

Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle



“Transforming Baltimore City Schools”

Proposal #1, Final Draft

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Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle is a dedicated group of Baltimore citizens who want to change the city of Baltimore through policy action.

LBS seeks to help Baltimore citizens take ownership of our communities and to make city government accountable the policies it produces.

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SUMMARY

The failure of BCPSS has been engrained in the minds of Baltimore citizens as a fact of life. Many of us have accepted the current state of education in Baltimore as an inevitability. The purpose of this proposal is to drastically change the nature of education in order to breath new life into the city of Baltimore.

Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle advocates that education officials, elected officials, community leaders, and others put together a comprehensive plan to reconstruct the education system in Baltimore. Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle advocate that a series of meetings be convened in order to engage the process of reconstructing BCPSS. We demand that these meetings take place at least twice a month, and that a year from the first meeting should mark the point at which the newly constructed template for BCPSS is complete.

We advocate that the following six tenets serve as the core components of the newly reconstituted education system in Baltimore:

- 1) BCPSS should establish that the school system have two parallel tracks. We would establish a vocational/industrial track, and an academic track.
- 2) BCPSS curricular framework should be centered around community building.
- 3) BCPSS should provide on site entrepreneurship and cooperative economics training.
- 4) BCPSS should mandate that its high school students mentor middle and elementary school students.
- 5) BCPSS should have a curriculum that is explicitly dedicated to social justice.
- 6) BCPSS curriculum should be informed by the cultural resources of the community.

The following proposal will explore the issue of education and how it has currently acted to perpetuate the status quo. It will also detail the components of a different paradigm for education.

INTRODUCTION

Baltimore City's education has failed its students miserably. Math, and reading proficiency among elementary, middle and high school are horrendous according to the most recent available data. In 2006 elementary school reading and math proficiency were 63.4% and 59.3% respectively. Middle school reading and math proficiency were 44.1% and 26.7% respectively. High School reading and math proficiency were 38.4% and 35.6% respectively. The Schott Foundation has provided data from its most recent study that reveals that the graduation rate for Black males in Maryland is 55%. Traditionally the response to data like this has been to figure out how to improve these scores or how to improve graduation rates. But this obscures important questions like, what are these scores measuring? Why are Black males dropping out of school at such an alarming rate? Does the current metric for evaluating student performance help for making students more equipped to empower their community? What are the over arching conceptual models being deployed in structuring the evaluation procedure for public education in Baltimore? There are a whole host of other questions that should be raised in the process of determining the meaning of the data mentioned above. This document will answer these questions and provide an alternative framework for a new educational system in Baltimore.

THE PROBLEM

COMMUNITY CENTERED EDUCATION IGNORED BY MAINSTREAM

Education must speak directly to the needs of its citizens. Most educational systems in cities that are plagued with structural inequalities are unresponsive to the need for community transformation. The core learning goals outlined in the Maryland Department of Education and by the Baltimore City Board of Education are not responsive to the social, economic, political, and cultural needs of the students being served. Many people with affluent backgrounds can afford to have academic goals that are not aimed at changing the material circumstances in their community, many of the communities in Baltimore need education that can equip us with the tools to produce economic, political, and social self-determination and independence. Advocates of critical pedagogy describe the goal of education as equipping students with the skills to actualize their agency to define and determine the nature of the institutions that are in their communities. Many of the institutions in this country that study and analyze data regarding student achievement produce scholarship that neglects the possibility of orienting education toward community building. It is often outside of the scope of analysis for many of the top education institutions in the country. The council of great city schools produced a document that recorded the progress of “urban” school achievement entitled “Beating the Odds.” This document does not mention the fact that the failure in “urban schools” to perform to national standards might have to do with the different social, economic, and political circumstances that demand an educational infrastructure that is designed to change these conditions. Throughout the document, and many like it, there are terms like “achievement” and “success”, none of these terms really describe anything but an arbitrary standard for learning that remains largely

unchallenged not only by education bureaucrats, but by many progressive education advocates.

The article doesn't even mention the possibility that the general paradigm of public policy, as it relates to education, is not capable of providing students with a meaningful education. Granted, the point of the article isn't to engage in criticism of contemporary educational frameworks, but the absence of a discussion of the prevailing educational methodological pre-dispositions demonstrates that community centered education is outside of the scope of many of the professionals that are engaged in shaping education policy in "urban" settings.

