared for some of the larger events that we have throughout the school year... We at the Marva Collins School really work hard and want our children to be very articulate and verbal, as well as proficient in their writing skills. We believe in this very much because no matter how smart a child may be, if he/she can not articulate his/her ideas to others or are afraid to do so, then it really doesn't matter how smart they are—no one will know. This event is also an opportunity to build our students self-esteem and self-confidence. For, I am a speech instructor at a local university and I have seen adults freeze up in little classroom settings. Speaking in front of a group of people might just be the next scariest thing to death! So, we give our children a chance to practice this vital skill so that they will be able to accomplish what they would want to accomplish after leaving our school.

The show began.

Jihari, a fourth grade girl and Mistress of Ceremony opened the program with a warm welcome sharing with the audience their class program theme, which was “building good character traits.” Although straggling in, by the end of the show all of the fourth grade students were present but some had missed their parts and other students had filled in. This phenomenon had already been accounted for as usually the class would all sing a song in the end of “Prepping for Power” performances or recite to school’s Creed in unison. Issues such as students being late, yet still needing the opportunity to present before the crowd were the types of issues that the staff had to be flexible with and take into account. Throughout the year, every student would have the opportunity to present, even if they were late.

The fourth grade “Prepping for Power” showcases seemed to have more of the traditional Marva Collins emphasis in respects to connecting classroom pedagogy with the student’s performances. The fourth graders all encouraged each other with their classic, “give it your best shot” cadence as they headed up to recite poems or speeches. This was a practice that the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders had perverted and used to mock fellow classmates. The students all wore their uniforms with no costumes or frills, just as on a regular school day. Whereas, many of the higher grades students seemed to always find a reason to dress in something other than the school uniform for their presentations.

Also, the fourth grade class stuck with the traditional poetry and speech recitations and did not venture into rehearsed dance routines or other forms of expression common to the 5/6<sup>th</sup> and 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade classes. Under the banner of “building good character traits,” poems entitled *Sharing*, *Opportunity*, *Don’t Stop*, *How to have a Winning Day*, *Talents*, and *When the Frost is on the Punkin* served as the vehicle to allow each student an opportunity to recite a verse in at least one of the poems. One of the more outgoing fourth grade girls recited the poem “Opportunity” alone. This was the basic routine of the fourth grade “Prepping for Power” performances throughout the year. The fourth grade class was cut and dry with no frills. Students had their parts and they came prepared to recite them making the fourth grade “Prepping for Power” performances the shortest in length of all classes.

## *The 7/8<sup>th</sup> Graders “Prepping for Power”*

### **Patriotism**

Twelve of the twenty-one 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade students participated in this class' first “Prepping for Power” performance. There was an audience of twenty-one adults present; a small crowd in comparison to the fourth and 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade showcases previously observed. The school's President/CEO sat next to me in the back of the chapel for most of the program, and at one point I asked her about the parent turnout in which she replied,

When they get older, people stop showing up. This is unlike the younger ones in which, as you have seen, practically fill this room. These parents have it all mixed up... they seem to think that our older children don't need them as much once they are not babies anymore. It's really cute to see the little ones recite their speeches, so the parents fill the room, you see... but it's just passé for them by the time they reach a certain age level and the turnout gets lower.

I felt that this had to send a message to the students who seemed to only have the audience of each other's parents and not even both parents for most, as I counted only four adult men in attendance. Nevertheless, the show went on with a small crowd's intimacy, as the program opened with a Christian prayer by one of the African-American men solicited from the audience by Dr. Mariama.

There was no printed program for this event as the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders obviously relied more on spontaneity and improvisation in comparison to the other classes. Mr. Siphos sat in the second row leaving much of the show's operation to the school's oldest students. Sharon and Berniece did carry sheets of paper throughout the program and seemed to direct the show by providing directions to the others.

Beverly opened the program singing a solo version of the “Star Spangled Banner” keeping with the day's theme. Beverly was an eighth grade Exemplar who had an excellent singing voice and these “Prepping for Power” performances provided the vehicle for such expression. I waited, but to no avail as “Lift Every Voice,” the Negro National Anthem by James Weldon Johnson was not a part of the program. I found this omission rather odd in an all African-American independent school.

As the program continued, the students performed “The Creed” by Marva N. Collins all in unison keeping with the school's tradition. Then the students transitioned into their own class's mock student presidential election. This was the first time that I had witnessed a “Prepping for Power” program in which the students did not heavily rely on scripted texts as a vehicle of communication with the audience. For this mock presidential election, they had to reflect, formalize their thoughts, and articulate themselves without the assistance of a scripted text. The presidential election format eliminated the scripts of poems and speeches authored by others. Thus, the mock presidential election provided a new kind of challenge to this group as most of the students were great poetry readers and scripted speech presenters. Nevertheless, the very nature of a mock presidential election created spaces where many aspects of the performance entailed impromptu speaking and articulation without a script.

The candidates for class president were Latasha, Berniece, and Donyetta. Moderated by Cabrero and Alonzo, the three girls were presented to the audience and asked to persuade them as to why they should be selected for the class presidency. The majority of the audience voted for Latasha a phenomenon that seemed not to surprise the few adults in the audience but surely her classmates as they watched the crowd vote by

raising one hand for their favorite candidate. It was already clear after years of being at MCPSC that either Donyetta or Berniece would be the school's valedictorian, as Berniece was eventually bestowed the commendations. Furthermore, everyone also knew (at least her classmates) of Latasha's "ineptness" in some aspects of her academic development as Mrs. Jawanza also alluded to this fact in our interview.

I did not interpret Latasha's campaign speech to be much more persuasive when compared to the other girls, yet the distinguishable characteristic appeared to be her physical size. Latasha was about the size of many of the fourth or 5/6<sup>th</sup> graders, but she spoke with just as much confidence as the other candidates.

Following the election, Berniece flawlessly recited "The Gettysburg Address." She was back to form with much hand gesticulation and high and low voice cadences making for an impressive rehearsed speech. These were aspects that were absent in her previous impromptu presidential nomination speech and question and answer segment. A praise dance presentation similar to that of the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade girls at previous "Prepping for Power" performances to the music of Curt Franklin followed Berniece's patriotic Gettysburg Address. Two boys, Ezekiel and Kenton presented "True Man" which is one of my favorite recitations as they pumped their fists in the air acknowledging, "I am a true man!" I knew the pumping of their fists in the air, which is so symbolic of the Black Power and Civil Rights movement had much to do with my enjoyment.

As a conclusion to the program, Mr. Siphso shared with the audience how the program came about.

As I tried to get the program together with the students in class, they simply seemed quite unmotivated and not willing to give me their all. I was directing them to do this and do that, etc. but nothing was working. Nevertheless, one day I was just fed up with their nonchalance and stopped to ask them, "just what is the problem?" It was at that point that I was told by one of the students to "just let us do it, we've been doing these programs all of our lives and you just came here... So, please just let us do it!" And, that is what I did. I let them do it, and this is for the most part a culmination of their efforts to put on such a show. By the way, that student was none other than Sharon, "stand up Sharon so everyone can see you."

The students at this point could obviously organize and direct their own performances pretty much without a teacher by the time they are in the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class. The 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders had also organized a clothing drive for South Africans in collaboration with a local church. Many of the small crowd present had brought bags of unwanted clothing items forming a huge pile in the back corner of the chapel. Mr. Siphso explained in closing, "there is so much excess here in America, and we as a class thought that it would be patriotic to share some of this abundance with others who may be less fortunate."

## **Phase II**

### ***Inside Stories: Weekend Rituals***

#### **Monthly Parent/Teacher Meetings**

A Letter to Staff Members on the Morning of a Parent/Teacher Meeting

To Staff (Boarding Campus)

From: Clara Mariama

I CAN'T BELIEVE IT'S NOVEMBER! So far, you are doing a great job under the circumstances of adjusting to a new environment, students who are unaccustomed to private school rules and policies, and staffing problems.

It is time to begin serious planning for the 2001-2002 school year. Therefore, your suggestions and input are welcome. Feel free to share your creative ideas with me. I will make time for you.

**BE REMINDED**

Students should be given homework every day

The Student Packet should contain at least four tests for each class (*subject*)<sup>40</sup> for the month

**PLEASE ENFORCE THE 'TWO STUDENT' RULE TO THE RESTROOMS (ONE BOY AND ONE GIRL AT A TIME).**

**REMEMBER THAT STUDENTS SHOULD NEVER BE UNATTENDED (IF YOU MUST LEAVE YOUR POST FOR ANY REASON, LET YOUR NEAREST NEIGHBOR KNOW).**

**DO NOT TOLERATE ANY DISRESPECT, REPORT TO ME AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.**

**PARENTS WHO COME TO VISIT MUST COME IN THE CLASSROOM AND NOT WONDER THE HALLS.**

**USE THE 'HOT BOX' TO HELP MANAGE YOUR CLASS. (STUDENTS IN 'HOT BOX' MUST EAT IN LUNCHROOM AT 12:30 WITH MRS. NZINGA AND RETURN TO 'HOT BOX' AT 1:00 WHILE OTHER STUDENTS ENJOY OUTSIDE OR INSIDE ACTIVITIES.**

Dr. Mariama

Heading to and from MCPSC on my fifty minutes to an hour trek for monthly Saturday parent meetings proved valuable time for reflection during the research process. I pondered issues such as the whole lack of support staff that I believed explained partly why there is a rather high rate of teacher turnover at the school. With the exception of Dr. Mariama, Mrs. Jawanza and the lead-teacher at the lower grades campus, the entire

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<sup>40</sup> Italics mine.

MCPSC staff had changed since my student-teaching internship five years ago. It seemed clear that, although with great intentions, these teachers were, for the most part, commissioned to interactions with students in some way for the entire day—including lunch.

Although a seemingly trivial issue, the above mentioned aspect of schooling at MCPSC presented the staff members with the interesting dilemma not faced by many other private/independent educational institutions—consistent, highly intense, working conditions. Typically, private/independent educational institutions are not able to compete with the level of benefits and wages paid to those educators who opt for the American public school arena. Yet, based on my experiences and conversations with other scholars on the issue, there seems to be educational environments in these private/independent schools that provide large spaces for teacher reflection and class preparation time—similar to university professors. Moreover, during many of my treks to MCPSC, I often thought about what was being asked of these teachers on a daily basis including monthly Saturday parent/teacher meetings as well as scheduled school performances including “Prepping for Power” showcases.

The teachers were expected to be at the school at 8:30 A.M. through 4:30 P.M. for a 9 to 4 o’clock highly interactive school day. I reflected on teaching in the public school system and having a fifty-minute planning period, as well as a duty-free lunch break. These times were, for the most part, non-existent at MCPSC due to the need for staff support on various levels such as aides, full-time administrators, counselors, etc. Thus, the staff support issue was a constant issue of reflection as I drove and thought of the teachers heading to and from monthly Saturday parent/teacher meetings.

### *Setting the Tone: Parent Meeting #1*

I arrived at the school early enough in the morning to spend some time alone with the school’s President/CEO who had informed me that she would be at the school at least an hour before the meeting’s scheduled 10:30 kickoff. Arriving earlier than she, I opted for a quick snooze as I sat in my car in the school’s back parking lot. Obviously, sliding into a deeper stage than planned, I was awakened by the sounds of the school’s back door being forced open, which startled me. Dr. Mariama had either cruised by me in the back parking lot asleep or arrived from the streets leading to the school’s front entering the building through the school’s main entrance. Nevertheless, our eyes connected as she looked out the door slung wide-open prompting greeting waves and my popping a peppermint ball in my mouth before exiting my vehicle.

As I entered through the back door, Dr. Mariama informed me that she was letting fresh air into the chapel, as parents would be arriving for this year’s first parent/teacher meeting in the next hour or so. Not wasting any time, she headed back out to her car parked in the school’s circular front driveway to retrieve the debris blower in the back section of her older model Chevy Nova hatchback. “Honey, I have so much to do and such little time, I am always busy around this place,” were one of her comments as she searched for an extension cord down the hall of the school’s west wing where the building construction workers were still storing their equipment. As she prepared to blow the dust from the newly renovated cement stairs that led into the main entrance of the school’s first floor, I offered to do the job. After thanking me for the gesture, handing over the blower, and taking the extra long, heavy duty, orange extension cord back into



the building to insert into a socket, I blew the dust, fallen leaves, and other debris from the steps and front section of the school's driveway.

By the time I had finished, there was a European-American gentleman who had transported a load of books from the lower grades campus to the higher grades boarding school that must have been left behind after the summer's move to the new campus. Expecting him, Dr. Mariama met the man in the circular drive way and gave him directions on where to unload the books down in the basement. After heading back into the building and helping Dr. Mariama who hurriedly arranged chairs in the chapel, I figured "what the heck" I might as well follow her into the basement as she headed to help this gentleman remove the load of books from his truck. I eventually learned that the man was a parent from the lower grades campus doing volunteer work for the school that morning. His truck was loaded and before I knew it, I was out of my collard shirt and sweating through my undershirt as we unloaded the books.

Although at this point in the school year there were not any European-American students attending the higher grades boarding campus, unloading the boxes of books with one of the few European-American MCPSC parents from the lower grades campus proved to be informative. Our short, yet informative conversation shed light on yet another aspect of life at this educational institution. This particular parent told me of his first affiliations with Dr. Mariama and MCPSC.

I was at a banquet downtown with some "big wigs" of the city a few years ago where Dr. Mariama was one of the speakers. And, after hearing her talk about the school, its philosophy, and what the school stood for, I fell in love with what she was saying. She was talking about the kind of education that I think children should be exposed to—hands on, singing, rhyming, you know... especially at a young age. Even though, both my wife, and I, are Catholic and our church has a school, I always believed that the school was too strict on the kids, at least on the younger ones. So, we took our two children out of the church school and signed them up last year and they love it at the other school over there (referring to the lower grades campus). They love their teachers, their friends—they're just much happier than they were at our church's school.

Before the truck was fully unloaded, Dr. Mariama had departed leaving us alone after noticing a few cars arrive in the school's front driveway. A few moments later, she and eight to ten parents who had arrived a few minutes early walked pass us unloading the last of the books. Dr. Mariama was taking them on a partial tour of the school as she pointed out the various designated areas of the basement and what their purposes were. With all of the books unloaded, I headed down the hallway noticing that the parents' tour entailed a small task as well. Their tour ended at the dining area of the basement in which Dr. Mariama grabbed a chair and requested that the parents each bring up a chair or two so that everyone could sit in the chapel once the meeting started. Dr. Mariama seemed to have a knack for getting people working and sharing in making certain things manifest. She put the parents as well as whoever was around to work while at the same time making it known that "I will get on my knees and scrub the floors if that is what is needed. I am the President/CEO, as well as janitor, and plumber, if need be."

As the meeting started at 10:45 A.M. due to the technical issues mentioned above, parents continued to linger in and at about 11:00 the chapel was almost full. The teacher/parent meeting this particular Saturday morning encompassed all parents from

both campuses. After count every so often I concluded that there were between eighty-five to ninety-five parents in attendance. The school, counting both campuses, consisted of approximately two hundred students.

The morning was not too hot or cold but nice enough for the two huge fans in the chapel to circulate a fresh breeze of air. The chapel was the largest room in the building and used for the assemblage of the large gatherings at the school. As I looked straight to the front of the chapel I noticed the walls farthest away wallpapered with gold Christian crosses. This is also the area where the pulpit and the covered communion table was located probably belonging to the church who leased the chapel on Sunday mornings when school was not in session. On the choir stand behind the pulpit stood three poles similar to the types used in the formation of a line in a crowded bank or a group of people waiting for a theme park ride. The poles held the announcement displaying "Welcome to Marva Collins Preparatory School: Celebrating Our 10<sup>th</sup> Year Anniversary."

Mr. Sipho had arrived and turned off the loud fans as Dr. Mariama came to the microphone and began to speak. She opened the meeting with a greeting and an offer for someone to come and pray for the new school. First, she solicited a clergy member since one of the children at the school's father was a Christian minister. He was not present so she opened the request to whoever was willing but to no avail. "It doesn't matter what your religious persuasion, our school is non-sectarian and as far as I am concerned, God is one," were her remarks as she waited for a parent to accept the challenge. After no takers Dr. Mariama half jokingly, half serious went on, "I guess it will be me, the one who is usually nominated for things around here." She opened with a prayer giving thanks, asking for blessings, and ending with "in your son Jesus' name, Amen"

The President/CEO started the meeting by first acknowledging those volunteers who had helped out this summer with painting, cleaning, electrical, as well as hauling various items for the upper grades to the new campus from the lower grades campus. As she thanked people, she made sure to not have missed anyone by announcing, "if I missed anyone please raise your hand." There was no response from the approximately forty to fifty parents in the audience during the meeting's opening.

Interestingly, although the student population at the new campus was 100% African-American at this point in the school year, of the four individuals, with myself being one acknowledged, two were European-American parents of children at the lower grades campus. First acknowledged was a European-American woman who had helped to secure file cabinets from a public school district for teachers at the new boarding school building. The second person acknowledged was a European-American father of two students at the other campus who was an electrician. He had gone through the entire three-story building fixing all of the light bulbs and making sure that all of the wiring was properly functioning. He had also used his truck to haul boxes of books whenever possible from the old campus to the boarding school campus (just that morning I had helped him unload about fifteen boxes of books before the parent meeting). The third person acknowledged was an African-American woman who had helped with various technical aspects of the summer transition such as painting and scrubbing. And lastly she acknowledged me as a person who put in numerous hours hauling boxes, and painting on weekends throughout the spring and summer months. I was proud yet embarrassed, as I had not expected this spotlight of attention.

## FUNDRAISING

After the acknowledgement of summer volunteers, Dr. Mariama transitioned to the issue of fundraising. “I want the children tuition bills paid this year... do you all understand what I am saying,” were her first comments. She then went into a litany of directions on how to pay for the students’ catered lunches. “Pay half, pay what you can... but pay something. I must pay the caterer each week, so I need that money from you even if you are not going to pay your child’s tuition in full right then.” She then told the story of a personal sacrifice she had made this summer to pay for insurance for the staff. “I had to pay three thousand dollars out of my own pocket because everyone’s tuition was not up to par. And, believe me, I won’t do it again because of delinquent tuition!” She ended this speech with a reminder for all of the parents, “always think about the institution and what part you play in whether it succeeds or fails.”

My staff’s salaries are on the line here... it all rides on you all as parents doing the responsible thing, the correct thing. So, please pay your child’s tuition because, you are either a part of the problem; tearing down this institution, or you are part of the solution; helping to make it prosperous. Always think in those terms about the livelihood of our school.<sup>41</sup>

Now, with the tone of the meeting set, Dr. Mariama began to discuss the school’s Sports Tuition Relief Service Program. She signaled a parent to come to the microphone (which she timidly did) and tell other parents about the program. Shyly, the African-American woman gave a brief description of the program which entailed parents being able to work at local professional football and baseball athletic stadiums in the concession stands or vending booths and the money that they made going directly to the school toward their child’s tuition bill. Many parents seemed quite interested in this program as they began to nod their heads and chatter with each other in the audience about what they were hearing.

Then there were two African-American men invited to the meeting by Dr. Mariama. These two gentlemen were dressed in business suits and ties separating them from the casually dressed crowd of parents. The men presented a tuition relief program that was designed to help parents help themselves with school fees. These men showed a short video clip of their program to the parents. The television set looked to be a 19’ model and sat on a table that was too low for good viewing if not seated in the center and in the first several rows. Dr. Mariama sat the pulpit’s microphone on the table in front of the television speaker amplifying the program’s volume so the parents in the back rows could at least hear the program.

After the viewing for some and listening for others of the videotape presentation, the men had two parents who had been using their program, add further context to the video presentation. After not getting a good understanding from the video, these parents discussion enabled me an opportunity to grasp the basic concepts of the program. It entailed selling coupon books and using them yourself to save money on groceries that could be put toward a child’s tuition. The first parent discussed her being able to save sixty to seventy dollars that morning while out grocery shopping using the coupon books. The second mother came up and discussed possibly starting a coupon club where the

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<sup>41</sup> Dr. Mariama informed me during a conversation in the summer following my year of participant/observations at MCPSC that in sum total throughout the years, parents owed approximately \$500,000 to the school in delinquent tuition fees.

parents could exchange coupons and keep each other informed on double coupon days at local grocery stores.

As I listened along with the other parents in the audience, I peered at my watch. My watch read 11:05 A.M. and parents were still arriving at the meeting scheduled to begin at 10:30. The two tuition relief presentations were followed by Dr. Mariama's announcement of "parents, please park in the back as to not block the circular drive way in the front of the school in the future." Then the school's lead-secretary, Mrs. Kamau from the lower grades campus came up to announce the school's plans for the students going on "The Black College Tour this year so that our eighth grade students can begin to see what their possibilities are after high school."<sup>42</sup>

The President/CEO then went on to explain to the parents, the school's "Prepping for Power" performance schedule and the purposes and philosophy behind the school function. After explaining how "Prepping for Power" worked, she then solicited more volunteers for general cleaning, electricians, plumbing, certified teachers and haulers to continue to bring things over to the new school.

## PARENT QUESTIONS

Finally, she opened the floor up to the parents for questions stating, "If you have any questions, the best person to ask is Dr. Mariama. So, don't go and get it from the grapevine."

One African-American woman raised her hand and asked, "my child is not going to eat the lunch served at school and he comes home hungry complaining if I don't prepare his lunch. Can we have a fundraiser to help defray the catered lunch cost since I have to pay it in the tuition and my child's not going to eat it if he doesn't like it?" In response, Dr. Mariama gave a speech about the past years when children would bring in very unhealthy lunches and the connections of that tendency to them performing well in school. In reference to the new boarding school campus, she also discussed her unwillingness to let students bring in lunches because of "the mess that was created" at the lower grades school with sour and spoiled food being found in various places in the school such as the students lockers and behind cabinets, etc...

Another parent had this same concern as well and others began to murmur to each other as tension around the issue thickened. After a moment of thinking of a way to resolve the issue, Dr. Mariama decided that since both of these parents had children in the kindergarten and they attended the lower grades campus, she would try to work with them. Yet, she was clearly not pleased finally telling them:

I will let you all prepare lunches for the younger children but my decision is contingent upon the fact that your children will not be allowed to get a school lunch if they decide that on some days they may want what is being served at school... either they get the school's lunch or they don't.

Nevertheless, she was uncompromising about the issue with the new boarding school campus parents stating, "they won't bring food into the new school... that's just not

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<sup>42</sup> Dr. Mariama and several colleagues had initiated this program many years ago while teaching in the city's public schools and the program was for any African-American students in the city able to pay for the trip. Although students from MCPSC had participated on this trip in previous years, none participated during the year of this study. Some students' cited previous commitments and others cited lack of finances as the major reasons for nonparticipation.

happening.” Finally, in closing the discussion, Dr. Mariama encouraged other parents to trust her and “please stick with the mandatory school lunch program.” She ended the discussion not letting the two parents off the hook so easily with a mini sermon/lecture:

You know, when I was young, my parents put certain foods in front of me to eat and told me to “eat it, it’s good for you!” And you know what, today they are calling those same foods health foods. Listen to me parents, you all had better be careful about letting your children at such an early age tell you what they will and will not eat. Because, in a few years, they will be trying to tell you other things that they will and will not do. These will be unfortunate situations for you and your children in the long run—trust me, I’ve seen it happen on too many occasions. Take control of your child’s life right now! And begin to mold them into what you want them to be. When our children are babies, they are just like clay, and clay does not mold itself! I hope that you all are hearing me. I’ve seen it too many times. Soon the child will be bigger than you... then it’ll be too late.

I could sense her sliding into the role of mother/elder/teacher as she responded to these young women and their concerns in reference to their children at such a young age deciding on whether or not they would eat the types of nutritious meals that they needed for nourishment, proper growth, and development. She ended her response to the parents by telling them, “start to talk to your children about what is good for them to eat and begin educating them on making the right choices and not always going for the foods that may taste really good but are very unhealthy for their minds and bodies.”

This speech was grounded in the ways and days of the past when many African-American children were raised in quite strict ways in many instances as parents of the pre-Civil Rights years knew of the harshness of what could happen to a child who thought that they could do whatever they wanted in a usually hostile and white dominated society. Her narrative was quite powerful as I could see many of the parents in the audience nodding in approval of her comments directed specifically at the two mothers of the young students and indirectly at everyone. She was in many ways teaching the parents child rearing lessons from the African-American tradition as a part of the meeting. The mandatory lunch question was the only question of the morning.

Finally, Dr. Mariama introduced the new faculty to parents as the teachers from both campuses had periodically entered the room for the meeting. After the introductions, she told the parents:

This is my staff and if you have any problems with any of them, come and see me first. I am a buffer for them and we can work out any problems you may have, and if you can’t get in contact with me in a timely manner contact our secretary, Mrs. Kamau. If she is unavailable, then feel free to go to one of the lead-teachers on both campuses. These are my right hand people.

She ended the meeting by announcing that the new school crests for the students navy blue uniform jackets were on sale in the back with Mrs. Kamau for ten dollars. Then she allowed the teachers from the lower grades campus to pair with teachers from the higher grades boarding campus and take the parents down to their classes for quick informal discussions, collecting students work, and tours of the new facility. My watch read 11:50 A.M. as the school’s initial meeting was longer than others throughout the year.

Throughout the year, parent/teacher meetings would be structured in the same fashion as the one (re)presented above. Even though, described as the monthly “Parent/Teacher” meetings, the parents always assembled and interacted with the school’s President/CEO for the first forty-five minutes to an hour in the schools chapel. Afterwards, the parents were dismissed to visit their child’s classes and retrieve completed assignments from the previous month’s school lessons. Thus, with such structuation, the teachers were not expected to be a part of the assembly conducted by Dr. Mariama. Nor were the parents allowed to hold lengthy conversations with the teachers on these days. After the assembly in the chapel, Dr. Mariama directed the parents to:

Keep in mind that today is a Saturday and as you all know our teachers do need their weekend breaks. So, go down into your children’s classes to pick up their tests and work for the month. And, please keep in mind that it is not feasible or fair to other parents if you attempt to have a lengthy conference with your child’s teacher—there’s just too many of you all here at one time. Keep your comments brief and if need be, use that time to schedule a parent/teacher conference on another date that fits both you and the teacher’s schedules. Other parents with brief comments will be appreciative of your consideration of their time... and the teachers would be appreciative as well.

The higher grades boarding teachers usually put student folders on their desks to be ready for parents after the assembly in the basement while the lower grades teachers usually showed up after 10:30 and waited outside the meeting organizing their students work and folders. After the group assembly with the President/CEO, the lower grades teachers would be free to select open areas in the chapel to meet and give work to their student’s parents that were present.

### **A WORD ON PRAYER**

All mass meetings at MCPSC began with a prayer, which never deviated from the Christian tradition throughout the year. Dr. Mariama always offered to those in attendance the opportunity to open the meeting with a prayer. Showing a level of religious sensitivity, she would always remind the parents in the audience, “we are a non-sectarian institution and anyone is welcomed to open us with prayer regardless of your religious faith and background.” As mentioned above, on the first meeting no one volunteered, but throughout the year various parents both women and men volunteered and opened with a prayer in the Christian tradition. By Christian tradition the opening prayers would always end with “in your son’s holy name, Amen” or “in Jesus’ name we pray, Amen”—something indicating recognition of the Christians God’s son. Growing up a part of the southern Baptist tradition, these prayer endings rang quite familiar. This final portion of a Christian’s prayer is usually the tip off to their faith of choice, for the actual body of these parents prayers tended to be rather universal in the sense of giving thanks to the heavenly creator or asking for blessings etc... Nevertheless, the final sentence was always the tip off.

### **ACKNOWLEDGED VOLUNTEERISM**

The agenda always called for accolades following opening prayer. At this point, Dr. Mariama personally thanked parents for various volunteer contributions made on behalf of the school. I was able to observe that much of what "got done" at MCPSC was

through the efforts of sporadic volunteerism. A particular field note entry helps clarify this phenomenon.

**Saturday October 14, 2000**

As I entered the school through one of the back doors leading to the chapel, I noticed the lead-teacher dressed in her school uniform making conversation with the eighteen parents that were on time for the meeting. My watch read 10:33 A.M. and the meeting was scheduled for 10:30 A.M. Some of these parents must have had children at the lower grades campus as she talked about some of the dynamics of the new higher grades boarding campus as if they were visitors. I headed down to the basement to drop off some lab coats that I had volunteered to take home and wash during the weekend. The lab coats had been donated by a local research laboratory and I wanted to help get them ready for the students. I began to observe that this was how much of what was done, got done around the school. For as I returned to the 1<sup>st</sup> floor leaving the boxes in the Science Lab in the basement, Dr. Mariama relieved Mrs. Jawanza from entertaining the waiting parents officially starting the meeting. She told the parents, “I wanted to wait on more parents to arrive, but out of respect for your time, we must begin.” The second item on the agenda following prayer was always accolades for volunteerism.

Other fieldwork notes highlighted the notion of volunteerism at MCPSC as well.

Agenda

October Parent Meeting

I. Prayer

II. Accolades- Parents

- Mr. Nzinga (Painted an elementary teacher’s room – replaced/cleaned light bulbs)
- The Sampson Family (Trimmed shrubs and hedges)
- Mr. James (Donated & installed paper towel dispenser/Toilet tissue)
- Mrs. Sonya James (Decorated bulletin board)<sup>43</sup>

The President/CEO spoke on the issue with some historical reflections on volunteering and donating to the school.

Always let me or Mrs. Kamau know if you donate anything to the school. We have a list of everyone who has ever donated to this school and made themselves known. I can tell you who gave the first roles of toilet paper to this school, as well as who donated the first book. So let us know when you do a good deed for our school so that we can thank you and give you the honor and recognition that you deserve.

She continued with the historical note:

Volunteering is so important to our school and we must acknowledge those who are doing their part and encourage more parents to come on board. I can remember when a group of parents used to come out and work as the school’s

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<sup>43</sup> All names are pseudonyms.

janitorial staff for no pay. We didn't have to pay a janitor because of this type of service. Another parent has been my electrician and you all know how much electrical work can cost us. But he has been there and it is good that he has, because you all would be surprised at how people like the fire department has been riding us about petty things that they deem in violation of the fire code.

Therefore, everyone can do something to help at our school.

She continued with this line of discussion acknowledging the individuals and families listed above.

I was in the process of getting some lawn service people to trim the shrubs outside this building and they were going to charge around \$100.00 for the job. However, out of nowhere the Sampsons' called me and offered to trim the shrubs outside because they had noticed that they were growing a bit wild. You see that's what we must have if this school is to succeed. This family had no idea that I was about to pay to have that job done but they volunteered and saved the school that money.

Then she moved to thanking Mr. James. "Is Mr. James present?" (he was not). She went on, "that man has really worked hard in helping us out. He installed the big toilet role dispensers that doesn't allow the students to tear off so much tissue and we are thankful for him." "What about Mrs. Sonya James is she with us today?" (she was present).

Mrs. James has worked diligently in the lower grades campus in keeping that entrance bulletin board up to date. She has been synchronizing with the seasons and that takes personnel time if none of you decide to step up and do it. The teachers as you all know work long hours and are so appreciative when parents help with such things as re-doing a bulletin board to help the school out. That just frees them up to be just that much more effective in the classroom. Thank you

Mrs. James, are you going to do winter for us?

The small group of twenty to twenty five parents in attendance all laughed as Mrs. James accepted the obligation.

### ***A Note on Fundraising***

"Our school fundraising events are for one thing and one thing only—to help you all pay your child's tuition. If you all keep your tuition up, I will handle the rest..." were words that Dr. Mariama typically announced to parents as she discussed the fundraising aspect of MCPSC. School fundraising opportunities came primarily in the form of coupon books, sports services, and bingo. Due to the sporadic nature of parent attendance, I was not able to ascertain as many details as I would have liked in reference to the many intricacies and particulars of these fundraisers. Moreover, the teachers tended to not know very much about these fundraisers as several parents organized these events outside of the school setting.

In reference to the Sports Services Fundraiser, one parent described the length of a workday in order to get one of the local professional sports teams (football or baseball) to send payment for a days work directly to the school defraying some of the expense of that parent's tuition bill. The parent, an African-American female informed other parents of what a typical day was like working as part of the Sports Services Fundraiser. She informed the audience:



It is really a 9 to 5 commitment on the day of the game once you factor in preparation, work, and clean-up time. You will be working the vending booths, or concession stands at the game depending on where they need you for that day. It's not that bad... actually I kinda enjoy being out to the games, so it works for me. I know others of you might have to pay sitters for your children and that might be more costly than going out to do the work.

### *A Glimpse at Discipline*

During the school's first year of transition, issues of discipline arouse as an item that needed to be clarified with the parents by the school's President/CEO. Although not a regular agenda item, Dr. Mariama's clarification of the school's discipline policy provided valuable insights into student/teacher interaction dynamics during the regular school day. Concerns about the school's discipline policy became apparent, as Dr. Mariama had received several phone calls from parents in the first few months of the school year.

### *Saturday November 11, 2001*

Dr. Mariama arranged a mock situation with a boy student from the lower grades campus and a 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade girl that attends the new higher grades boarding campus. The demonstration allowed the President/CEO an opportunity to physically demonstrate when and only when a teacher would physically touch a child. She went into sermon/lecture mode, which was always quite captivating and all parents seemed to listen intently. She opened telling the parents, "we have to get the students attention if we are going to be able to teach them anything." Then she signaled, "come here young man" and the young boy hurriedly came and sat in the chair that she had propped in front of her. She turned to the parents continuing to speak, "now, I am going to show you all what is permissible at The Marva Collins School so that the teachers can get this child's attention. First I verbally ask the young man to sit up straight in his chair." Then she told the boy to disobey her so that she could make her point as to what some students in the school will do. The boy disobeyed, slouching in the chair with his head turned in the opposite direction. She then took one of her hands and softly placed it under the boys chin area as to guide his face in her direction. The boy let his face move with the tension of her hand, and she began to talk to him eye-to-eye. "Smart boy, I need you to sit up in your seat and give me your attention. Look into my eyes. Do you understand me?" The boy shook his head indicating yes as much as he could with her hand beneath his chin. Finally, she dismissed the boy back to sit with his mother in the audience. He was one of the six students who had come along with their parents to the meeting, which consisted of approximately forty parents from both schools on this particular day.

Next, Dr. Mariama moved to a demonstration with the older 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade student. "Come here smart girl," she requested. She then turned to the parents and said, "Now the younger ones are O.K. you can get them on track with no problem, but the older ones might offer a little more of a challenge on this issue. So, let me really clear up this policy with you all before your child comes home telling you some story that they made up about what a teacher did to them."

The parents' all laughed a bit seeming to know exactly what the President/CEO was inferring.

She and the older girl began the mock situation. “Have a seat smart girl.” Missy, one of the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade Exemplar students, stood as if in defiance of Dr. Mariama’s request. This prompted the President/CEO to speak with a more forceful tone, “I requested that you take a seat and you need to do that now.” The adolescent girl sat down with a serious attitude accompanying the gesture, really getting into her role. At this point, Dr. Mariama used the same hand-to-face approach with this girl directing her to snatch her face away. Missy acted the part just as I had witnessed in some of her classes during the school’s first several months. Then, Dr. Mariama told Missy, “now say the words that go with this action.” Missy looked befuddled, prompting Dr. Mariama to quip, “you know the words... get yo hands off of me!” The parents broke out in laughter as if totally understanding and believing that this is what would happen in a situation of this nature, especially with the older students at the new boarding school campus.

The President/CEO quickly reverted to the seriousness of this issue as the climate had been set for a sermon/lecture. She had made the school’s policy clear so that each parent in attendance would know when their child would ever be touched and was now ready to drive home her point.

Now, that is our policy! And, I want you all to make sure that your children understand that we need their attention and this is the only way that we will ever touch your child at this school. Also don’t be so quick to make judgment on the teachers or anyone at this school based on what your child has come home and told you. Come speak with us and we can clear up any problems that you may be having but you can’t give your child the impression that you are going to go and tell that teacher or myself “off” or “a piece of your mind” for the one side of the story that your child has come home and told you. If you act that way in front of the child, you will erase everything that we are trying to do at this school for the benefit of our children – your child. You will erase it!

Finally, Dr. Mariama transitioned out of the serious sermon/lecture mode ending on a lighter note. “So, I know that this does not apply to any of you here today, but just in case you know someone who it does apply to, let them know.” The parents burst into laughter clearly getting the message of this soapbox scene. She ended this demonstration/lecture/clarifier with a reiteration to the older students parents to be patient with their children as they move through adolescence. She spoke about their typical ambivalence during their puberty years as they sometimes want to be a child and other times to be fully grown adults—“know it alls.” She concluded telling the parents, “so, let us be patient with them and their teachers, let’s work with them and be understanding of what they are going through.”

As should be clearer from the discussion above, MCPSC monthly parent/teacher meetings has its own unique format and structures in which the teachers have responsibilities but in a limited fashion. By noon on these scheduled Saturdays, most parents and the teachers had exited the school. Mrs. Jawanza and Dr. Mariama typically remained on campus discussing a variety of issues and sometimes simply cleaning and arranging for the upcoming week.

Parent attendance at the school’s monthly parent/teacher meetings was sporadic starting with the year’s largest showing being the year’s first meeting of eighty-five to

ninety-five parents.<sup>44</sup> Attendance at parent/teacher meetings fluctuated between fifteen and forty-five parents throughout the year following the school's first meeting. In addition, on most occasions throughout the school's second term, Mr. Sipho's, 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class would have as few as four parents visit his class to retrieve their child's work for the month. As the year progressed, Mrs. Goldstein resorted to putting her student's work out on their desks on the Friday evenings before the scheduled meeting and not coming at all.

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<sup>44</sup> MCPSC 2000--2001 Parental Attendance: Sept. 85--95 parents, Oct. 20--25 parents, Nov. 40--45 parents, Dec. no meeting, Jan. 20--25 parents, Feb. 20--25 parents, Mar. 15--20 parents, April 20--25 parents, May 20--25 parents.

## CHAPTER 7

### PHASE III: INSIDE STORIES ON THE SECOND TERM AT MCPSC

#### *Introduction*

This phase of the research explores the daily interactions of the MCPSC educational community during the school's second term of the school year which led to what also marked the end of MCPSC's first year in transition to a boarding school facility. In this section, a contextual narrative elaboration on both the school's setting and climate immediately after its reopening due to the mid-year winter break will be presented. Phase I of the research process explores school culture in the three base classes, in the dining area, and during recess bringing to life the underlying rituals and inherent power play created through such interactions. This phase of the ethnographic process (Phase III), however, will encompass further (re)presentations of this educational community's staff, student, and parental relations as well as daily interactions based on participant/observations and interviews during the aforementioned period.

By this time in the research process, much like the first several weeks at the research site of Phase I, my approach was to explore the school as if it were a multi-staged theatrical performance with acts and performances all going simultaneously in various areas of the school. Obviously not able to be everywhere at the same time, I listened to people communicate and watched their interactions in one area, observed a spontaneous scene in another, dialogued, formally interviewed, and informally interviewed in other places. This approach was more fluid and spontaneous than the more systematic observations that characterize much of Phase I in which significant school structures highly determined my physical positionality, i.e. set/arranged times in the fourth grade classroom, the dining area, etc.

### *Phase III*

#### *Inside Stories: The Second Term at MCPSC*

##### **The Bell Rings for Round Two: Situating MCPSC after Winter Break**

At this point, MCPSC had surely “gotten out of the gates” and was well on its way into the completion of its first year of transition at the new higher grades boarding campus. Mrs. Jawanza and Mrs. Goldstein, two of the three base classroom teachers were back with what they typically described as a much needed winter holiday break. Mr. Sipho remained in South Africa due to the complications with his immigration clearances, which prompted his departure in December just before the winter break. This dynamic created the situation where Dr. Mariama had been forced into a quasi-distant learning format for the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class as she assigned their lessons via textbooks, overhead transparencies, and a lengthy, in-depth class analysis of the literature of Booker T. Washington.

When asked about her curricular strategy Dr. Mariama replied, “see that monitor right there,” which signaled to her office video monitor that allowed her to observe any classroom in the school from her office on the first floor. On the monitor, this particular day was the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class. “Look at them, they look like a college classroom don’t they,” she remarked while looking at me with her trademark smile of confidence. I nodded in agreement, as I looked at the monitor and witnessed the students in a dimly lit room all working on an assignment presented in the form of an overhead transparency. She went on:

I go down there and assign their work using the overhead projector. I have boxes of work ready for them along with Mrs. Nzinga who is down there with them now. You know that television show that’s on, Big Brother? Well, I’m “Big Sister” around here (she said with a smile).

I thought of how technology and times have changed aspects of schooling. “Big Sister” was monitoring these students in the basement from the first floor. In addition, the strategy seemed, in a sense, to be behaviorally effective as the students at least were all assuming the role of expeditious workers. Thus, the combination of Mrs. Delta, the Science teacher and Mrs. Nzinga the full-time assistant typically served as a physical presence in the classroom. This was the case even when Dr. Mariama had meetings to leave the school for, teaching responsibilities at the university, or to administrate at the lower grades campus.

By this time, morning chapel had been discontinued as the staff decided that the students’ behavior during that time had gotten progressively out of hand at such an early time in the school day. Getting the students through prayer, The Creed, and morning poems proved rather burdensome as many students began to not take the ritual seriously opting instead to horseplay or not recite unless a teacher constantly observed and demanded their participation. The teachers were now both receiving the students in their classrooms and doing the morning ritual as separate classes. In addition, eventually the mandatory school lunch program was abandoned as a complicated set of circumstances prompted Dr. to take action in this regard.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> This issue will be further contextualized through (re)presentations of the school’s second term student/student/staff interactions in this phase, Phase III.

Thus, with the exception of the aforementioned issues, the fourth and 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade classes were functioning as usual, as the term began. As for the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class, a new path was being charted, and the “Hot Box”/redefining room had become inactive once more due to Mrs. Nzinga’ new responsibilities with the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class.

The school’s performance in tandem with the lower grades campus of “The Living Words of Martin Luther King, Jr.,” represented the first major school ritual that followed the winter break. In collaboration with Dr. King’s holiday, field notes on this event provide insights into MCPSC’s celebration and representations of a national figure and historical icon.

### ***Sunday, January 14, 2001***

The cover of the program bears a black and white photo of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The picture is one of those well-known photos that depict him speaking at the famous 1963 March on Washington, D.C. On the bottom of the black and white cover of the program reads, “I Have a Dream.” The black and white picture adds to the antiquity and classical nostalgia of that historical event which for contemporary youth seems to be a thousand years ago. “I Have a Dream” seems to be one of the lingering memories of Dr. King that we seem not to want to let out of our grasp. Simultaneously, we seem to downplay the notion that many African-Americans saw Dr. King’s dream as an American nightmare. He even hinted that his prophetic dream of a very idealistic, utopian-like society might have been a nightmare as he shared with his closest friends. Furthermore, Dr. King was afraid that he might be attempting to integrate into a burning house.

Nevertheless, the “I Have a Dream” photo is the first image of Dr. King that I encountered as I entered the cultural arts center in the city’s downtown area. Why not the picture of Dr. King when he stood in a poolroom smoking a cigarette, or the frustrated and angry picture of him as he stood next to Malcolm X on the stairs of the U.S. Capitol building? On this day, both men agreed that the United States Congress was in front of their very eyes shafting their people as Civil Rights legislation through filibusters. My historically and socially constructed subjectivities were becoming apparent, helping to shape my every thought as I interpreted the symbols of the program.

I know that there are “tons” of pictures to pick from, but the famous ‘63 March on Washington picture with the “I Have a Dream” caption on the bottom is a text that I read as representing the non-violent, passive, turn the other cheek, Martin King, who most history books share so generously. It is a representation of King that is seemingly most palatable to mainstream U.S.A. The Martin King who had not begun to stand up against the American powers who wanted to continue to send troops to Vietnam even Negroes whose civil rights were violated daily in their own country.<sup>46</sup> Or, the Martin King who had become so frustrated and fed up with waiting and dreaming to the point that he had plans to take poor people of every color, creed, and religion to the country’s capital and stay there until something was done about the unequal distribution of the country’s wealth in addition to racial injustices.

As I handed the attendant my \$5.00 ticket that I had purchased for \$6.20 two days before from Ticket Master (Capitalism, everyone has to get their cut) in route to do

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<sup>46</sup> The term Negro was widely used and usually acceptable during this era.

fieldwork, I flipped open the program to further look inside. The lights in the theatre had not yet been dimmed, so I was able to further browse through the following:

“The Living Words of Martin Luther King, Jr.”

Sunday, January 14, 2001

4:00 PM

Aronoff – Jason Kaplan Theatre

Choir.....Negro National Anthem  
Beverly..... National Anthem  
Introduction.....5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> Graders  
Ronald Reagan’s Speech on King.....3<sup>rd</sup> Graders

ACT I

Scene I.....Community of Man (Pre-K)  
Scene II.....Racism (Kindergarten)  
Lean On Me – Praise Dancers

ACT II

Scene I.....Non Violence (1<sup>st</sup>)  
Scene II.....Civil Rights (2<sup>nd</sup>)  
Stepping For Freedom I

Act III

Scene I.....Justice and Freedom (3<sup>rd</sup>)  
Scene II.....I Have A Dream (Primary Grades)  
Precious Lord

Act IV

Scene I.....Peace (4<sup>th</sup>)  
Scene II.....Non Violence (7/8<sup>th</sup>)  
Scene III..... Biography/Faith and Religion  
5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup>

A Man with a Purpose.....Written by Clara Mariama  
Stepping For Freedom II

Remarks.....Clara Mariama, CEO/President  
We Shall Overcome.....Students & Congregation

I took my seat in the middle of the back rows at stage level crossing over people already present. The school’s President/CEO sat alone in the balcony positioned at stage level, to the left. All I could see was her profile, which reminded me of the famous Abraham Lincoln profile as he sat in the theatre of his assassination. As I continued to peer through the audience, my attention was brought to the sprinkles of European-Americans in the crowd like a few dashes of salt in a pile of darker melaninated African-

American pepper. I had seen them at the younger grades “Prepping for Power” showcases during the school’s first term. They represented the small group of parents at the school who are not African-American.<sup>47</sup>

The room was packed on the floor level and up to three of the four balconies that sat stage right and left. The pre-K students entered the stage after the singing of the Star Spangled Banner followed by the Negro National Anthem, even though the program stated in the reverse order. The students all came on stage and sat around some of the older students as the older students spoke of Dr. King’s Dream. One boy who looked to be in the second or third grade recited Ronald Reagan’s speech as if he was Reagan when the national holiday was dedicated in Martin King’s honor. This was an interesting ritual in that the pre-K students did not have speaking parts but they were put on stage exposed to an audience. What was also interesting was the strategic use of the students who were just a few years older who modeled what was to be expected of them in the years to come.

Other students in the lower grades starting with kindergarten were given a chance to say something written by Dr. King as a part of the program. As the entire class marched out carefully positioned in line by their teacher at center stage, they were given the nudge to approach the microphone in front of them and “give it their best shot.” Most of the Kindergartners accepted the challenge with the exception of two students (a girl and boy). Each student would slowly walk to the microphone and recite a phrase or complete thought of something that had to do with the life of Dr. King. The number of students who refused to say their lines quickly diminished to one as the little African-American girl with the encouragement of her teacher, the audience, and her classmates telling her in harmony, “give it your best shot!,” recited her prepared 8 or 10 words.

The remaining young boy stricken with stage fright was eventually brought back on stage by Dr. Mariama, his mother, and his teacher later in the program. It was almost as if his mother were thinking, “with all the time I’ve spent working with you, you are going to say these 3 or 4 lines.” Finally, after literally being balanced by his mother as he slumped and would have hit the floor had she let him go, he said something to the effect of, “Dr. King died for everyone...” while half murmuring and his confidence wavering with each word. Although much of his mini speech was blurred, the crowd went wild giving him a standing ovation.

Then, the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade girls performed their now trademark praise dance routine which they had been practicing at school during after lunch recess as well as “Prepping for Power” performances. Their dance was done to the music of the contemporary Christian artist, Curt Franklin who has taken much criticism in the religious sector of the African-American community for his up beat rhythms that break the mold of solemn Negro Spirituals which so deeply saturated the fabric of the black church.

There has been a prevalence of contemporary Christian music via videos that are rhythmically upbeat, and the artists dress in styles reminiscent of urban hip-hop culture rather than traditional African-American churchgoers. This trend of music is becoming increasingly acceptable by those church powers that would not condone such a thing in the past. As Antonio Gramsci would put it, the resistance of contemporary Christian youth to the structures of the traditional black church is being incorporated as the mainstream black church is now allowing the youth to indulge the historically taboo

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<sup>47</sup> I counted three couples and one European-American man sitting by himself to be exact.



while at the same time, remaining under the Christian banner at the end of the day. In the final analysis, the youth's resistance is incorporated into the dominant cultural structure of Christianity, which causes a rearticulation of its norms.

As the show went on, it became clear that this program was organized so that every student present could have a chance to speak publicly. By the end of ACT IV and a litany of speeches and repeated speeches by students from both school campuses, the crowd began to dwindle. Finally, after well over 2 hours and before "A Man with a Purpose" composed by Dr. Mariama could be performed by the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders, approximately a third of the crowd had departed the auditorium. Parents had begun to exit with their children who had already performed and were now becoming fidgety. Other parents sat, waited, watched, and applauded with a bit more patience. Nevertheless, Mrs. Jawanza and Dr. Mariama informed me of how proud they were of the students, marking the show a successful endeavor.

#### Staff Relations

##### **Teaming: Trials and Collaboration**

The initiation of the school's second term immediately created new patterns of interaction in reference to staff-staff and staff-administrator relations. Clearly, Dr. Mariama, Ms. Delta, and Mrs. Nzinga had to come together in mapping out a course of action for the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class bearing in mind Mr. Sipho's situation. During the winter break, I ran into Mrs. Nzinga at a black book store.<sup>48</sup> She informed me of the plan in which Dr. Mariama was the chief architect regarding how the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class would function in Mr. Sipho's absence.

Dr. Mariama devised a plan over the break where either Ms. Delta or I would be with the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders throughout the day depending on Mrs. Delta's Science schedule. When she is on campus and not with the other classes doing Science, she will be doing Science projects with them, and helping them prepare for the CAT-V (California Achievement Test) and Ohio Proficiency tests. Dr. Mariama or I will be with them all other times. Plus, they still have Spanish; I think all of them will be going to Spanish now...

Eventually, through much of the months of January, February, and the beginning of March, this was the process. Soon, Mrs. Nzinga became the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders' major symbol of a teacher, carrying out most of the curricular plans outlined by she and Dr. Mariama until Mr. Sipho's eventual return. She represented consistency as Dr. Mariama's busy schedule usually pulled her in too many directions with respect to serving as the students' full time teacher. Nevertheless, it was not unusual to discover Dr. Mariama grading English assignments in the library on the first floor or guiding the class through *Up From Slavery* by Booker T. Washington—a classic in her estimation. The students seemed to enjoy the literature on Booker T. and their discussions with Dr. Mariama immensely. Yet, Sista Souljah's, *The Coldest Winter Ever*, also received rave reviews as one of the girls bought the book from home and read it at every open moment. Before long, other girls were interested and eventually several other girls had engaged the text, marveling over Souljah's main character, Winter Santiago's devious antics, and "New Jack"

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<sup>48</sup> Black bookstores are typically, African/African-American owned, found in predominately African-American communities and provide merchandise and literature specifically geared to African-American cultural understanding and human development.

lifestyle.<sup>49</sup> During this period, I spent more time in private conversations with Mrs. Nzinga than either of the other two staff members teaming for the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class. Mrs. Nzinga's perceptions of her new responsibilities spoke to her close interactions with Dr. Mariama and commitment to carrying out whatever tasks were required of her.

I tend to not mind being flexible and always doing this and that for Dr. Mariama—like when I drive from campus to campus doing things for her. You know, I always try to keep in mind that this is the school's first year... but of course, I really would much rather just work with the "Hot Box" students. But, with all the other things that are going on with Mr. Sipho and his situation, I know that Dr. Mariama needs me here (in 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class) more than anything right now... plus it's like we are both in the class for the most part because she has that camera on them up in her office.

In reference to Ms. Delta, she shared, "we don't really work together because I can take a short break or go help out somewhere else when she comes in to do Science of something else with them (referring to the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders)."

I was also able to gain valuable insights into the individual, subjective world of Mrs. Nzinga in reference to her perspective on leadership. The following are excerpts from an interview with Mrs. Nzinga:

K.S. (P.C.): Identify people in your school community that you consider leaders. Mrs. Nzinga: O.K., leaders, I see number one, Dr. Mariama as a leader, because she takes (she pauses), let me put it this way... she takes a lot of abuse from the children, parents, grandparents, uncles, grandmothers.

K.S. (P.C.): Tell me more about this abuse, what are some of the things that she take?

Mrs. Nzinga: For example, some children refuse to go along with the rules of the school and they'll go home and tell their mother, "I didn't do that... they makin' that up." And, the parents will believe the children. Then they'll try to attack Dr. Mariama or attack the teacher, but Dr. Mariama being the person that she is, and she really knows her staff, she will support us because she knows that we're not going to hurt those children. But, parents will attack her, "my child did not do that" and the kids know they did it.

K.S. (P.C.): Who else, do you have any others in mind?

Mrs. Nzinga: I see Mrs. Jawanza as being a leader. She has so many children in her class. The one thing I had a hard time getting (she digresses)... my problem was, I had to learn to accept Mrs. Jawanza as Mrs. Jawanza because she has so much, she has forty children. And, if I want to ask her something, I had to learn, O.K. wait, she's focused on the children, not me. Whatever I have, if nobody is dying or nobody is sick—it can wait until after school. So, I had to learn that and I learned it, so now everything is wonderful. But, I look at her and all I can think is "wow" how can she do it, but she does it—all because the love of children and she knows the importance of having a good education...

Ms. Delta, seemed not to mind the newly created operations at the school. She felt more obligated to be flexible with Dr. Mariama's dictates due to the staff's understanding and flexibility in reference to her having to reschedule and shorten her

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<sup>49</sup> I was rather familiar with the book as Sista Souljah had recently visited the university and I attended her round table session. I had engaged the text before her arrival.

weekly hours during the first term because of her graduate school schedule. Ms. Delta informed me:

I typically don't mind the way things are going right now as far as what I have to do when I get here. I wish things were more consistent, but who am I to complain (she laughs, referring to her change of schedule)... I figure doing things like this for Dr. Mariama, Mrs. Jawanza, and the other teachers is the least I can do.

Mrs. Delta as well as Mrs. Nzinga's reflections on interactions with Dr. Mariama seem to be reflections that show their commitment to the overall educational project at hand. Their willingness to be flexible and not harp on the predicaments in which they found themselves created by various circumstances outside of their control spoke to a level of staff loyalty, willingness to collaborate, and be flexible. Mrs. Delta's comments also highlighted a tone of reciprocity or a feeling of "giving back" to other staff members due to their understanding and show of consideration and flexibility in reference to her situation as a first year Science teacher and graduate student at a local university.

The restrictions and limitations of my participant/observation schedule and the impossibility of omnipresence during the school's first term did not allow for sustained, in-depth engagement in the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade math sessions conducted by Mr. Haley. Nevertheless, rescheduling during the school's second term did allow for many observations as he began to work in tandem with Mrs. Jawanza and the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade students during math sessions. My understandings of the need for Mr. Haley's change in classroom environment stemmed from personality conflicts with many of the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade students, even some of the school's Exemplars. Dr. Mariama as well as many of the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade students shared insights into this situation. "He think that he can talk to people any kinda' way... he'll curse you out too—if you make him mad enough" I was told by Berniece, an Exemplar. The nature of other students' comments was rather similar in scope—"he so grumpy," "Mr. Haley will kick you out for nothin'..."

In reference to the situation, Dr. Mariama shared a broader, more perceptive, and wisdom filled perspective:

You see, Haley's from the "old school" and he does not play around with them or put up with their foolishness. He'll just put 'em out quick fast and in a hurry, you see... I know, because he and I taught together for many years in the public school. So, they (referring to the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders) get all bent out of shape when he doesn't put up with their foolishness and want to put all of the blame on the way he treats them. Haley's set in his ways and he's not going to change his teaching approach at this stage, which as we all know is no frills and from the "old school."

Dr. Mariama also shared with me many of the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade students' desires for her to get rid of Mr. Haley for cursing and mistreating many of them earlier in the first term. As I had come to understand, she always made time to hear the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade students' perspectives in reference to complaints about the school. And, of course, the tried and true Exemplars' complaints seemed to carry a bit more weight. Yet, she informed me that she both knew and understood exactly what was going on and that surely Mr. Haley more than likely had belted out a harsh word or two at some students. However, she also understood that the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade students had not been the most considerate bunch themselves earlier in the year. Dr. Mariama informed me:

I know Haley quite well, we go way back, and I know that he doesn't mean any harm to any of these children around here... he's retired and has a bunch of land and money... he doesn't have to get up and come to do math at this school for the pennies that I pay him. He does it because he cares—but h-o-n-e-y he don't fool around.

Thus, she decided to reallocate Mr. Haley's expertise and services to Mrs. Jawanza and the 5/6<sup>th</sup> graders days before the close of school for winter break.

The 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade students began partaking in individualized, self-paced math sessions designed by Dr. Mariama and monitored by a combination of herself, Mrs. Nzinga, and me as I would lend as much algebra and pre-algebra expertise as I could. The students had individualized progress sheets created by Dr. Mariama that charted their progress through the Saxon Math textbooks. She was even open to my suggestions as I helped her tweak the sheets for a more self-sufficient, systematic process. They also tested and advanced based on mastery of the Saxon Math Tests that accompanied the text filling in a wall chart that marked each students' progress. Furthermore, Mr. Haley continued to work with appreciative students on a one-on-one basis as he became more available taking up residence at the school during the second term.

Nevertheless, Mr. Haley and Mrs. Jawanza's second term teamwork provided insights into staff members' interactions and teaming situations. Typically, Mr. Haley having by this time taken residence on the higher grades boarding campus, engaged the students in whole class lessons covering specific math concepts. Due to the large class size (more than thirty five students), Mrs. Jawanza usually served as an extra set of eyes as Mr. Haley explained concepts, demonstrated problems on the board, and called students to the board to "give it their best shot." One particular observation experience is telling and reveals much of the usual workings and dynamics inherent in these two staff members' interactions and pedagogical practices.

*January 23, 2001*

- Very engaged math class today
- Students eagerly trying to answer his questions
- He is teaching at the board as she sits in her chair facing the students. "You need to be either reading your book or paying attention—those are your options," announces Mrs. Jawanza as Mr. Haley writes math problems on the board. This must be one of the remedial/review math sessions as some students are busy reading Odyssey as well.
- "Remember now, our system is a base ten system." "Every 2 to the right is greater than 2 to the left." "No, no, no I'm, saying that wrong. It's the opposite. Every 2 to left is greater than 2 to the right." I had no clue of what he was explaining but the students followed along closely, as Mrs. Jawanza scanned the room making sure that everyone was on task.
- Student gadget goes off on Mrs. Jawanza's table prompting her to grab it and reprimand him once more, as the gadget disrupts the class once again.
- David is sitting not doing either of his options for the day. He has his chair leaned back with two of its legs in the air. He's probably resisting Mrs. Jawanza's options because it's his gadget on her table that must have been confiscated earlier. Mrs.

Jawanza ignored his blatant resistance to her options and just let him be, as he seems to need to cool off.

- Class doing very well behaviorally today, as students seems to understand Haley's elaboration on the Base Ten System much better this time around. Mrs. Jawanza had students tell him, "we like the way you dooo it M-r. H-a-l-e-y," as he departed the room with a smile of accomplishment on his face.
- One student yells out, "he so smart" as Mr. Haley seems full of joy and exits the room.

### *Those Snakes*

As the school year progressed, I learned that Sermon/Lectures by Dr. Mariama were not only crafted for students at MCPSC. Occasionally, while sitting in her office deliberating with Mrs. Nzinga over curricular matters in reference to team teaching the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class or conferencing with a parent, Dr. Mariama would share philosophical insights slipping into Sermon/Lecture mode. These discussions always taught me something new about the school President/CEO's subjective convictions.

You see, we as a people have to get up off our butts and do something for ourselves—no one is going to give us anything for just sitting around and being lazy... that welfare system made many of our people that way, you know—especially in this city. And, we can't just keep blaming everything on racism, we know that there are poisonous snakes out there... but it doesn't mean that we have to spend all of our time hunting down the darn snakes. If you see a poisonous snake in your path, h-o-n-e-y you just go around it. Otherwise, by the time we spend all of our time chasing and trying to capture poisonous snakes, we could have done something for ourselves... you know what I mean... we can go on ahead and do some things for ourselves and stop sitting around blaming everything on racism and white folks.

These words of insight into Dr. Mariama's understanding of racism as it exists in our society was met by nods of agreement as Mrs. Nzinga and I stood in her doorway while two parents sat in the office's newly furnished forest green, guest seats. The "snakes" seemed to symbolically represent deadly, poisonous (racist) individuals in our society.

Thus, if African-Americans in this society would carry on in their desires, aims, and goals with an understanding that, yes, there are snakes; but, do not spend an inordinate amount of time focused on snakes. Dr. Mariama's discourse on racism appeared to be more of an individualized approach and focused less on the historical systematic, politico-economic, and social barriers created through institutionalized slavery, Jim Crowism, and monumental attacks on governmental remedies through Affirmative Action. In addition, much of the answer to the alleviation of the many social problems that contemporarily afflict African-Americans was located in her embracement of a strong work ethic and self-sufficiency.

On another occasion but in the same vein of strong work ethic and self-sufficiency, Dr. Mariama shared insights into her struggles of getting other African-Americans on the bandwagon in this mid-west city, as she and three 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade boys worked to shelve books in the developing library. She shared,

They just seem to think that everything is supposed to be handed to them, you know. H-o-n-e-y, we blacks from the south never acted like these people up here.

We would get out and do what needed to be done; at least that's how I was raised down in the cotton fields of Alabama. But, nowadays I just don't understand our people. [She corrects herself] Well, I do understand them; they are just lazy and think that everything should be just handed to them—especially around here. We were just not brought up like that in the south. We were more like Booker T. (speaking of Booker T. Washington); we got out and did for ourselves. That's all I know!

Words of this nature echoed often. The “do for yourself attitude” and “that's all I know” approach to accomplishing goals kept Dr. Mariama's “boat floating” during the times when seas were calm and afloat when the waters became turbulent—she could always count on herself. Furthermore, this was a lesson that she seemed to want all African-Americans to embrace.

### **Strategizing for Student Recruitment at the Citywide School Fair**

A day at the citywide school fair was also a telling moment of staff interactions, even outside the confines of the school's campus and in the public's eye.

The brochure's cover of the event read,

W elcom e (written in large youthful font)

#### **Phil Heimlich**

Cincinnati City Councilmember

Dear Parents and Children:

Welcome to the 2001 Greater Cincinnati School Fair. Today, parents have more choices than ever for educating their children. Many of these options are free of cost to you.

Explore these many options by visiting the informational booths with exhibitors from more than 50 schools, including those from the Cincinnati Public Schools, community schools, Catholic schools, and private schools. A complete list of schools with basic information on each can be found inside this program.

The speakers will begin at 1:30 PM. We ask that you join us in the front of the hall and listen to the program featuring nationally syndicated columnist Walter Williams.

Enjoy the fair.

Sincerely,  
(signed)  
Phil Heimlich

As I entered the city's Convention Center browsing through the event's program, a few dormant ideas stored in my brain's central processing unit resurfaced. First of all, buzz words like "choice," "parent options," "free of cost," "choose between public, Catholic, or community schools," and the syndicated columnist "Walter Williams" all stood out in my mind. On this day, I was privy to MCPSC's staff as they interacted on a larger scale outside the confines of the school with city officials and local residents. "Higher-ups" in the city were entertaining the idea of an educational "voucher" system and MCPSC's staff had fought hard for its presence in their city. In the past, Mrs. Jawanza and Dr. Mariama have even advocated for a voucher system in the state's capital speaking before members of the legislature. Now, at the citywide school fair, it was clear that prominent members of the city had joined the "voucher" bandwagon.<sup>50</sup>

More than anything, the name of today's keynote speaker, Mr. Walter William's conjured up a litany of connections to MCPSC. I clearly remembered stacking a classroom set of books that he had authored in the school's first floor book storage room this summer as a volunteer worker. Through my extensive participant/observations at MCPSC, I have come to realize that Mr. Williams is a supporter of the school and has made visits to the school in past years. I also thought back to a conversation with Dr. Mariama on the first floor in the school's developing library. This was the day early in the second term when the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade girls received a lesson in Home Economics as they were commissioned by Mrs. Nzinga and Dr. Mariama to clean the first floor bedrooms on the east wing. This was the wing of the building where visitors passed on their way to the President/CEO's office. In addition, on this occasion, Dr. Mariama informed me that in a few days, she would be taking Walter Williams on a tour of the new boarding facility. Thus, not only would Mr. Williams be delivering the keynote speech strongly advocating school choice and a voucher system, he would also be paying MCPSC, of all the city's schools, a visit.

The large ballroom sized area on the second floor of the Convention Center was packed with exhibitors from throughout the city. Before heading over to the area where I had noticed the MCPSC posters, I wandered throughout the room browsing as well as taking advertisements from unfamiliar schools. Teachers, school administrators, and supporters of the various schools all stood around their booths talking with possible clients about the benefits of choosing their particular school. The many booths, were in most cases neatly, decorated tables with brochures and cardboard displays of the traditional science fair persuasion. The boards highlighted particular aspects of the various schools in attendance. These displays conjured up thoughts of high school career fairs as I could only imagine how difficult it would be for parents to feel sure about making the right choice for their children.

I also had recollections of south Florida "Flea Markets" in the city of Miami. My mother would drive a few hours to take the family shopping at the Flea Markets during my grade school years. The Flea Markets in Miami were mall-like shopping facilities

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<sup>50</sup> See, Appendix E for more insight into vouchers in the state of Ohio.

where in every direction merchants had booths selling everything one could imagine: jewelry, toys, food, plants, wigs, clothes, music, etc. What always caused me so much frustration during those Flea Market days were the seemingly hundreds of merchants with the same (or almost identical) products. This resulted in long shopping hours in order to compare costs of items as well as to negotiate prices. I could only imagine what systems of elimination the many parents in the room were using on this particular day to find that perfect school. As I perused the room, there was just a smorgasbord of schools ready and willing to share information about their particular offerings. The school fair program identified one catholic school, seven public schools along with a general information booth, thirteen community schools, and thirty-two private schools as school fair attendees.

After a brisk perusal of the city's offerings for the day, I headed over to the MCPSC table located in the northeast corner of the room that served as the designated private school area. Before reaching the MCPSC booth, I noticed a more maturely aged woman and a younger man both observing me with "that" look that said, "I bet you don't remember us." I did after a short moment, as a light bulb finally went off in my mind while reading the school's emblem on both their gray athletic sweaters. The two African-Americans were teachers at a school that had allowed me entrance to complete a study a year earlier.<sup>51</sup> We all embraced as they inquired about my current endeavors at the university.

As we spoke, I noticed that their school's booth was next to MCPSC's. I must admit, I did feel a sense of guilt as a researcher who had both volunteered at their school as well as conducted research there. Now, after not seeing this group of educators for more than a year, I was now doing research at MCPSC. I wondered what they thought of me. Did they think that I only used my racial/ethnic commonality to get inside their worlds only to disappear and go to do the same thing at another school? I had made many one hour drives and done an enormous amount of tutoring and volunteering during my days at their school as a means of reciprocity and as an indicator of my appreciation of them opening their doors, minds, and hearts to me. Nevertheless, I still felt a sense of guilt even though they all seemed quite happy to see me again. I wished the rigors of life in an academy were a bit less demanding and allowed for more time to reconnect with people who open their worlds to us as researchers.

As I began to think about my surroundings, I was standing in the midst of two schools, which had spearheaded the private school movement for African-Americans in the city during the latter half of the twentieth century. After giving everyone from the other school a great big, "I haven't seen you in so long hug," I headed over to the MCPSC booth where Dr. Mariama and the lead-secretary from the lower-grades campus stood.

As Dr. Mariama and I greeted each other, she delivered a mini history lesson on these two independent schools in the city that were both founded and operated by African-Americans (women in particular). As I told her of my interactions with the other school's teachers and director, she informed me, "yeah, she and I were the first two in this city to start schools for our children. Their school is a bit older than ours." I knew that the "our" was in reference to local African-American children. She went on, "long before anyone was thinking about this kind of thing, we were out doing it." I felt a sense

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<sup>51</sup> See Sekou (Collins) study on *Teachers Perceptions of Afrocentricity* in references.



of pride just standing in their midst, not to mention having the privilege to know them both quite well through my research interests.

After, about a half hour of watching, smiling, and helping disseminate information, an intercom announcement of today's scheduled program sounded. Many people walked away from the display booths and headed toward the large auditorium filling the seats for the program. I chose to stand against the wall next to a local news station cameraman. After peering over the seated audience, I noticed Mrs. Jawanza and five students from MCPSC's upper-grades boarding school sitting in the front row draped in their school uniforms. I noticed some of the students' parents several rows behind. This explained Mrs. Jawanza's absence from the school's advertising booth, as she had another important task for the day. In addition, Dr. Mariama had made her way onto the stage seated between the school's Superintendent and Mr. Walter Williams. I immediately knew that the MCPSC students would be a part of the scheduled program.

Dr. Mariama was introduced to the audience after the welcome address by the emcee, a popular African-American A.M. radio talk show host, and the invocation by a local pastor. Dr. Mariama began what was to be an introduction of the students brought to perform with a few general comments in reference to where MCPSC was located and some of the school's foundational values such as discipline, respect, hard work, etc.<sup>52</sup> Afterwards, the five students were summoned to the stage by the President/CEO to share a litany of MCPSC classic speeches. Three of the girls (Sharon being the head secretary at the lower grades school daughter, Donyetta, and Berniece) and the only boy (Ezekiel being Mrs. Jawanza's son) were 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade Exemplars at MCPSC. They could perform in front of an audience with ease and on short notice. The youngest girl, Kiesha, a 5/6<sup>th</sup> grader had proven to be one of the school's most animated and gifted public performers during her class's "Prepping for Power" events. These students represented MCPSC's idea of success and Dr. Mariama knew when, where, and how to display it.

The students performed poems such as "Be Strong," "A Great Somebody," "Strong Man," and of course, "The Creed," which always overwhelmed audiences due to the students' ability to remember such lengthy texts.<sup>53</sup> As I viewed the audience, many appeared impressed by these African-American children standing up, speaking out with attitude and boldness. The crowd as well as the panel members also appeared visibly impressed as the students received a loud round of applause upon completing their last oration and exiting the stage. They had done well and I am sure that such a performance clearly separated MCPSC from many of the schools that did not have the opportunity to display their students' talent. Mrs. Jawanza, Dr. Mariama, and Mrs. Kamau who is the lower grades campus lead-secretary marketed the school through displaying some of their best and brightest students to those in attendance at the school fair. This marketing strategy was done to highlight just a few of (the) many talents that the school has.

Following the students' performance and brief words from the school's Superintendent advocating that parents learn more about school choice so that they might be able to take advantage of this opportunity, City Councilmember, Phil Heimlich, introduced the keynote speaker, Walter Williams. Mr. Williams gave a short speech and it really drove home the notion of choice. His rhetoric highlighted the following themes:

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<sup>52</sup> See, Chapter IV: The Setting for more discussion of the school's foundational values.

<sup>53</sup> See, Chapter IV Phase I: Getting Out of the Gates: The First Day of School.

- \* Advocating choice using Montessori Schools, Multiple Language Schools, Math and Science Schools, and the Paidea approach as types of choice parents would have
- \* Made mention of the city being the first city with a Montessori school in the nation
- \* Teacher accountability for student achievement measured by state test scores
- \* The Market Metaphor, where parents get to go out and pick their goods as in “one wouldn’t continue to shop at a store that sold bad products, so why should we continue to send our children to schools of this nature?”
- \* The Milwaukee voucher program, which he argued improved the city’s public school system through competition created by their voucher system.

After the program, I asked Dr. Mariama about her being the only school representative on the stage who had the opportunity to display her students. I wondered why MCPSC and not other schools? After all, they were all competing for potential clients. This opportunity was like a strategic market advertisement. She gave me her signature smile of confidence and pride. I had seen this facial expression before and it usually manifested when the President/CEO had made a “power move” in the school’s favor. She informed me:

Well, that happened through some of my cool and smooth maneuvering. You know, I always do what has to be done in order to share our children with the world since that’s what we are teaching them to be, citizens of the world.

Wouldn’t you agree?

Citizens of the world, I thought. This was a line lifted verbatim from the Marva Collins Creed. Dr. Mariama even had the Marva Collins philosophy deeply intertwined into and consistent with the school’s rituals of recruitment. Show off your best, recruit others, attract potential donors, and at the same time create “citizens of the world” – who could argue with that logic?

Dr. Mariama also informed me that the keynote speaker was a personal friend of hers and that she had contacted Mr. Williams for City Council member, Heimlich, in order to get him to come and speak at the program. She went on:

You must always be connected with people in high places, that’s how I got them on that stage today. Also, last night I was invited to a banquet with many of these “big wigs” you know, to welcome Mr. Williams. I use these events to work toward the “voucher” as well as connect with new people who are serious about education around the city.

With a ten-year school history, the MCPSC staff seemed to have become strategic marketers of their school. Several school fair attendees approached Mrs. Jawanza, the students, and Dr. Mariama after the stage performance inquiring about the school. People constantly approached the students congratulating them with comments such as: “that was so powerful, you all keep it up,” “nice job up there,” etc. The school had developed sound recruitment rhetoric and it was polished and used powerfully in situations such as the above.

### **Can I Lend a Helping Hand?**

**February 13, 2001**

K.S. (P.C.): Dr. Mariama, what are your plans for teacher recruitment for the next school year... how are you going to get live-in faculty for the future boarders?

Dr. Mariama...: Well, I have that already planned for the immediate future actually, if I am able to get things worked out with Mr. Sipho and get him back from South Africa, that would be great. I'm working on that now. Also, there's another teacher who will be coming over from South Africa in the next several months. She will be teaching over at the other campus, so that's good news for us as well.

K.S. (P.C.)...: Will that be enough teachers, what if the enrollment increases on this campus?

Dr. Mariama...: Well, I will control the enrollment, of course. And, my plan is to take it slow with the boarding school's development. I already have Mrs. Kemba, who is in residence here at the boarding school and Mr. Haley has just come onboard as a resident. And, with Mr. Sipho and the other teacher from South Africa, we should be in good shape—I just have to secure that aspect with their papers and all (referring to the South Africans). We should be fine on that level.

K.S. (P.C.)...: So what about staff recruitment locally and around the U.S., what are your plans for that?

Dr. Mariama...: Well, as soon as I get this building functioning at a level where I am comfortable with everything, I plan to travel across the country recruiting both teachers and students for the school. I also still have my connections to your university down in Florida (referring to Florida A&M University where I did undergraduate studies before coming to MCPSC to complete a student teaching/internship five years ago). I may consider bringing up more interns like I did with you guys several years ago... I had stopped because none of the interns would stay after receiving our training in the Marva Collins Method—you all took that knowledge elsewhere (she says laughingly). But, that's one avenue that I may explore once again.

Also, people call me out of the blue inquiring about the school and openings based on something they have read in the papers or heard about the school from a parent of one of the board members. Actually, that's how I've employed most of the teachers here... they find out about the school and look me up. I also have my board members and some parents who advertise for the school as they travel and meet people who might have what it take to survive around here. I wish that I had someone who could specifically focus on recruitment right now at our school but that's something that I see happening down the road in the future.

After this particular interview with the school's President/CEO, I understood that a systematic attachment to potential teachers was non-existent at MCPSC. Connection to a readied body of potential teachers is one mechanism that U.S. public schools, for the most part, have automatically built into their structures through connections with the country's public university system. Independent schools by their very nature are not privy to this level of teaching potential and locating available qualified teachers seemed to be rather serendipitous, at least at MCPSC.

Although rather optimistic as usual in reference to Mr. Sipho's return and the new teacher from South Africa's arrival, my inclinations were more of a realist in the sense that there was just no guarantee of his return. The nature of his departure was quite abrupt and the status of his expected return remained quite a mystery, at least to those

whom I interacted as well as myself. Even to Mrs. Nzinga, the full time assistant, Mr. Siphos return remained uncertain as she, for the most part, had taken over his class on an indefinite basis. I pondered the possibilities of the school's worse case scenario, which led me to the conclusion that there probably needed to be some available qualified teachers in mind.

In addition, with both Dr. Mariama's blessings and permission, I acted on that conclusion by volunteering to revise the school's basic teacher recruitment packet, which only highlighted the older, lower grades campus.<sup>54</sup> I also compiled the addresses of twenty-one HBCUs' (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) that were closest in proximity to MCPSC. Finally, I personally mailed the revised teacher recruitment packets accompanied by three school promotional documents to the twenty-one colleges and universities with the approval of the President/CEO. I felt that this would be one step in the positive direction of making teacher recruitment more systematic, and not so tremendously serendipitous.

### **Mrs. Goldstein Purges the Rabble-rouser Party**

As mentioned in other areas of this study, staff/staff and staff/student interactions were ever persistent in calling for a high level of flexibility, patience, and consideration of others issues during MCPSC's first year of transition. As I alluded to earlier in Phase I, several particular students oftentimes found themselves expelled to the periphery of Mrs. Jawanza's class for out of class timeouts. Insights into staff flexibility and patience with one another and the students manifested once more during February of the school's second and final term as Mrs. Goldstein purged her class of several challenging students.