Another document that appears on Harvard's website entitled "Efforts to Narrow the Minority Student Achievement Gap: A Longitudinal Case Study of One School District" pays lip service to the idea of making the material relevant to the lives to the students being served. It mentions nothing substantive about the efficacy of the current educational schemas that are used to produce the standards for achievement. It mentions the "tripod" project where one of the legs of the tripod project is "pedagogy and relationships". It contextualizes pedagogy in terms of delivering certain ideas external to the life experiences of the students and making them relevant. Students in "urban" settings constantly endure a continuous barrage of ideas and information that in many ways are alien to the community being served. This isn't to say that only material that is indigenous to the local community should be taught in schools, but it is to say that the material must be pertinent to the livelihood of the citizens of the city. This is indicative of the problem with contemporary education, entities that are external to the community are making policies for people that they are disconnected from.

It would be impossible to pick out every research paper, or academic article produced by all the mainstream institutions and criticize them here, but these articles are examples of what most of the research being produced looks like. There are substantial amount of literature produced that describe the need for community-centered education. This includes the writings of Paulo Friere (Pedagogy of the Oppressed), Henry Giroux (Rethinking the Promise of Critical Education Under an Obama Regime), David Gilborn (Education policy as an act of white supremacy: whiteness, critical race theory and education reform), Carter G. Woodson (The Miseducation of the Negro), bell hooks (Teaching to Transgress) and others. But many of the appointed education officials seek to try to fit liberatory calls for community centered educational material into a decaying and failed education system, instead of trying to just develop a new one. The viability of liberatory community centered education is not taken seriously, and for this reason cities like Baltimore continue to suffer because education bureaucrats have overlooked this possibility.

MEASUREMENTS OF INTELLIGENCE

Current educational paradigms are Eurocentric, which creates an added barrier for student engagement. Na'im Akbar in his work on African Psychology makes very detailed and substantive criticisms of the prevailing ideas of meritocracy. He says that the models used to evaluate intelligence have only reasserted the hegemony of European conceptions of the world, which are not appropriate for determining the intelligence of people from a substantially different cultural background. Akbar contends that these models are harmful to students of color (particularly Black students) because it causes students to internalize an assumed legitimacy of a model that justifies their inferiority. An example of this is the saturation of object orientated educational practices from which students are taught to learn primarily from sterile text. This is characteristic of European American culture's instrumentality from which education is understood as separate from the learners' subjectivity. People of African descent are traditionally subject oriented, relational learners who prefer to learn from people than from detached text. Janice Hale in her book "Black Children: Culture, Roots, and Learning Styles" proclaims that one's culture shapes one's cognitive orientation. This means that one's culture affects their cognitive processes. Hale describes a study that was conducted on the differences between Black children and white children. She concluded from this study that white students typically learn in a "topic-centered" way. The white students typically didn't feel the need to relate the topic to themselves and could talk for long periods of time about a particular topic without invoking themselves. The Black children demonstrated a tendency to learn through "topic-chaining" where they talked about a given topic in relationship to other related topics which often led to them relating the material back to themselves. These studies suggest that there are some cultural

components of students' cognitive process that can explain the lack of engagement by many Black students in "urban" areas with the material taught in school. Education that is not informed by culture has the potential to alienate students of color because they are being taught with teaching methods and content that is not readily intelligible to them. It often requires a substantial amount of resources to reconcile the cognitive mis-match that students of color often encounter. This suggests that analytical instruments in the education field that omit the effect that culture has on the way that information is processed must be abandoned.

The test that Maryland Department of Education (and consequently Baltimore City Public Schools) uses to determine whether students are proficient in a given subject are centered around the idea of measuring how well a student engages in "higher order thinking processes." There are two things that are disturbing about this, 1) the document that outlines the major purpose for the various assessments that are administered, doesn't describe what "higher ordering thinking processes" means in any meaningful detail and 2) there is absolutely no mention of how culture may implicate what constitutes higher order thinking. Given that we live in a Eurocentric society, what education officials call higher order thinking is most reflective of white cultural bias that alienated the masses of students of color who drop out of school each year. Education officials must begin to see culture as inseparable from education, and not merely as a supplement, or else they will find themselves purveying cloaked white supremacist ideals.