By this time in the year, Tremaine, Ramona, and Jihari had withdrawn from Mrs. Goldstein's class and three new students had been added to the class' twenty-two-student roster. Thus, Mrs. Goldstein's classroom remained numerically the same, but the chemistry of the class had been substantially altered.<sup>55</sup> Clearly, my observations yielded a difference in two of the three newcomers to the fourth grade class when compared to the three students who had withdrawn. The three withdrawn students were clearly future MCPSC Exemplars.

Tremaine, Ramona, and Jihari were students who represented MCPSC's values in the fourth grade class.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, Mrs. Goldstein seemed to adore Jihari, a student who took leadership in getting the class prepared for "Prepping for Power" events, as she typically served happily as the class' emcee for most of their programs. She always knew her parts as one day during recess, Mrs. Goldstein had her recite to me the entire Gettysburg Address by Abraham Lincoln and the speech Remembering Marian Anderson by Joyce Carol Thomas. It was practically a flawless recital by Jihari, which prompted Mrs. Goldstein to say, "I gave the Gettysburg Address to her yesterday, she learned it in one night!" I stood for several minutes listening to that fourth grade solo presentation. Tremaine and Ramona both from the same family had rather quiet, reposed demeanors and they mostly engaged in harmonious relations with others. During formal interviews,

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<sup>54</sup> See, Appendix F for a copy of the revised teacher recruitment packet.

<sup>55</sup> Also this phenomenon occurred in Mrs. Jawanza's class, as students would withdraw and be immediately replaced within days.

<sup>56</sup> Ramona and Tremaine were cousins from the same household.

his classmates identified Tremaine most often as a leader.<sup>57</sup> In the African-American community, these students are considered to have “good home-trainin’.”

On the other hand, two of the three new replacement students clearly needed time to adjust to the MCPSC culture and daily rituals. Although James and Reginald were able to remain in Mrs. Goldstein’s class for the remainder of the year, the mere change in class chemistry and climate compelled her to 1) begin sending Lenardo, the other new student, to timeout in Mrs. Jawanza’s class almost daily, and 2) send three other students who were already being expelled occasionally to Mrs. Jawanza’s class even more frequently. Eventually, five students transferred from Mrs. Goldstein’s class to Mrs. Jawanza’s class, including Lenardo. At this point, Mrs. Jawanza’s class was then comprised of fourth, as well as 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade students with approximately forty students.<sup>58</sup>

Mrs. Goldstein spoke on the issue:

K.S. (P.C.)...: Akil and the others told me that you were not their teacher anymore. What happened?

Mrs. Goldstein...: I’m just not going to put up with it anymore, they are disrespectful, and rude to me and the others in our class. I’ve spoken to Dr. Mariama, parents, and grandparents and nothing seems to be working. So, Mrs. Jawanza ended up taking them out of my class for good.

K.S. (P.C.)...: But what about Marsha, she seemed to be one of your better behaved students?

Mrs. Goldstein...: Marsha’s mother cursed me out in front of the entire class the other day... that’s why she ended up out of my class. She would tell her mother all these things about me, and her mother began to believe that I was mistreating her or something. Then, the other day... that was about all I could handle, so Dr. Mariama moved her to Mrs. Jawanza’s class with the others.

Also, displaying an extraordinary amount of flexibility and understanding of the entire situation, Mrs. Jawanza shared very informatively her convictions of this school, even under very trying circumstances such as these:

... In our society, there’s going to be a lot of people left behind... so, we want to keep our children here and keep them up at a high level. Even the worst acting at our school is going to be something... Akil, if he stays with us through eighth grade, and he has so many home problems or whatever, but you see, the biggest problem I have with him is saying, “put the book away,” he likes to read. See, what I’m saying? But we’ve been able to spark that interest in him. So, I don’t mind having that discipline problem, because he likes to read... so if he hangs in there with us regardless of his bad background, he’s gonna be something... he’s gonna be somebody in society ahh (she searches for words)... he won’t go to prison. He’ll be a productive citizen...

[on saving the children]... Now, up until this point, our school has been designed for students of lower economic levels, those who might not be able to make it into the more prestigious private schools in the city but have a lot of potential or those who sometimes came to us after being put out of the public schools. For a long time, once they got put out of the public schools and they didn’t make it with us,

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<sup>57</sup> See, Phase III of this chapter: Student Relations.

<sup>58</sup> The five students transferred to Mrs. Jawanza’s class were Akil, Limbaugh, Lenardo, Marsha, and Kiswana.

they didn't have nowhere else to go... cause once they went back to public school it would be the same cycle that they came to us for in the first place: kicked out, suspended, expelled. They might be smart as a whip but they don't sit like "Tommy" sits, see what I'm saying. See like Sag, that's why I have him sitting way in the back... he'll be standing up and nobody else would know it. See, he's just a little bit different, but I can get a little more out of him... but because of patience, he's still here and has not been expelled and has not been suspended... [a vested interest]... you see, what they (outsiders of the MCPSC and the African-American community) don't understand is that we have a vested interest, I have spoken to you about that before... And, I keep going back to Akil, because when he was in the other teacher's class (referring to Mrs. Goldstein). That was more typical of the average public school as far as mentality towards our children (referring to African-American children)... referral, detention, suspension, and expulsion. Well, he was taken out of her class because he was a discipline problem for her... he was put out so much, I said, well he might as well just be in here... because if he came over here with her work, I couldn't keep up with what she had given him. So, once he was doing my work, I could gage it better... But the difference was, I feel, I have more of a vested interest in his future. He and his family is going to live in my community, he may end up marrying someone in my family, you know what I am saying? And, we can't afford to see any of our people as being a lost cause, we always have to look for ways to help.

Although not expelled from school by the support network of the MCPSC staff, the new fourth grade additions to Mrs. Jawanza's class seemed to gain a certain aura about themselves. This in many ways seemed to appear as a grade level promotion for these students. The structures of the school with the fourth grade class being the lowest grade level on campus, made demotion much less of an option than promotion in the case of the five students. Thus, in a sense, the students were "bumped up" to use Limbaugh's words, and my observations revealed a new attitude of arrogance by four of these five students toward their former classmates and Mrs. Goldstein. They seemed rather proud of their new situation, now that they were with the older students. Smirking at their former classmates in the dining area and walking pass Mrs. Goldstein with their heads and chests puffed out resonated a level of evil satisfaction in their minds. In reference to his former teacher, Mrs. Goldstein, Akil shared, "she tried to get me kicked out of this school but she couldn't."

Kiswana, the lone sorrowful student had established a strong friendship with another fourth grade girl and continued to associate more than the others with the fourth grade class during recess. Around the time of this situation, Mrs. Jawanza had informed me that although quite a challenge for Mrs. Goldstein, Kiswana had actually gotten better judging from previous years. She laughingly shared, "that girl squirmed all over the floor at the other school (the lower grades campus). She wouldn't even stay in a seat. Now, at least she'll sit!" In addition, now having to sit next to Ivonna, her older 6<sup>th</sup> grade sister, a well disciplined and sure future Exemplar also added to both her sorrows and reservations.

Moreover, in the context of "challenging students," Sag provided interesting insights into his subjective conceptualization of leadership in an interview session. His insights seemed to reveal a clear understanding of what it took to be a leader at MCPSC,

yet he remained a student in the forefront of Mrs. Jawanza's consciousness as she discussed the school's "challenging students."

When asked to identify people in his school community whom he considered leaders, Sag identified two girl classmates, Anna and Ivonna, (two sure future Exemplars) as well as his base classroom teacher, Mrs. Jawanza.

K.S. (P.C.)...: What do they do that makes them leaders?

Sag...: Anna always listens in class and does what Mrs. Jawanza tell her to do...

Ivonna, she the same way. Both of them just bein' obedient and they don't talk back to Mrs. Jawanza or nothin' like that.

K.S. (P.C.)...: What about your teacher, you named her?

Sag...: She just the lead-teacher... she earned that 'though.

K.S. (P.C.)...: Give me examples of when you saw one of them showing leadership here at school. Do you have any stories?

Sag...: Like yesterday, we was comin' back from lunch and Mrs. Jawanza said we was too loud in the hallway and she wasn't gonna let us go outside (recess). So, they started making even more noises and stuff in the hallway when Mrs. Jawanza couldn't see 'em. But, Anna and Ivonna just kept standin' there all quiet and stuff. So, she let them and some other students go outside when we got back in class.

K.S. (P.C.)...: Did you get to go outside with them?

Sag...: (he gives a sly grin) No, she let me go later... but it was 'bout time to come back in when she did.

Although Sag, Akil, Limbaugh and other students may have been viewed as discipline problems by staff members—rightly so in many respects. Mrs. Jawanza's subjective perceptions of the school's "discipline problems" were revealing.

We've been able to tap into different aspects (she was referring to student performances and class poetry lessons) it has brought out the leader in these children... Who others would have said were discipline problems but they've evolved into leaders. Your discipline problem kids are probably going to be your best leaders, because they're not the type that likes to follow anyway. So, if you can get them to be positive, then you know... they want to be the leader anyway. It's just a matter of channeling and making them feel good enough about themselves so that they could step down just a bit to let somebody else lead until it's their turn.

### **Mr. Sipho is Back, Hallelujah!**

As one could probably imagine, the mere absence of one staff member had caused large waves in the school's functioning as Mr. Sipho had departed. At a sensitive time such as MCPSC's first year of transition to a boarding school facility, every staff member counted. Skeptically, Mr. Sipho's abrupt departure from the school could have marked collapse in the school's infrastructure. Yet, the staff had managed to maintain the vibrancy of the school on a daily basis during such trying times. Nevertheless, Mr. Sipho did eventually return and his leaving did not mark the end of the world. Select fieldwork entries helped bring to light MCPSC's community reactions due to his eventual return.

### **March 14, 2001**

Leaving the school on this particular day, I encountered Dr. Mariama just arriving in the parking lot. She informed me that Mr. Siphos was back in the country and he was at her house relaxing from the long trip from South Africa. I do not think that anyone other than Mrs. Jawanza was aware of this fact. I am rather sure that Mrs. Nzinga did not know that she was soon to be relieved from her new second term duties as she had just today wondered out loud about Mr. Siphos's return, especially when the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders had less than pleasant days. Dr. Mariama shared, "The children don't know that he's back and I'm going to really surprise them when I bring him in tomorrow." Dr. Mariama seemed to enjoy surprising the students whenever possible. She said laughingly as we departed,

After all that it has cost me to get him back, they had better act right for the rest of the year... or, I'm gonna put him in another class and continue with my old program for them. And I know they're tired of Mrs. Nzinga and I.

### **March 15, 2001**

As I walked down the hallway, one of the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade students came up to me casually announcing, "Mr. Siphos's back." I asked how the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class had been acting. She informed me, "they were screamin' so loud, we heard them all the way over in our class... they were yellin' and all that kinda stuff." Being a student who entered MCPSC just before the winter break and Mr. Siphos's departure, Jalila went on to tell me, "I hardly know him, he left a few days after I came back to this school... I don't know why they actin' like that?"<sup>59</sup>

I headed toward Mr. Siphos's class peeking into the room. He gave me one of his signature waves and signaled to me, "come on in here really quick!" I entered and we embraced obviously happy to see each other once more. Some of the girls thought that our embrace was rather "gay" as they made sounds of "ugh" and "ill." Carla blurted out, "man, that's gay!" We both looked strangely at each other as Mr. Siphos told her, "there's nothing wrong with two men embracing, Carla get over it" in his British influenced South African accent. I exited the room not wanting to be too obtrusive on Mr. Siphos's first day back.

In addition, I was able to gain subjective insights from Dr. Mariama as she sat and had a quick lunch in the dining area.

Well, I brought him up to the school this morning and let him go upstairs. Then I went down to the class and was just teaching my butt off... just teaching, teaching, teaching. I had my helper, Mrs. Beamon to call down into the room after a short while and announce that my visitor had arrived...<sup>60</sup> So, I told her to send him down and stepped out of the classroom and met him in the stairway. And, then we both walked into the classroom. C-h-i-l-d, you should have seen 'em... they just started screaming and Ann just started crying yelling out "oh, Mr.

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<sup>59</sup> This was one of the students who had been at MCPSC the prior year, and her mother decided to give a public school a try before eventually re-enrolling Jalila back into MCPSC shortly before the school's winter break.

<sup>60</sup> Mrs. Beamon was a maturely aged African-American woman who sporadically, then more systematically began to assist Dr. Mariama in clerical responsibilities at the boarding campus. She rarely interacted with the students or staff in the basement as she worked clerically on the first floor.



Sipho, Mr. Sipho we are s-o g-l-a-d you're back!" They all have a new attitude today and they had better keep it.

Everyone was happy on this day, and Mr. Sipho seemed to be overwhelmed at how much of an impact he had made on the students during the school's first term. Later, he jokingly told me with that distinct accent, "I could not believe it when several of them started crying. Man, they must have really missed me."

Later, Dr. Mariama also informed me that she had Mr. Sipho explain to the students just how troubling it was getting him back to the U.S. I asked her about these troubles and she shared,

Listen, when you're a black person, with a black business and you are trying to hire black people from Africa, people make things very difficult. They pull out all of the red tape. Other whites bring people over, they do it all the time for their businesses and it's no big deal. But with us, there's all this red tape to go through and all of these hurdles to jump. It was purely racial... all those troubles they took me through to get him back to the school...

Mrs. Nzinga's response was joyful yet simple, "hallelujah, now, I can get back to my "Hot Box"... they're all his—especially those 'hot' girls." "Hot" was Mrs. Nzinga's descriptor for the overwhelmingly majority of 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade early pubescent girls who were in what Dr. Mariama described as a stage of "ambivalence." She usually told their parents:

We have to be patient with our older ones. They are at that stage where they are very ambivalent. One minute they wanna be children and the next, they think that they are grown and know it all—have this world all figured out.

Thus with Mr. Sipho's return, I was interested in sitting with him to discuss how he conceptualized leadership within the context of the MCPSC community. Mr. Sipho's insights helped clarify his subjective positionality. When asked to identify people in the school community whom he considered leaders, Mr. Sipho shared,

That would be very easy for me because they are easily identifiable, not by their general approach or anything, but simply by the quiet assertiveness that they show. And, I definitely must identify Clara Mariama first and foremost, because to me she is an icon. What she says, she achieves. For me to have left my home country and to have left a lucrative contract, in Nigeria where I was headmaster, had my own home, had a chauffeur, had everything going for me... and to come over here was a pleasure because of what I believed she had achieved and the fact that after three years she could say to me the exact same words she had given to me at that time. This gave me the faith and this woman has never let me down and don't think she ever will... There's something soulful about the woman, you develop a feel for her... There's something spiritual about her... you want to be part of what this woman is doing.

[on Mrs. Kamau, the lead-secretary at the other campus]... someone else is Mrs. Kamau, she has the same kind of soul, you know you have got the feeling that these people believe in you. And, when someone calls and says "congratulations your petition is through" it must have been an achievement and something that they share in and that is what it has been for me as an African. Because when my petition was through, I went to the American Embassy, I was grilled by this young lady who was an American. She said to me, "I've never seen anything like this,

I've never heard of a black person offering an African a job. There's so many people in the states, why are you going, what did you do there when you were there, how did you survive for five months?" And, I could just honestly tell this woman at the end of the day after she told me, "I had to give you the third degree treatment because this is just unusual." And all of this was due to Dr. Mariama and especially Mrs. Kamau in what they had achieved during the five months that I was here before having to leave... the way they sustained me and my family and things like that.

Mr. Sipho, also identified Mrs. Jawanza by stating, "... She bases very much of what she does on the Mariama method of working which gives opportunity to individual development." He went on, "there is so much dedication... she could work until ten o'clock at night and it wouldn't matter..."

Finally, he focused his comments on several students whom he viewed as leaders at MCPSC:

In terms of leadership, I've been astounded by the children I've had in 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade. Beverly, for example and a couple of other kids... Donyetta possibly, even Sharon. Because, of the simple reason that they do not necessarily just follow... They wanted to get to the point of, was I a leader... to find out do you know where you are going. We know where you come from, we've been to your country but we don't really know you and we are going to "suss" you out. Yes, "s-u-s-s" that's what we call it in South Africa and this is exactly what they did.

Now it wasn't easy for me, because this is not what I came for... I came to teach and present what I could. And, also learn... after thirty-five years in the profession, what I could. And, to have people questioning you all of the time, on everything you say, is not going to be easy... And, it's never going to be easy for any other person who comes here. And, I had to sit back and say to myself, "you're going to really have to put your heart and soul into this, and you need to let these kids know exactly who you are." And, children have this gift of knowing when your honest and sincere. And it has taken them up until about now, which is about almost nine months later—to know who Mr. Sipho is...

### *Teacher In-Service Staff Meeting Days: No Students*

The two teacher in-service days during the school's second and final term and a last in-service following the students final day of school also helped to shed light on staff's interactions. These times permitted the MCPSC staff an opportunity to flush out the various issues affecting the school on both a professional and collegial level in the absence of students. A particular field note experience and insights from others help to highlight much of what my interpretations of these meetings entailed and the structures of the staff's interactions.

Usually, Mrs. Jawanza filled the air with soft jazz recordings that she sometimes used during silent work in her class. This particular Friday was no different as Mrs. Nzinga, Mrs. Delta, and I sat in Mrs. Jawanza's class waiting on the other teachers to arrive. Mrs. Jawanza had exited to get the agenda from the first floor after grabbing her coupons to order pizza for lunch—complements of Dr. Mariama. As we sat, the two staff members present spoke of how happy they were to have Mr. Sipho back at the school. They also pondered the length of the day's meeting as Mrs. Delta announced that she

would need to leave by noon. “I didn’t plan on staying much longer than that either. Nine to twelve or so should be long enough,” chimed Mrs. Nzinga in agreement. It was already a few minutes after nine o’clock, Mrs. Goldstein had not arrived, and Mr. Sipho had not come from his living quarters on the first floor. Mr. Haley never attended meetings of this nature.

Eventually, Mrs. Jawanza suggested that I run upstairs for Mr. Sipho. Mr. Sipho was dressed and waiting in his room yet not aware of the time of the meeting’s start. As we greeted he slid out of his bedroom slippers and into his black loafers telling me, “Oh, I did not know that you all were down there. I’ve been sitting hear waiting to hear from someone.” By the time we arrived, Mrs. Goldstein had come in and joined the circle of desks organized by Mrs. Jawanza earlier. The lead-teacher delved into her newly retrieved agenda, which she outlined as follows:

We need to discuss, proficiency testing procedures first of all to decide on who is going to do what and be where—this is really to get things straight for the eighth graders who will be taking the test. Then, we have to do the same for the CAT-V Tests that everyone will take. We need to discuss the new sign-in procedure that Dr. Mariama wants implemented. And, now that Mr. Sipho is back, we must discuss how we will use the “Hot Box” effectively due to Mrs. Nzinga now being freed up.

Those were the agenda items and everyone seemed in agreement with their orders.

Upon Mrs. Jawanza’s completion of the list of agenda items, Mrs. Goldstein asked the general question, “do you all think that we will get through all of this by noon? I have to leave by then.” I started to feel that the MCPSC staff had worked hard in the last several months of the second term and this Friday of no students represented a long needed break—an extended weekend. Mrs. Nzinga and Ms. Delta revealed their need to depart as well after Mrs. Goldstein’s comments. Mrs. Jawanza replied to them all, “Well, this is a planning day, but we’ll do our best” in a rather perplexed tone.

Mrs. Jawanza took on the lead-teacher’s role with pride and undying enthusiasm, as nonstop seemed to be her pace throughout the year. During an interview, she shared with me some of her perceptions on the role of a leader at their school as well as who some of those leaders were.

When asked to identify people in her school community whom she considered leaders, Mrs. Jawanza identified Dr. Mariama, and the lead-teacher from the lower grades campus.

K.S. (P.C.)...: What do they do that makes them leaders?

Mrs. Jawanza...: Well, leadership is an interesting thing... it’s something that you can’t teach people—they are either leaders or their not. And, I was in the military, striving to be an officer and I came to the conclusion that this was the only job, I’m signing the dotted line saying “I’m willing to die for it... and something was not right with that picture you know!” (she laughs). Even policemen can say, “O.K. I’m leaving today.” But when you sign that line, you’re in there for four years saying, “I’m willing to die... shot me if you want...” (She digresses)... but anyway, my major at the time said “you are a born leader...” and with some people, you either are or you’re not... it just comes natural to try to help out or whatever... and you know those people aren’t always easy to find.

[Leadership and MCPSC's students]... when it comes to children, the children that are graduating, the ones who have been with us since pre-school... it kind of makes me proud to say that everyone of them who have been with us since pre-school are all leaders: Berniece, Donyetta, even Brianna in her quietness—she's a leader, she's not a follower... even Beverly. So, that's why I feel like that's what we are about. They are going to go out and hold their heads up high, even if they don't know everything but they know that they have what it takes to get whatever knowledge it is that they want... even Latasha in her ineptness in different areas, she has a pride that makes her not a follower. She has a certain aura, even though she's been with us two years that... she'll step out. Those who've been with us the longest are leaders... I can't think of one timid person who has been with us for more than two years. And, that's our legacy, that's what we are about—producing leaders here.

Thus, at this staff meeting, Mrs. Jawanza dug in her heels leading as she and the staff quickly made sure that all bases were covered on the upcoming testing days, as no one dissented to any of what Mrs. Jawanza had worked out before the meeting with Dr. Mariama—probably during a nightly phone conference. Mrs. Nzinga was assigned to the “challenging” students who might disrupt testing procedures, a task that she did not “mind.” I was asked if I did not mind filling in leaks in the plan during testing days and serve as back-up human power: standing in the halls, etc... I agreed. “We all have to make sure that we work together as a team so that the students are in the most comfortable situation possible... make sure that you get your materials from me first thing in the mornings and be sure to have enough pencils,” were Mrs. Jawanza's concluding remarks as she moved to the new staff sign in policy.

In one of their nightly telephone conversations, Mrs. Jawanza had received instructions that needed relaying to the staff members at the meeting. The four staff members sat and listened as Mrs. Jawanza went on with the agenda.

In reference to our signing in procedures, Dr. Mariama wants you all to know that she will be setting up a sign in area over in the corner of my classroom near the doorway (she points to the corner). That way I will have a better sense of who's here or who's not. We have not done very well with that this year and sometimes I don't know who's in the building. For instance, I'll send a student to Mrs. Delta, and you will have already departed for the day—I have a hard time remembering your schedule. So, this way I will know who is here because you will sign in when you come and sign out when you leave—that way I can also see you as well.

Also, Dr. Mariama told me to tell you all that she will be using those sheets to cut checks and pay everyone. So, please sign in and out to prevent future problems with being paid. Plus, I can't think of any place where teachers don't have to sign in... any questions or comments about the new sign in?

No one disagreed as Mrs. Jawanza announced the next agenda item, and getting out before noon was beginning to look like a good possibility.

The “Hot Box”/Redefining room was now in a position to become effective once more and both Dr. Mariama and Mrs. Jawanza had also worked out a plan for its effective use. Mrs. Jawanza announced,

The “Hot Box,” how are we going to use it effectively now that Mr. Sipho’s back? This is what Dr. Mariama and I have decided, let me know what you all think once I am done laying out the plan. First, if you’re having problems with a child, don’t send them to the “Hot Box.” Send them to me and I will decide who will go. This will help keep us on the same page, as I might have already sent ten of mine (her students) (everyone laughs)! We want to make sure that we use her (Mrs. Nzinga) effectively... because she will also be tutoring pullout students already throughout the day. So, we want to only send her our extremes, because she’s right next to the phone and can make calls to parents in those cases...

Once more, no one dissented in reference to the proposed plans and the meeting was over. The pizza man had arrived and the scent of Larosa’s pizza was beginning to cloud the room. We all exited to the dining area at nearly eleven o’clock to have pizza for lunch. As we departed, Mrs. Jawanza made another announcement:

Mrs. Nzinga, you will be back to your schedule of taking the fourth graders at 3:30 as you and Dr. Mariama discussed... and Mrs. Delta, make sure that you call Dr. Mariama or me if you have stuff come up with your schoolwork, the night before. Everyone would appreciate knowing the night before if you are not going to show up...

The lead-teacher, Mrs. Jawanza, usually conducted staff in-service days in this same manner. There would be certain concerns to be discussed based on telephone conversations with Dr. Mariama as meetings ran smoothly without dissention.

### **Student Relations**

At MCPSC, there were many opportunities for the students to engage in non-class work discussions and open conversation throughout the year. Their connection to the rest of the U.S. and the world through the propaganda of American mainstream media was quite evident. A few examples of these kinds of discussions helps to add deeper insights into the students’ subjective world and interests as well as their inter-subjective relationships and ritual performances.

#### *7/8<sup>th</sup> Graders*

Early in the second term, I had the opportunity to witness the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders in their newly scheduled “dancercise” class. Practicing dance routines reminiscent of contemporary hip-hop groups had become a favorite recess activity for most of the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders—at least the girls. The popular Curt Franklin’s upbeat Christian C.D. was acceptable and fitting at the school as well as for “Prepping for Power” performances.<sup>61</sup>

Mr. Sipho had begun to let his students go into an empty classroom as soon as they completed lunch to practice dance routines for their “Prepping for Power” performances before his unexpected departure. This privilege created a level of autonomy for the older 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders, as they were not confined to whole class dismissal in the dining area as the other classes were; they could exit to the vacant classroom for rehearsal.

Now, after winter break Dr. Mariama was capitalizing on the above-mentioned phenomenon by referring to the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade students’ recess time as scheduled

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<sup>61</sup> See Phase II: “Prepping for Power,” which deals more in-depth with the use of Curt Franklin’s contemporary Christian style of music as his music predominated in the students’ usage at the school.

“dancercise.” She had always seemed a bit uncomfortable with Mr. Sipho’s decision to let the girls practice in the empty room, as it was classroom ready, unused, and newly painted with fresh carpet. Nevertheless, after several short sermon/lectures on not destroying the room and requiring the girls to dance in their socks, she seemed to be more at ease. Eventually, Dr. Mariama became even more comfortable after returning from winter break and having the students clear out the maintenance/loading/unloading room on the basement floor. This room was much more spacious, uncarpeted and not as easily damageable as the empty classroom, a perfect dancercise area.

On this particular day, I sat in with the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders during recess. Winter was at its peek and all students were to remain inside during mid-west winter days of this nature. The new dancercise room that on one side opened like a two-car garage for loading and unloading, was large enough for a multiplicity of simultaneous activities. In the far right corner was an older model stationary exercise bike on which Sharon created a stir by paddling fast as though striving for fitness. As she sat on the aged bike and paddled, the handle bar simultaneously moved backward and forward in an alternating fashion and the wheel mechanism spun and blew like a fan. Finally, one of the handle bar rods slid out of the socket leaving her holding it in one hand while she continued to paddle using the other arm for balance. The other students seemed to be transfixed by her spectacle and found her rather amusing.

In the same area of the stationary exercise bike was a stationary snow gliding exercise machine. Several students (both girls and boys) waited for a turn and attempted to use the machine that required a high level of leg/arm coordination. Leroy and Adrian were the only students with the strength and body coordination to get the machine working. Others gave it their best shot only to be mocked by students just sitting around observing.

By the time all of the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders (21 on that day) had come in from the dining area with Mrs. Nzinga, I was curious to see who would take the lead in dancercise. Sharon, feeling quite energized on this day attempted to get the other girls to do music-less step aerobics with her as she stepped up and down on the carpet-covered wooden stage that was being stored in the room. She imitated an aerobics instructor with the following routine: “and one and two and up and down...” Half serious half enjoying the show that she was putting on, Sharon continuously stepped up and down from the floor to the stage exclaiming to the other girls sitting to her side, “y’all come on... lets do somethin’, we’re supposed to be in dancercise, remember!” Finally, after getting no takers, she sat down along with the others attempting to catch her breath as the girls laughed at her. She seemed to enjoy her one-woman exercise show starting with the broken stationary bike and ending with step aerobics.

Eventually, as the three boys stood and sat around the small table watching Ezekial and Cabrero play chess and the girl’s small talked, I realized that there was not going to be any dancercise today. Usually, by this time Donyetta, Berniece, and Adrian would have already embarked on rehearsing a new routine or picked up on where they had left off the day before—the other girls always joined in. Nevertheless, today Donyetta had forgotten to bring her radio and the tape that the girls used to create dance routines. Thus, for the next fifteen minutes or so, I witnessed the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders interact with one another in a rather unstructured and spontaneous way as Mrs. Nzinga sat and relaxed near the door.

During this time, several of the girls took turns grooming in an old, stained mirror on the maintenance room's wall which looked to be as aged as the building, although it had been refurbished. As they took turns putting on lipstick and helping one another make sure that their hair was to satisfaction, Diane told Ronnette, "girl your ends splittin'." In which she replied, "I know, I believe she kept that perm in too long this time" referring to whoever had permed her hair rendering it straight instead of curly and kinky as most African-Americans hair is in an un-permed state. From where I sat, I noticed that the mirror was quite blurry as Ronnette still attempted to make use of it. After observing the girls grooming themselves and one another for a while Latasha decided to remind them of one of the school's rules and Dr. Mariama's pet peeves—wearing lipstick and make-up at school.

I don't know why y'all standin' up there puttin' on all that lipstick when you know Mrs. Nzinga or Dr. Mariama gonna make y'all take it right off soon as you hit that classroom... ain't that right Mrs. Nzinga?

Mrs. Nzinga focusing in another direction nodded her head in agreement seeming not to want to deal with the issue at that moment. The four girls at the mirror looked at her in disgust. "They make me sick," exclaimed Diane as if Latasha had just told her something that she would have rather not heard. Mrs. Nzinga ignored her as historically those words could easily spark a verbal spat between Diane and a teacher. A spat that Mrs. Nzinga probably figured was not worth it, as she seemed to much rather use the few rare open minutes to relax. Diane never seemed to see anything wrong with her comments of that nature.

For the remaining minutes, I sat on the stage area where Sharon had been doing step aerobics dialoging and listening to the girls. Conversation this day was typical of most days of recess during the winter months in the maintenance room. Comments to the tune of, "I can't wait to get out of here and go to "The Hill" (as they had nicknamed Walnut Hills one of the local prestigious high school's in which students had to pass a test to enter)." Or, "Um not going to "The Hill" when I leave, Um goin' to "The Bake" babeey..."bake-head till I die," referring to Roger Bacon a catholic high school in the city. The whole notion of getting out of MCPSC seemed to pervade the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade students' conversation, even those with a year remaining. Many of these students seemed to feel ready to move on, as though they had gotten what they came to MCPSC for. Bigger and better things were in near sight and they could almost taste them.

Finally, before the class was called to leave, Mrs. Nzinga saw fit to deal with the lipstick issue making the announcement, "young ladies, don't come into class with that lipstick on" as she raised from her seat and exited the room. The four girls could only smack their teeth and make sounds of "ugh" as Mrs. Nzinga had categorically made her statement and did not wait around for their reaction. Latasha and the others all laughed as the class headed into the hallway following Mrs. Nzinga, already in the hallway. Latasha pointed at their lips exclaiming, "told ya... told ya she was gonna getcha didn't I!" Cabrero joined her making the issue worse telling them in a demanding tone, "get it off... all of it, or don't come in our class" as if he was commanding them. Cabrero's statements were met with contentious quips of, "mind yo' business" and "shut up" as the girls went into the dining area and got napkins to remove the lipstick.

In addition to policing lipstick wearers, the President/CEO was known for confiscating jean jackets from most the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade girls as they attempted to rearticulate the school's uniform by not wearing the dressier blazers prescribed by school policy.

At this school there is a uniform and I've decided on what the uniform will be...

not you (referring to several girls whose jean jackets were being confiscated)!

And, I keep seeing you girls, every time I look up there's a different jean jacket that looks just alike and you are not going to create a new uniform for the school.

And, do not try me because with one swipe of my pen, you will be out of here!

On this occasion in the school's second term, some of the guilty but not yet prosecuted girls attempted to hide their jackets as Dr. Mariama sermon/lectured others who had been chastised in reference to the school's policy. Several of the already prosecuted girls noticed the others and began yelling, "no, no... she took mine and she gonna take y'all too." Dr. Mariama ended up taking all of the jackets simultaneously chastising the girls for using words like "y'all" and "gonna" as they began to, in their own words, "rat each other out."

During recess in the maintenance room, the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade girls and their interactions typically overshadowed the small minority of boys who seemed quite content playing chess or dominoes. Competitive games of chess, dominoes, and wrestling one another as though they were from the W.W.F. (World Wrestling Federation) typically characterized the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade boys' interactions outside of class interactions.<sup>62</sup> Occasionally, I would join in a game of dominoes, to gain insights into their world. Typical conversations centered around the themes of: 1) "why we can't bring our Super Nintendo video game to play during recess", 2) "can't wait until it's warm enough to go play basketball... dancercise sucks", and 3) "man, can't wait for Mr. Sipho to get back."<sup>63</sup>

With Cabrero being the only boy Dissenter remaining in the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class, his school rule violating actions did not seem as prevalent as during the first term. Nevertheless, he typically led the charge in reference to getting back outside to play basketball and slamming the whole dancercise concept. Cabrero enjoyed burning the energy that he would usually have burned playing basketball, by horse playing with the girls in the maintenance room. This usually carried on until one of the girls, typically Adrian or Diane, hit him hard enough in the center of his back to stop his antics. Adrian was a very physically mature seventh grade girl who could, in my estimation, pass for a high school sophomore with ease. She was also probably stronger than most of the boys at the school as well as one of the best athletes during outside recess. On the other hand, Diane was simply "feisty" or according to Mrs. Nzinga, "hot." Thus, one of Adrian or Diane's blows to Cabrero's back making a thud sound typically signaled enough for him to stop tantalizing them and join in on a game of dominoes with the boys.

Ezekiel, Kenton, Leroy, and Alonzo's conversations during a chess game or dominoes usually centered around their favorite Super Nintendo video games which typically led to debates on professional sports teams. "I always play with the Reds babeey... I know they sorry but I have to represent for the Nasty Nati," would explain Ezekiel's choice of professional teams. In football, Cabrero and Kenton would continue their debates on the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and the Tennessee Titans. These boys

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<sup>62</sup> The W.W.F. is a popular professional wrestling television program, contemporarily.

<sup>63</sup> The 7/8th grade girls also expressed this sentiment, especially when they were at odds with Mrs. Nzinga or Dr. Mariama.



tended to loathe over the absence of Mr. Siphon often speaking of how much they wanted him back as their teacher.

Mr. Siphon, seemingly understanding the plight of the minority of boys in his class would bring down his video game from his first floor living quarters, so that the boys could play it in class during recess toward the end of the first term and before his abrupt departure. As the girls would dance in the unoccupied classroom, the boys could turn their base classroom lights off and play the video game. Now, with Mr. Siphon's departure, the boys had not been able to persuade Mrs. Nzinga or Dr. Mariama to let them bring a video game from home to take the place of Mr. Siphon's.

Man, I don't understand this school. Them girls get to bring radios and dance all they want but let us try and do something... the answer is always no. Mr. Siphon always let us play the game during recess, now they won't even let us go in the room by ourself... man, that's a shame...

These were comments from Alonzo who thought that the whole ordeal was unfair and illogical. Since after all, Mr. Siphon did not object to the boys playing a videogame—he even let them play his own.

### *Hip Hop Child Megastar "Bow Wow" Visits MCPSC*

Slated as the school's worst day of the year by both Mrs. Goldstein and Nzinga, the surprise visit of Bow Wow simply rendered most of the students at the school absolutely senseless and emotionally uncontrollable. Although this rather spontaneous event occurred during a day of unscheduled fieldwork, it is imperative that the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade girls as well as the other students' subjective narratives and interactions during the week that followed be (re)presented. "They all lost their minds Friday," was Mrs. Nzinga's explanation of the entire event as Dr. Mariama surprised everyone by calling a whole school assembly and escorting the *So So Def* recording label Rap Star, Bow Wow, into the chapel. Mrs. Goldstein said, "they just went nuts... they literally went nuts after that young man came to our school!"

During the following week, I was inundated with the latest emotional ravings of particularly the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade girls in reference to Dr. Mariama's surprise guest. Mrs. Goldstein assured me that her fourth grade students "just lost it," and comments from the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade boys gave insights into their class' reactions. Nevertheless, the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade girls maintained their emotional high longest of all. Actually, Bow Wow, at the time an eighth grader, was very close to their age, if not the same, and the fourth as well as 5/6<sup>th</sup> and fourth grade girls simply had to wait their turn. Below are compiled reactions and comments from students in reference to their surprise guest.

7/8<sup>th</sup> grade boys: not too emotional, seemed not all that impressed with Bow Wow and wondered what the girls in their class problem was. [Comments] "He alright." "Man those girls silly, actin' all crazy cause Bow Wow came here." "He aint nothin' but a boy just like us."

7/8<sup>th</sup> grade girls: still could not believe that Bow Wow was actually at their school and that they were able to touch him. Mrs. Nzinga informed me that most of the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade girls were crying at the assembly when Bow Wow spoke to the school and on a Bow Wow emotional high for at least the next week. [Comments] "I want Bow Wow to be my man." "Bow Wow likes them Ghetto Girls, oh yeah."<sup>64</sup> "These boys at our school ain't

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<sup>64</sup> He has a hit song entitled, "Ghetto Girls."

nothin' but playa haters, they just tryin' to hate on Bow Wow cause we like him." "He shorter than he look on T.V., but he still look good." "I was 'bout to pass out (faint)." 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade boys: rather envious but maintaining their "cool." Some mad nevertheless found laughter in the whole matter loosening their tensions for Bow Wow and his high jacking the MCPSC girls for a short moment. [Comments] "Man he was cool and everythan'." "I like them boots he was kickin,' them junks was fresh." "Bow Wow stole our women... but it's all good cause he ain't here everyday." "Them girls was hatin' on us... they treated us like we were nothin'... they didn't even see us." "I hate Bow Wow, I'll beat his butt." "I can understand those girls cryin' but David...he couldn't even sit in his seat right when he saw Bow Wow. He was so nervous and cryin' just like the girls... he fell out his seat when Bow Wow came in the room." "David said Bow Wow is my boyfriend," in which David categorically denied yelling, "no I didn't" (as they told me about David, I could not help but laugh at their imitations of him trembling uncontrollably and falling from his seat at the Bow Wow assembly.)

5/6<sup>th</sup> grade girls: mostly the same sentiments of the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders with a bit lower intensity. [Comments] "My daddy gonna take us (two girls) to the Bow Wow concert in Dayton (about an hours drive)" "I couldn't help but cry, I couldn't believe it when Dr. Mariama brought Bow Wow in the chapel—I thought I was gonna faint." "Y'all was cryin' not me for no Bow Wow... get ya' facts straight" "Bow Wow fine (nice body)." "Them 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade girls was 'bout to knock everybody down tryin' to touch him." "He gave that same little ole speech I heard him give on T.V. 'bout make straight A's, keep faith in God, and do yo' work in school. I bet he don't have straight A's."

Fourth grade boys: typically in awe and adoration. Not as envious as the older classes of boys [Comments] "He was cool." "You saw what he had on, that junk was tight (his outfit was nice)!"

Fourth grade girls: typically in awe like the other girls. [Comments] "Bow Wow was fine." "He too big to be my boyfriend, but I like him anyway." "I see why all them girls be chasin' him on them videos, it must be because he look so good."

These types of surprises in many ways deified Dr. Mariama. She even had autographed posters for students with no "infractions" which meant no bus demerits or office visits for the year. Diane, one of the remaining Dissenters in the school's second term was flabbergasted when she did not receive a poster. After Dr. Mariama had presented all posters for their class, Diane innocently remarked, "I didn't get one." Dr. Mariama responded, "that is because you have infractions in your file" exiting the room. Diane, giving up on the innocence retorted once the door had closed behind the exiting Dr. Mariama, "Well, y'all didn't tell me I had 'em... I hate this school, ugh!"

In most of the students' minds, she seemed to be able to get not just "ordinary" people but famous people to come to their school and visit. State legislatures, actor Danny Glover, Judge Mathis (the famous African-American Television judge), and many more people in high places had graced their presence.<sup>65</sup> They had met a person who had donated a personally authored class set of books with his face on the cover, Walter Williams. In the school's history these students had been visited by people of "importance" after all, she even had the power to bring Bow Wow!

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<sup>65</sup> Danny Glover and Judge Mathis came the year before this study. Nevertheless, the students continued to speak of their visits.

### *MCPSC's Alumnus in da House*

On another occasion, I had the opportunity to witness MCPSC's 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders as they interacted with a former student who was now in the middle of her senior year of high school. "So what do y'all think about Jesse Jackson?" asked Janine probing the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders' minds on Jesse Jackson's illegitimate child fiasco, which recently broke through the national media. Comments of, "that's just my baby daddy" came jokingly from several of the students as they imitated a popular recent Hip Hop song entitled *That's Just My Baby Daddy*.

This situation had Janine all excited at the gossipy nature of the topic while at the same time disappointed at such a poor representation of African-American leadership and lack of commitment to the integrity of his family. Before moving to another subject Janine remarked, "now we know why Rev. Jackson was so forgivin' of Clinton when he got in trouble with Monica Lewinsky, huh."

Janine was a seventh grader during my student teaching/internship days at MCPSC several years ago, and popped by the new campus to pay a visit. Seizing on the teachable moment, Dr. Mariama arranged for her to come and speak with the various classes in reference to her experiences after leaving MCPSC. I witnessed the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade students interact with a MCPSC alumnus around several issues, but the core of her discussion focused on the "7 Hill Schools" of the city.<sup>66</sup>

You all want to do as good as you can here at Marva Collins so that you can get accepted into one of the city 7 Hill Schools. And, believe me none of you want to get caught up in those public schools... Let me give y'all an example of where I am comin' from, I get to do all kinds of things at my school that you will never get to do in a public school. I just came from Europe for three weeks and when I leave here today, I'm going by a funeral home to arrange for a casket to be delivered to my school for a drunk driving presentation... Think you're gonna get those opportunities in the public schools?

Janine seemed to represent a level of hope for these students as many of them were in the second grade when she attended MCPSC's lower grades campus—when there was but one campus.

Nevertheless, all the students knew of the 7 Hill Schools of which Janine spoke, and some had planned to attend several of them. Other students were planning to attend Walnut Hills, which is one of the city's elite and prestigious public high schools or other public schools and wanted to defend their choices—more than likely their parents' choices. Waiting for a chance to "chime" in Donyetta rebutted as Janine leaned on the table in the front of the class, "Janine, no disrespect, but um, goin' to "The Hill" (referring to Walnut Hills). It's just as good as those other schools, you have to take a test to get in, and it's got more black people... plus it's free so my momma don't have to pay for me to go to school after I leave here." Donyetta and several other students even in the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade class had already passed the admissions test for Walnut Hills several weeks earlier. Janine conceded that Donyetta's selection of schools was acceptable telling her, "you better not be partyin' all the time cause you at "The Hill"... I go to some parties over there cause it's more blacks... but don't be stupid, hit yo' books cause college is the next step." Berniece candidly followed Donyetta's comments letting Janine

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<sup>66</sup> The city 7 Hill Schools were St. Xavier, St. Ursula, Cincinnati Hills, Cincinnati Country Day, Seven Hills, St. Ursuline, and Summit High School.

know that her parents were sending her to a really good public school in one of the city's more prosperous districts. "I know I'm gonna be at Lakota next year, my parents have already made that plain and clear."

The students seemed to enjoy the dialogue with Janine, Janine as well. She shared with them how she was in the process of selecting a university to attend. She spoke of strong leanings toward a HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) as she candidly shared with the students that although her high school is one of the top in the city, she was one of few African-Americans at the school. "When I go off to college, I just want to be surrounded more by my own," was her rationale as the students probed her on why a black college. Kenton probed even deeper asking, "well if you say that the high schools with the most white people are the best high schools then why not the colleges with the most white people?" Janine's reply was, "I don't know of any good black high schools around here, of course except Walnut Hills if you want to call that a black school... but there's some really good black universities." He seemed still a bit confused on the break down in logic.

Finally, Janine admonished the class to do their best while at MCPSC, "because it's not going to be the same when you leave—trust me." From a rather Afrocentric and culturally conscious family, her father and I had participated in the 1995 Million Man March as I, although from Florida, joined the Cincinnati contingency of men on the trip to the nation's capital during my student teaching/internship. I clearly remember how her parents groomed in traditional African clothing styles. During my student teaching/internship, Janine's mother had encouraged me to read Afrocentric books and then juxtapose them to Mrs. Collins' text, *Marva Collins Way*. She even directed me to a black bookstore near the school. In addition, before exiting Janine shared with the class that her family had traveled to Washington, D.C. for this year's Million Family March 2000 and that black people must always "stick" together. "No one is gonna care as much about y'all as Mrs. Jawanza and these teachers around here... So, respect them and do your best, cause it will never be the same once you leave." These were her final words as she left with some of the girls following behind asking Mrs. Delta to let them speak with Janine in private. Surely, MCPSC was a unique and meaningful place in the heart and mind of this alumnus—an experience she now seemed to appreciate and cherish. Furthermore, MCPSC students got a glimpse at what the future could hold, if they chose not to take their experience at MCPSC for granted.

Later in the year, Janine returned with another MCPSC's alumnus who had been home schooled after her departure and was now attending a local university. Dr. Mariama gave both girls the task of connecting with their other classmates, so that she could meet with all of them in the future.

### *5/6<sup>th</sup> Graders*

By late January in the school's second and final term, the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade class had begun to once more, partake in outside recess activities. The students typically rejoiced at getting to go outside after several weeks of recess inside the school due to the cold weather. Nevertheless, although chilly, I was able to observe the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade students on their first day of release back to the outdoors. "Ooh, um gonna make me a new dance for Preppin' for Power," said Wolette excitedly dancing around and happy to be outside. One of the other 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade girls shot back, "what you gonna do, one of them African

mumbo jumbo dances,” as others laughed partly at the remark and partly at Wolette’s new dance. With this comment, Wolette transitioned to an even more polyrhythmic dance reminiscent of those in various African traditions. “Um gonna do this one, you wanna’ learn it,” Wolette shot back at her seemingly not embarrassed by the others looking and laughing at her.

Having been born and lived several years in Nigeria, West Africa, Wolette seemed unwilling to let Jada’s comment get under her skin. Wolette was a 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade student who I observed to be unashamed of her African ancestry, something seemingly not prevalent in Eurocentric dominated societies. I even once heard her tell a group of others at lunch, “you see... um real African cause I was born over there plus I lived over there... y’all African-Americans...” It was almost as though the other students were “wanna bes” and not *real* Africans, as Wolette had put it on other occasions.

Nevertheless, Wolette’s pride in her Africanity was too thick to be embarrassed by Jada’s remarks of “doin’ some African mumbo jumbo dance” for “Prepping for Power.” I was saddened by Wolette’s notions of her being the *real* African in her circle of African-American classmates.<sup>67</sup> Even other students had bought into this notion as I had on occasions heard from Nino and others, “Wolette’s a real African, she was born over there... um African-American I was born over here” being sure to point out the difference between a *real* African and an African-American—the inauthentic African I assumed. Yet, my feelings were double-edged as I was also proud of the way Wolette refused to let naïve African-American put downs of African culture, such as Jada’s, dismantle her African pride—even in her dance.

The “real” African/African-American dilemma also surfaced during an interview with the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, Mr. Siphon, as he shared with me some of his reflections on teaching African-American children. In reference to setting boundaries in his class, Mr. Siphon attempted to share with me, his students’ thoughts about him.

These kids have a comfort zone in which they have been operating all this time. And they thought, “so this guy comes from Africa and he wants to challenge us on everything and remember he’s ‘African,’ we’re ‘African-Americans’ and we need to know, since he professes to come from where our roots are. So, he’s got to be on a slightly different level than we are. He has something to offer that we need.” So they question and challenge me on everything I say and do telling me, “well since you’re from Africa, you should know.”

The 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade girls non-classroom activities oftentimes centered around a game of jump rope, standing around talking, or rehearsing their parts for “Prepping for Power” presentations. The melodic songs that they would sing as they sometimes jumped double-dutch and other times with a single rope were quite creative and rhythmic. The girls’ ropes resembled a long telephone or extension cord, taken from the construction workers leftover wiring from the summer. Occasionally, they would convince me to try double-dutch as with others like Mr. Siphon or Mrs. Kemba, Dr. Mariama’s older sister. I never could do it as good as they, as the girls would gather around laughing. I loved to hear them sing those songs so reminiscent of my childhood as African-American girls would engage in the same ritual performance in my neighborhood. On some days I would simply request, “that Bam Bam song” in which they would sing only if I gave double-dutch a try, which usually meant laughs for them. After living up to my end of

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<sup>67</sup> Dalila and Limbaugh were two other students at MCPSC who had at least one continental African parent.

the deal, Jada, Myra, or another of the girls would jump in and to my pleasure get the song started:

Bam Bam cho cho train wine me up and I'll do my thang no peanut butter no reeces cup mess wit' me I'll kick yo' butt to the front to the back to the front to the back to the side to side to the cat, meow meow... Say what, meow meow to the dog ahroof roof to the dog ahroof roof. Do the donkey do the donkey kong (then the song is repeated as the girls jump out and let someone else participate).

Tammy, a 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade student usually caught my attention as she typically divided her non-classroom time between jumping rope with the others and reading alone. *Harry Potter* books were her literature of choice as I also noticed her reading at lunch. After several conversations around Tammy's interest, I came to understand that Harry Potter was out of my league. I simply could not figure out her excitement with what seemed so far out to me—and the books were by no means short and full of pictures. I eventually asked Tammy to write me a letter explaining why she chose to read such literature. Below is her letter.

Harry Potter is to me a very very interesting character in a book. Harry Potter is a wizard who is raised by Muggles (non wizard or humans). He is raised by his aunt Petunia and uncle Vernon because of a incident that happened when he was a baby. A dark wizard name Voldenmart killed his parents. And in all 4 books that I have read Voldenmart tries to come and kill Harry, but when Voldenmart tried to kill Harry he failed and Voldenmart was after that lost his powers and nothing much of him was known.

I read Harry Potter because of the books most series (*misspelling*) books are just boring. This book tells you what classes they take (my favorite class is the dark arts). I also like the book because of the adventures in each book.

I've learned about the people there and I've learned some spells like if you want to repair something yell (also take out your wand.) If you want to kill somebody go to Hegwarts and take dark arts classes. (*italics were my additions for clarity but not to change Tammy's representation*)

Tammy was not a loner, as she interacted with other students frequently. She was also not perceived as a loner by her classmates based on both my observations and conversations. This particular student just seemed to be able to separate from the crowds of jump rope and girl talk for other interests when she saw fit; others seemed to accept her for that.

Thus, as with the older 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade girls, the issue of grooming and cosmetics also manifested in the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade student interactions. Amos Wilson has compiled research that documents the disproportionately high rate of cosmetic product purchasing in the U.S. by African-American women when compared to other racial/ethnic groups in the country (Wilson, 1998. Grooming with purchased cosmetics was obviously a social phenomenon in which the African-American girls at MCPSC were influenced and not disconnected when juxtaposed to research on this issue and African-American women, who make up an integral part of that community.

Furthermore, recess allowed for cosmetic opportunities at MCPSC and these occurrences provided insight into the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade girls' subjective perceptions and inter-subjective interactions around the issue.

Oh, um goin' and tell on y'all, um gonna tell! Both of y'all know better than to be out here sinnin', puttin' on those fake nails. Y'all know Mrs. Jawanza gonna be mad when she sees them... she's gonna make y'all take 'em right off.

These were Kiesha's ravings as she noticed two of her classmates putting on store purchased Lee Press-On Nails while sitting on the fire escape during recess. These girls were not only violating Mrs. Jawanza's policy of "no artificial nails" at school, they were also "sinnin'." Wearing "fake" (artificial) nails had religious/moral implications in the mind of Kiesha and Mrs. Jawanza further confirmed her convictions with the classroom rule of "no fake nails." This practice was sinful and ungodly.

Nevertheless, the two girls like so many other African-American women who enjoy wearing artificial cosmetics, as Wilson's research revealed, obviously thought otherwise. They light-heartedly brushed Kiesha's comments off continuing to assist each other in the gluing and filing process. Yet, as Kiesha had warned, Mrs. Jawanza noticed one of the girls' new set of nails shortly after the class's return from recess. "What are you doing with those nails on, you didn't have them on earlier... take them off!," was her response to the situation. Kiesha and several others immediately "ratted out" the other guilty party who also came under Mrs. Jawanza's wrath for, "puttin' on that mess."

The two girls did not resist Mrs. Jawanza's demands to peel off the Press-On nails. They seemed to be more embarrassed as they stood over the trash can discarding the "sinful" nails. They obviously knew the rule and the consequences as they and other girls had been reprimanded for this infraction on other occasions. They must have appreciated the act of violating the sacred through putting on the nails, which represented something sinful in the minds of at least one MCPSC student and was enforced by their teacher. Bordering the sacred and the non-sacred secular seemed to represent a rebel's spirit in these two girls unified ritual and others on other occasions, as they would put on the nails knowing that a reprimand was sure to follow.

Clearly, influenced by the National Basketball Association (NBA) and African-American blacktop recreational basketball culture, many of the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade boys constantly modeled their perceived notions of NBA players such as Allen Iverson, and Koby Bryant – the two most talked about. Common retorts of "watch out now 'fore I crossover and break yo' ankles" or "shake em... shake em" could always be heard as they guarded each other in games of twenty-one.<sup>68</sup> Loud shouts of "ooh" would reverberate if someone was "shook," and the "oohs" would be even louder if one of the few girls who chose to play, scored against a boy defender.

Typically, cool days made it necessary for the students to wear coats as they played and socialized outside. I noticed that for the boys, this dynamic created a space for winter fashion statements during recess. Coats and hoods were typically Tommy Hilfiger, Nike, Polo, or Starter. Sometimes the boys debated over who had the "flyest" overcoat, which could be worn over the school uniform for warmth. For, school uniforms by default of being uniformed, were not up for debate.

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<sup>68</sup> Crossover referred to a cross dribble which is designed for a quick change in direction to confuse your defender. Also, "shaken" a defender means do a quick fancy move to free yourself for an easier shot.

On the strip of grass north of Mrs. Jawanza's class is where a football game could be found. Exclusively played by the boys, the football area served as an alternative space for many of the boys who could not jump as high or dribble as well as other boys playing basketball. Some of the boys opted for football after some days of going the entire recess without even getting to touch the basketball. Getting a rebound in a game of twenty-one became quite a challenge when a crowd all waited and fought for a chance at a rebound. Nino and Bishop were the oldest and tallest of the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade boys, as both had been "stuck" at least once having to repeat a grade.<sup>69</sup> These two boys seemed to dominate the basketball area in the absence of Adrian the seventh grade girl who was as tall and strong.

David, a tall, lanky 5/6<sup>th</sup> grader tended not to follow any of the boys who typically played either football or basketball. Usually, he had some type of electronic gadget and enjoyed partaking in a conversation. I once asked David why he did not play much with the others. He shared, "I do sometimes, but I like hangin' with you... you're my buddy... plus I like to play with my computer and stuff when we come outside." I asked David to tell me about the computer in which he had stuffed in his jacket as though someone would mug him for it.

It's a Organ Scientific thing... you can put phone numbers, you can ask me what the time is, you can make a memo, you can put the alarm, you can make a memo, schedule, use a password... um...

[people's phone numbers]... I have Tommy's, my friend Tommy, Tim's, Tiffany, Theodores, Sue (My grandma), Ronny, Rochelle, Rick...

K.S. (P.C.): What do you use it for at school

David.: I just use it for an alarm in case... like when I get out of school... see, I push edit, then see the alarm... I'll give you a demonstration....

David gave me a mini demonstration of his Organ Scientific thing before we parted. Eventually, I noticed that Mrs. Jawanza had confiscated the organizer as David's alarm went off during a lesson as it sat on her table. She grabbed the gadget chastising David while simultaneously disengaging the alarm telling the class, "I don't know why you all bring this stuff to school in the first place, they're just distractions."

### *Act of Masculine Solidarity*

Towards the end of the school year, I became privy to 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade male rituals of solidarity outside the confines of their teacher or any other staff members at the school. Mrs. Jawanza, searching for incentives for those students who conformed and did not violate the CAT V standardized testing protocol asked if I would walk some of her boys to the park after testing and lunch two days during that week. I accepted the task knowing that she would then be free to work with the girls on "Prepping for Power" performances of the school's upcoming Shakespearean Festival—something she desperately needed time and space to do. These trips were revealing as these boys interactions help highlight what it was like in their world, even in environments outside of the confines of the school campus. An incident with an adult European-American woman helps to explain some of their ritualistic acts of masculine solidarity experienced at the park.

On this particular day, some of the sixteen boys had all agreed to play games of basketball as they sorted themselves into teams during the twenty-five or so minutes walk

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<sup>69</sup> Nino had been retained twice and Bishop once at other schools before coming to MCPSC.



to the park. Others opted out announcing, “Um tired of basketball, um goin’ on the swing and seesaw.” As, we walked the boys were quite happy to be away from the school. They sung in unison the popular rapper, Master P’s *No Limit Soldier Anthem*:

I don’t know what you been told (others repeated it as if in military cadence)...

No Limit Soldiers are in control (others repeat)... where all my homeys at (repeat)... to the north to the east to the south to the west (repeat)... sound off, one two... Break it on down... three, four, five, six, seven, eight...

Between songs and small talk the boys reflected on the test that they had just taken earlier in the morning. Bishop remarked, “man, by the fourth section I was sick and tired of testin’... I just wanted out, I was readin’ three questions tryin’ to get ‘em right and just bubblin’ in the next three. I couldn’t take it no more.” Other boys smirked as if they had also done something similar in nature at some point during the test. Nevertheless, Kemo appeared clearly disturbed by Bishop’s test taking tactics. He retorted, “man, you ain’t gonna get put in Spanish next year!” Bishop replied, “I still think I passed, I didn’t do that but at the end” attempting to clean up his previous statement.

I persuaded Nino to be my helper by showing leadership and making sure that the group stopped at all stop signs. He took on the responsibility with an aura of confidence, as he was the oldest in the bunch and typically got the other boys’ respect – one way or another although usually his stern commands were enough. Bishop and Sag helped him out by grabbing Limbaugh by the arm and pulling him along as Limbaugh was the youngest, plumpest, and had the shortest legs in the group. Limbaugh’s pace was slower than the other boys were and he constantly had to run a few strides to get in the pack as we all crossed the street. His favorite comments were, “I have money, can we stop to the UDF (United Dairy Farm Store) so I can get a scoop of choco-chip ice cream?” Before I could tell him no, one of the boys would already have hollered out, “you already can’t keep up, you don’t need no ice cream.” On several occasion I had to tell Nino to stop calling Limbaugh names as Nino would command, “come on Pillsbury Doughboy” urging Limbaugh to catch up with the pack as he lagged behind.

Upon arriving at the park, I took a seat in a shaded area letting the boys free to enjoy themselves after a long morning of testing. Two tennis courts in which a group of African-American children was having lessons with a European-American woman separated the basketball court and the shaded area in which I relaxed. The woman was clad in the trappings of a tennis coach as she adorned the clean, white visor, Oakley sports shades, a whistle, and the famous coach’s short pants.

As the five 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade boys engaged in a game of basketball, I noticed the tennis coach head in their direction. Then I heard her nicely say, “boys, I don’t want to hear that language out here” in which Sag replied, “what language” ready to switch into denial of any wrongdoing mode. She retorted not wanting to falsely accuse anyone, “Well, I heard the “F” word come from over there and I don’t want my children hearing that type of language.”

My first thoughts were Dr. Mariama’s recent mini sermon/lecture to the students who passed us as we headed off campus. She sermon/lectured,

I want you all to remember that when you leave off this campus, you represent not only yourselves but also Marva Collins (referring to the school). And, I want you all to know that social relations are very important – people are always watching

us. See, look at how nice you all look, everybody has on their ties (which Mrs. Jawanza had made sure by borrowing ties for some from non-goers) and tuck in your shirts. I want nothing but good from you all – understand?

The boys all nodded in agreement anxious to move out and continue our journey. Nevertheless, the basketball crew was obviously creating rather negative impressions in the mind of the adult tennis coach, as the boys had now loosened their shirt tails and top buttons, as well as taken off their ties for basketball. Did they really understand or plan to exhibit what Dr. Mariama had described as the importance of social relations? Obviously not as approximately ten minutes later, the tennis coach headed back in their vicinity once more. This time she slammed her empty soft drink bottle into the trashcan sitting near the basketball court. One of the boys announced loud enough that I could hear, “man, y’all don’ made her mad.” She confirmed his statements exclaiming, “yes, because I keep hearing the “F” word in every other word coming from over here.”

Noticing the oncoming situation, I began to head towards the basketball court as I could see Sag and Nino beginning to blow her comments off as they laughed at her trashcan gesture of anger and displeasure. As I approached, countless thoughts went through my mind. I did not know what I was going to say, but it needed to be good, as I already assumed that these boys were going to deny the tennis coach’s allegations. Thus, instead of yelling at them, which I figured would only make things worse and give them the impression that I had automatically taken her word without hearing their defense, I just stood. I knew that they usually used this type of language when they felt that no adult or staff member was in hearing distance during recess. During participant/observations, I would sometimes overhear their conversations as they played football or basketball while I simultaneously focused in another direction. So, it was clear to me that these boys would use inappropriate language as I had heard it myself.

Nevertheless, I knew that they knew that I was too far away to hear them cursing as I sat in the shaded area. So, if I approached these boys too aggressively, I would become the accused for judging them guilty without hearing their case and at that point nothing would be learned by them. Even though I was sure of the boys’ guilt, – at least some of them – I had to approach the situation as if I had not heard anything, as I had not. Anything else I figured they would read as presumed guilt.

So, as the tennis coach noticed me headed in the direction, she returned to her students. I chose not to say anything but to just sit in the bleachers next to the court after standing for a moment as they continued their game of basketball. I was still in the process of gathering my thoughts as they played basketball in a peculiar way—nobody talked. They seemed to be trying to get a read on me and what I was up to, as occasionally they would look over at me then at each other and laugh at the awkward situation that my presence had created. After about five minutes of silent basketball with spurts of laughter at the situation, I summoned the crew over. On a reflexive note, my African-American socialization into manhood seemed to move into automatic pilot.

As they approached, Sag blurted out, “man, that white lady be lyin’” accusing the tennis coach of fabricating their “F” word episode. Before he could go on with the denial, I retorted, “just be quiet and come silently, you don’t even know why I am calling you all over here.” Then, my thoughts started to flow,

Sag, you must be guilty of something, because all I did was come over here, sat down, and asked you all to come here... and you come talkin’ about what this

lady did. I want you all to understand that whether or not you all were doing it or not is not the issue. We're beyond that, because I know at least some of you did it, because I've heard you use those very words at school. So, let's not have the debate about that white lady loosin' her mind and pickin' on you all for no reason, cause somebody was sayin' the "F" word over here. So, lets all be clear on that – understood...

Nino, Kemo, and Bishop began to snicker knowing that I had analyzed the situation and their actions fairly well. In acceptance of their guilt, without making them confess, I could now turn this moment into an educational lesson. Feeling as though I had eluded the denial tactic of Sag as the others smirked shaking their heads in agreement to my categorical statements of their guilt, thoughts of Dr. Mariama's mini sermon/lecture on social relations entered my mind. I went on:

Now, this lady is probably a coach. Here she is with all African-American children over on the tennis court and I have yet to hear a single profane word. As a matter of fact, one of the tennis balls flew over the gate almost hitting me and one of the boys made the little girl apologize to me – twice as I sat. Now, that's how they are treating me and what do you think I am thinkin' about their tennis team? And, here you all are over here being chastised by their coach for using profanity. This whole situation is embarrassing and you all have done nothing to represent a good image of your school. Remember, social relations? Dr. Mariama? The speech?

Sensing their acknowledgement of mediocrity in reference to what Dr. Mariama referred to as social relations, I began to speak with them more from the perspective of an African-American man talking with African-American boys in this context.

O.K. look at what we have here. Here I am, a black man, an African-American man out here with a group of African-American boys. And, then you have this European-American/white woman out here with another group of black kids... and her group of kids have not used one profane word. But, the group that's with the black man is using all of the profane language and thinkin' it's cool. So, what is it, does those black kids respect that white lady more than you all respect me and I'm a black man?

At this point, they were clearly remorseful as we all sat in absolute silence for about thirty seconds, as my words soaked in. They all looked in every direction except mine as I finally broke the silence walking away with the parting words, "I'm just disappointed in you all. I suggest y'all go over and apologize before we leave here."

After I had returned to the shaded area taking a seat on the bench hoping they would adhere to my suggestion, I noticed the boys finally head back towards the basketball court. After about ten minutes of shooting around, I called for everyone, as it was time to depart. They honored my request as I saw them all walk over and speak with the tennis coach as they passed her practice still in session. Ironically, after going to apologize, Sag informed me that he finally realized that he knew her from one of his previous schools. Prompting me to ask them, "now what if she goes home and call Dr. Mariama at the school to tell her about this incident? Now, do you all understand what she means about social relations and people always watching you?" Seeming to understand her concept a bit clearer through living this experience, they gave a litany of possible responses as we headed down the street – "she'll call our parents," "won't let us

go with you anymore,” “cut out recess,” “she might swang on one of us – Dr. Mariama be violent sometimes – and she’ll tell my daddy she did it,” etc.

This phenomenon of using socially unacceptable language when out of the vicinity of MCPSC staff seemed to represent a certain ritualistic bonding mechanism amongst these boys. Moreover, I have witnessed most of the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade boys engage in this ritual during football games although I gave the impression that I was not giving their interactions and activity any attention. Words like, “fuck that,” “fuck you,” “damn,” “man damn,” etc... seemed to represent a breaking of social rules established by the school – and certain validated segments of society in general. These boys seemed to also function in environments where these words were rearticulated and the profane became the sacred thereby solidifying their bonds of masculinity. To say, “fuck” or another socially inappropriate word during their interactions outside of the staff’s presence seems to represent a level of boldness and willingness to go outside the boundaries amongst the others boys. They also found it amusing to say, “Bam!” or “It!” around two particular staff members, Mr. Haley or Mrs. Kemba, then debate them on the fact that they had not said “Dam!” or “Shit.” Mr. Haley and Mrs. Kemba were the most maturely aged members of the school’s staff.

Interestingly, during the school’s second and final term, insights into power relations amongst the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade students began to manifest in the dining area. Many students along with sympathetic and collaborating parents had successfully had the mandatory school hot lunch program disbanded about midway through the second term. Dr. Mariama had often sermon/lectured the parents during monthly Saturday parent/teacher meetings about the students’ diets and how she had worked very hard to find a caterer who had the ability to provide nutritious daily lunches for the students. She also did not want the students to have any excuses or reasons to bring food into any area of the new building. The dining area was where food was to be acceptable.

Nevertheless, most parents did not attended at the monthly meetings and were not able to partake in Dr. Mariama’s rationale for the mandatory hot lunches. She often “preached to the choir.” Other parents particularly of the younger students from the lower grades campus would complain of their children many times not liking what the school served for lunch. One parent of a first grade student stood up during a meeting earlier in the year announcing,

My child is not going to eat the lunch served at school and he comes home hungry complaining if I don’t prepare his lunch. Can we have a fundraiser to help defray that cost since I have to pay it in the tuition and my child’s not going to eat it if he doesn’t like it?

Other parents eventually agreed and joined in her laments.

Although Dr. Mariama would have loved both campuses to only have mandatory hot lunch served by the catering service, she was a bit more lenient with the lower grades campus parents. Nevertheless, in the beginning of the school year, she was not budging with the new boarding school’s policy. However, as mentioned above, she eventually did eliminate the mandatory hot lunch program as mysteriously students began to have different items for lunch than what was on that day’s menu as well as some parents falling behind on payment.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> See, Chapter IV: Phase II for even more elaboration of the lunch issue.

Nevertheless, during the short transition of weeks between Dr. Mariama's allowing the few students whose parents had not paid their school lunch bill to now bring their lunches and the official ending of the mandatory hot lunch program, various interesting student/student interaction patterns manifested. This phenomenon affected the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade students seating arrangements as well as created a change in the dining area culture, as their class was rather conspicuous being the largest in the dining area.

The first structural change was in reference to the students seating arrangements. The new small group of "packed" lunch students were instructed to sit at a table by themselves – no packed lunch was to be mixed in with the hot lunch people. This structural mechanism became necessary as before the new seating arrangement, some packed lunch students began to take advantage of the hot lunch program by sending a friend who had paid for hot lunch back up for seconds so that the seconds could, then be shared. Therefore, as a remedy, the packed lunch crew ate on a segregated basis – even though several students did not engage in these plots to get hot lunch without their parents paying.

In reference to student/student interactions, after the initial segregation of hot and packed lunch students, one sure future MCPSC Exemplar began to bring packed lunch. I observed Ivonna, to be a model classroom student throughout the year and although now bringing packed lunch, she somehow still managed to be able to sit with her choice of friends who all ate hot lunch at a hot lunch table—she just continued to sit where she had always sat.<sup>71</sup> She surely represented the caliber of student that would not think to take advantage of the hot lunch program by conspiring on someone's seconds. If there were such a disciplined student to be trusted on the matter, she would be one. Nevertheless, this situation eventually became an issue.

Daily, a boy (or two) would break the segregation rule and carry their packed lunch to sit with a hot lunch table of friends. Interestingly enough, Nino and David, the two boys most willing to defy Mrs. Jawanza's segregation policy were typically some of the major conspirators on days when they wanted the best of the packed and hot lunch worlds—even though they had not paid. "Why can't we sit at the other tables, Ivonna don't sit over here with us and she has packed lunch," would be typical retorts as Mrs. Jawanza would ask them to go to their appropriate table. Other packed lunchers would join them now feeling that they are being treated unfairly and getting the short end of the deal. These boys seemed not to be interested in Mrs. Jawanza's ignoring of Ivonna for the obvious—she could be trusted not to violate and eat her tablemates purchased hot lunch. They were rebelling based on the principle of the matter, as David would announce to his segregated comrades, "if we have to sit over here, then so should she."

Mrs. Jawanza's explanation of what the packed lunch students perceived as a break down in logic, principle, and show of favoritism spoke to the complexities ingrained in her reasoning as a teacher who knew her students well. Reflexively, I reconciled the issue to one of trust and earned privilege. Ivonna was the type of student at MCPSC who had a track record of adhering to the dictates of behavioral acceptability with minimal to no resistance to the staff. She would surely be a future Exemplar once at the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade level. A record of accomplishment of this nature yielded certain fringe

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<sup>71</sup> Ivonna is Kiswana's older sister. Kiswana was purged from Mrs. Goldstein's class. See, Staff Relations in this chapter.

benefits or privileges when absolute rules such as, the packed lunch or hot lunch table were in question. Mrs. Jawanza explained it this way:

There are many decisions made around here that don't have to be explained to them (referring to the students who wanted an explanation for every situation that defies their logic). I make decisions that are in their best interest and in the best interest of the school and sometimes they (the students) might not understand it. Plus, we don't have to justify our every decision to them... they have to trust us teachers on some of these things. Maybe they'll understand better later...

Eventually, the number of packed lunch students increased to the point of segregating the students became tremendously burdensome. Some students whose parents had paid for hot lunch would also bring packed lunch to school and other's would continuously share hot lunch and make trades for candy bars and cookies. The situation became very complex. The culmination of these types of student interactions and surely other issues between parents and the staff in which I was not privy, eventually led to the termination of the mandatory hot lunch program. Dr. Mariama and Mrs. Jawanza seemed rather saddened by this complex set of issues, but Dr. Mariama seemed to settle the issue in her mind in this manner:

Well, I've tried to provide nutritious meals daily for these children. I guess many of these stubborn parents will have to learn the hard way about letting their children decide on what they will eat and will not eat at such an early age. The children are going to always end up with bags of junk food for lunch... but God knows I've tried.

#### *Fourth Grade*

The second and final term of the school year at MCPSC presented rather unique and telling insights into fourth grade student daily interactions. The first class to be graced with the presence of a substitute teacher, I was privy to aspects of these students interactions outside the presence of Mrs. Goldstein for a short time.<sup>72</sup>

I had seen Mr. Henton on a few occasions during the school's first term but never in action as a teacher; he seemed to be more of a visitor. Recruited by the lead-teacher at the lower grades campus, MCPSC's first (and only) substitute throughout the year was a slender African-American man in seminary training.<sup>73</sup> Although I did not venture to sit in on MCPSC's first day with a substitute as I figured this approach to be rather obtrusive bearing in mind the spontaneous nature of his tenure. Nevertheless, fourth grade dining area and hallway interactions were revealing, especially in lieu of responses I received during interview sessions when asked about the concept of leadership. One, fourth grade student, Ava shared her own individual, subjective perspectives of leadership with me during an interview.

When asked to identify people in her school community that she considered leaders, Ava identified three of her classmates: Angel, Dalila, Tremaine, and the lead-teacher, Mrs. Jawanza.

K.S. (P.C.): What do they do that makes them leaders?

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<sup>72</sup> This was the school's first substitute in the traditional sense; not Mrs. Nzinga or another teacher standing in for the base classroom teacher.

<sup>73</sup> Mrs. Jawanza suggested I go and meet this gentleman after informing me of his pursuit of the doctorate degree as well. His area of study was Divinity.

Ava.: They don't be laughin' in class when other people get in trouble... they corporate with Mrs. Goldstein when she tell them to do something.

K.S. (P.C.): What about Mrs. Jawanza, you named her?

Ava.: Mrs. Jawanza have her uniform on everyday, and she be on time to school everyday.

K.S. (P.C.): Give me an example of something that happened at your school where you saw your classmates showing leadership. Do you have any stories?

Ava.: One time (girl in her class) had a seizure in our class. Mrs. Goldstein was absent and everybody went crazy on Mr. Henton (their substitute for that day). We all had to go out of our class and go sit in Mrs. Jawanza's class 'til her and Mr. Henton called the ambulance and stuff. When we went over there, Mrs. Jawanza had some questions on the board for us to answer.

K.S. (P.C.): What kind of questions?

Ava.: We had to answer five questions like: what should you do if it is an emergency? I don't remember the other ones.

K.S. (P.C.): Did you do the questions?

Ava.: I was tryin'

K.S. (P.C.): O.K. go on.

Ava.: So, while we was in Mrs. Jawanza's class hardly nobody was tryin' to answer the questions. Everybody was actin' all crazy. Them boys in Mrs. Jawanza class was gettin' on the floor actin' like they was havin' a seizure. But, Tremaine them was the only students doin' what Mrs. Jawanza told us to do.

K.S. (P.C.): What about Mrs. Jawanza, you mentioned her as a leader?

Ava.: She had put them questions on the board for us. She was tryin' to handle the situation but people was actin' crazy...

Mrs. Goldstein's presence surely affected the student/student interactions as well as the student/teacher's as I observed more than usual trips to the restroom by many of the students during their time with Mr. Henton. As I had assumed, later conversation with Mr. Henton revealed that the students were quite well behaved – up until lunch. I closely observed their hallway behavior, as Mrs. Goldstein's class had been models of exemplifying the culture of hallway acceptability during the school's first term.

Going to lunch, the students touched each other more frequently telling others to "go" or "move up" although their voices were rather quiet as usual. As the students ate, a level of horseplay and louder than usual conversations ensued causing Mrs. Tyler, the caterer to remark, "I can tell their teacher is absent today." By the time the students departed the dining area, their awe of the new, slender, nicely groomed, youthful looking, substitute teacher had clearly lessened as he rubbed his cleanly shaven head between admonishments of some of the students to lower their voices and not touch anyone. I am sure that Mrs. Tyler's observations only confirmed much of what she and Dr. Mariama's older sister and multipurpose staff member, Mrs. Kemba spoke so frequently in agreement about in reference to what they described as "today's children."

Spankin' should never have been outlawed... when I was comin' up, I didn't even think to do some of the things these children are doin' around here these days.

That's because we would get our butts tore up! If you acted up in school that's where you would get it, and you would pray that your parents didn't catch wind of it because that meant you had anotha one comin'.

Yeah and let me not forget about prayer. I thought that that was the worst thing they could have done when they took away prayer. You know, our kids need that prayer in school. I still grab them boys sometimes when I know they done got in trouble and say a small prayer with 'em... and it helps, I know it helps and they surely need it...

These words or one similar in nature by Mrs. Kemba could always extract nods of agreement from Mrs. Tyler, the school's caterer as the two elder women prepared the student's lunches.

Scheduled to fill in for two days, Mr. Kenton requested Dr. Mariama come and speak with the students the morning of the following day. He also told me that the second day was much better after she spoke with the fourth graders. Akil, a fourth grade boy who was eventually transferred to the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade class informed me that the class had received a scathing sermon/lecture filled with unpleasant consequences if she had to visit their class again. In his own words during lunch Akil shared, "man, she came and blasted us out this mornin'—for about thirty minutes... everybody doin' their work today."

These remarks spoke to the level of control Mrs. Goldstein had been able to create with her class leading up to the situation of her absence. It also highlighted how clearly the students understood the boundaries of behavioral acceptability at the school and how the students knew when the coast was clear to act outside of those established ideological codes of appropriate behavior.

Of the five fourth grade students whose parents gave consent for formal interviews, each chose three specific classmates as exemplifiers of leadership at MCPSC: Tremaine, Dalila, and Angel. This phenomenon seemed to point to an understanding of at least 1/4<sup>th</sup> of the class having a common understanding of which students demonstrated what they conceptualized as leadership characteristics.<sup>74</sup> I never received consent to interview Tremaine, as he also withdrew from MCPSC early in the school's second term.<sup>75</sup> Angel's parents also chose not to consent to the formal interview as well. Nevertheless, I was able to interview Dalila and capture her perceptions of leadership at MCPSC.