COMMUNITY BUILDING

Currently the education in schools does not educate students about the issues that they face in their communities. This trades off with the time students desperately need to address the pressing concerns they face everyday. The task of community building education should not be relegated to the realm of higher education. Every moment that students are not being provided an educational experience that is conducive to fixing the problems faced by the community, is a waste of that student's time. A major reason that so many students in Baltimore drop out of school is that there are so many issues that students are faced with, that are not adequately addressed by the curriculum. Students are smart enough to recognize when the education that they are receiving does not address their immediate needs. For instance, there is a high rate of teen pregnancy amongst women in Baltimore City. Throughout the 2000's teen pregnancy has been as high 81 per 1000, and no lower than 68 per 1000. This is often presented as a moral and social crisis outside of the scope of the curriculum. Many of the ideas that young people have (and adults for that matter) about love and sexuality are often acquired on television, music, relatives and friends. Unfortunately these sources typically do not contribute to the development of healthy a understanding of love and sexuality, but tend to give rise to unhealthy conceptions of these issues. There are very few academic resources made available that students can use as a means to produce healthy ideas about relationships and the like. If they are included they made tertiary concerns. This contributes to a community that engages in self-destructive behavior because they live in a dysfunctional environment that doesn't provide the necessary resources for addressing the problems. There are huge amounts of literature and scholarly work done on relationships and sexuality in so-called urban settings. We need to use those academic resources

to enhance the types of knowledge and understanding that students receive that can affect the life circumstance of the students being served. Many people might say that this is an attempt to lower the rigor required for students in our system. Keep in mind that the scholarly work that has been done on issues of relationships, love and sexuality are at least as intellectually stimulating as a class about British literature, which most students in Baltimore City are required to complete. The difference is that the material will be more applicable to the student's condition and a more engaged classroom. There are many other issues that can be directly confronted in the classroom that would make the classes more engaging. Another example of a more relevant topic for a class to pursue is the war on drugs. Many students are exposed daily to the problem of drugs in our community. If the curriculum was formulated in such a way where this would be a topic of a class, students would be more prone to be engaged because students could reflect on their own experience and contribute to the effort stop the drug problem that plagues our communities. I am sure that there may be legal issues that implicate a class of this nature, but it is worth exploring the possibility of offering this kind of a class to students in Baltimore.

THE SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE

The education in its current configuration is funneling large quantities of students into the prison system, which reinforces the prison industrial complex. This dooms many young people to social, economic, and political paralysis that comes as a result of incarceration.

The prison has become a site of corporate expansion. Anyone who actually reads the 13th Amendment will notice that it specifies that slavery was abolished “except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted”. This has provided the opportunity for corporations to use prisons as a source of cheap labor to maximize profits. Everything from license plates, to cotton, to furniture is produced in prison. This has created an incentive for society to perpetuate societal conditions that produce an influx of inmates. The evident failure of the education system exacerbates the problem of high levels of incarceration. Students who live in an environment that encourages self-destructive behavior, and that does not provide adequate resources, contributes to the high levels of youth incarceration. Many of our Baltimore youth are in need of institutions that can remedy the psychological trauma that many of our students experience as a result of the grave conditions in Baltimore. Many students have issues that need to be dealt with in order for them to be functional human beings, but many of their issues don’t get addressed because resources are not provided to deal with these issues. Often youth are told that they are responsible for their own demise, but without reasonable access to resources to deal with the conditions that youth face day to day. It does not make sense to convict students of crimes that are encouraged by the dysfunction of their environment. People convicted of crimes lose the right to vote, and have a record that keeps them from getting jobs. This creates a dilemma for people trying to change their life, they have a hard time adjusting to

life outside of the prison and often end up back in prison. Almost 70% of people incarcerated are re-arrested in 3 years according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. The failure of the education system is not just merely a problem with education, it threatens the livelihood of the citizens of Baltimore. We are in a state of emergency!