Thus, as alluded to in other sections of this study, Dalila represented the ideal class room-ready student. "She's a dream child" was Mrs. Jawanza's, point blank, comments on the matter. Dalila, seemed to be a rather quiet student, yet not the shy/whimpy/timid brand of quiet.<sup>76</sup> During our interview, Dalila just as her other classmates interviewed chose Angel, Tremaine and herself as leaders at the school. She shared with me that each of them was nice, had good ideas, was quiet, and warns other people if they are talking too much. Unlike her classmates, Dalila did not have any stories to share about the school and leadership. Yet, I tended to get the impression that this fourth grade student was more action oriented thereby acting out the characteristics that describes a leader in the eyes of those at MCPSC. Her classmates and other students interviewed seem to obviously be able to point out who the leaders were and what they did, yet just knowing it and being able to tell stories about leadership seemed to be their

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<sup>74</sup> The class size fluctuated around twenty students throughout the year.

<sup>75</sup> See, Phase III, Staff Relations: *Mrs. Goldstein Purges the Rabble-rouser Party*

<sup>76</sup> See Phase I: *The Fourth Grade Classroom* for more insights into Dalila's character as she courageously questioned Mrs. Nzinga about chastising the entire class for wrongdoings of which she played no part.



stopping points. Finally, unlike any of her other classmates, Dalila confidently identified herself as a leader at the school.

### PARENT RELATIONS

Several parents seemed obviously engaged in many behind the scene projects throughout the year at MCPSC. Nevertheless, outside the routine daily pick-ups and drop-offs of students as well as attendance at special functions like monthly parent/teacher meetings and “Prepping for Power” showcases, parent presence in the daily interactions of the school was rather minimal during the research process. The above is not to paint all parents at the school with a broad brush, yet the temperament of Dr. Mariama’s announcements to the active parents during monthly Saturday parent/teacher meetings and the school’s graduation helps explain this phenomenon. These are the words that she “preached to the choir.”

Once I get this school running and slow down a bit, I will then be able to write my autobiography... and I’m going to give everyone their just do, and you all know that I record what people have done around here. I know the name of the person who donated the first rolls of toilet paper to our school when we opened years ago... There are some of you who are invaluable and have been there for our students and school for years... but there are others of us [she digresses] Well, I’ll just use pseudonyms to protect the innocent... if you know what I mean.

Those parents present and within listening distance of these words always seemed to get the message couched in Dr. Mariama’s rhetoric, as I had come to learn that she always had a way of making her points in a tasteful, yet ruggedly precise manner.

During the school’s second term, one particular fourth grade parent occasionally joined her daughter for lunch. This particular parent was also very instrumental in the volunteer efforts during the summer preparing for the school’s grand opening. Several other parents could also be called out of the woodworks to chaperon school trips and other things whenever necessary.<sup>77</sup> Parents of those students chosen by Dr. Mariama and the staff obviously had to make trips to places in the city in order for their children to recite poetry as a part of the school’s recruitment strategy. This small group of parents, typically of students who had been to the school many years, must have seen some efficacy in the endeavors as they were present at the citywide school fair with their children all dressed and ready. This type of parent participation was not tied to the school’s daily functioning.

One particular 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade parent whose son had been a part of the MCPSC community since pre-kindergarten would visit the school occasionally during her lunch break which coincided with the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade class’ lunch time. Usually, she spoke with Mrs. Jawanza, who would be hurrying through her only chance at a meal throughout the day and discussing the boy’s progress simultaneously. Once, during a lunch period where Mrs. Jawanza was yet to arrive in the dining area, this parent sparked a conversation with me adding subjective insights into a MCPSC parent’s world.

Mrs. L.: Kemo has been at this school for eight years—all of his life... and I think that he had just about topped out here. I think we are going to have to move

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<sup>77</sup> See, Chapter IV: Phase II for more insights on parents participation at the school outside of the school’s regular school day.

on next year. I mean, he's done well here and learned a lot—God knows he's spoke in front of so many people to be a child... but I just don't know what he's learning in that class with almost fifty students in it. But, I understand that she (referring to Dr. Mariama) has gotta do what she gotta do... but I think it's 'bout time for us to move on.

K.S. (P.C)...: Have you spoke with her about the class size? The other classes aren't that large.

Mrs. L...: I asked her about it earlier when I noticed them adding more students every time I came out here. She told me that she needs to bring in students to keep the school running and pay the staff... plus she feels like Mrs. Jawanza can handle that size class. I don't doubt that she can't handle them, it's the individual attention that I'm worried about... individual attention in that class is 'bout impossible. So, like I said, I know she's gotta do what she gotta do but Kemo has to go out into the real world when he leaves here; he'll be in the seventh grade next year and I need him prepared!

Actually, there were thirty-eight students in the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade class during my conversation with Kemo's mother—she thought it was more like fifty. There are many other inferences that could be made in reference to this particular parent's comments—the nurturing environment that MCPSC creates seems to be one. It seems as though MCPSC is O.K. for the child's early childhood years, but eventually they will have to encounter the “real world” and the shelter created by the MCPSC community will be no longer—at least in this parent's perspective. Kemo, did exit MCPSC at the end of the year as he later informed me of his parents relocation to another area in the city where there are, to use his own words, “good schools.” His mother also confirmed this as I passed her in the hallway during the last week of school. She told me, “that she was headed to an exit interview appointment with Dr. Mariama.”

### So Hard To Say Goodbye

“Boys and girls listen, let us finish this year on a high note, with a strong step in the right direction—a positive direction and a high note... what do ya say” were Dr. Mariama's opening remarks as on this day late in the school year she cancelled all regularly scheduled activities in preparation for the school's annual Shakespearean Festival. The Shakespearean Festival along with Senior's Week represented strong symbolic closing of the school year rituals at MCPSC. In addition, Dr. Mariama was stepping to the forefront of leadership to insure that everything flowed according to plan.

As for the Shakespearean Festival, Dr. Mariama seemed to notice a hole in the wall of the dam as many of the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders would horseplay and engage in non-relevant conversations during allotted practice times more than seldomly resisting Mr. Sipho's instructions of “class, let us practice our parts.” “Man, I don't want no part or I can't wait till this school year is over” were the comments of some to the students who seemed to just not be able to muster the self-motivation to get with a partner and rehearse their parts. As Mr. Sipho would schedule rehearsal into his class schedule, many other things would go on between the small circles of 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders and partnered groups.

Conversations around topics such as Diane's, “I got cheerleader tryouts comin' up soon... ooh, I hope I make it. I don't know what I'll do if I get cut” as she sat with Brianna with their parts lying unmolested on their desks. Diane was referring to junior

varsity cheerleading tryouts at the high school that she would be attending next year. Or, Berniece's, "oh, y'all saw what Usher had on at the Music Awards last night? He know he fine and can sing too... oops, what um talkin' 'bout, we betta' get back to this play. Dr. Mariama gonna' kill us if we mess up at the festival." Moreover, with Cabrero, the final boy Dissenter withdrawn from the school due to being suspended, returning, and more problems, the remaining four 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade boys tended to enjoy the open rehearsal times as they always found a way to make their scene encompass a wrestling contest.

Attempts at self-guided practice of this nature went on for several days in the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class leading up to the scheduled performance at a performing arts center in the city's downtown. Many of the students, like Sharon, assured Mr. Siphon that they would be ready when the performance day arrived. She would tell him, "Mr. Siphon, we know how to do it. We've been doin' these plays every year... don't we know our parts for "Preppin' for Power" when our turn comes?" Sharon was an Exemplar who had become rather proficient at remembering lines and presenting in front of audiences. This approach was usually to get him off their backs as they gossiped about everything, from music videos to what they will do over the summer.

Mr. Siphon seemed to believe that she would be ready, but many of the other students would attempt the same approach as Sharon only to be met with resistance, also ruining it for Sharon. "No, you need to study your parts, now! See what you have started Sharon? Everyone no fooling around, I want everyone studying their parts now..." was Mr. Siphon's final retort to Adrian. Adrian was not a 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade Exemplar, yet she was far from a Dissenter – she struggled in some areas academically but tried her best. Mr. Siphon knew that she needed to practice as she was only in her second year at MCPSC and had not had the socialization of a Sharon who had been at the school since pre-kindergarten.

As for Mrs. Jawanza's class, the boys typically got extra recess as she worked mainly with the girls who predominated in the upcoming performance. Many of the boys had already made it known to Mrs. Jawanza that they were not going to attend the Shakespearean Festival and she probably had every reason to believe them, as most of the boys usually did not attend the Sunday "Prepping for Power" performances throughout the year following their class's first performance. In addition, on the one and only day before the performance, Mrs. Jawanza fell ill and needed Mr. Henton's substitute teaching services. This was also the day of Dr. Mariama's whole school rehearsal as she saw fit to help Mr. Henton with Mrs. Jawanza's large class as well as step in for Mrs. Jawanza in her day of need and absence.

In my estimation, there was absolutely no other staff member with the exception of the President/CEO and the lead-teacher who could pull off a whole school rehearsal during this late stage of the school year. The students would simply not respond in the same manner for the other newer staff members. This day shed light on a school's major end of the year ritual as well as the school's interactions as a whole with Dr. Mariama in charge.

#### **May 24, 2001**

Dr. Mariama had made her rounds, telling all of the teachers that she would need to see a run through of tomorrow's performance. "I need everyone to come in here (Mrs. Jawanza's class) and have a seat... I don't have a lot of time, I have an appointment in exactly one hour. So, let's not waste time," were her words as the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade students

came in through the door and the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade boys angrily came in from the play area. The 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade boys did not want to come in as Mr. Henton had already released them for recess as the boys blasted out of the dining area not bothering to go back to class for homework check as usual with Mrs. Jawanza. Yet, Dr. Mariama insisted that they all come in and sit quietly. Nino frustratingly told her as he came in the door sweating, “but I don’t even have a part” in which she retorted, “well just sit down and listen for a minute, it won’t hurt you.” He continued into the room and sat obviously not wanting to.

All of the classes sat, the fourth graders on the floor, as Mrs. Jawanza’s class was large enough to accommodate the entire school’s population. The 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class sat in the extra chairs usually used for out-of-class timeouts and teacher in-service days. I took the liberty to sit near the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade boys and suggested that they take out paper to draw or something to occupy their minds, because Dr. Mariama had decided that everyone would attend this spontaneous rehearsal—even if you did not have a part and were not coming to the performance. Mr. Sipho and Mrs. Goldstein sat near their respective classes as Mrs. Jawanza’s substitute for the day, Mr. Henton stood at the door’s entrance.

Dr. Mariama was draped in her business casual purple pants suit with a pair of comfortable slippers, her keys hung from her right hand and her purse was thrown across the same shoulder. One student’s attempts at whispering after she had silenced the room prompted her to arm herself with a Heath Math Connections textbook that she carried the remainder of the rehearsal in her other hand. When she picked it up, the message was clear to all in the room. She made sure telling him, “boy, you had better not try it with me,” sharply. Dr. Mariama did not “fool around” and she needed to have everyone’s full attention and corporation—or else.

The fourth graders were called first to give it their best shot. Mrs. Goldstein lined her first group of student up to recite the Sonnets from Shakespeare. Pleased with some of this groups progress and displeased with others she began to pair those who needed more help in gesturing and articulation with 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade Exemplars. She summoned one of the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders, “Donyetta take her and work with her on her enunciations. I want her pronouncing those words clearly. Show her how to do it, how to open her mouth, you know what I want.” Donyetta and the girl exited the room headed for a place of one-on-one rehearsal. Several others’ from the fourth and 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class were also given this task. Afterwards, Mrs. Goldstein’s class was free to return to their room.

Then came Mrs. Jawanza’s class in her absence. Mostly girls presented, as the class was now a bit less compact due to the departure of the fourth grade class and some of the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders who had been commissioned to work with the needy group of fourth graders. Four or five boys had parts in the fifth grade class, although there were approximately fifteen in the class—only three came to the performance the following evening. As one of the boys mumbled his lines, “hark stark the lark...” or something to that extent, the crowd of non-participating boys could not contain themselves as some of them put their heads down to hide their laughter. Sag hoped up laughing simultaneously asking Mr. Henton, “can I go to the bathroom?” Dr. Mariama answered for the substitute, “no, sit down and get your act together... and pull up those pants!” Then she digressed, “you can go when we finish in a few minutes.” Sag sat seeming not to want to be a victim of the Math Connections projectile; Dr. Mariama was loaded. Steven, the butt of the other boy’s jokes later informed me that he had to get a part “because my momma and auntie gonna be at the festival and wander why um not up there.” His aunt

had a child who attended the lower grades campus and seemed to be a rather active parent as I noticed that she attended most of the school's functions and sometimes asked Mrs. Jawanza about Steven's behavior.

Thus, moving on with the practice, one girl in reciting her lines announced, "Doeth" in a sentence prompting Dr. Mariama to immediately correct her, "that's not right, it's grammatically incorrect and Shakespeare would have never written it like that." The girl now a bit confused responded, "that's what it said on my paper" heading towards her desk to double check her script. Dr. Mariama suggested she make sure that she was saying the correct word because, "Shakespeare would never write like that and perfect practice makes perfect." The President/CEO paired three of the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade students with 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders as well, prompting them to "drill them on their lines and gesticulations."

While all of the above had been going on, the tension in the room remained thick as the majority of the boys, who would have much rather been outside playing, had no stake in the play. Some pouted and others attempted to snicker at others who were in the play. In addition, she had hijacked valuable recess minutes, which seemed to be the least of Dr. Mariama's concerns. As she gave a quick sermon/lecture to those sitting in the room:

When I say practice Shakespeare, I mean practice Shakespeare! You all running around here like you don't have anything to do. I want this festival to be even better than last year. [She turns to Alonzo an 8<sup>th</sup> grade Exemplar] You had better know your parts this year – you understand me. I don't want any fumbling through your lines this year. You better be practicing.

He innocently responded, "yes maam" as Ezekiel and Kenton snickered, making matters worse. Beginning to smile at Alonzo's innocence, Dr. Mariama shot at them, "that goes for the both of you as well," squelching their snickers.

Eventually, Dr. Mariama sent for the others who were in one-on-one practice. "Tell them to come on. I need to see them redo their parts before I leave." The students came back and redid their parts to her satisfaction with a few added tips by the President/CEO. Afterwards, she told their teachers, "you all can have them, I have to make it to my meeting" as she hurriedly exited the room headed towards the stairway that led to her office.

### **Senior Week**

Actually, although referred to as "Senior Week" by the students and staff at MCPSC, this particular end of the year ritual started before the school's last week. I noticed about three weeks before the school's end Dr. Mariama begin to focus a considerable amount of time and energy with the eight eighth graders—the school's seniors. Thus, Mr. Sipho continuously loosened his reign on these six girls and two boys as they began to have an extraordinary amount of privileges, in which the underclassmen were not privy. The stage was being set for their exit from MCPSC as these students could be found in the dining area working on a group project commissioned by Dr. Mariama or helping elsewhere in the school. Their younger colleagues were given a special time in the year to look forward to, as they would one day be able to roam freely as seniors during the schools final weeks.

During certain times in Mr. Sipho's class, interesting conversations would ensue as the eighth graders would sometimes casually sit waiting for Dr. Mariama's arrival to

release them for special, end of the year projects. During these times, it would be rather difficult for the remaining twelve or thirteen seventh graders to stay on task leading to whole class conversations. Mr. Siphon would entertain these conversations as long as the students did not get out of control becoming rambunctious.

The moon conspiracy theory debate was one of the more intriguing interactions between these students and their teacher created by the senior week ritual during the final weeks of school. Carla got the ball rolling, “Mr. Siphon, you believe everything you read. Man, you think these books can’t be wrong—at least some of the time.” Karyn quickly jumped in keeping the momentum, “yeah, and we keep showing you problems wrong in the English book.” “Oh, plus that math book know it have some wrong answers in the back,” shot Diane the only Dissenter to complete the school year.

Mr. Siphon attempted to defend himself countering with a jokingly weak rebuttal, “well they put it in the books, the people are smart who write the books, it must be right” prompting Karyn to shot back, “see what um sayin’... There you go, thinking cause people put it in a book it’s got to be true!” Mr. Siphon nonchalantly replied, “well it’s true.” I began to think that he was playing the devils advocate as Karyn grabbed an English book from beneath her desk turning rapidly to the back of the book for an incorrect answer to an exercise in the book. “What about this one, huh...?” She walked to the back of the room showing him the problem where the answer should have been “was” in the sentence structure exercise but the back of the book had “were.” “See, that’s wrong, I remember this problem... even Dr. Mariama said it was wrong! They be usin’ the wrong tense and everything.” Mr. Siphon looking at the problem and continued with what I assumed to be devils advocate brushing her away saying, “well you talk like that too don’t you, don’t you make mistakes?” She headed back to her seat telling him, “yeah, but this the book, it’s supposed to be tellin’ the truth.”

Then she moved to another position obviously wanting Mr. Siphon to admit that textbooks could indeed be incorrect alluding to the United States landing a man on the moon. She sat continuing to debate Mr. Siphon determined to change the teachers mind.

What about a man goin’ to the moon, you believe that too don’t you? Even when Latasha proved that that couldn’t be true. That was just a story made up by the American government, ‘cause they want all of us to think that America’s a great country and Russia was about to go there. Mr. Siphon, you know it’s true too, ‘cause for one if you look at the picture of the man on the moon... if you look at that picture, the flag was wavin’. Now, how was the flag wavin’ when there ain’t even any air on the moon.

Mr. Siphon cut her off grabbing a Ohio history textbook from beneath the student’s desk in which he sat flipping through the pages telling her, “well, the man was right from your state, Ohio... and this picture has him standing on the moon.” One of the boys butted in, “he could have blown it with his breath or somethin’.” Which prompted a chorus of “shut ups!” from the other students. Karyn attacked again:

See that’s what um talkin’ about. You can’t believe everything you read Mr. Siphon! And another thing...Latasha told us that you can’t land on the moon because of the atmosphere and the gravity, you can’t land on it. Plus, they filmed all of that stuff in Area 51 and they were just running and slowed the camera down to make it seem like they was jumpin’ in the air and being affected by gravity. But, it’s all a lie made up by the American government ‘cause they just

wannna seem better than everybody else. Plus, he even has a shadow on those moon pictures. How'd he get a shadow? You shouldn't have a shadow on the moon.

I could not resist and knew that Mr. Siphso would not mind as I asked her, "well since the government is so corrupt, will you work for the American government?" She responded categorically, "hecky nawl, I won't ever work for no government!"

These group dialogues, although spontaneous, could be quite enlightening as well as enjoyable. Mr. Siphso seemed to enjoy them as well as the students as they debunked the school's official knowledge in class conversations such as this. There was a paradox created around reading where Ronnette would often exclaim, "I'm gonna start readin' more" during these conversations, then remembering "but the books be lyin'." This paradox seemed to have the students caught between whether to read or not to read. They seemed to be looking for "Truth" and did not know who to believe—surely their textbooks had become suspect.

### **Tribute to Seniors Day**

One of the most powerful rituals of senior week took place as Dr. Mariama organized a tribute to the school's eight eighth grade seniors in which the staff and parents took a back seat as the younger students honored the MCPSC's graduates. On this particular day during the school's last week the lower grades campus staff and students took a trip to the higher grades boarding campus to participate in a ceremony to "send off the seniors." Also, invited to this event were the seniors parents. Thus, on this day, the chapel was filled with students from both campuses as the seniors sat in a semicircle taking in the shower of praise heaped on them by their fellow schoolmates.

Tribute to Seniors Day seemed to symbolically represent the seniors "last walk in the sun" during a regular school day. Informed to "dress up" and shed the school's uniform, the six girls all wore very elegant, sleeveless, summer dresses with classy ladies pumps to match. The boys sported a business casual look as they wore slacks and collared button up shirts. This was an opportunity to separate themselves from the other students at the school as well as give them something in which to look forward to. The eight students graced the stage on this day as if they were mature young adults. As a sign of this new felt maturity, each of the girls sat with their legs crossed on this day—a body posture that I had not observed throughout the school year.

On this day, the seniors simply sat as the kindergarten – third grade students came up to the stage and gave farewell speeches that they had obviously been preparing for with their teachers at their respective campus. The students came up in small groups resembling a line of ducklings and recited such poems as "Be Strong" or "A Great Somebody" from the MCPSC classics list of poetry. Also, other students from the lower grades campus individually presented small gifts and cards that they had made in school to the seniors as going away memoirs. Finally, one small boy who looked to be in the first or second grade came to the front of the platform in which the seniors sat and honored them by singing a touching solo. I was not familiar with this song, but the small boy seemed to sing it in a touching, meaningful way—from the heart. He was not shy or bashful and before he had completed the song, three of the senior girls were crying. And, as I peered into the audience, I noticed some of the parents crying as well. Dr. Mariama

seeming to have prepared for the effects of this ritual, sat to the right of the stage equipped with a box of Kleenex passing them out and wiping her eyes occasionally.

The underclassmen and underclasswomen from the higher grades campus did not perform tributes. Yet, as I observed, most of these students sat with their eyes glued to the front as the seniors stood and delivered their “last words” to the school following the young boy’s solo.

After two of the seniors had given their remarks, I knew that preparing their “last words” had been one of Dr. Mariama special, end of the year assignments for the seniors. Each of the students’ “last words” were structured in a very similar fashion. First, there was thanks and honor given to their respective families followed by acknowledgment of the teachers who had impacted their lives. They all ended their speeches with promises to give back to MCPSC after achieving their career goals of becoming lawyers, pediatricians, professional actresses, engineers, and architects. Each of the student’s speeches had caveats, which deviated from the basic group structure allowing for a more personalized text. Latasha shared her story of being born a miracle child weighing only a little over one pound but surviving against the odds. Alonzo, spoke of all the values he had learned from his aunt, Mrs. Jawanza as he personally addressed her using her first name, which was touching and appropriate for this particular occasion. Leroy touched the crowd as he gave thanks to his mother sitting in the audience for putting up with him as a widowed mother after his father’s death several years ago. Diane, thanked the teachers for putting up with her “attitude” over the years telling the staff, “I know that I haven’t been the best student, but I promise that I won’t let you all down...I am goin’ to be somebody and make you all proud.” Berniece and Donyetta thanked Dr. Mariama for taking them all over the country speaking to people and raising money for the school. Donyetta also told her, “Dr. Mariama, you have even taken us almost around the world when you took us to South Africa.”

By the time each student completed their speeches, they, their parents, and many students and staff were in tears—even myself. Dr. Mariama saw fit to go and stand with her arms around Leroy and Latasha as they cried blurring the words of their speeches. With the exception of Latasha who had been at the school for three years at that time, most of these students had been a student at MCPSC since at least the third grade. Furthermore, Leroy was one of the school’s first students having been a student in the first school in the church basement, the school after it moved to the lower grades campus, and finally attending the higher grades boarding school. He was MCPSC’s longest standing student and a shining example of the institution’s capability, as Dr. Mariama would say often say, “only if we had them from the cradle.” Leroy had been accepted and was headed to one of the more prestigious and reputable private high schools in the city the following year—one of the “7 Hill Schools of Cincinnati” schools that MCPSC alumnus Janine had lobbied for earlier in the year during her visit to the school.

Afterwards, Dr. Mariama shared with me her rationale for such an event highlighting where and how she came up with such a ritual practice. Well, I lie in my bed at night and think all of these things through. Then, when I get up in the mornings I have my visions of exactly what it is that I want to do...the next step is only putting my visions into action...that’s where this Senior tribute day idea came from.

You see, I want that to be an occasion where the teachers all step back and let the students talk to and honor each other. I feel as if the teacher should have said



what they needed to say to them by then... so, now it's their schoolmates turn. I wanted to send the seniors off with something special and I wanted them to see what they are leaving behind. That way they will understand that for this institution to go on, they will have to come back, give back, and help. I also wanted to give those seniors a chance to stand up and say what's on their minds...to tell us how they feel and to give thanks to all who have helped them get to where they are. You know this is very important...that they are given the forum to share their last words. Through this process of sharing and being showered with love and gifts from their peers, an emotional bond is created between them and this school that they will carry with them for the rest of their lives...

On another occasion, just after receiving news of Mrs. Goldstein's announcement that she would not return the next year by Mrs. Nzinga, I noticed the eighth grade students sitting quietly alone in the dining area.<sup>78</sup> In the hallway leading to the dining area were eight neatly hung white sheets of computer papers with digitized pictures of each senior standing individually in the school yard in front of the school's sign. Above each senior's picture was their name all typed bold and "caps" and beneath each picture was the school in which the students would be attending the following year. Each of these students were going to prestigious private as well as public school's of the city—a fact that the staff was quite proud of. As I entered the dimly lit room, they all sat reclining in their chairs as if I had interrupted a good meditation session. Donyetta, Alonzo, Berniece, Diane, Latasha, Leroy, Brianna, and Beverly all seemed much more mature as they all sat together—they were the seniors with privileges.

I knew that the students had been working on projects created and administered by Dr. Mariama so I asked, "so what's this project all about that you all are doing that gets you all out of class unsupervised?" Berniece, the school's eventual Valedictorian spoke first "this project that we are workin' on now is on racial profiling for Dr. Mariama." Latasha corrected her, "actually it's for us, Dr. Mariama just gave it to us." Then, Beverly chimed in, "See, it's this project that we've got to put our heads together and finish it." Berniece clarified their project even more, "we have to put our heads together and figure out a problem or something that has been a problem in society and we all have to propose the best possible solution using teamwork." Finally, Alonzo chimed in with another interesting perspective on the issue saying, "see, that's what we have to do and then when we finish, she can go and take it to show to people and say, see look how good my little kiddies did... give me some money, give us some money!" The girls refuted his comments saying, "no, it's not like that" forcing him to rephrase his point. He tried again, "nah, it's not exactly like that, she don't say give me some money right then, but she always takin' and showin' off our work to all different types of people—and they do give us money sometimes."

Before leaving, I asked Alonzo had he ever heard of human capital. This question drew a table full of blank stares. Therefore, I went into a mini explanation:

You all are in many ways human capital for this school. Dr. Mariama show's you all off...show how bright you all are and at the same time people like to hear

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<sup>78</sup> Mrs. Goldstein informed me that she was going to venture into the reality business after the school year ended.

that and they give certain things to keep the school going. So, the school continues for those who will come after you. Do you think that's fair? Shrugging his shoulders, Alonzo replied, "that's fair, why not?"

The issue of racial profiling was surely one of the burning societal problems which indicated the students, all African-American, awareness of at least one factor that has direct and indirect effects on their immediate lives. I later learned that Dr. Mariama was rather impressed with the students' final proposed solution which entailed putting in place ways for the police to be policed themselves. I never acquired the students' final product that was submitted to Dr. Mariama like top-secret information needing security clearance. These assignments were precious and a last battery of tests prescribed by Dr. Mariama as if the seniors were being initiated into the inner sanctums of a MCPSC alumnus secret society.

During an interview, Dr. Mariama shared insights into why she chose to implement such end of the year rituals.

First of all, I know each child by that time and I know what each child needs. Take for example, a Diane...an attitudinal problem. So, my subject may be, "you're very very bright. You're very, very beautiful. You have all of these things" and I want them to know that I know all of these things about them. But there's this one...[she digresses] It's as if someone is evaluating you. "But, there's one weakness...that you've got to work on, and that's your attitude." So, I will get into a lecture on attitude and I will make it so simple by using parables and asking them questions. It's very philosophical what I'm doing...but I will talk about attitude.

If it's a Sharon, I would say, "respect"...because Sharon thinks that everything" [she digresses] I'm talking about them because I know each individual...and I know what their weaknesses are. So, if it's a Sharon...Sharon's weakness is that I (refereeing to Sharon) thinks that everything should be fair. Smart, but...am I not hitting them on the head? [I smile nodding in agreement] Everything should be fair. Well, my philosophical conversation with Sharon would center around fairness and what is fairness – life is not fair. You know what I mean. Just conversation, just communication, giving them an opportunity one on one to express themselves without having to feel that they are being put down in front of their peers...You can't do that in the classroom, you have to do that one on one. And then you have to do it in very small groups...

We don't have a counselor and it's like counseling to me, you see. I do it all yearlong when it's needed but I do it at the end of the year when I know they are leaving me. I don't want to leave anything unsaid. So, I want their attention...

In reference to the garden that the seniors had to create in the south/east corner of the school, the President/CEO shared,

They always must do something to give back, something that is permanent...something that one-day they can come back, look, and say, "this is what we left behind". And it's something that they left behind that's concrete and they are excited about that...

The children planted a tree down at the other school, some of them graduated and they went out there and they saw it after their graduation. It's important to the kids to be able to leave something, to give something. And, I'm also trying to

plant the seed that giving is always better than receiving. And, It's just like when I got that honorary doctorate degree – I made a big deal of it with them. And, I remember one of the things that I definitely said was, “well you know all of the other degrees that you get, you are gaining something...you get a degree and that degree is measured by how much you have gained...how much knowledge you've gotten from the books and all of that for yourself. And, you walk across the stage and they give you this doctorate degree. But, this honorary doctorate degree is similar to that but it's measured only by how much you give. So, it's different in that sense.” And they understood...

Dr. Mariama went on to tell me of how the students could relate to her message and how important that she “leave no stone unturned” before sending them away. In her final assessment she shared, “if they stay with us long enough, we will pen so many wings on them, they will have no choice but to fly.”

### **PART III**

#### **Analysis of Discursive Encounters: Making Sense of Things**

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **CRITICAL TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP THEORY & CURRICULARIZING**

#### **Introduction**

Now that I have reflected on a year of ethnographic fieldwork at MCPSC, this chapter provides a critical analysis of the school's daily practices. First, I examine some underlying interests and assumptions of critical transformative leadership theorizing within the context of this independent school setting. Second, I analyze the philosophical and pedagogical curricular underpinnings of the school. I also situate the school's philosophical and pedagogical curricular thrust within the context of the school's racial population and its primary economic contributors.

#### **Some Underlying Interests and Assumptions of Critical Transformative Leadership Theory and Independent Schooling**

The introductory chapter of this study highlighted the fact that with more than forty-four years of de-segregated public education in the U.S. there continues to be an unsatisfactory outlook on education for increasingly large numbers of African-American students. This issue led many educators and concerned citizens to implement alternative strategies of education for African-American students.

Created by Mrs. Marva N. Collins, Chicago's internationally known Westside Preparatory School was born out of the historical/material realities that produced the need for a post-civil rights alternative schooling movement.<sup>79</sup> This movement amongst African-Americans remains vibrant more than four decades after the historic *Brown v. The Board of Education* case.<sup>80</sup> In the midst of this movement, some view Marva Collins schools as one of the great success stories in American education, especially for African-American children. Thus, the creators of The Marva Collins Preparatory School of Cincinnati—Clara Mariama International Boarding Campus (MCPSC) has declared their school to be a scion of Chicago's original Westside Preparatory School and its approach to education based on The Marva Collins Way (i.e., philosophy and pedagogical methods). MCPSC started out as, and remains, an educational institution primarily attended by African-American students even though the school's recruitment policies are not racially discriminatory.<sup>81</sup>

The notion of transactional leadership has been pervasive in the field of educational leadership research since the time of the industrial revolution (Quantz et al., 1991). Transactional leadership is a barter or exchange of wants between leaders and followers. Transactional leaders recognize what followers want to get out of their work

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<sup>79</sup> Independent schools predominately attended by African-American students such as those built on the Marva Collins philosophy represent an interesting phenomenon. For, within forty years after blacks fought to achieve the U.S. Supreme Court's decision of public school integration, some African-Americans such as those in this study have already opted out of the fight to "get inside" the doors of America's public schools.

<sup>80</sup> Alternative schooling practices are not unique to African-Americans as there has been a plethora of reasons beyond the scope of this study for alternative schooling by various other groups in this country.

<sup>81</sup> The archival documents for student and staff recruitment reviewed during the study consistently footnoted, "The Marva Collins Preparatory School of Cincinnati Recruits and Admits Students of Any Race, Color, Religion, or Ethnic Origin."

and assure that followers get what is warranted (Bass, 1985). This leadership approach hinges on the individual and yields too easily to market place ideology where the democratically oriented critical transformative ideals such as social justice and equality are subsumed in favor of individual fulfillment. In these instances, individual wants become more important than collective will. Through transactional leadership approaches, social democracy too easily takes a back seat to the all-important gratification of *the I, the me, and the my*.

Transformative leadership, by contrast, goes beyond the notion of exchange (Shriberg, Lloyd, Shriberg, & Williams, 1997). Burns (1978) proposed that transformational leadership include two essential elements: 1) it is relational, and 2) it produces real change. "Transformational leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (p. 20). For Burns, leadership was an engagement that transformed the lives, attitudes, behaviors, and institutions to higher moral and ethical dimensions. Foster's (1986) notion of critical transformative leadership raises the question of "Whose vision is it" or what I allude to as "Leadership for what?" Whereas transformative leadership theory raises the moral question, critical transformative leadership theory compels us to engage the intersections of the moral and political dimensions of leadership.

The work of Quantz, Rogers, and Dantley (1991) raise even deeper critically transformative questions helping to further clarify this theoretical construct. In reference to *racial/ethnic group dynamics* critical questions must be asked such as: what are the political conflicts among groups in educational communities over which cultures should be approved and legitimated or disapproved and delegitimated? Which specific racial/ethnic group culture(s) are promoted and advocated more than others in schools? Why are this/these groups promoted more than others are? Who in this educational community has the power to promote this/these racial/ethnic group cultures over others in this school? Are there other groups within the school that want other racial/ethnic group cultures promoted and advocated but do not have the power to do so?

In reference to *class tensions* critical questions must be asked such as: whose socio-economic group lifestyles; such as lower, middle, or upper class gets promoted and advocated more than others in schools? If so, why are this/these groups promoted more than others are? Who has the power to promote these group lifestyle(s) over others in schools? Furthermore, *gender politics* provokes such questions as: what are the differences in the roles and expectations of girls and boys in schools? Who in these educational communities has the power to promote this/these roles and expectations over possible alternative roles and expectations? Are there other groups that want other roles and expectations for girls and boys but do not have the power to do so?

The critical transformative notion of *democratic authority* invokes questions such as: what role does the conceptualization of democratic authority (i.e., understood as the legitimating of power, which unlike authoritarianism, promotes symmetrical relationships and is legitimized based on both process and consequence) have in schools? In addition, *leadership at all levels of the community* provides further context of school politics by posing such questions as: what is thought of the leadership process in terms of empowering followers to become leaders? In addition, how do the particular school leaders get to practice leadership?

Accordingly, a *language of critique* focused on transformative praxis is of importance. Questions such as: are there discussions which seek to provide a critical understanding of and pinpoint the global, national, and local barriers, which work against the achievement of a more democratic society? Furthermore, are these discussions serving as mechanisms that allow for the possibilities for schools to work actively for the alleviation of undemocratic societal barriers within their sphere of influence? Finally, the critical transformative notion of *civic responsibility or an ethic of risk* remains essential posing such questions as: what are some risks that those in school leadership positions have to take in reference to those who have the economical and political power to adversely affect them?

The aforementioned underlying interests and assumptions of critical transformative leadership theory help to clarify the theoretical framework of this study. Thus, the next section of this chapter discusses the critical transformative notions of civic courage and an ethic of risk inherent in this school community's choice to abandon America's public school system opting to create their own school.

### *Vying For Transformation by Moving Outside the Public School Arena: Civic Courage and a Transformative Ethic of Risk*

My yearlong observations at MCPSC revealed a complexity of interests and a multifaceted arena of discursive power-play immersed in the construct of leadership at this school. Although this international boarding school campus only functioned for the purposes of day-schooling during its first year of transition, the underlying assumptions of the institution's very being—an independent school—speak to this community's political positioning vis-à-vis the U.S. public educational system. Establishing an independent school was a strategic political act by those who saw fit to create MCPSC and is critical to situating a study of this nature in which critical transformative leadership theory is central. For, the critical transformative idea that Giroux (1983) as well as Quantz, et. al. (1991) call civic courage or what Welch (1990) calls an ethic of risk is inherent in the mere will of this school community's decision to “do somethin’” in recognition of the historically gross disparities in public educational opportunities for children in their city, particularly African-Americans. Critical transformative leadership calls for civic courage or an ethic of risk. For as Quantz et. al. (1991) note:

Too often we have watched while people naively support democracy because it seems a nice thing to do, democracy is, however, about restructuring power and those who work for democracy must develop the courage necessary to fight the inevitable resistance by those whom democracy threatens... The transformative leader must develop the strength of community necessary to support those who risk the wrath of the dominant elite. (p. 114)

Thus, this school community acted courageously against the historical educational oppression of African-Americans in their city. Nevertheless, I must hasten to add that although a courageous act against oppression is venerable, the critical transformative ethic of risk is inherently a counter hegemonic act. A counter hegemonic act implies a sophisticated political action with the understanding of how certain societal groups manage to dominate others and maintain not only their privilege and control, but also the consensual support of those dominated. Paul Willis' well-known study, *Learning to Labour* has examined uncritically oriented resistance to hegemonic oppression. The

“Lads” in Willis’ study exemplified how uncritical resistance to domination and oppression can be likened to, “jumping out of the frying pan directly into the fire!”

Therefore, opting for an independent schooling environment is a step in the right direction towards critical transformative praxis. Nevertheless, critical transformative leadership theory implores further interrogation into the nature and context of this independent school community’s daily rituals. This approach also allows for a deeper analysis of the nature of resistance inherent in the school’s functioning outside the American public school system. Thus, the following section of this chapter explores a fundamental assumption of critical transformative leadership theory within the context of notions of critical transformative democracy.

#### *A Fundamental Assumption of Critical Transformative Leadership Theory and Demystifying Transformational Democracy*

Used in the literature almost exclusively as a leadership theory for public schools,<sup>82</sup> transformative leadership theory assumes that American public schools are tax-funded institutions, which *should* function to serve the democratic interests of the state—the amalgam of the people. Ahistorical and apolitical theorizing in traditional leadership discourse would posit that, in a society where the community building democratic practices of social justice, fairness, caring, and equality are regarded as the prerogative of the people, the institutions of schooling work to be reflective of those principles. Nevertheless, in accordance with the historically contradictory nature of the aforementioned form of democracy in a white supremacist, hyper-capitalist, patriarchal, and materialist society, gross inequities have permeated American institutions such as public education.

In the public arena of American education, critical transformative leadership theory becomes a powerful analytic tool based on the fundamental assumption that schools *should* primarily function in the general democratic interest of the people. Democracy, in this context does not imply the naively held conceptual notion where it just rhetorically seems to be the nice thing to do. Furthermore, in our society where power relations in schools have always been asymmetrical around issues of race, class, and gender I agree with Quantz, et. al. (1991) who state, “...democracy is, however, about restructuring power and those who work for democracy must develop the courage necessary to fight the inevitable resistance by those whom democracy threatens” (p. 114). Those who democracy threaten advocate the “gritty realities”<sup>83</sup> produced through the power of various voices of the conservative national commissions on education, state and local boards, and conservative foundations that have been historically prominent in deciding “Who Decides What Schools Teach” (Eisner, 1990, p. 337). These voices and their inherent power influences have not been transformative but have worked to shape inequitable socially reproductive educational policies and practices, especially around the conflicts of race, class, and gender within American public schools (Apple, 2000). The

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<sup>82</sup> See Burns, 1978; Foster, 1986; Bennis, 1984; Bass, 1985; Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Heifetz, 1994); Shriberg et. al., 1997; Quantz et. al. 1991. All of the aforementioned speak to public educational institutions with the exception of Shriberg et. al., 1997, which actually address MCPSC as a transformative institution not delineating between public and private institutions in their analysis.

<sup>83</sup> See, M. Apple in P. Trofinas 2000 for more insights of the “gritty realities” that rightist, neoconservative powerbrokers produce in the context of education.



studies which elaborate this conflict are so voluminous that one must engage in active denial to remain ignorant of the research” (Quantz, et. al., 1991, p. 100).

The implications for this study become readily apparent in the specific mistreatment, suppression, and oppression of educational possibilities for people of African descent within the state of Ohio as well as the city of Cincinnati as historicized in chapter 4 of this study. On a macro level, the traditional practices and norms of American public schooling have been essentially conservative and held together by a Eurocentric textbook driven heritage, and high-stakes standardized evaluative systems for both students and teachers who work to stabilize the curricular status quo (Eisner, 1990). Moreover, on a micro level, I argue that based on this study’s in-depth exploration of people of African descent and their historical interactions with the Cincinnati public educational system, the status quo has been neither democratic nor transformative.<sup>84</sup>

Thus, within the historical context of inequitable and less than transformative democratic public educational relations in the city of Cincinnati, some citizens such as those foundational in the creation of MCPSC have opted for independent education. At the very least, this school is free of much of the hierarchical bureaucratic red tape associated with the state’s continued and growing emphasis on high stakes proficiency testing as well as traditional teacher accountability measures that so often restrict the educational process. The educational process is restricted by eliminating the art and craft practice of teaching and learning through attempts at standardizing the construction of knowledge and meaning making on apolitical terms. I speak of an educational process, which must embrace the nature of knowledge production, consumption, and learning as never disconnected from the discursiveness of legitimating power within schools. Thus, the next section of this study engages the freedoms and constraints inherent in the daily functioning of this independent school helping to contextualize the power dynamic intersecting and conflicting with notions of critical transformative leadership.

#### *Vulgar Independence, or, Just, Certain Other Forms of Hegemonic Constraint*

MCPSC may be an “independent school,” but it is not “independent” in the autonomous commonsensical meaning usually associated with this term.<sup>85</sup> This independent educational institution simply had different forces creating new notions of freedom, constraint, and obligation when juxtaposed with American tax-funded public schools. It must be clear that this school was not situated in a vulgar form of independence associated with “anything goes” and a lack of accountability inherent in the historical/material power relations of those who perform various roles in the maintenance of this school community (Foucault, 1980; Rhoads, 1995). MCPSC’s accountability was to different stakeholders who created a certain approach to leadership as well as the particular patterns of interaction apparent in the previous chapters’ ethnographic (re)presentations.

By choosing to function as a private school, this independent educational institution then, was designed to serve not public but *private* interests. First, the *private* interests of MCPSC’s creators contain certain freedoms and constraints that come with

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<sup>84</sup> See, The Setting of Ch. 4 for more elaboration on the historicizing of blacks in Cincinnati.

<sup>85</sup> See Apple (2000) for an excellent Gramscian discussion of the need for curricular theorists to acknowledge the necessity for counter-hegemonic commonsenses to counter the “rightist” tide of hegemonic commonsenses in educational practices and policy making.

selecting a certain philosophical curricular approach to underpin their educational service offered to the community—The Marva Collins Way/philosophy. Second, the *private* interests of MCPSC’s philanthropic contributors provide certain freedoms and constraints that play a large role in the economic viability of this institution. Finally, the private interests of the consumers of MCPSC’s educational services create certain freedoms and constraints that play a major role in this school’s destiny by providing students for the institution. Therefore, unlike theorizing for public schools, this study uses critical transformative leadership theory within a relatively new and different context of independent schooling.

Thus, the underlying interests and assumptions of critical transformative leadership theory within the context of this independent schooling provide insight into an emergent critical transformative ethic of risk through acts of civic courage. In addition, the fundamental critical transformative assumption that schools should work to serve the interests of all people helps in situating the historical contradictions of Ohio’s public school system, which compelled this community to create their own independent school. Yet, even in the creation of an independent school, the constraints and freedoms of choosing curriculum, recruiting students, and securing needed funds manifested as power-laden aspects of this school community’s daily functioning and rituals. The next section of this study examines one of the aforementioned aspects, curricularizing at MCPSC.

### **Curricularizing at MCPSC: Establishing Philosophical and Pedagogical Clarity—In Search of Transformation**

In exploring the underlying philosophical assumptions inherent in the Marva Collins approach to education, I examine two key educational dynamics. First, the Marva Collins pedagogical *how* directs our attention to the actual daily teaching practices advocated as a means of knowledge construction and meaning making. Second, the Marva Collins philosophical *what* implores a critical interrogation of the school’s foundational curricular content, which stems from Marva Collins’ neo-classical philosophical approach. Critical interrogation brings a language of critique to an analysis of this nature where, “critique is an analytic construction of social or historical conditions tied to a firm understanding of lived reality” (Quantz et. al., 1991, p. 108).

#### *The MCPSC Pedagogical How*

Aspects of *how*, or the pedagogical daily teaching practices of the Marva Collins faculty speak volumes in catering to the strengths of the children, mostly of African descent. The use of rhythm through poetry, song, and dance interconnecting with many subjects such as Math, Grammar, and school public performances allowed these students the opportunity to tap into the deep culture of African aesthetics (Gittens, 2000; Welsh-Asante, 1994). In elaborating the philosophical underpinnings of an African-centered aesthetic response to art as well as performance (as in the case at MCPSC and the Marva Collins *how*), Gittens draws on Welsh-Asante’s “text senses” stating,

- 1) Polyrhythm refers to the simultaneous occurrence of several major rhythms. 2) Polycentrism suggests the presence of several colors in a painting or several movements on a dancer’s body occurring in the context of a presentation of art...

4) Repetition is a recurring theme in the presentation of art. 5) Curvilinear means that the lines are curved in the art, dance, music... (Gittens, 2000, pp. 138, 139)<sup>86</sup>

In this respect the MCPSC pedagogical *how* inherent in the Marva Collins method constantly created an ethical environment of care and nurturance that promoted educational excellence. On many occasions throughout a school day, the MCPSC pedagogical *how* would easily rattle advocates of traditional, desks-in-a-row, education as the various classes prepared for Sunday “Prepping for Power” events, did rhythmic class lessons, or practiced for other school performances. This is not to imply that students never sat in traditional neatly rowed desks partaking in teacher-centered instruction.

These teachers, especially the veteran lead-teacher, using aspects of African aesthetics oftentimes captured students’ attention. Lessons were reworked into songs with slammin’ beats that reflected an African cultural festival, the black Baptist church or a Hip Hop musical event. This pedagogical practice was as socially normalized for many of these students as talking African-American Language at home with family and friends (Smitherman, 1999). I refer to black talk as African-American Language in agreement with Smitherman who persuasively points to the idea that the denotation of a language or dialect is typically based on political and social power more than anything else. Smitherman agrees with another linguist, Weinrich (1963), who argued that typically the difference between a language and a dialect is whoever has the Army, and the Navy!

When the lessons required a rhythmic beat, it was not uncommon to see the students beating on the desks as they syllabicated words. This method embraced aspects of the aforementioned African-centered aesthetic subjectivities that many of these students brought to school. These activities became electrical as the room filled with energy and students learning new words, phonetic sounds, and number facts.

In this vein, The Marva Collins Way was definitely untraditional and for such purposes rightfully so. It took special teachers to embrace this particular pedagogical approach and the lead-teacher was one example of an expert with over ten years of experience. As a MCPSC neophyte, the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher used this pedagogical approach far less often than his two colleagues did. The 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders tended to resist these rhythmic “sing-song” approaches as if they were childish and not “cool” or “hip.” In further reflection on participant/observations in the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade classes, it became clear that the curricular content of their subjects and textbook work required more sophistication and creativity in order for a rhythmic pedagogical approach to be successful. These students were not interested in the traditional alphabet Wall Card songs, or the addition and multiplication songs that always excited the lower grades students. Typical MCPSC rhythmic songs were primarily designed to teach basic rudimentary skills such as phonetic sounds, word beginning/endings, parts of speech, and math facts. Thus, by the time, students entered the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade these songs had become passé making the use of rhythm as a pedagogical teaching strategy more challenging and complex for Mr. Sipho, the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher.

In the fourth grade classroom, Mrs. Goldstein’s lack of experience as a first year teacher was not as detrimental as that of Mr. Sipho when it came to MCPSC rhythmic pedagogical approaches. Mrs. Goldstein’s students’ were the youngest group at the school. In addition, beating on their desks and singing Marva Collins alphabet Wall Card

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<sup>86</sup> The third component of this citation is inapplicable to this study. It states 3) Dimensional is spatial relationships and shows depth and energy, the awareness of vital force.

songs or doing rhythmic multiplication drills always represented a break from their teacher's traditional, conservative, no-nonsense, silent class monotony. This was a traditional pedagogical approach that Mrs. Goldstein was accustomed to as a longtime public school teacher. She rethought this teaching approach at MCPSC. During lessons of this nature or poetry, the fourth grade teacher could easily relax as future Exemplar MCPSC students took over—usually the girls. This pedagogical approach was one that most MCPSC students were familiar enough with to carry out without a teacher's assistance, as this format is used starting at the pre-kindergarten level to introduce less complex numbers, sound, letters, and poems.

In the context of leadership theory, these pedagogical spaces allowed for the suppression of the usual top-down asymmetrical teacher-student power relations inherent in other aspects of leadership at this school—glimpses of emergent critical transformative possibilities. At least, for the fourth and 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade class, these times in a MCPSC day allowed for leadership, to a certain extent, to manifest at all levels. The students were given opportunities to lead other students as well as their teachers on many occasions. In some instances, it may be argued that the teachers never really relinquished their power, because they continued to set the parameters, and had the final say on matters pertaining to this aspect of the school when juxtaposed with critical transformative leadership theory. I argue that power is always inherent in teacher student relationships, and the teachers in this context of analysis used their power to promote symmetrical power relations, which is a sign of the transformative possibilities inherent in such acts. This was especially reflected in the 5/6<sup>th</sup>, as well as the fourth grade class as Mrs. Goldstein was also in the process of learning the school's way of engaging poetry as well as other math and phonics songs. The teachers, although not on all occasions, frequently let the students engage the creation of knowledge based on the guidance of various students who after years of poetry lessons and alphabet Wall Card songs, knew the routine. Unfortunately, the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade students were not as interested in this opportunity at leadership like the two other classes.

Critical transformative leadership theory teaches us that schools are arenas of cultural politics. An example of the struggle that such politics can create is found at MCPSC around issues of language. Pedagogically, a dilemma surfaced around the issue of Ebonics (ebony = black & phonics = speech sounds) or what I referred to above as African-American language.<sup>87</sup> Teachers' constantly scolded students for not using "correct standard English." Moreover, faculty members often scrutinized and delegitimated the cultural language practices that the vast majority of these students brought into school. The language that many of these students brought to school was viewed as deficient. These students' speech patterns were perceived to be in need of constant correction, a particular practice invoked most often by the President/CEO and the lead-teacher. I often wondered how the students felt after leaving school and going back into their home environments where it were acceptable to use African-American Language in conversations.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> See Smitherman (1999) who discuss the various terms used to identify African-American speech patterns.

<sup>88</sup> I make this assumption about the students' home life based on my experiences with these students throughout the school year. The overwhelming majority of these students discarded the "right" way to

Now, I must be clear in stating that I am not advocating that these students not become proficient in the use of the language of wider communication. The ultimate purpose of language is effective communication. Therefore, the use of Ebonics or African-American Language will not serve as an effective method of communication in all situations in a diverse society such as the U.S. Obviously, these students must learn how to communicate with people who are not of their racial/ethnic group and culture in mainstream society. This makes the use of what MCPSC teachers considered “standard English” in America a viable tool to be used in code switching—not for the delegitimation of their mother tongue.

Nevertheless, the use of “Ebonics” for any reason was unacceptable and this lack of acceptance goes against notions of transformation such as racial/ethnic/class group dynamics as well as a curricular language of critique that interrogates mainstream communication norms. These notions require respect for people’s racial/ethnic culture and language rather than the unquestioned privileging of legitimated language patterns of the status quo. Curricularly, Mrs. Collins (1982) in *The Marva Collins Way*, the pillar of all such schools clearly asserted her position while correcting a student’s usage of “incorrect” language in class.

The boy replied, “It ain’t the same.” “Isn’t, sweetheart, it isn’t the same. Children, listen to me for a moment. To succeed in this world, you must speak correctly. I don’t want to hear any jive talk in here or any of this stuff about black English. You must not just think of yourselves as black children or ghetto children. You must become citizens of the world, like Socrates. (p. 30)

This pedagogy becomes problematic once the underlying issues of culture are explored in reference to embracing what the child brings to the class. Her statement subsumes what advocates of critical transformative leadership theory promote by inherently denying the student’s subgroup identity. The identity politics of being “black” in the pluralistic U.S. is not engaged by such a curricular approach leaving the assumption that the student is not a member of a human sub-group but only of the world which, of course, gives them no group identity at all.

The critical linguist, Geneva Smitherman (1999) taps into African-American language helping to position this pedagogical aspect of MCPSC teaching spearheaded by the school’s leaders. She states, “...linguist/educators/English teachers/and just plain folk bees comin from one of three bags: (1) eradicationist; (2) bi-dialectalist; (3) legitimizer. These positions have undergirding them not simply linguistic issues but important socio-political concerns” (p. 346). In reference to the eradicationist she states,

Now this is a old position and don’t too many people hold it no more since it ain’t considered cool... Essentially, they say get rid of the dialect; it’s illogical, sloppy, and undeveloped. It retards reading ability and the acquisition of language skills and thus is dysfunctional in school. It is the language of Uncle Tom and thus is dysfunctional in the socioeconomic world. Ergo, the only way to facilitate the up-from-the-ghetto rise of Black folk is to obliterate what one educator deemed “this last barrier to integration.”...

Bi-dialectalist are from the bag that believe,

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speak opting for African-American Language patterns during recess and other activities outside their classrooms, a practice not tolerated at MCPSC.

...Because Blacks learn they language patterns in a Black environment, they manifest they linguistic competence in Black English... And if reading teachers is hip to the phonological system of Black speech, then there ain't no reading problem... However, there do be that social/real(?) world out there. And Blacks will need to acquire the "prestige" usage system in order to facilitate they socio-economic mobility. At the same time bi-dialectalist recognize that Blacks need they powerful and efficient dialect to function/survive in they own communities... (p. 347)

Finally, the Legitimizers assert,

... that while the former group is linguistically inaccurate and outright racist, the latter is politically naïve and pedagogically wrongheaded. After all if the dialect is not a problem, but socio-linguistic attitudes are, then why not work to change those attitudes? While we may be talking bout Blacks enterin the mainstream, we can change the course of that stream. Not CAN but IS—since Black language... is rapidly being adopted by whites. Not CAN but GOT TO—since cultural plurality don't mean remake Black folk in white face...

Unfortunately, at this point in the school's evolution, the pedagogical ethos promoted in reference to language instruction seemed to be eradicationist. For, I agree with Smitherman when she succinctly states, "That's how come Black folk bees so schizophrenic seemin, all time havin to front and mask, go through linguistic and other kind of changes round whites" (p. 348). Blackshire-Baley (1996) helps clarify this point even further stating,

Ebonics as well as standard European languages can be found among African people throughout the Diaspora. Ebonics has its origins in European languages that were adopted by enslaved Africans. Because they were separated from their common groups, they had to communicate in another language. In the case of the United States, the form of English spilled over into the language of other Europeans. To distance themselves from this new language, wealthy Europeans labeled it "broken English." (p. 5)

Furthermore, telling black children that they will become like Socrates presents a psychological impossibility every time they look into a mirror, not to speak of cultural mis-orientation. A more culturally sensitive method of teaching could serve to benefit these students and not degrade the things that they do as part of their culture outside of school. A critical transformative language of critique and attention to the cultural dynamics that these students brought to the school would help these students understand the politics of power inherent in "who decides" what is or is not a legitimate language. Lovett and Neely (1997) offer a more sensitive approach to this subject stating that,

African Americans need to be advocates for their children. This means that they need to recognize—if they do not already—the legitimacy of Ebonics among African American youth. Let the children know that it is appropriate to communicate in Ebonics in certain settings. African American children need to be able to communicate in both ways or they will be at a disadvantage. To a certain extent, a disconnection exists when one is inflexible. Although legalized integration exists, American society

is still very much segregated. African Americans need to communicate both in the dominant culture and their own culture. (p. 244)

Marva Collins' pedagogical methods and strategies have been proven successful in motivating children. This aspect of The Marva Collins Way speaks to the *how* that so amazes people who had written inner-city students off as being dysfunctional and having subordinate capabilities in the formal educational arena. The Marva Collins Way for a long time served as a model of what subordinated students are able to do. For this reason, many educators have latched on to Mrs. Collins' approach just as they latch on to other trendy teaching approaches such as cooperative learning.

I must be clear in stating that I am not arguing against approaches to education such as the cooperative learning approach. But, if these approaches are used uncritically like one size fits all models then they can be mis-educative. Bartolome (1994) helps add clarification to this point asserting,

Well-known approaches and strategies such as cooperative learning, language experience, process writing, reciprocal teaching, and whole language activities can be used to create humanizing learning environments where students cease to be treated as objects and yet receive academically rigorous instruction (Cohen, 1986; Edelsky, Altwerger, & Flores, 1991; Palinscar & Brown, 1984; Perez & Torres-Guzman, 1992; Zamal, 1982). However, when these approaches are implemented uncritically, they often produce negative results, as indicated by Lisa Delpit (1986, 1988). Critical teacher applications of these approaches and strategies can contribute to discarding deficit views of students from subordinated groups, so that they are treated with respect and viewed as active and capable subjects in their own learning. (pp. 238, 239)

Thus, certain aspects of the MCPSC pedagogical *how* both simultaneously embraced as well as suppressed aspects of what students brought culturally to school. On the one hand, as with the lens of critical transformative leadership theory, I am in agreement with the school's embracement of African oral tradition and African-centered aesthetics as students often had performance opportunities during class sessions and at planned public events. These practices even entailed a strong emphasis on vocalization highlighting the power of *Nommo*, the spoken word (Asante, 1998). Nevertheless, a critical transformative leadership approach questions the idea that the racially acculturated language patterns of students be targets of delegitimation and suppression without attempts at clarifying the deeper implications of such cultural phenomena curricularly.

Furthermore, a key aspect of The Marva Collins Way, the *what*, has for so long been not been critiqued as I will attempt in the next section of this study. No one can dispute the *how* of the Marva Collins Way. Her methods have been proven successful repeatedly in reference to helping inner-city youth score in the upper percentiles on standardized proficiency tests, and move on to locations of economic stability in the mainstream of U.S. society, especially African-Americans. However, there remained the philosophical *what* that, in many ways, subsumed critical transformative possibilities inherent in the daily rituals of the MCPSC school community.

#### *The MCPSC Philosophical What*

Critical transformative leadership theory evokes the more encompassing question of, what if black students are scoring in the upper percentiles on standardized tests that are culturally biased and standardized through the valued cultural capital of middle, upper-middle, and upper class European-American society? The philosophical *what* must be dealt with from a culturally relevant perspective, and combined with the pedagogical *how*, as these components of teaching are essentially inseparable in curricularizing. This approach offers a more holistic educational thrust for the African-American children who are suffering from a hegemonic, Eurocentered, economical, educational, as well as political system that reproduces poverty in a society and renders them culturally illiterate and without a transformative language of critique needed to change the circumstances in which they and their families live.

Neo-classical educators assert that the major purpose of education is to transmit “character, academics, and discipline” —the educational triad that incorporates the ‘traditional moral values’ (Wynne & Ryan, 1993). Those who are influenced by critical transformative leadership theory counterclaim that character is not simply transmitted but must be cultivated bearing in mind context and historical/material realities. In the public schools, the character-education curriculum is a kind of hierarchy with history and literature ranked the highest, because students can most successfully mine these disciplines for the moral values and exemplars conspicuously missing in the modern world (Bennett, 1992; A. Bloom, 1987; Kilpatrick, 1992). These are very intriguing insights from the neo-classicalists in reference to curricularizing. With history and literature ranked as the highest components of curriculum by neo-classicalist, the question then becomes whose perspective of history and literature will be embraced? The obvious answer in keeping with the neo-classicalist curriculum philosophy is their view of the Western/European tradition.

The worldview of the neo-classicalists may not be critically transformative but it allows for an understanding of the school of thought that underpins MCPSC’s curricular thrust based on the Marva Collins Way. Nash (1997) offers these words of description in reference to the neo-classical worldview.

As upholders of “traditional moral values,” the declinists (believers of the fact that American culture, and education in particular, are in a period of grave, near-catastrophic moral decline and in desperate need of a massive virtue infusion to save them) are self-declared ‘neo-classicalists’ who extol the traditional virtues of Western civilization, especially those embodied in the cultural legacy of the ancient Greeks. (p. 18)

In presenting the neo-classicalist saturation of ancient Greeks in their works Nash further states:

Kilpatrick (1992) refers to Plato and Aristotle a whopping 22 times in a book devoted exclusively to an analysis of contemporary education. And Marva Collins (1990) speaks frequently of the ancient philosophers—particularly Plato and Aristotle—both in her more general analysis of the education of ghetto children and in the personal account of her actual, day-to-day teaching in a private, inner-city elementary school. She cites Plato and Aristotle, and a variety of other ancient authors as well, at least 50 times in a relatively short volume aimed at the general reader. (pp. 18,19)



Therefore, it becomes clear that the neo-classicalist perspectives on education are deeply rooted in the philosophical frameworks of European/Western civilization, and curricularizing at MCPSC. The fourth and 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade classes primarily completed whole group reading lessons with the mythological stories of Western civilization. The texts of traditional Greek based narratives such as *Odysseus* were common. Moreover, contemporary Western texts such as *Animal Farm*, or *Anthem* were central texts in the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade class providing solely a Europeanized discourse of communism, socialism, and capitalism.

Exploring deeper into the neo-classical character educators' beliefs on educational issues, Nash posits,

Generally, they believe in an essential human nature that conduces all children everywhere, regardless of class, ethnic, racial, and gender difference, to want to know the truth and to lead the morally good life. They stress the importance of the Western cultural heritage in embodying this universal truth and the responsibility of the school to transmit this truth to all children. (p. 21)

Nash goes on to reveal these comments in reference to Marva Collins' Way and her neo-classical approach to educational curricular issues, which were foundational and unscrutinized at MCPSC.

Marva Collins (1990), a self-professed Platonist who believes in a world of timeless truths and an invariant moral order, is harshly critical of "curriculum experts" who are obsessed with "relevance." As both a founder and principal of a Chicago private school, Westside Preparatory, and as someone who has taught there for more than 20 years, Collins, an African American, believes that a "relevant" curriculum serves only to undermine the fundamental purpose of education: to "expand children's horizons." (pp.24-25)

The neo-classical philosophy inherent in Marva Collins Way and embraced by MCPSC has deep educational implications. This approach to educating the black oppressed in our society has the potential to be devastating on a more fundamental level. It is clear that Mrs. Collins is an advocate of the neo-classicalist ideology as it relates to the content of the curriculum. These curricular assumptions and influences were inextricably connected to the general classroom culture of MCPSC dimming critical transformative possibilities.

The curriculum content of MCPSC based on the Marva Collins philosophy created educational practices such as the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade class' rhythmic Greek alphabet song. This pedagogical practice was used to assist in student memorization of the Greek alphabet—the only "foreign" alphabet practiced other than English.<sup>89</sup> Mrs. Collins' philosophical critique of those "curriculum experts" obsessed with "relevance" has deep implications as this approach manifested in such ritual practices as the Greek system of letters reigning supreme thereby delegitimizing all others of the world—even those of African people which would seem relevant in this school's case. My critique is not against learning the Greek alphabet per se; yet learning only the letter system of Greeks represents an uncritical approach to critically educating African-American students.

Thus, it must be clear that by positioning critical transformative leadership theory in opposition to neo-classicalism, I am not positing that critical transformative learning

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<sup>89</sup> The students selected for Group B did get to learn Spanish as well.

means not engaging classical Western literature. One can engage classical Western literature and be critically transformative. The point is that the Marva Collins philosophy promotes uncritical and non-contextual engagement of neo-classicalism and, is therefore, hegemonic. When Socrates, Plato and other European thinkers and statespersons are offered privileged positions in the curriculum and are studied uncritically, then you have neo-classicalism. When such “men” occupy important positions among men and women from Africa and other parts of the world and when all of the texts are studied critically, then you have a more balanced approach to critical transformative learning.

In accordance with the analysis stated above, I submit that neo-classicalism as a curricular framework did undoubtedly help students to read and write. This was evident as all of the graduating eighth grade students were accepted into some of the city’s most prestigious secondary schools, most of which the students had to “test into.”<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, I suggest that these lessons taught in this manner conveyed disconnected information stunting the transformative possibilities essential to these African-American students’ development, as well as the school’s one European-American student. The mythologizing inherent in the Western neo-classical traditional literature has suffered withering attacks from various contemporary discourses such as feminism, womanism, Afrocentricity, and critical theorists, to name a few, for delegitimizing the social histories and narratives of “others” while simultaneously legitimating paternalistic, Eurocentric myths of a glorified past.

Nevertheless, I often wondered about where the use of a neo-classical orientation to education positioned, these all but one, African-American students as racialized, classized, and genderized subjects. Education of this nature does not to prepare these students to be critical readers of the world therefore empowered agents able to lead in the democratic social transformation of our society. The *uncritical* learning about and emulating the likes of the historical Platos’ and Aristotles’ of the Western European tradition cannot help these students see the invisible oppressive ideologies that continue to systematically render them and their families in the poorest echelons of society by every measure. Moreover, it is highly probable that these students will enter society as adults who are literate of the word and illiterate of the world—reproducers rather than transformers.

Critical theorist Donaldo Macedo (1996) helps to clarify a more critically transformative view of literacy as it relates to the world in such a situation as this school community. He states,

It is indeed ironic that in the United States, a country that prides itself on being the first and most advanced within the so-called “first world,” over sixty million people are illiterate or functionally illiterate. If Jonathon Kozol is correct, the sixty million illiterates and functional illiterates whom he documents in his book *Illiterate America* do not constitute a minority class of illiterate (Kozol pp. 39-40). To the sixty million illiterates we should add the sizable groups who learn how to read but are, by and large, incapable of developing independent and critical thought. In reality, the United States is in forty-ninth place among the 128 countries of the United Nations in terms of literacy rate. This ranking applies basically

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<sup>90</sup> See, Phase III of the ethnographic “Inside Stories.”

to the reading of the word and not the world. Our ranking, if applied to the reading of the world, would indeed be much lower. (p.55)

In accordance with Macedo's analysis, I submit that neo-classicalism as a curricular framework undoubtedly produced students who could read and write the *word*. Nevertheless, beyond the rudimentary level of basic skills in counting and literacy many lessons taught at MCPSC lacked a critical element. These black students resistance to the school's yearly Shakespearean Festival epitomized this assertion. Most of the boys at the school saw the rehearsals of such information as folly and irrelevant to their everyday lives. Thus, almost none of the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade boys attended the citywide performance. The neo-classicalist curriculum framework was not transformative but ahistorical and non-contextual leaving me with impressions that these students were not becoming critical readers of the *world* based on the school's unquestioned curricular underpinnings and thrust.

Although, the school's President/CEO was known for her sermon/lectures filled with the narratives streaming from a woman of African descent who knew racism/white supremacy all too well growing up in the southern state of Alabama, her sermon/lectures oftentimes highlighted the historical oppression of people of African descent as it intersected with European civilization's expansion through domination. Just as the President/CEO, the school's lead-teacher also occasionally engaged in personal narratives of black life and oppression in the U.S. Yet, these spontaneous, periodic sermon/lectures and personal narratives could in no way counter the neo-classical curricular thrust of daily lessons in the various classes.

In *The Marva Collins Way*, Mrs. Collins speaks to her belief in teaching Western classics. She states,

Children do not need to read stories that teach "street smarts." They learn enough on their own. What they need are character-building stories. They need to read for values, morality, and universal truths. That is my reason for teaching *classical literature*. (p.156)

This is the philosophical attack on engaging "popular culture" as curricular text. We must not forget that human beings gave Western literature the titles "great and classical"—these terms did not simply fall from the sky! Human beings socially constructed these constructs. This Eurocentric domination of the terms "great and classical" conditions individuals to not even think of the literature such of Asians, Africans, etc... as being "great or classical."

This espousal of universal truth while at the same time stressing the importance of the Western cultural heritage in embodying this universal truth is, for those at MCPSC, to play into the hands of a hegemonic strand of Eurocentrism by unrecognizingly acquiescing in their own domination and oppression as African people. This form of curricularizing is also mis-educative for the one European-American student at MCPSC, as this curricular approach offers no critical deconstruction of "whiteness." Therefore, the question of is it appropriate to focus on the universality of a Eurocentered Western culture and the "truths" espoused by them? Furthermore, since there is no argument about there being a great Western cultural heritage, I am inclined to ask are there any other "great cultural heritages" and why are they delegitimated or ignored? Such questions become problematic when confined to a framework of analysis that purports

universalisms without considering the multiple realities that exist outside of the Western cultural tradition.

These neo-classically based educational practices often evoked rebelliousness from many of the students. Many of the young men had great aspirations of being rappers and professional athletes. Much of this I accredit to their interactions with American media, which is saturated with misconstrued images of blacks primarily as athletes and rappers—entertainers. By and large, these were the people who looked like them and they wanted so badly to emulate. The Plato and Socrates stuff was “cool,” but that just seemed not to be what these boys perceived as reality. Therefore, when away from their teachers the boys acted and spoke about the issues that had deeper implications for their lives. They even had their own legitimated ritual spaces of solidarity away from staff where profanity was acceptable and normalized—signs of American popular culture and mainstream media.

Frankly, much of this Eurocentered Western classical type of instructing was disconnected from the historical, cultural, and personal experiences of the children. Furthermore, what could be more poetic and connected to the African-American child’s reality than the lyrical geniuses of modern day rap music? At UCLA one can study the lyrical genius of rapper Tupac Shakur and receive college credit. Many of these artists are nothing more than African America’s modern day griots with stories to tell just like Shakespeare. Critical transformative leadership theory compels us to acknowledge that these aspects of the students’ lives must not be subsumed in the name of a neo-classical curricular orientation. Instead, aspects of the students’ lives must become curricular from a critical and transforming perspective invoked through a language of critique.

My fieldwork revealed that relying on neo-classical content as a mode of instruction provided few opportunities for students to critically analyze why the rappers that they adored did not own the record companies in which they worked and distributed their music. Furthermore, given the miniscule chances of many of these students becoming star athletes or entertainers, critical transformative leadership curricularizing would have allowed for the educative interrogation of various student-centered issues. Contextually based questions such as: how does the mainstream U.S. media work to maintain hegemony by creating false and damaging dreams? Or, given that these popular figures are, largely, icons of consumption, what roles do they play in oppressing or creating a socially just, equitable, and more democratic society?

Students seldom received a critical and historically situated perspective on professional athletics in relation to the African American male. They rarely had the opportunity to discuss the issue of professional athletics in class in relationship to slavery exploring who were the owners and who were the slaves, or were they witnessing a new colonization of black bodies under the guise of getting a “job” or “career.” How enlightened these students might have been if they understood the historical/material reality of over 80% of the NBA players being African-American, but few partially own teams. Giroux (1992) is correct as far as the neo-classical approach promoting students who are virtuous, understand values, and who are literate enough to read the “Great Western Classics.” He states,

Literacy within this perspective is geared to make adults more productive workers and citizens within a given society. In spite of its appeal to economic mobility, functional literacy reduces the concept of literacy and

the pedagogy in which it is suited to the pragmatic requirements of capital; consequently, the notions of critical thinking, culture and power disappear under the imperatives of the labor process and the need of capital accumulation. (p. 87)

Therefore, in this neo-classical framework of rehashing a Eurocentered Western classical discourse, these African-American children will not be equipped to see the connectedness of their past to the present oppression experienced by their people. They may become the rappers or professional athletes that they aspire to without ever questioning why they have been hegemonically incorporated as workers without the same aspirations to become owners.

The aforementioned aspects of curricularizing are essential in understanding how notions of critical transformative leadership, in many ways, were thwarted due to conservative curriculum underpinnings. After all, this school community consists of primarily blacks. Furthermore, as stated previously, one of the key dynamics of providing independent schooling is the financial responsibilities of such an endeavor. Therefore, the next section of this study draws attention to the historical/material reality of being overwhelmingly a black school funded by wealthy white philanthropy.

### ***Acknowledging The Real***

Opening in 1990, MCPSC was totally financed and operated by African-Americans from the basement of an African-American church. Nevertheless, as the school grew to eventually relocate to a standalone facility (now the lower grades day campus), the school leadership chose to solicit outside contributions from city well-wishers, corporations, and philanthropists. These contributions supplemented assets created through tuition fees, “penny pinching,” a non-salaried President/CEO, and the use of unneeded supplies and materials donated by other schools and businesses in the city. The President/CEO often commented, “This school was created from the leftovers of others.”

At the point in this school’s evolution where the possibility of moving out of the church basement and acquiring a standalone building became a reality, a wealthy European-American man emerged as the school’s largest financial donor. A large portrait conspicuously hangs in honor of this gentleman on the dining room wall of the lower grades campus next to an African-American male founding figure’s. Overtime, MCPSC has accumulated substantial philanthropic donations from various wealthy European-American individuals as well as foundations to the point that wealthy whites presently represent the school’s primary economic contributors.<sup>91</sup> Unfortunately, foundations and wealthy white philanthropy represent an economic reality that the school’s President/CEO does not see changing—at least not in her lifetime.

In many ways, the old Golden Rule adage, “those with the gold, make the rules” obviously influenced the discursive practices of leadership as well as individual and group representation at MCPSC. Furthermore, the school’s conservative neo-classical curricular foundation helped in providing an image necessary to securing needed “gold” from the school’s primarily wealthy white contributors who obviously embraced the school’s philosophical and pedagogical thrust. The school’s President/CEO expressed

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<sup>91</sup> See Appendix G for a list of school contributors posted on a bulletin board during fieldwork.

that a level of reciprocity was due to donors and foundations that have given so generously to *her* on the behalf of MCPSC. She explained,

We've had all kinds of people, concerned parents and such, with all kinds of great ideas about how to raise money for this school but they have never been able to get much. What they don't understand is that I have earned many of these peoples' respect and trust over the years... The money is for the school but it is really entrusted to *me*—it's because those people know my character... That's why money comes from here and there... and, I know that people are always watching us and word gets around about this or that... We know that these people don't just give away their money to anyone, so we must deliver and not waste those peoples valuable contributions.

Regardless of the school's embracement of the Marva Collins philosophy of education which is fundamentally conservative in curricular content (*the what*), yet pedagogically (*the how*) transformative at times. In addition to the new boarding school's intentions of attracting international students in the future, *the fact remains that the higher grades Clara Mariama International Boarding School campus had an all African-American student population with the exception of one European-American.* This is a reality that cannot be dismissed, for it begs the question regarding what type of education, delivered primarily to black students, will wealthy white philanthropists and foundations that they govern support? This question is essential to understanding the complex politics inherent in leadership as it relates to transformative leadership theory, for I came to experience leadership at MCPSC within that historical/material context.

Moreover, although the daily practices at MCPSC were inextricably connected to the school's neo-classical curricular base, which served as the starting point of daily planning by the staff. The inherent influences of, "Those with the gold" made for a certain type of "dance" or "ritual performance" at MCPSC creating a complex, sometimes contradictory, other times coherent approach to leadership that will be explored in the next chapter's ethnographic themes of this study.

## CHAPTER 9

### ETHNOGRAPHIC THEMES

#### Introduction

In the previous chapter of this study, I alluded to the idea that by choosing to function as an independent school, MCPSC, was designed to serve not public but *private* interests. I further pointed out that, inherent in the group who created this school were private interests as well as certain freedoms and constraints that came with selecting a certain philosophical curricular approach. In this regard, these concerned community members selected The Marva Collins Way/philosophy to underpin their educational service. Furthermore, I stated that, the *private* interests of MCPSC's philanthropic contributors also provide certain freedoms and constraints that play a large role in the economic viability of this institution. Finally, I alluded to the *private* interests of consumers of MCPSC's educational services which also create certain freedoms and constraints that play a major role in this school's destiny by providing students for the institution. These are all critical reiterations that help to contextualize the emergent ethnographic themes of the study.

Through an analysis of the interview data, observations, and documents collected over the course of the school year, three recurring themes emerged at MCPSC. The complex interests inherent in the continual and successful functioning of MCPSC created: 1) The double edged (i.e., sometimes coherent/sometimes conflicting) nature inherent in the MCPSC "official" image situated in the politics of leadership at the school, 2) A semblance of tracking inherent in the school's structure, and 3) A special valuing and adherence to the MCPSC Work Ethic built on a high level of flexibility, patience, and collaboration. These themes provide the context for a final analysis of the various nuances of critical transformative leadership theory that concludes this chapter.

#### ***The Double Edged Nature Inherent in the MCPSC Image: The Politics of Leadership***

Image is important. I am reminded of a popular television commercial that boldly advocates, "Image is everything." At MCPSC, an independent school that functions in the private sector of American life, the inherent overarching capitalist American ethos of competition was central to the school's rituals of attracting possible consumers of their educational service. The school could not escape competing with other independent schools in the city and the non-tuition based city public schools for its clientele.

Therefore, out of necessity in relation to institutional survival, MCPSC had to be an educational community that presented itself to outsiders (the public) in a certain way. This type of positive imaging has not only created a strong rhetoric for faculty and student recruitment but it has also attracted major financial as well as other types of contributions from "outsiders." In essence, this school dynamic has worked to sustain and maintain the assets valuable to the institution's continual operation throughout the school's ten-year existence.