POST-GRADUATE OPTIONS

BCPSS does not have a viable program for students who are not interested in going to college. This impedes the development of a strong infrastructure for students interested in vocational/industrial skills. Hundreds of students may have been lost because of this infrastructural deficiency. The emphasis on “college readiness” also poses a huge challenge to the city of Baltimore. Every student should not have to go to college. Every student should have the opportunity to be college ready, but in our current system college is being imposed as the goal for every student in Baltimore City. This is problematic because there are many students that could have better living conditions if they were encouraged to pursue something that may not have the same societal respectability as a lawyer or a doctor. This is emblematic of the elitism that runs through our society. There is a long history of Americans, particularly Black Americans, who have made a living doing what many call vocation/industrial work. In fact E. Franklin Frazier in his work the “Black bourgeoisie” describes that economic advancement of Black people in America came largely as a result of industrial laborers who were able to provide the financial support necessary to send their children to school. Janice Hale in her book “Unbank the Fire” recalls that many Black families often allowed children the option of seriously pursuing formal education or working industrial jobs. She notes that there was a common respect for those who were laborers, and that typically a few children actually pursued formal education. We need to understand the importance of industrial skills and that they have an important place in our communities. We shouldn’t view these skills merely a last resort for those who didn’t make the grade as an academic, but as a respectable option for those who may be interested in acquiring industrial skills.

Attempting to funnel all students into college runs the risk of putting hundreds of students in college who are prone to eventually drop out. There is a 42% graduation rate amongst students of color in college. This should inform our persistence in getting students to college. This should tell us that just getting people to college does not by itself yield meaningful results. Many students are pushed off to college without the necessary academic skills and resources to be successful. The culture shock that can ensue and the overwhelming societal anxieties can actually have adverse effects on a student's personal development. College is not for everyone, and if we continue to force people into an environment that they are not adequately conditioned for, we will exacerbate the social ills in our community.

One of the biggest issues that face laborers in Baltimore city is the lack of training that Baltimore residents have in industrial skills (i.e. port work, construction, operating warehouse equipment). Industrial skills are important to the development of a viable workforce, which often times must compete with non-residential job candidates who may have acquired the appropriate training.

Vocational/industrial training can provide the skills necessary for students in Baltimore to meet the immediate financial needs of their families and their communities, while still providing learning opportunities for students to be active and effective participants in their communities. Learning can happen, and does happen outside the classroom. The emphasis on education being a means to help America be more competitive on the global market, trades-off with an emphasis on community building. The only way to compete globally is to have a strong foundation from which to compete. The education of the community must at least assist, and at best be a driving force for the community gaining control of the industry in their community. Without this

emphasis we will perpetually be seeking to become educated to be employees, and not masters of our own economic, social, political, and cultural destiny. If we don't push for abandoning the current educational system then we will continue to produce master degreed slaves. We will produce people who are mere cogs in this machine that we call America, instead of developing the agency of people in our community.

Many critics of revolutionary education reform contend that if all of the students in the system were to just work hard and refrain from engaging in many of the activities that distract students from being good students, then the issues of educational equity would be largely a non-factor. If all of the dysfunctional behavior of students were to disappear there are two major issues that would at least maintain the current levels of poverty and inequity, and if not exacerbate the issues facing Baltimore City. Baltimore City Public Schools do not have nearly the amount of resources that other school districts have to provide the materials and level of instruction to train students to be equally competitive with student in other districts. This means that student coming out of Baltimore City are at a competitive disadvantage that ONLY increase in resources can mitigate. The second issue is that the education system as it operates doesn't educate its students to understand their scholarly endeavors as directly connected to the empowerment of the community. Nothing written in the BCPSS master plan posits community empowerment as an integral component in assessing whether the schools are properly serving the community. The lack of emphasis on community development and community centeredness that is demonstrated by BCPSS will contribute to what Carter G. Woodson has described as "educating Negroes away from the masses." This phenomenon is not new particularly in

communities of color, and if education does not begin to address this issue then the divide between the rich and the poor will only widen.