The notion of imaging and presentation has always been tenuous, complex, and many times contradictory for people of African descent in America. The validity of the aforementioned statement is applicable to MCPSC, an independent school with an overwhelmingly African-American faculty and student population. Signithia Fordham's

(1996) theorizing of black allegiance to the African-American fictive kinship system helps to clarify the double-edged, sometimes coherent, sometimes conflicting nature of leadership at MCPSC. Fordham (1996) points to the idea where the “fictive kinship is, first, a prestige system through which most African-Americans apprehend reality; and second, the ideology and organizational structure that undergirds and permeates Black social life...” (p. 72). In Fordham’s study, the parents of academically successful African-American high school students often times confused their children with bicultural representational acts in which parents “talked white” on the phone or outside their home when interacting with those of the dominant culture but talked “regular” when amongst other blacks who were a part of the black fictive kinship. Not understanding the power relations inherent in their parents’ interactions with those of the dominant culture, the high school students deemed their parents linguistic code switching as “phoniness” or “putting on airs.”

At MCPSC, “phoniness” or “putting on airs” was a necessary component of this school’s “official” imaging, bearing in mind the overwhelming predominance of wealthy white philanthropy essential to the school’s continual operation as an independent institution. The double-edged nature of this type of imaging for survival also confused many of the students at MCPSC as even in their acquiescence they described this type of highly political presentation, in the presence of outsiders, as “frontin’” by the school’s staff. In a broader context, what many students regarded as “frontin’” could also be described as “politicking” as a means to meeting the needs of maintaining such an institution. Although few of the MCPSC staff escaped these indictments by many of the students, the President/CEO and the lead-teacher were usually perceived as the guiltiest parties on these occasions, as they always had to be in the forefront of a good showing of the school.<sup>92</sup>

Students identified as Dissenters in previous chapters of this study<sup>93</sup> at MCPSC also criticized Mr. Sipho of the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade class regarding his enactment of the “official” MCPSC image. Classroom disruptions by students constantly complaining about promises made to them, their parents, and school guests about issues such as the school’s getting Lacrosse and Volleyball teams constantly destabilized the school’s “official” image presented to outsiders. As MCPSC students who were insiders, these positive image-creating rituals that manifested for recruitment and garnering funds was typically discounted and considered *frontin’*. One student’s untimely quip highlights this issue as she interrupted a poetry lesson, “they need to just *keep it real* ‘round here and stop frontin’ about how good this school is...” And:

When we gon’ start practicin’ Lacrosse... She [referring to Dr. Mariama] always talkin’ ‘bout what we gone do at this school... She always tellin’ parents about we gone do this and we gone do that at Marva Collins... but do we do it? No! No-bod-dy is comin’ here to teach us Lacrosse this year... I betcha that...

Neither sports team materialized during the school year. This usually helped in making the school’s image seem so farcical and the staffs’ plans appear empty to testy insiders. Yet, the voice of hope inherent in future plans for such activities and the surprise guests

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<sup>92</sup> Throughout my year of participant/observations students also on several occasions indicted me for being complicit in the “frontin’.” As a researcher, I was keenly aware of the political implications of a “good showing” and did not want to do anything to jeopardize the President/CEO and staff’s intentions.

<sup>93</sup> See, chapters 5, 6, & 7 for “Inside Stories” on Dissenters



such as Hip Hop star Bow Wow by the school's President/CEO always helped. Furthermore, I also learned of the letdowns and reneged promises made to the school's President/CEO by various people who promised to come and introduce the students to fun and exciting extracurricular activities such as lacrosse but never lived up to their commitments. These reasons for reneged promises made to the school's President/CEO were beyond my knowledge.

### ***MCPSC, Imaging, and Faculty Recruitment***

As an independent educational institution, the recruitment of quality faculty members was vital to MCPSC's survival—an aspect of schooling in which the community had to compete with other city schools. The President/CEO's laments of, "they come to us, get our training and expertise, then leave us and take it elsewhere" speak to the school's inevitable competitive situation as she addressed concerns of former university interns who chose not to accept employment at MCPSC after completing degree requirements.<sup>94</sup> Dr. Mariama's sentiments were similar in referring to some teachers who had exited MCPSC opting for teaching positions in other independent or public city schools. Nevertheless, over the years the administration at MCPSC has developed a strong rhetoric of staff recruitment integrally connected to the school's positive imaging and presentation of itself, especially to outsiders.

The powerful rhetoric surrounding the MCPSC "official" image is captured in responses of the staff members as they recanted personal stories of being compelled to become a part of this educational community. As outsiders, the staff members "bought in" to the MCPSC marketed package—its image. An interview with Mrs. Goldstein, the fourth grade teacher exemplifies the powerfulness of the MCPSC "official" image and the effectiveness of this marketing approach to outsiders. She shared,

O.K., I was a Cincinnati Public Schools teacher... I am a retiree now, but Dr. Mariama did a career day at my school... I was teaching at [name of elementary school] at the time and she came to the school to give a talk... and told me about her school...and told the kids and everything about her school. I was really interested because I sort of had read some information about Marva Collins and the method that she used... I thought that that was the correct... I mean I thought that her methods were excellent. So, I told Dr. Mariama at the time that when I retire well I'll give you a call... and I did and she hired me and I am here.

K.S.(P.C.): About how many years ago was that?

Goldstein.: That was about maybe fifteen years ago... maybe ten years ago.

The school's President/CEO articulated her vision of the school some ten to fifteen years ago in a quite convincing way. As, with only one encounter, Mrs. Goldstein vowed to one day be a part of the school's vision, based on the strong rhetoric of recruitment inherent in the MCPSC "official" image presented to outsiders. Once an official insider and a part of the MCPSC community, Mrs. Goldstein decided to remain for only one school year.

During a more frustrated moment in the school year, Mrs. Goldstein shed light on the MCPSC image based on an outsiders' perception, now that she was an insider. On this rare occasion of coming out of her class and into the lead-teacher's room, Mrs. Goldstein chastised some of the school's 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders who had been somewhat

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<sup>94</sup> I was one such intern who promised to return and assist the school in some fashion in the future.

rambunctious on that particular day. Showing solidarity with the school's lead-teacher, she walked to the front row, pointed at them and declared,

A lot of people talk about this school and how it is such a good school with excellent students, but you know, much of the things that I have seen from you all this year would never be tolerated in the public schools... Some of the things I've heard you say to her (referring to the lead-teacher) would not be tolerated; you would have been gone by now...!

After being an insider for one year, Mrs. Goldstein shared her desires to pursue work in real estate. Unfortunately, after the year's end, the school's only European-American Jewish teacher informed me that her decision to depart MCPSC was made rather early in her first year. Yet, she chose to "stick it out" for the remainder of the school year. Mrs. Goldstein's sentiments were in response to the level of commitment needed by MCPSC teachers at this stage in its development as she informed me, "The school is good for students but hard on teachers." In addition, she alluded to what she considered an insufficient starting salary of \$28,000 as an additional reason for her departure.

Nevertheless, the MCPSC "official" image encapsulated in Dr. Mariama's vision for the school also had the same effect on the school's staff assistant, Mrs. Nzinga, who learned of Mrs. Marva Collins via television and MCPSC from her sister—one of Dr. Mariama's university students. This ability to stand out in peoples' mind is part of what is used to win the hearts and commitment of those who first learn about MCPSC. As, seven years ago, I had my first interactions with the school and Dr. Mariama's vision sparked not by her (the President/CEO) but by an attending student and his mother. The young man's self-confidence, demeanor, word articulation, and his mother's enthusiasm about the school surely won my heart and commitment. For, as a fledgling Elementary Education major, I eventually arranged to complete student-teaching internship requirements at this school some 1000 miles away from the university of my attendance in the state of Florida. I made this choice based on a first impression similar to that in Mrs. Goldstein and Mrs. Nzinga's case.

MCPSC's "official" imaging as a staff recruitment device was also the key to attracting the school's lead-teacher who was drawn to the school's newspaper advertisement seeking teachers who approached education not simply for economic gain but wanted to be "missionaries" of education. In addition, not only does the school President/CEO's character and reputation attract and secure financial contributions for MCPSC, these esteemed attributes led to other outsiders introducing both the school's staff assistant, Mrs. Nzinga and the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher from South Africa, Mr. Sipho, to Dr. Mariama as potential teacher candidates for employment. After connections were made, the school's President/CEO convinced these staff members to be a part of the MCPSC community.

#### *MCPSC, Imaging, Student Recruitment, & Possible School Contributors*

The MCPSC "official" image and packaged presentation to outsiders was not only effective in recruiting vital quality staff members (although more staff was needed) but also in student recruitment as well as influence on possible charitable donors. The school's President/CEO was extremely tactful even to the point of strategically incorporating me, as a researcher, into the important rhetorical marketing scheme vital to this independent school's survival. Dr. Mariama usually introduced me to adult visitors

interested in the school for their children or guests pondering possible financial contributions. Once she announced to a group of guests:

This is one of my former interns, who has returned to do research here at our school as well as help us out this first year... he is the only intern to ever return to us after completing college... he is now working on his *doctorate degree* over at Miami University.

With me floating around throughout the year and visitors as well as guests frequenting the school, I heard words to that effect often. It added another dimension to the caliber of people and endeavors going on at the school—a good marketing tool that she used well.

Another aspect of this school that served powerful purposes in reference to the school's "official" imaging and packaged public presentation to outsiders was evident in its poetry rituals. As a component of the Marva Collins philosophy and methodology, public speaking is essential to cultivating student leadership qualities. Thus, poetry lessons, which allowed students opportunities to articulate the words of poets, were central to the school's curricular thrust. Each class learned poetry and the school's President/CEO expected students to be able to say "something" learned from class in poetry if ever called on. Strategically, students identified in this study as school Exemplars or those students who had proven to be good presenters were taken to perform in places like the citywide school fair or banquets and other places where possible donors and potential clientele were present. As I observed during the students' performance at the citywide school fair, audiences highly admired these students, as they were able to recite lengthy poems unabashedly with body gesticulations for added emphasis.

As an independent school that functioned based on "buy in" from those willing to pay for the school's services, the use of poetry as a central aspect of the school's curriculum helped to create the MCPSC "official" image needed to attract outsiders who may be in need of independent schooling services. Not only is the ritual of public speaking, gesticulating, and student presentation an integral component of the MCPSC curriculum, the school created specific venues where students could "show what they know" to an encouraging and enthused crowd. The school's "Prepping for Power" showcases, and feature events such as the Martin Luther King Celebration and the Shakespearean Festival performed in one of the city's downtown concert/theatre venues strategically provided every MCPSC student with an opportunity to display their talents learned in poetry to the public. These opportunities also helped students hone the leadership skill of public articulation, while also promoting the school.

### ***Semblances of Tracking***

Bearing in mind the issue of tracking observed in PART II of this study, it is important to also keep in mind the historical context for understanding how this school has now begun to group their students into group A (the lower) and group B (the higher). Hopefully, this procedure can be rectified at its early stage before it becomes deeply ingrained in the school's rituals. According to McPartland, Coldiron, and Braddock's (1987) analysis of elementary, middle and secondary school structures, grouping students according to achievement level is almost universal in middle grade schools. In theory, "tracking" reduces the heterogeneity of the class and enables teachers to adjust instruction to students' knowledge and skills. Thus, greater achievement is supposedly possible for both "low" and "high" ability students.

This theoretical framework is not new to schooling and is quite pervasive at the middle childhood level. Nevertheless, the practice of this form of grouping students has been ineffective. Oakes' (1985) work highlights that this kind of tracking has proven to be one of the most divisive and damaging school practices in existence. Students placed in lower academic tracks or classes during the middle grades tend to get locked into dull, repetitive instructional programs leading at best to minimum competencies. Although much of the tracking that takes place at MCPSC is based on the scheduling of students and the dividing of the self-contained classroom, it nevertheless provides greater opportunities for a select group of students at the school.

As also mentioned in the previous chapter, the threat of lowering a student from the higher group (group B) to the lower group (group A) in the 5/6<sup>th</sup> and 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade classes has been occasionally used as a behavioral modification tool for those students in the higher group who, at times behave inappropriately inside or outside of class.

Once placed in lower tracks such as group A, it remains to be seen whether these students will be able to move to the higher group solely based on merit. Students were usually given the opportunity to advance to the higher Group B when teacher schedules were rearranged or a student from the higher Group B withdrew from the school. The research is quite clear in highlighting that students often do not move up (Oakes, 1985), as students often did not at MCPSC. While lower track youth refine basic skills, students in higher tracks move to more advanced ones. The gap in achievement between "low-ability" and "high-ability" students widens, and isolation between the two groups increases (see, Oakes, 1985; Goodlad, 1984). Being locked into a lower track over several school years will inevitably lead to restricted opportunities for those students as they move into adult life.

John Goodlad (1984) in his work, *A Place Called School*, highlights the idea of minority youth typically being disproportionately placed in lower academic "tracks" often reinforcing racial isolation and unjust stereotypes in America's public schools. This brings about an interesting phenomenon at this school bearing in mind that the student population from fourth through eighth grades is nearly 100% students of African descent. This aspect of MCPSC does not manifest as "official" imaging, yet the grouping practice did exist. Lack of human resources and staffing was the primary culprit as more opportunities such as Spanish for all students was clearly the future goal of MCPSC faculty.

### ***The MCPSC Work Ethic Built on a High Level of Flexibility, Patience, and Collaboration***

A work ethic saturated with notions of flexibility, patience, and collaboration was a recurring theme steeped in daily interactions at MCPSC. As for the faculty members, a work ethic of this nature was vital to the school's survival in its first year of transition to the new higher grades boarding school campus. As I reflected on these dedicated professionals interactions throughout the school year, it dawned on me that, for the most part, they only had each other in dealing with many day-to-day issues. Dr. Mariama, the school's sole administrator, constantly came and went due to split responsibilities as she worked with both MCPSC campuses and taught at a local university. This school's first year in transition was "sink or swim," and the work ethic that

manifested during this first year helped the school to “swim.” As I reflect on fieldwork, the MCPSC work ethic was evident, even as one of the three base classroom teachers had chosen early (yet unannounced) in the year to depart as she “stuck it out” and completed the school year.

Basic school functions such as the transitioning of students from class-to-class required flexibility, patience, and collaboration. These structures were being implemented and re-implemented as this school community worked to figure out what worked and did not work in their new school. One issue of this nature was the school’s locker room situation where eventually the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders began to use an empty classroom to keep from disrupting the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade class, as getting to their lockers usually entailed traversing through the 5/6<sup>th</sup> grade class. Another example was, the issue of students loudly entering classes still in session after being released early due to the occasional unsynchronized watches of the teachers, or the loud talking and horse playing in the hallways during these transition periods.

At MCPSC, there was a place for practically everyone. It took a concentrated effort to be expelled from this community. As the sole administrator, Dr. Mariama always attempted to find the right place or “fit” for everyone working to keep a cohesive community. Dismissal from this school community was always a last alternative and after all else had failed. This was the case for the school’s staff assistant, Mrs. Nzinga who teachers at the lower grades campus viewed as “sometimes overbearing and also at times a bit too ‘hard’ on the younger children.” Dr. Mariama recognized Mrs. Nzinga’s unveiled, direct disciplining approach and personality as useful to this school community and not to be discarded.<sup>95</sup> Thus, Mrs. Nzinga was relocated to the higher grades boarding campus to initiate the Redefining Room/“Hot Box” and assist in structural discipline procedures.

This was also the case for the school’s math teacher, Mr. Haley whose duties changed after encountering serious difficulties with the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade students during the first phase of the year. Some of the 7/8<sup>th</sup> graders even lobbied to have Mr. Haley banished from the community to no avail. Dr. Mariama simply worked to find a “fit” for these individuals, as they remained a part of the school community. No one was wantonly dismissed or viewed as “useless” at MCPSC. A work ethic of being flexible, patient, and collaboration aided in this process.

The pedagogical style of Mrs. Goldstein, the fourth grade teacher made collaboration a necessity as students would be dismissed from her class having no place else to go but to one of the other teachers classroom when Dr. Mariama was away from campus. This usually meant that the students headed to the lead-

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<sup>95</sup> See, Signithia Fordham’s (1996) work on African-American high school students for an excellent discussion on the cultural implications of veiled and unveiled disciplining/negotiating educative approaches. Fordham argues that dominant middle class European-American culture, and to a great extent mainstream public schooling culture, tends to value an unveiled discipline/negotiation approach where the power of an authority figure is positioned as indirect and manifest through giving the student a series of options. On the other hand, Fordham alludes to the idea that in the “African-American fictive kinship system,” a higher value is placed on authority figures disciplining/negotiating with black children on more direct and “unveiled” terms, especially when the child makes choices that may be unknowingly detrimental to him/her bearing in mind the history of black oppression in the U.S.

teacher's class, already the largest in the school. As the school year progressed, the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher began to implement the same dismissal practices as the fourth grade teacher. This practice invoked an ethic of collaboration and flexibility, as the students' only option was to head for the lead-teacher's class to do "an out of class timeout." This required teachers to be extremely patient with those students who found the transition to the new school campus difficult. With the exception of certain 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade Dissenters who exited the school for various reasons outlined in PART II of this study, no students received suspensions during the school year for continual dismissals from class.

Also, I witnessed the same kind of nurture and care that Mrs. Collins showered her students with throughout the pages of her text, *The Marva Collins Way*, on a daily basis during fieldwork. This phenomenon speaks to the ethic of patience and care, which has proven to be vital in education (P. Collins, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Mrs. Collins' statements such as "Children today will decide whether you succeed or fail tomorrow. I promise you, I won't let you fail. I care about you. I love you. You can pay people to teach, but not to care" (p.48) speaks so very well to the style that these teachers attempted to bring to their classes. Although, the evidence of an ethic of flexibility, patience, and collaboration was apparent in each of the staff members at MCPSC, the ritual practices of the school's lead-teacher represented a qualitatively deep commitment to her profession. She conveyed that it took a special kind of educator to really spark the minds of these children many of whom had been for so long neglected in public education.

In many instances, a work ethic of flexibility, patience, and collaboration at MCPSC was essential. Dr. Mariama's surprise guests such as the Hip Hop Rapper, Bow Wow, or the University Professor who spoke about Haiti were spontaneous events. The flexible teachers would have short amounts of time to rework class plans or their lunch times in order to accommodate these occurrences. This obviously was a ritual practice that socialized MCPSC students to "be ready" to change their rhythm as well. Teachers did not complain in these situations even when these changes represented inconveniences. Many students usually resented the change of lunchtime or the loss of minutes from recess. Nevertheless, the work ethic of flexibility, patience, and collaboration was not only for the teachers, as students were not exempt.

Furthermore, the MCPSC work ethic of flexibility, patience, and collaboration was readily apparent in these teachers willingness to give up the Saturday mornings once a month for parent/teacher meetings as well as the countless Sundays for "Prepping for Power" performances. The staff pulled together in the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher's abrupt departure back to South Africa, keeping the school above board. Moreover, in the midst of all challenges, only one student was suspended during the last week for bringing a Playboy magazine to school.

Thus, the aforementioned themes become useful in contextualizing a final look at the emergent critical transformative possibilities and constraints of this school community. Therefore, the final section of this chapter examines these themes when juxtaposed with the various aspects of critical transformative leadership elaborated earlier. In addition, the next section of this study will continue to explore the subjective voices in this school community gathered through interviews collected during the school year.

## **A Final Look at Leadership: Critically Transformative or Not—That is the Question**

After one school year of field-based research in tandem with the previous chapter's analysis and this chapter's ethnographic themes, it has become convincingly clear that the ritualized practices of critical transformative leadership cannot be relegated to an analysis of either "it is or it is not." An analysis of this nature undermines the complexities inherent in a multifaceted theoretical construct such as critical transformative leadership. I came to understand that different aspects of critical transformative leadership theory emerged at varying times as other aspects were subsumed depending on specific situations within this school community. Although several aspects of critical transformative leadership were elaborated earlier in the study, this section specifically highlights various nuances of the construct as it pertains to school community members' perspectives of leadership and the interpretive usefulness of school rituals apparent in the previous sections ethnographic themes.<sup>96</sup>

Building on Foucault's concept of power and Giroux's rearticulation of emancipatory authority from its traditional use, Quantz et al. "reject the traditional understanding of emancipatory authority..." (1991, p. 113). In their rejection of traditional dominating forms of authoritarian, assumed emancipatory power, the concept of democratic authority becomes useful. Power is used in this way to create symmetrical community relationships. They go on to state,

We reject the traditional understanding that leadership is embedded in administration and instead argue that leadership can and should occur throughout the organization. We reject, as a false dichotomy, the idea that leadership implies followership and replace that dichotomy with the idea that leadership begets leadership. We suggest that democracy can only result from a discourse of critique and possibility fostered at all levels and leading to the critical acceptance of responsibility by all members of a school. (Quantz et al., 1991, p. 113-114)

The ethnographic themes as well as interview data revealed that leadership at MCPSC was hierarchical. The school's President/CEO clearly reigned as the leader of this community followed by the school's lead-teacher based on the interviews of the school staff. When staff members identified students as leaders at MCPSC, the school's oldest, veteran Exemplar students were always identified. Furthermore, all staff members interviewed identified Donyetta (salutatorian), and Berniece (valedictorian), who represent eighth grade Exemplar girls. Thus, MCPSC staff members discussed leadership as flowing from the President/CEO to the lead-teacher then other adults at the staff level. Further in this secession of power was the MCPSC Exemplars at the student level. "Earned stripes" or "dues paid" by time served acquiescing to the school's norms and acceptable behavior parameters seemed to be the major prerequisite for leadership identification as each student identified as a leader by the school's staff members were not only older students but they were also MCPSC veterans of more than three years. These were also the students, unlike the Dissenters, who usually chose not to "cause riffs" or dissent when the school's "official" image was being ritually displayed to yield favorable impressions from outsiders.

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<sup>96</sup> See Chapter 2, A Review of The Literature for more discussion on this study's appropriation of ritual.

On the other hand, the double-edged nature of the MCPSC image was always under interrogation by Dissenters and other students not identified as leaders when school staff were accused of *frontin'* for outsiders. It is imperative that the politics that create such behavioral dynamics as the school's "official imaging" ritual become curricular. MCPSC students need to know about the "*politicking*" and power play inherent in what they identified as *frontin'*.

Similarly, as with the aforementioned faculty interview data, MCPSC students interviewed for this study appropriated leadership in a similar manner. In identifying leaders at MCPSC, the only differences in student and teacher interview data were that some students identified other classmates not identified by the staff members. The students from the three classes identified as leaders were typically described as, hardworking, obedient, don't talk back to teachers, quiet in class, have a lot of discipline, and respectful. In essence, a 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade Exemplar student as described in PART II's "Inside Stories" of this study represented ritualized student leadership at MCPSC.

Critical transformative leadership theory posits that "leaders should be found at all levels of a school." The school's hierarchy was clearly visible as the President/CEO clearly represented the primary leader at MCPSC. Nevertheless, much of the day-to-day functioning of the school in the President/CEO's absence was based on the decision making of Mrs. Jawanza, the school's lead-teacher. Thus, the school's lead-teacher served as the central apparatus for most school decisions, especially when the school's President/CEO was away from campus and asymmetrical power relations were subsumed in this regard. As for the other MCPSC staff members, the lack of human resources in the form of school administration also provided a level of autonomy in many classroom decisions.

As alluded to earlier, in reference to MCPSC students, symmetrical power relationships manifested in the interactions of MCPSC students relations with staff and the President/CEO, *contextually*. In this sense, the critical transformative idea that "leadership begets leadership" applied to certain students. Those students who internalized and often demonstrated an understanding of the MCPSC hierarchy and acceptable school behavior patterns were in turn given relatively more decision making autonomy from MCPSC staff members. This power sharing was apparent in the school's poetry lessons and preparation for public performances as certain students were empowered to lead activities, create dance routines, and help others with poems to be learned.

The highest manifestation of the creation of symmetrical power relations occurred during Seniors Week, as the eighth grade students had "earned their stripes" and were given a high level of autonomy and power in the decision-making process related to end of the year activities to be completed working solely with the school's President/CEO. Those students that embodied and ritualized acquiescence to MCPSC cultural norms were viewed as leaders, as well as empowered in the institution. Those students who did otherwise by default continued to exist within the realm of asymmetrical power relations as they interacted with MCPSC staff as well as fellow students who performed the accepted norms of the MCPSC Way. Finally, notions of flexibility, patience, and collaboration, surely represent this school community's willingness to create a climate conducive to the emergence of positive educational practices like those constituent of



critical transformative leadership. Such a climate is needed, as the school must continue to grow in positive directions.

## **CHAPTER 10**

### **IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This last chapter suggests several areas in which the implications of this study have potential significance. First, I speak to the notion of humility as expressed in the African communitarian ethos. Second, I suggest implications from this study that specifically addresses notions of critical transformative leadership as discussed in previous chapters. I will also explore implications for a re-articulation of the school's neo-classical curriculum thrust and suggest alternatives which may allow the school to interrogate, eliminate, and build on the present positive qualities of the Marva Collins philosophy. Finally, based on the historical/material realities of African-Americans in this country, I suggest the creation of more independent schools for blacks. The implications of creating more independent schools to service African-American children is inseparable from the issue of wealthy white funding and finance which will also be discussed.

Thus, based on the above stated implications, this chapter serves the multiple purposes of providing specific suggestions for this school community as well as other independent educational institutions or those in the process of being created. I further highlight these implications bearing in mind previous chapters', which are also intertwined with various research implications and recommendations.

#### ***Africans, Eldership, and Humility***

Understood in this context, humility is recognition of and respect for "eldership" as representative of an aspect of wisdom and knowledge accumulated through life's sojourn and time spent physically in this world (Akoto 1992; Wilson 1998). I recognize that Mrs. Marva Collins and most of those pivotal in the creation and maintenance of MCPSC are my elders. It is imperative that I, as an African-American scholar address this issue.

Eldership is inherent in the structuation of communal living and has historically manifested not only in the cultures of continental African life but, also, in the African-American diasporic fictive kinship system (Fordham, 1996). The creation of the Marva Collins Way/methodology and the evolution of MCPSC represent an engagement of the historical/material world by elders in my community who sought to "make a better way" for children, especially African-Americans. Thus, there are deep implications for critical theorizing of this nature as the notion of humility must always be addressed in helping to bring critique to historical cultural practices of a group while simultaneously eluding brash analysis inflated with arrogance. As a humble African-American scholar, I believe that this approach to critical theorizing works in the interest of understanding that culture is discursive and dynamic, never stagnant.

Thus, youth of African descent will and should analyze the cultural practices of eldership—without ever forgetting the notion of humility in this process. As I have brought the critical transformative lens to bear on the philosophy and practices of African-American eldership, leadership, and educational practices, I appeal to W.E.B. Dubois' work as he maintained this communitarian value in an examination of the philosophy and cultural practices of an African elder, Booker T. Washington. In critiquing Washington, Dubois states,

To-day he stands as the one recognized spokesman of his ten million fellows, and of the most notable figures in a nation of seventy millions. One hesitates, therefore, to criticize a life, which beginning with so little, has done so much. And yet the time is come when one may speak in all sincerity and utter courtesy of the mistakes and shortcomings of Mr. Washington's career, as well as of his triumphs, without being thought captious or envious, and without forgetting that it is easier to do ill than well in the world. (1961, p. 44)

I, like Dubois, believe that "it is easier to do ill than well in the world." Yet, as the younger scholar-educator went on to raise serious questions in regard to Washington's philosophy and practice, the nature of this study has morally compelled me to do likewise.

### ***Critical Transformative Leadership***

In previous chapters<sup>97</sup> of this study, I provided seven nuances necessary for transformative leadership theorizing and practice that can continue in bringing about real change within the MCPSC community. I believe that these nuances of critical transformative leadership theorizing compel those in this school community, as well as others, to engage the construct of leadership more innovatively than historically traditional, transactional approaches. I alluded to the idea that, in order for more transformative possibilities, this school community must understand MCPSC to represent an on-going arena of cultural politics. That is, dynamics of race and ethnicity, class tensions, and gender politics not only affect the daily lives of the MCPSC community in daily interactions, but also this school community's interactions in the larger society.

In regards to the three nuances above, critical transformative leadership theorizing at MCPSC would be more readily apparent simply through a deeper engagement and interrogation of the three aforementioned constructs. Clearly, a deeper community understanding of the intersections of racial/ethnic dynamics, class tensions, and gender politics would help in providing a clearer historical/material context of the lived realities of those attending MCPSC. This argument is only strengthened when compared to the school's current uncritical approach to their neo-classical curricular framework.

The intersections of racial/ethnic dynamics, class tensions, and gender politics must also be interrogated within the context of living in the U.S., as well as the global community. Eluding such engagement only thwarts further possibilities of a critical transformative language of critique at MCPSC. This approach to education and leadership will help the MCPSC community in providing the needed curriculum framework imbued with a language of critique which could lead to a more demystified/enchanted understanding of their world and critical transformative possibilities. Pedagogy that embraces the deep intersecting cleavages of race, class, and gender represent a critical transformative shift away from a perennialist philosophy of education committed to traditionally subject bounded courses apparent at MCPSC.

Other critical transformative nuances posited in this study highlighted both the notions of democratic authority and leadership manifesting at all levels of this

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<sup>97</sup> See, Chapters 1 and 8 for further elaboration.

school community. These two nuances of critical transformative leadership theorizing are inseparable, as well as compliment and build on one another. That is, in hierarchical institutions such as education, democratic authority combats the pervasiveness of authoritarianism, which represents a more domineering approach to leadership and so often pervades and prevails in schools. This study appropriated democratic authority as the legitimation of power, which unlike authoritarianism, promotes symmetrical relationships legitimized on both process and consequence. Thus, it is not possible to have a traditional approach to leadership that is embedded in administration or “higher ups,” and simultaneously have transformative leaders at all levels of the school community. Leaders at all levels of an educational institution are more likely to be found where notions of democratic authority are practiced.

Thus, in this study, I highlighted that power sharing through notions of democratic authority and leaders being at all levels of the school manifested contextually. It was clear that the teachers, other staff members, and administrator did work to create symmetrical power relations, which led to leadership opportunities at all levels of this school community when students had demonstrated an understanding and acquiescence to the school’s cultural norms. This aspect of schooling at MCPSC represented an emergent aspect of critical transformative leadership manifesting at the school. Now, as a part of this school’s continual growth and evolution is the challenge to create even more spaces for leadership at all levels of the school. This is a process that will entail rethinking curricularizing at MCPSC, and could help in creating a more culturally relevant and critical approach to teaching and learning.

Furthermore, it is clear that the school’s curricular thrust played a major role in creating the school’s cultural norms of what is or is not acceptable behavior. Thus, if many aspects of the schools curricular thrust are not approached critically, but instead approached in an irrelevant, and uncontextual manner, students will resist such an approach and by default resist the cultural norms of acceptable behavior that, in this school, leads to leadership opportunities.

### ***Rethinking Curriculum and Other Implications of Critical Transformative Leadership***

At MCPSC, the traditional neo-classical form of curriculum is highly evident. The rudiments of book knowledge are central in engaging this aspect of the school’s curriculum. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this is problematic because of the heavy Eurocentric undertones and valorization of Western Civilization and culture. If students and teachers at this school are to bring from within themselves the creative knowledges needed to transform this society, the school’s curriculum thrust must be critically engaged and analyzed within the context of the students’ and staffs’ lived experiences. This process entails a critical interrogation of many assumptions that under gird education at MCPSC.

The deeply entrenched conservative educational belief that Western culture, couched in isolated subjects, represents an authentic and superior way of

“knowing” has galvanized much force in the last century. This study problematizes such a curriculum approach. In reference to the Marva Collins neo-classical curriculum thrust, a deep interrogation of the school’s curricular thrust could help to demystify and critically engage the undercurrents of Western culture inherent in such a curriculum framework. Furthermore, not only should Western culture be critically interrogated but also the cultures of those that comprise the MCPSC community. In this way, curricularizing becomes more relevant to the lived experiences of the MCPSC community and should be equally worthy of educational time, as well as of critical engagement. Thus, this study advocates an educational approach that is transformative, recognizing that, Eurocentric culture is largely the culture of the powerful in the U.S., contemporarily. Yet, a neo-classical perspective of Eurocentric culture does not have to be the sole focus in educating African-American students, which is the case at MCPSC.

Therefore, this study situates critical transformative leadership curricularizing as an approach that recognizes the difference between learning that helps students take their place in the present culture, thereby maintaining the status quo, versus learning that helps students transform that culture in more socially just and egalitarian ways. Furthermore, this study suggests that the MCPSC community continue to educate students to become good readers of “words” as has already been proven and is readily apparent at the school. Nevertheless, there must also be a stronger thrust toward critical transformation based on educating critical readers and transformers of “the world.”

Another important aspect of the school is the emergent critically transformative attentiveness to polyrhythmic pedagogical style and emphasis on exposure to the art of public speaking through poetry as well as creative performances. This aspect of the MCPSC curriculum offers great potential in respect to youth leadership development, in which verbal articulation and the use of persuasive rhetoric is essential in rallying others to critically transformative causes. The recognition of the importance of good rhetorical skills is exemplified in the words of the President/CEO when she stated,

“Prepping for Power” is an activity that we at the Marva Collins School really believe in. This is an opportunity for our children to practice speaking in front of large crowds so that they will be prepared for some of the larger events that we have throughout the school year... We at the Marva Collins School really work hard and want our children to be very articulate and verbal, as well as proficient in their writing skills. We believe in this very much because no matter how smart a child may be, if he/she can not articulate his/her ideas to others or are afraid to do so, then it really doesn’t matter how smart they are—no one will know. This event is also an opportunity to build our students self-esteem and self-confidence. For, I am a speech instructor at a local university and I have seen adults freeze up in little classroom settings. Speaking in front of a group of people might just be the next scariest thing to death! So, we give our children a chance to practice this vital skill so that they will be able to accomplish what they would want to accomplish after leaving our school.

The teachers at MCPSC had a range of options that they could use in the selection and timing of curricular events, notwithstanding the times when special events took

priority requiring high levels of flexibility, patience, and collaboration. Even when they were reminded to make sure that their plans were consistent with the Marva Collins philosophy, there remained a range of choices to be made by teachers with respect to how those plans would be used. Nevertheless, students must progressively assume responsibility for the planning of their educational program in order that the critically transformative notions of leadership further emerge. Here, I refer to transformative notions of leaders begetting leaders by empowering followers to become leaders and democratic authority working to create symmetrical power relationships. The emergent critical transformative possibilities inherent in such notions manifested somewhat in the students' preparations for "Prepping for Power" events. In addition, these possibilities were even more pronounced during the last several weeks of school where the soon to be MCPSC eighth grade graduates were given a high level of autonomy in the creation of knowledge through group projects.

What is at stake from a traditional teaching perspective is the risk of losing control of the focus, sequence, and directionality of the educational process—the fear of school becoming an “anything goes” enterprise. However, such a fear results from a misunderstanding of the democratic approach. The critical transformative notion of democratic authority does not suggest that these teachers approach the craft with the naïve assumption of relinquishing all power. To not use power in helping create democratic spaces is to misuse power as a critical transformative educator. Yet, the effective use of power by teachers allows for democratic processes with a clear aim of moving students towards democratic ends, which are similarly important. Thus, implied in this study is the need for staff members at MCPSC to take a critically transformative risk and relinquish the fears of using both their and the students everyday lives as a referent for curriculum. This approach would be one step away from the European centering inherent in the neo-classical curricular thrust that drives much of the schooling process.

The aforementioned implications of this study leads us back to the critical transformative question of, leadership in the name of whose moral and political interests. In this regard, I agree with Murtadha-Watts (1994) who argues,

...Educators have fallen into a trap of making students the *object* of education rather than educating them to use education to choose ways of living their lives, ways of being. That is, in attempting to ameliorate many of the social problems confronting minorities which are reflected in the schools researchers/educators have abandoned the notion of preparing a critical citizenry to a notion of teaching children basic skills for survival and a limiting notion of getting a diploma. (p. 171)

MCPSC students must become active subjects in the creation of knowledge and meaning making. This approach also entails a more culturally sensitive and relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1994) examination of the language and speech patterns brought into this school by the students.

In the previous chapter, the delegitimation of Ebonics or African-American Language (Smitherman, 1999) by MCPSC staff in regards to student language patterns was an issue in need of analysis. As alluded to, the implications of language politics in this school community are serious. Nevertheless, issues of schooling and language politics represent a national issue that is greatly “brushed over” and misunderstood by

many educators, school administrators, and politicians as witnessed in the 1996 Oakland, CA schools Ebonics controversy. MCPSC is simply a microcosm of a larger national problem.

Nevertheless, as an independent school the critical transformative possibilities of engaging the language problem could be promising. At the least, this study suggests the need for staff engagement with the scholarly literature encompassing issues of language, culture, and the education of black children. Teacher meetings and staff workshops should highlight this issue. This would be a monumental step towards sensitizing staff members to the complexities and politics of language at this school, as well as throughout the country. This step alone presents the promise for more critical transformative leadership possibilities. Another aspect of this recommendation is the need for the MCPSC community to seek the expertise of individuals adept in the study of African/black language, culture, and education.<sup>98</sup>

### ***Towards A Curriculum and Pedagogy of Empowerment***

The work of curriculum integration by James Beane (1997) has provided an innovative and highly needed alternative to subject-centered educational theories. Curriculum integration helps to destroy the unnatural divisions of subject matter that have become deeply ingrained in the D.N.A. of U.S. schools. Ultimately, I argue that learning (for democratic life or its antithesis) is a naturally connected and wholistic phenomenon that should be inherent in curricularizing. An integrated curriculum approach takes us beyond curriculum frameworks and pedagogical practices of rote memorization and unchanging “Truths” towards an engagement of critically examined lived experience without regard for subject-area boundaries. Integrated curricularizing does not infer that subjects are totally useless, yet such a curricular approach does infer that strict subject-area boundaries should not reign supreme as the sole avenue to knowledge creation and interrogation, as well as meaning making in education.

Beane’s conceptualization of curriculum integration involves four major aspects: *the integration of experiences, social integration, integration of knowledge, and integration of curriculum design*. Each component of Beane’s innovative curricular design compels deep curricularizing and pedagogical practices consistent with critical transformative leadership theorizing.

First, *the integration of experiences* involves integration in two ways. Initially, experiential knowledge seeks to acknowledge past experiences by recognizing and legitimating knowledge learned previously through the formal schooling process as well as knowledge acquired outside of school. The integration of experiences then seeks to integrate new experiences into current schemes of meaning making and knowledge creation (Beane, 1997, p. 4).

Second, as an aspect of curriculum integration, *social integration* focuses on the intersection of personal (experiential) and social/world issues. This aspect of integrated curricularizing is collaboratively planned and carried out by teachers and students together (Beane, 1997, p. 5). Social integration simultaneously works to create pedagogy that supports the critical transformative notion of symmetrical power relations. This

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<sup>98</sup> During my fieldwork, I shared a video copy of the critical linguist, Dr. Jeremiah Wright with the school’s lead-teacher. Presenting at a teacher’s conference, Wright examined the “differences” – not the “deficiencies” – of black children’s language and learning styles.

arrangement makes knowledge more culturally relevant and accessible to students, as well as helps to create more democratic classroom settings.