BLACK STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

W.E.B. DuBois in an article published in the Journal of Negro education in 1932 provides insights that informed the conceptual framework that helped to frame the six tenets of the LBS education platform. DuBois reflects on what he observed as the failure of higher education to contribute substantially on the livelihood of Black people in America. He describes that a major downfall of the Black community is the lack of emphasis that has been put on the development of an economic base to project our interest. Black students entered colleges around the country without a culturally indigenous industrial base from which they could meaningfully contribute to the empowerment of the masses of their people. Instead we were forced to be dependent on the white majority for our economic success. As we look around the city of Baltimore we can see what happens when we are reliant on the white majority. DuBois suggests that education for Black people be constructed with the intent to help Black people develop culturally indigenous industry so that our intellectuals and scholars can be mutually supported by the community.

An educational system as envisioned in the advocacy statement would rejuvenate the community. Most, if not all, of the evidence on educational success indicate that the best outcomes occur when the community and students feel like participants in functioning of the school.

THE SOLUTION: OUR SIX POINTS

We advocate that the Baltimore City Public Schools System (BCPSS) be completely reconstituted. We must completely rebuild what education looks like in Baltimore City Public Schools. This includes the current set of core learning goals, its relationship to the community and the curriculum in its current configuration.

We advocate a community centered educational paradigm that orients education to being most concerned with responding to the conditions of our communities. There is literature on community-centered education, but many of the efforts to implement these initiatives have not been heavily supported by education officials. Examples of community-centered education include Paulo Friere's literacy programs, which deems literacy not merely as a way to teach people how to read text, but to be full participants in a democratic society. Bell hooks describes in her book "Teaching to Transgress" a paradigm for education from which the emphasis on the efficacy of education have its basis in its liberatory potential. Asa Hilliard in his article called "Teacher education from an African American Perspective" says that education must not be geared toward individual advancement, but that one should be educated to empower the group to be collectively uplifted. These are just examples of the types of research and scholarship that has been written about liberatory community centered education. We advocate six points that serve as introductory visions of what education should look like in Baltimore City. They are the following:

VOCATIONAL AND ACADEMIC TRACKS

BCPSS should establish that the every school apart of the system have a vocational track. There will be provision for students who change their minds to switch between the tracks. Students would have the option of aggregating to these tracks beginning as early as the 7th grade, and no later than the 9th grade. The Vocational track would allow students to pick very specific career fields that do not require excessive academic skills. Students would spend substantial time actually engaged in their career and actually offer their services to the community. This means that programs in auto-mechanics, cosmetology, culinary arts etc.. would take up much of the time students spend in school. This means that the school system would have to accredit certain institutions that provide these services to teach the various vocations that would be made available to students. The students would also be paid for the services that they provide. There would be required classes that students would attend two or three times a week to supplement their vocational training. These classes would not be excessively academic. The subject area of many of these classes would be relevant to the student population and their socioeconomic and cultural environment. For instance there would be classes about local education policy, health, gender and sexuality etc... These classes would encourage students to engage in learning outside of the classroom, and instill the principles of being engaged citizens. Students would use their basic reading, writing and math skills in helping to operate the business related to their vocation.

Through the vocational track the school system would provide services to the community that could allow the school to do business with the community. Things like cosmetology, which are services that Baltimore residents consume very abundantly, could be provided to the community and provide jobs to the youth who perform these services. There are many other entrepreneurship opportunities that the school could provide as a major component of the students' educational experience that would keep students in school and interested.

Some may say that there are already vocational opportunities available to students in Baltimore City. While there are vocation programs in Baltimore City there is not a significant emphasis on vocation/industrial training as a viable alternative to pursuing higher education. Students who are not interested in being high-level scholars should be encouraged to pursue career goals, and have the proper infrastructure to develop the skills they are interested in mastering. This may involve accrediting institutions to formally teach the skills that students would be attempting to master.