*The integration of knowledge* represents the third component of integrative curricularizing. Imagine for the moment that students at MCPSC in a particular class are confronted with some problem or puzzling situation. Pedagogically, how is a situation of this nature approached? Do the students and their teacher stop and ask questions such as which part of the situation is Math, or Science, etc. Alternatively, could they take on the problem or situation using whatever knowledge is appropriate or pertinent without regard for subject-area boundaries. I am persuaded in advocacy of an integrative curricular approach, which promotes the latter of the previously mentioned educative options. Furthermore, if the problem or situation is significant enough, I believe that students will be more inclined to engage the educative process, critically. Thus, more students would more likely see value in the educational process, be less likely to cause behavioral tensions through resisting the school's cultural norms, and more likely be in positions to demonstrate readiness for leadership responsibilities at MCPSC.

In addition, there are four types of knowledges that encompass *knowledge integration*: personal knowledge, social knowledge, explanatory knowledge, and technical knowledge. Both personal knowledge and social knowledge are encompassed in the previously mentioned curriculum integration components of *the integration of experiences and social integration*. Explanatory knowledge embodies the interrogation of various paradigms, worldviews, or discourses in relation to social group constructions of knowledge that names, describes, explains, and interprets the world. Explanatory knowledge also engages the complexities of "popular" or subcultural approaches to knowledge formation and meaning making as these formations intersect with students' lived experiences. Technical knowledge encompasses the interrogation of many skills needed to promote a critically oriented and literate democratic citizenry such as effective communication skills, functional literacy, and computational skills (Beane, 1997, p. 7).

Finally, integration as a curriculum design places emphasis on substantive projects and other activities that involve real applications of knowledge, thus increasing the possibility for students to integrate curriculum experiences into their schemes of meaning and to experience the democratic process of problem posing and problem solving (Beane, 1997, p. 9).

In her study of an Afrocentric school attended by African-American children, Murtadha-Watts (1994) outlines a refreshing view of curricularizing through critically oriented questions needed to help contextualize or "center" educative experiences. In tandem with Beane's (1997) integrated curriculum approach, I suggest a similar approach to thematic experiential learning for the MCPSC school community. Such questions as:

- Does it relate to what the children already know?
- Does it draw from the students' real experiences?
- Does it creatively stimulate differing cognitive processes and skills such as interpretation, analysis, and evaluation?
- Does the knowledge become personally and socially useful so that the children see learning not only as beneficial for their personal lives but as part of a contribution to their school and home communities?
- Does it incorporate various preferences for learning including the manipulative, auditory, and visual?



- Does the curriculum and the classroom organization encourage a desire to participate and foster cooperative learning?
- Does it draw direct and indirect attention to values such as a sense of justice, equality, or liberty?
- Does it encourage skills of debate, compromise, habits of reflection, problem solving, study and the examination of multiple perspectives to nurture the student ability to participate in community?
- Does the curriculum use themes to integrate knowledges from the humanities and sciences so that students may interrogate the issues of racism, classism, sexism and oppression of those with different abilities? (Murtadha-Watts, pp. 176-177)

The social, economic, and political realities of being African-American in this society makes a curricular approach of this nature not only relevant but also imperative.

In advocating an integrative and culturally relevant curricular approach, I recognize the hesitancy and bias of many educators towards the deeply entrenched subject-centered curriculum frameworks that have historically dominated American public schools. In many ways, a curricular approach of this nature conjures fear of the unknown, as stagnation holds sway to traditional educative approaches and top-down bureaucratic mandates. Nevertheless, if the MCPSC community continues as an emergent critically transformative institution imbued with a language of critique, innovative curricularizing such as that advocated in this study becomes promising. Curriculum integration and culturally relevant curricularizing interrogates many long held beliefs and underlying assumption of schooling and the nature of knowledge. In addition,

...curriculum integration is not simply a method for rearranging lesson plans, as so many educators seem to think. Rather it is a broad theory of curriculum design that encompasses a particular view about the purposes of schools, the nature of learning, the organization and uses of knowledge, and the meaning of educational experience. (Beane, 1997, p. 95)

Thus, MCPSC represents an ideal educational institution as an independent school free of much bureaucratic red tape and with a greater level of educational autonomy than the city's public schools.

Some pundits of traditional subject-centered curriculum approaches may highlight perceived dangers in an integrative and culturally relevant curriculum approach. For example, such contentious issues as the weakening of intellectual rigor and the integrity of acquiring the information of established bodies of knowledge may render hesitation and/or prove problematic. One assumption inherent in this line of thought is that subject-centered, textbook funded approaches to education are inherently rigorous, while other forms of progressive curricularizing are viewed as "quick fixes" and "easy tricks" (Beane, 1997, p. 71). Nevertheless, after deeper analysis of an integrative and culturally relevant curriculum approach, these assumptions appear to lack depth in understanding and seem misguided.

In reference to educational rigor and integrity, teaching, learning, and the aforementioned curricular approach that this study recommends for the MCPSC community, there are many sound answers to such criticisms. First, in reference to the advocacy of curriculum integration, schools are typically organized around separate subject areas consistent with separate subject unit and lesson planning. On the other

hand, integrative and culturally relevant problem posing, and thematic, approaches to unit and lesson designs require a departure from traditional approaches as the information embodied in one subject area may prove insufficient. This is not to infer that textbooks might not be useful for an integrative and culturally relevant curricular approach.

Nevertheless, I agree with Beane who asserts, “handing each student a textbook at the beginning of the year and plowing through it is a lot easier than constantly searching for pertinent resources” (1997, p. 71). I make this point not to delegitimize those educators and subject area specialist who strive to provide a more relevant and integrated experiential curriculum approach through their areas of specialty. Instead, I am arguing for an open-minded and critical interrogation of the underlying assumptions that render such traditional approaches unquestioningly superior to others.

Furthermore, an integrative and culturally relevant approach coherently compliments notions of critical transformative leadership theorizing. Beane (1997) highlights a clear example of these curricular consistencies stating,

...Collaborating with students in decision making raises many questions that are ignored in other classrooms: Which students are speaking up and which ones are silent? How do gender, class, and race relations enter into those interactions?

Does silence mean consent? Does consent mean commitment? (p. 72)

These are all questions that any critical transformative educator must embrace. Important questions of this nature interrogate the legitimation and delegitimation of what is taught, and learned, in schools. Teaching and learning in an integrative and culturally relevant way, by no means represent a “quick fix” or “easy trick” to the educational process. Consequently, an integrative and culturally relevant approach will only broaden the non-traditional educative spaces currently in existence at MCPSC such as the performative arts and poetry.

One of the most valuable aspects of the work at MCPSC is the regard given to the performative arts and poetry. This aspect of the school’s curriculum has been a powerful recruitment tool. Most elementary school programs devote some attention to such aspects of the educational process but not nearly enough when compared to time allocated to textbook driven subjects. This school community has created a nice balance in this respect to daily school activities. The popular cultural form of contemporary Praise Dancing to Christian songs with intense beats has created an acceptable space for MCPSC girls to engage this expressive art. This study further suggests that spaces be created that may critically engage MCPSC boys through other popular cultural mediums such as positive and uplifting Hip Hop cultural (re)presentations. Through the lens of critical transformative leadership gender politics around such issues must be engaged, for the sake of MCPSC boys who many times took a back seat to girls in the performative arts and poetry.

Nevertheless, the MCPSC community has made several important steps representative of an emergent critically transformative educational institution. They are a group of people working to better the lives of children as best they know how. MCPSC represents the creation of a space where children can expect to receive care and love. I truly believe that more spaces of this nature needs to be created for African-American children, but these educational spaces must be open to cultural critique as a means of working towards the continual betterment of these institutions. The next section of this study elaborates on the need for more independent schools for blacks by outlining the

disproportionate number of African-American educators as well as students currently participating in American public schools.

### ***The Need For More Independent Black Institutions***

Rojas and Gordon (1999) present eye-opening figures that help to substantiate my sentiments for the urgency of more independent black educational institutions. Chapter 2 of this study highlighted the history and diminished numbers of independent black schools following the 1950-60s Civil Rights/Black Nationalist movements and attempts at public school integration. Contemporarily, I believe that there is a need for the re-creation of more independent black schools along with a continued fight for a better public educational system as the historical/material reality of the following statistics reveal.

Under the title, JUST FACTS, Rojas and Gordon highlight glaring issues of racial “re-segregation” and inequality in American public schools after the groundbreaking 1954 Brown .v Board of Education Supreme Court decision. In addition, they elaborate on the issue of court-mandated school district lines that counter busing as a tool of integration. Rojas and Gordon state, “the 1974 *Milliken* Supreme Court decision forbids desegregation plans that cross school district lines, so if the suburbs and the city have separate districts, their students won’t be able to attend the same schools” (p. 11). In outlining who goes to public schools in this country, African-American students accounted for 16% of the country’s 46.9 million students in K – 12 schools. The U.S. Department of Education approximates the number of African-Americans at 17.2 % (8,021,000) for the year 2000. Rojas and Gordon go on to highlight the fact that approximately 88% of American public school teachers are European-American/white. Furthermore, it is logical to assume that the percentage of black public educators is minimal when the other 12% of America’s public school teaching pool is divided amongst the various remaining racial/ethnic groups.

Therefore, largely in the United States of America, where African-Americans comprise only 12 to 15% percent of the general population, black children are being schooled in fundamentally Eurocentered environments and primarily by European-American teachers. As the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) points out, the implications for this historical/material reality remain seriously in need of engagement in reference to the education of African-American children. Ladson-Billings posed her question in terms of the late twentieth century educational era stating, “Why, in the 1990s, after decades of fighting for civil and equal rights, are African Americans even contemplating the possibility of separate schools” (p. 1)? This study further extends her question into the new millennium. Ladson-Billings goes on to state,

One look at the statistics provides some insight. African American students continue to lag significantly behind their white counterparts on all standard measures of achievement. African American children are three times as likely to drop out of school as white children are and twice as likely to be suspended from school... in inner cities, where large numbers of African Americans live, the rate nears 50 percent. African American students make up only about 17 percent of the public school population but 41 percent of the special-education population... Nearly one out of two African American children is poor. The rate of infant mortality is twice that of whites... African American children are five times as

likely as white children to be dependent on welfare and to become pregnant as teens; they are four times as likely to live with neither parent, three times as likely to live in a female-headed household... More young African American men are under the control of the criminal justice system than in college... (p. 2)

Simply by looking at the numbers, the reality of America's public educational system for blacks invoke a level of concern.

If culturally relevant pedagogy and integrative curricularizing is to be at all meaningful (a factor typically overlooked or superficially engaged in teacher preparation programs) then more independent black educational institutions with black teachers are in need. Whether or not such curricular transformations will affect the continual charitable donations of the school's wealthy white philanthropists and foundations remain to be seen. William Watkins' (2000) ground breaking work, *White Architects of Black Education* compels the African-American community to deal squarely with the historical shaping of a "special," "accommodationist" black schooling process primarily controlled by the desires and economic capital of wealthy whites. African-Americans must take total economic control of independent schools that they create while simultaneously continuing in the monumental battle for a better national public school system.

The question of funding black independent schools is not a question of ability or means; rather it is a question of desire, organization, and resistance to societal oppression.<sup>99</sup> The aforementioned statement takes into consideration that African-Americans earn a take-home salary of more than \$500 billion annually (Wilson, 1998). Usually, the argument against the creation and need for more independent black educational institutions is "that blacks pay taxes to fund public schools too!" Nevertheless, bearing in mind the fact that African-Americans comprise only 12 – 15% of the nation's population, the local property taxes paid towards public schooling would be proportionate. I emphasize local property taxes to illuminate one of the major means of public educational funding in the U.S. Poetter and Badiali (2001) state,

In general, public schools receive public money from state and local taxes to pay for the costs of educating students... In round percentages, about 6% of all funding for schooling comes from the Federal Government. Most of this federal money comes to states, local districts, and schools in the form of Title I money, money appropriated to support and serve students in under-served settings, especially through academic remedial programs and school-wide reform programs. But as you can see from the 6% figure, the federal government plays a minor role in school funding. The remaining 94% or so of funds needed to educate children in local settings comes from two primary sources: 1) state governments... and 2) local governments, typically through taxes on residential and business properties. (pp. 193, 194)

Thus, as previously stated, African-Americans comprise only 12 – 15% of the nation's population and the local property taxes paid towards public schooling would be proportionate. Therefore, blacks contribute less than one-fifth of the overall public school funding in the U.S. The rationale of "blacks pay taxes to fund public schools too" can no longer suffice at face value when juxtaposed against the previously mentioned historical/material realities of African-American educational tax contributions and how

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<sup>99</sup> See Smitherman 1999, as she alludes to W.E.B. Dubois and Carter G. Woodson who make similar claims.

the majority of blacks have faired in public schools. This argument is not against a more critically democratic public educational system—only against advocates of public education as the “sole” educative response to historical black oppression and mis-education (Woodson, 1993).

Nevertheless, black Independent schools have stirred quite a controversy and are being seriously discussed in the works of antagonists who have usually seen fit to ignore such movements. One such antagonist, Stephen Howe (1999) points to the growing number of private blacks schools in the U.S. as he works from afar in Oxford, England. While directly attacking the Afrocentric schools movement and indirectly attacking independent black schools in general, Howe asserts,

Public controversy has centered particularly around the inroads Afrocentrism has made into school-level education in the USA. By 1991, it was reported, roughly 350 private schools or ‘Afrocentric academies’ devoted to the approach had been established, educating more than 50,000 children. The number has continued to grow... (Howe, 1999, p. 3).

The above statistical reality suggests that the number must grow! Furthermore, although not central to this study, the transformation of our society must not overlook the need for the creation of more democratic epistemological spaces within U.S. public schools where traditional mainstream Eurocentered ways of knowing become unsettled. In our multiethnic and hybridized society, multiple epistemological worldviews and ways of knowing must be more fully recognized in public schools. This diverse experiential curricular approach using multiple worldviews or discourses will help in the positive identity formation of those students in our society who may not fit into the neat, yet reductionist, categories of black or white. Furthermore, the MCPSC community could be extremely helpful in providing insight on their evolution for other educators interested in independent school development.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

The MCPSC community represents an educational institution imbued with critical transformative possibilities. As a transitioning boarding school campus, this trend setting community represents a glowing light of possibility in the city of Cincinnati. The relationship of blacks and education has always been tenuous at best in Cincinnati forcing the creation of schools’ such as MCPSC dating back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. People of African descent have historically struggled for the right to education in both public and private arenas. This struggle must continue.

Educational philosophy and curricularizing must also be an ongoing process engaged by people of African descent such as Mrs. Marva N. Collins. The U.S. represents a pluralistic society where cultural group power relations have been historically asymmetrically normalized around issues of white supremacy, capitalism and patriarchy. Thus, in such historical/material power arrangements are aspects of resistance as well as domination. Within this context, those suffering from various levels of domination inevitably resist and every stage of resistance entails progressive gains as well as contradictions. This process holds true for African-American practitioners and theoreticians such as Mrs. Collins. Inherent in the historical educational work and philosophy of the Marva Collins philosophical approach are obviously many progressive gains as her life story and work alone has inspired many students as well as teachers to

higher levels of academic achievement. Nevertheless, the contradictions of such an educational approach must also be engaged allowing for critical transformative praxis and a more dynamic as opposed to a static approach to enhancing the culture of schools.

Finally, sustained emersion through participation and observing this educational community in action was a fascinating process. As it turns out, the political and intimate nature of this critical ethnographic study has not only been for the transformation of the researched, because I, the researcher, have also been transformed through this process. Hopefully, the MCPSC community, as well as those interested in the education of African-American students and independent schools may find this study informative, engaging, enlightening, and critically transformative.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Formal MCPSC Parent Interview Form

Dear Parents of Marva Collins,

It has been a pleasure and a privilege to spend valuable time with your children this year at The Marva Collins Preparatory School. I have learned so many lessons about educating children, successfully maintaining such a positive institution, and simply life itself. Also, as many of you know, I am a Ph.D. student at Miami University completing a dissertation study that explores aspects of leadership at MCPSC. Also, I understand that the voices of parents are a critical component to the educational process. Therefore, with the aforementioned in mind, I would like to have your perspectives represented in the study. This study will not use the actual names of those who participate. The only thing that I am requesting is that you please write a response to three (3) basic guiding questions of the study listed below?

You can either have your child return your response to me at the school, send them by e-mail, or the postal service. My addresses are:

Paul Collins  
639 W. Chestnut St. Apt. 13  
Oxford, OH 45056

e-mail: collinpd@muohio.edu

\*Feel free to use the back of this form if extra space is needed.

- 1) Could you please list five (5) people that are a part of the Marva Collins School Community who you consider to be leaders?
- 2) What are some of the characteristics the individuals listed above display that make them leaders?
- 3) Are there any stories that you could share about the school to help me understand what leadership means at The Marva Collins School? If so, could you please write this/these stories below?

## APPENDIX B

### Sample of Fourth Grade Students' Reflections on Haitian Professor's Visit to MCPSC

*\*I attempted to copy the students' manuscripts verbatim and not edit any of their errors*

#1

I feel sorry for the little girl because she had to work all day for her parents and for the little girl. That was rich and she got beat with that hard rope. And she had to knel on the concrete and look at the doll. And I feel sorry for that boy that got caught. And he went to jale. And he got beat and died if I was the girl I would run away far far away. Where I would never see them agian and that my feelings for the little girl.

[Boy's script]

#2

The way I felt about the movie is very sad because someone should not work so hard all the time. If someone walked into your house and you don't know it, you can't blac,e anyone because you don't know who it is. The slave girl might have been happy if she had not been working all the time. If I could help her, I would have took her to a happier place.

It's like if a slave girl/ or boy went to your house, you might have made them your slave like Harr Potter, a wisard, who lives with his mean aunt and uncle along with their son. Harry lives I a cupboard and he is trated like a slave. People and slaves all need a break sometimes. And that's the way I felt.

[Girl's script]

#3

I think that it is not good for kids not to go to school. Kids need a very good engocash so they can liv a scsenful life. I'm blassed I go to Marva Collins Perpartory School. I think I'm blass to have a roon, a bed, to sleep in, a class room to learn in. I think I've very blesss but I would like everyone to tgo to a good school everone to have a room and bed to sleep in.

I think ever chilednd our any slave sound be able to go home from groshore shoping and go to sleep without get a botter on your had without getting hit by anything. God will bless those whole is a slave. I think the slave oner's sound be pushed for there ashes. If someone would com to me and say her is my chilend I would say know thing keep your chield here is some mony for you all and God bless you. I hope that Mr. [the professor from Haiti's] plan workes.

[Girl's script]

#4

I had felt very sad about the children in Haiti. How the people treated them and whipped them. How they didn't let no parents children go to school and it is still like

that. It is horrible how they treat them badly and mean. They should not have that legal at all.

People should at least act like being nice to children. They should put them in good clothes feed them good food even celebrate their birthday at least once. I wish I could help those children. Can't they at least have home school for them. If I was a parent I would get me a good education and had home school for my child.

In Haiti they really treat kids bad. Not one slave child could go to school. Not one slave child could have a great time and go swimming. I mean they can get whippings, but not with a whip. All kids are the same it doesn't matter how they look if they don't have parents or even if they are different colors all that matters is that we need to be loved all the time.

[Girl's script]

#5

My experiences are that was not right to keep children like that. I don't think that was to not let kids go to school, and make them do all the work. I would have ran away or prayed to god about the problem. What I had seen just now was unbelievable and sad. That one little boy who got sent to jail and they beat him, that was terrible. If I was in the problem I would have been mad and kind of sad. They should have a real life or a opportunity to do something. My reaction to that problem would be crying. I do not want to see those kids out on the street or stealing. I want to see them with a good education. I do not want to see them sad or mad, I want to see them happy. The sad part about it is that it's true.

The END

[Girl's script in cursive]

#6

I am thankful that I am in school and that I live in a nice home. I am thankful that I am not a slave and I don't live on the streets. I am glad I don't have to steal to make a living. I am glad I have a good education and a good chance of getting a job. I am thankful that I can read and write. I am glad that slavery is illegal here, but I feel sorry for children who are slaves. I hope all people don't remain slaves.

[Girl's script in cursive]

#7

My experience of what I just heard is that all the things that are happening for black kids now, had come from other little black kids before us. Kids now should be happy of what they have. Because kids then had nothing but to be a servant and get tormented by white folks. This is going to change my life by that. All the things my ancestors had to go through was for a boy like me. And I really should appreciate what they went through for me.

And I should start being good in school. Because my ancestors couldn't even go to school. I really learned a lot today. I thank my ancestors sister and brothers. I

thank [the professor from Haiti] for coming and explaining. This new for us kids. He really opened my eyes. I really depend on getting his book.

[Boy's script]

#8

My feelings of the movie I just saw were mad, sad, and angry. It's very mean to treat black people bad but today I'm glad to have the life I'm living today. But in one way I wouldn't like being loaned to a girl that was younger than me. But why does the girl have to carry Simone's back pack. The girl could have lots and lots of heavy stuff. I really want to know why does the made have to treat the girl who's in slavery like garbage. There both the same color. I mean if the children that are in Haiti now saw the clothes, shoes, houses, food, jewelry, toys and everything else that we had now they would faint. So I hope [the professor from Haiti] will chang the world in Haiti. And for all you black kids that are in slavery. I hope you get a better life.

The End

[Girl's script]

#9

If I were a slave child I would be sad because I would have noone to love me. And I think it's very mean and very Evil the that they treated Gods children. And I don't thank it's fair not to feed the slave children because if your body dose'nt get food it will stat eating other part of body puls you would be work your self to you die. And I pray every to please help the childeren in slavery because it's not fair the you treat kids because of the color of your skin because it really does'nt matter the color of your skin because deep inside we are all the same. And one day all kids well be free. And bad thing will happen to them.

[NO name script, in cursive]

#10

I feel kind of sad cause I think the kids should not Be slaved. And I think they Should have not Be slaved for doing nothing and they should find out who took something. And the kids should have Birthdays and fun things so they can Be happy. And they should Be able to eat Like rich kids do. And we should not throw away things that poor children could eat. The kids shcold go to school and Be rich Like other people. A and they should Be treated like other people. So they won't have to sleep In seme tires in the kithen or in the mud. They should not have to Be Beat Up with a switch jus for a punish ment. And I'm really angry cause people treat us right But in Haiti they treat kids rung I think everybody should Be treat good the same way. Everywere. So I hope All those things come true.

[Boy's script]



## APPENDIX C

### MCPSC DAILY ROUTINE FORMAT 1999-2000 SCHOOL YEAR *FROM THE DESK OF Mariama/Jawanza*

(YOUR HOURS FOR TEACHING SPECIFIC SUBJECTS MAY VARY FROM BELOW, BUT THE FORMAT PRESENTED IS EXPECTED OF EVERY MARVA COLLINS TEACHER. EXCEPTIONS, OF COURSE MAY BE APPROVED BY DR. MARIAMA)

**WITH THE FOLLOWING POINTERS. PLEASE BE MINDFUL OF INFO GIVEN IN EACH SUBJECT. WHETHER YOU ARE SCHEDULED TO TEACH THAT SUBJECT OR NOT SOME CRUCIAL INFORMATION IS NEEDFUL FOR ALL SUBJECTS, BUT MAY BE STATED UNDER ONE SUBJECT IN PARTICULAR. WE TRIED TO STATE WHAT IS CRUCIAL TO ALL SUBJECTS IN BOLD TYPE.**

#### 9-9:30 CREED

- \*RECITE CREED, BE STRONG, GREAT SOMEBODY
- \* HAVE STUDENTS LIFT A LINE OR YOU LIFT DIFFERENT LINES ONE AT A TIME , AND ASK VARIOUS STUDENTS TO EXPLAIN.
- \*EXAMPLE 1: "SOMEONE LIFT A SIGNIFICANT LINE FROM THE CREED, AND EXPLAIN WHAT IT MEANS." OR' SINGLE OUT A CHILD OR DIFFERENT CHILDREN.
- \*EXAMPLE 2: "THE CREED SAYS, ~ WAS BORN TO WIN IF I DO NOT SPEND...' WHAT EXACTLY DOES THIS MEAN?"
- \***YOU MAY ALSO PRACTICE WHATEVER POEMS YOU ARE TEACHING OR HAVE TAUGHT, AFTER DOING THE ABOVE.**

#### 9:30-10:30 MATH

- \*CALL STUDENTS UP INDIVIDUALLY TO LEAD THE OTHERS IN THE JINGLES WHICH ARE APPROPRIATE FOR YOUR LEVEL, SUCH AS; "SUMS SUMS" AND "MULTIPLES MULTIPLES" (START WITH JINGLES OF 2, 5, 10, 11, 100).
- \*GIVE A MATH TIMED TEST. EITHER GIVE SHEETS OR PUT ON BOARD TO BE COPIED BY STUDENTS.
- \***YOU COULD HAVE STUDENTS EXCHANGE AND GRADE THE TESTS OR COLLECT THEM AND GRADE THEM YOURSELF, AS WITH ALL TESTS.**
- \*START TEACHING THE LESSON: HAVE STUDENTS READ ALOUD FROM TEXT AND OR SUPPLEMENTAL HANDOUTS.
- \*ANY NOTES THAT YOU GIVE. OR PARTICULAR SENTENCES YOU WANT TO HIGHLIGHT OR EMPHASIS, PUT IN OUTLINE FORM ON THE BOARD (AS WITH EVERY SUBJECT).
- \*IF YOU FIND THE NEED TO HAVE 2 OR MORE MATH GROUPS:
  - HAVE ONE GROUP WORK INDEPENDENTLY ON PROBLEMS WHILE YOU WORK WITH THE OTHER. (**THIS METHOD APPLIES TO ANY SUBJECT, LIKE READING, FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN IT IS NECESSARY TO HAVE STUDENTS ON VARYING LEVELS**)
- \*ALWAYS PUT SAMPLE PROBLEMS ON BOARD AND CALL STUDENTS UP TO SOLVE THEM.
- \*MAKE SURE MATH HOMEWORK IS GIVEN EVERY DAY!

10:30-11:30- PHONICS

\*HAVE INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS LEAD THE WALL CARDS.

\*STOP AT THE FOLLOWING CARDS AND MAKE THESE COMMENTS:

**BLOCK A** - ASIA BEGINS WITH THE LONG A SOUND. ASIA IS THE LARGEST OF THE EARTH'S SEVEN CONTINENTS, AND THE SEVEN CONTINENTS ARE...( SING "THE SEVEN

*\* [A page of the handout seems to be missing]*

EACH OTHER, OR FACSIMILE "FAX" OF EACH OTHER~ EVERY SOUND THAT THE HA'

C MAKES, THE K MAKES AS WELL.

**FRIGHTENED CAT F** - FACETIOUS BEGINS WITH F. WHAT DO WE NOTICE ABOUT F.

HAS ALL OF THE VOWELS AND IN ORDER) SING THE LONG AND SHORT VOWEL SO~

**OUT OF BREATH (RUNNING BOY) H** -HALCYON BEGINS WITH H. SAY: "WHEN THE

TEACHER IS TALKING, EVERYONE SHOULD REMAIN HALCYON." HALCYON MEANS

**BLOCK I**- IOTA HAS TWO MEANINGS: A VERY SMALL AMOUNT, AND THE NINTH LE

GREEK ALPHABET. (SING GREEK ABC'S)

**MILLIE SOUND M** - MEDIOCRE BEGINS WITH M, AND IT MEANS AVERAGE. WE DON'T

BE MEDIOCRE; WE WANT TO BE ABOVE AVERAGE.

**MOTOR BOAT N** - NADIR BEGINS WITH N, AND MEANS THE LOWEST POINT.

**BUZZING BEE Z**- ZENITH BEGINS WITH A Z , AND IT MEANS THE HIGHEST PONT. S

REACH FOR THE ZENITH. LETS STRETCH TOWARDS IT NOW." ( EXERCISE BY STRETCH

THE ZENITH THEN TOUCHING THE NADIR - THE FLOOR- A FEW TIMES)

- ANY SONG OR JINGLE YOU HAVE TAUGHT MAY BE SUNG AFTER THE APPROPRIATE LE CARD IS STATED AND ALL OF ITS SOUNDS. (FOR EXAMPLE, AFTER F, I SING A SONG ABOUT PHOTOSYNTHESIS). YOU MAY SING SONGS FROM ALL THE VARIOUS SUBJECTS YOU HAVE
- SING "THE PARTS OF SPEECH SONG" ~~IMMEDIATELY AFTER SAYING ALL OF THE WALL ANY OTHER PHONICS/ LANGUAGE RELATED SONGS IF YOU DID NOT SING THEM YET.

· THE PARTS OF SPEECH SONG SHOULD BE THE VERY FIRST

LESSON IF YOUR STUDENTS IT YET. AND IF MANY OF THEM DO, BUT

YOU HAVE MANY NEW STUDENTS, MAKE IT I AND STILL PRESENT IT

AS THE FIRST LESSON.

- BEGIN WITH LESSONS.
- **WRITE ALL KEY NOTES ON BOARD USING OUTLINE FORM. AS WITH I SUBJECT (AS STATED BEFORE).**
- **WITH ALL SUBJECTS** -CALL ON INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS TO FILL IN BLANK WORDS), TO YOUR NOTES AT THE BOARD, AS EVERY STUDENT COPIES FROM THE BOARD AT THEIR SEATS.

THE FOLLOWING IS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW YOU SHOULD WRITE ALL NOTES ON **ALL SUBJECTS** - INCLUDING: PHONICS, MATH, SCIENCE, ETC.

NAME (FIRST AND LAST)

DATE  
MARVA COLLINS  
PREPARATORY  
SCHOOL

I. PHONICS-THE PARTS OF SPEECH  
SONG (I, BEGINS NOTES IN PHONICS ON  
MONDAY, II-TUES ETC.)

- A. AN ADJECTIVE DESCRIBES A NOUN.
- B. AN ADVERB DESCRIBES A VERB.
- C. A NOUN'S A PERSON, PLACE OR THING.
- D. A PRONOUN TAKES THE PLACE OF A NOUN.
- E. A VERB'S AN ACTION WORD. (TELL THEM THAT NOUN'S=NOUN IS, AND VERB'S=VERB IS
- F. [DIRECT OBJECTS RECEIVE THE ACTION OF THE VERB] (TELL THEM WE USE BRACKETS... DIRECT OBJECTS ARE NOT A PART OF SPEECH, BUT WE SING ABOUT THEM IN OUR SONG (REMEMBER WHAT THEY DO.)
- G. CONJUNCTIONS CONNECT WORDS.
- H. INTERJECTIONS SHOW EMOTION!
- I. EXAMPLES ARE: (CALL OUT EXAMPLES FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS TO GO TO THE BOARD). **AS THE APPROACH THE BOARD TELL THEM. WITH THE CLASS: GIVE IT YOUR BEST SHOT**  
ONCE THEY FINISH WRITING ON THE BOARD, OR GET A CORRECT ANSWER OR DO ANY

*\* [A Final portion of the handout seems to be missing]*

## APPENDIX D

### MCPSC Hot Box Form

Date:\_\_\_\_\_ Time Started\_\_\_\_\_ Time Completed\_\_\_\_\_

1. Teacher releasing student to HOT BOX:\_\_\_\_\_

2. Students Name:\_\_\_\_\_

3. Did teacher send work with the student? YES\_\_\_\_\_ NO\_\_\_\_\_

4. If work was sent with the student,

describe:\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Did student cooperate and complete work? YES\_\_\_\_\_ NO\_\_\_\_\_

6. If teacher did not send work, student was given work by \_\_\_\_\_

Describe work given to student

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Did student corporate and complete work? YES\_\_\_\_\_ NO\_\_\_\_\_

8. COMMENTS:\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signed\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E

### Vouchers and Ohio Schools

In general, the voucher is a document usually issued by the state that can be used by parents to pay tuition at an 1) out-of-district public school, and 2) a private school and/or a religious school. Typically, the term has been used more broadly to describe school-choice initiatives in which states would help pay tuition for children attending private or religious schools. The voucher approach was previously piloted in 1998 when the Ohio legislature enacted the Pilot Project Scholarship Program. This educational assistance program offered tuition scholarships and tuition assistance grants that could be applied toward tuition at eligible and participating private schools within the Cleveland school district, or at public schools in participating adjacent districts.

The Ohio grant/scholarship pilot program was overturned just a year later by the Ohio Supreme court, reauthorized by the Ohio legislature, and then re-halted under a judicial injunction. Nevertheless, outcry from parents and community members allowed the current students to return to their school of choice. At the time of this study, the case was currently on appeal to the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals.

## APPENDIX F

### MCPSC Revised Teacher Recruitment Packets

#### Student Teachers

##### Teacher Practicum

Student teachers seeking to do their practice teaching at the Marva Collins Preparatory School in Cincinnati, Ohio shall meet the following prerequisites.

Senior Status – Candidate must expect to receive a bachelors degree within nine (9) months.

Liberal Arts Courses – Candidate needs a strong background in math, science, English and social studies. (A background in classic studies, foreign language and philosophy is helpful but not required)

Effective Communication – Oral and written communication skills are crucial to placement.

Moral Character – Candidate is expected to demonstrate a positive attitude, self-discipline, integrity and willingness to adhere to principles inherent in the mission and philosophy of MCPSC.

Dress Code – Candidate is required to dresses according to the code of MCPSC. Women wear dresses or skirts and blouses. Men wear slacks, blazers and neck ties. (Note: Men do not wear earring, gold chains, nor gym shoes)

## Contract Agreement

I, \_\_\_\_\_ agree to adhere to the philosophical principles and mission of the Marva Collins Preparatory School; to implement the school's curriculum as instructed by cooperating teachers, consultant and school director, and to promote the academic excellence for which the school is noted.

The Marva Collins Preparatory School, Inc. agrees to provide housing for teachers in training and/or student teachers for out of state residents during their training period.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Student Teacher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of CEO/President, MCPSC

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Teachers

MCPSC, a rapidly expanding educational institution and a school where children don't fail, seeks "educational missionaries" who are committed to the intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth of each student they serve.

At MCPSC teacher dedication is more important than teacher certification, and loving the child is paramount.

MCPSC serves 155 students from low to upper economic classes and from Pre-kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grades.

MCPSC obtains state teacher certification for non-public schools. The cost (\$100.00) for certificate is deducted from teacher's first paycheck.

At MCPSC teachers are given the opportunity to develop their human and professional potential and to employ their creativity in a cooperative, supportive, and stimulating environment.

MCPSC school calendar runs from the 4<sup>th</sup> week in August through two weeks into June. School is closed for two days in November (Thanksgiving), two weeks in December (Christmas break) and one week in April (Easter break).

MCPSC offers \$18,000.00 to 20,000.00 for beginning teachers holding a Bachelors Degree. Salary increments are based on merit – education and performance. Also, the incentive of possible living arrangements for new teachers at the school's boarding facility is negotiable.

MCPSC has two campuses located in suburban Cincinnati, Ohio. The Pre-K – 3<sup>rd</sup> grade campus is located at 7855 Dawn Rd., Cincinnati, OH 45237 (in the community of Roselawn). The 4<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade campus is located at 6760 Belkenton Rd., Cincinnati, OH 45237 (in the community of Silverton). Phone (513) 761-6609



## APPENDIX G

### Partial Listing of Charitable Contributors Displayed on a MCPSC Bulletin Board

1) Mercy Systems	\$200,000.00
2) Thomas Emery Memorial	\$ 70,000.00
3) The Andrew Jergens Foundation	\$ 60,000.00
4) Fifth Third Bank	\$ 55,000.00
5) Carl Lindner	\$ 50,000.00
6) Smith Family Foundation	\$ 80,000.00
7) Mayerson Foundation	\$ 25,000.00
8) WIZF Radio (Blue Chip Broadcasting)	\$ 5,000.00
9) The Robert Reakirt Foundation	\$ 20,000.00
10) John & Shirley Davies Foundation	\$ 25,000.00
11) Otto Budig Foundation	\$ 25,000.00
12) The John Hauck Foundation	\$ 10,000.00
13) Daniel & Susan Pfau Foundation	\$ 10,000.00
14) Scripps Howard Foundation	\$ 5,000.00
15) The Josephine Schnell Russell Charitable Trust	\$ 15,000.00

## APPENDIX H

### MCPSC Schedule of Tuition and Fees

#### **(Pre-K Thru 3<sup>rd</sup> Grades)**

New Student Application Fee \$20.00

Non-Refundable

Must Accompany Application

Covers Cost of Processing

New Student Enrollment Fee \$205.00

Required To Reserve Enrollment

**Due Upon Acceptance**

Covers Consumable Supplies

Books and Special Programs

Re-Enrollment \$100.00 Per Family

Due March 1 For all Continuing Students (Non-Refundable After July 31)

#### Pre-Kindergarten

1 Child @\$ 4,455

2 Children @\$ 7,910

3 Children @\$10,365

4 Children @\$11,820

#### Kindergarten – 3<sup>rd</sup> Grades

1 Child @\$ 3,855

2 Children @\$ 6,410

3 Children @\$ 7,865

4 Children @\$10,320

5 Children @\$11,775

1 Pre-K Child and 1 K – 3<sup>rd</sup>

@\$ 6,910

1 Pre-K Child and 2 K – 3<sup>rd</sup>

@\$ 8,865

1 Pre-K Child and 3 K – 3<sup>rd</sup>

@\$11,320

2 Pre-K Children and 1 K – 3<sup>rd</sup>

@\$ 9,865

2 Pre-K Children and 2 K – 3<sup>rd</sup>

@\$12,820

#### Tuition Payment Options:

1 Annual Payment of Total Amount

2 Payments, One Each Semester

10 Monthly Payments, Due on 15<sup>th</sup> of Month

Late Fees: A \$25 late fee will be added to tuition bills not paid in full by the 15<sup>th</sup> of each month. Unpaid tuition bills could result in your child's dismissal from MCPSC.

continued on next page

## Schedule of Tuition and Fees

(4<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> Grades)

New Student Application Fee \$20.00

Non-Refundable

Must Accompany Application

Covers Cost of Processing

New Student Enrollment Fee \$205.00

Required To Reserve Enrollment

**Due Upon Acceptance**

Covers Consumable Supplies

Books and Special Programs

Re-Enrollment \$100.00 Per Family

Due March 1 For all Continuing Students (Non-Refundable After July 31)

4<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> Grades

1 Child @\$ 3,855

2 Children @\$ 6,410

3 Children @\$ 7,865

4 Children @\$10,320

5 Children @\$11,775

1 Pre-K Child and 1 4<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> @\$ 6,910

1 Pre-K Child and 2 4<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> @\$ 8,865

1 Pre-K Child and 3 4<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> @\$11,320

2 Pre-K Children and 1 4<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> @\$ 9,865

2 Pre-K Children and 2 4<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> @\$12,820

Tuition Payment Options:

1 Annual Payment of Total Amount

2 Payments, One Each Semester

10 Monthly Payments, Due on 15<sup>th</sup> of Month

Boarding

4<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> Grades

Tuition: \$ 4,000.00

Meal Ticket: \$ 1,400.00

Housing: \$ 5,600.00

Total: \$11,000.00