COMMUNITY BUILDING

BCPSS curricular framework should be centered on community building. In much of the literature that has been written about the stated goals of education in Maryland and around the country, there is an emphasis on being "competitive in the global market place" or "regaining America's dominance in the field of technology and education" that has obscured the necessary energy needed to fix the immediate problems that face the most vulnerable citizens of Baltimore city. In fact that there are many examples of reports published by prominent education officials in Maryland that explicitly and implicitly marginalize the emphasis on lifting the masses of people in Baltimore out of political, social and economic ruin. For example, a report put out by Governor O'Malley's task force on STEM programming mentions NOTHING about how these programs can be oriented in such a way to develop and protect the interest of those in Maryland who are impoverished and suffering. In fact the excerpt in the beginning of the report says "we will continue to protect the investments in education at every level, from Pre-K to college, while increasing the alignment between the needs of our partners in the business community and the curricula designed by our educators." This is an explicit declaration to use education to meet the needs of a business community whose goals are not to empower the struggling citizens of Baltimore, but whose goals are to generate more profit for their own economic and political interest. Instead the curriculum should be based on what the citizens of Baltimore need to make the quality of life better for the masses of people in this city. Education in Baltimore should be framed based on the need to thwart the saturation of external, non-residential private interest on determining the financial and political configuration of Baltimore; it should be based on the need for young

men to have adequate access to facilities that are designed inspire young men to practice healthy masculine identity development; it should be based on the need to help the community develop communal wealth in order to be more equipped to help individuals. This is not an extensive list of all the needs of the community that should be addressed in the new curricular framework, but the previous list should provide examples of the needs of the community that education should model itself to address.

The Harlem Children's Zone is an example of a community centered education framework. Geoffrey Canada's efforts demonstrate an understanding of the importance of connecting vital needs of the people in the community to the education of the students served in the Harlem Children's Zone. There are social workers, psychologist, dieticians, physicians, and many other important services that are provided to the people of the Harlem Children's Zone which are synthesized into a program which seek to address the needs of the community as the gateway to help students achieve educational success.

A possible way to situate community building into the curricular framework in Baltimore City would involve designating certain activities that are vital to the community as credit toward graduation. This is something that is very loosely a part of the education system in the form of a 75 hours community service requirement. This is not sufficient in providing the proper guidance necessary to help students understand their contribution to the community. There need to be structured activities that are based in community building that are a part of the students' academic learning experience.

ECONOMIC TRAINING

BCPSS should provide onsite entrepreneurship and cooperative economics training. Students should have the opportunity to have their education directly related to the economic development of their communities in such a way that can contribute to alleviating the social, economic, and political subordination that the masses of our citizens face. Jessica Gordon Nembhard has written very brilliantly about a model of political economy that recognizes the strength of collective economic empowerment to produce substantive change in cities like Baltimore.

WAGES is an organization that trains women (mainly Latinas) to develop business cooperatives and has had remarkable success. Emma's Eco-Cleaning house cleaning cooperative is a project of WAGES, which was founded by 5 women and with one year of business training and 75 hours of industrial training in ecological cleaning were able to win the Silicon Valley Environment Business Award with WAGES and was nominated for a 2001 San Mateo County Sustainability Award. Emma's Eco-Cleaning is still a thriving business that has served 2,600 homes. This is an example of the type of instruction and opportunities that should be made available to Baltimore City students.

Programs that provide specific instruction to students who want to focus on developing their economic viability should be composed of classes in which students are actively participating in building the economic condition of the community and providing students with the potential to personally benefit financially by helping them to start and run businesses.

MENTORSHIP

BCPSS should develop a comprehensive program where its high school students mentor middle and elementary school students. There is very little incentive for high school students in the school system's current structure to be present in any meaningful way in the lives of younger students. There should be programs designed to encourage positive interactions between students of different age groups to provide role models and personal resources to the younger students who unfortunately don't have an adequate amount of guidance from many adults in Baltimore City. BCPSS should develop a formal mentoring program that focuses on finding mentors for students.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

BCPSS should have a curriculum that is explicitly dedicated to social justice. Education is widely regarded as the tool necessary for its citizenry to effectively participate in a democratic society. Societies must be equipped to defend their interest or they will perish. There have been social phenomena that have historically marginalized Black people, people of color generally, poor people, women, the LGBT community and many others. This cannot be something that is ignored by policy makers whether we are talking about those who are elected officials or people within the community who have power in a much broader sense (i.e. principals, teachers, bankers, community associations officials etc...), especially since these social forces continue to have an effect on the people in this city. Students must be rigorously trained to understand and critically think about systemic oppression and domination that relegate many people to the margins of society. This training must come in the form of an abundance of instruction where students are challenged to engage issues of social justice in order to become effective at empowering themselves to fight against the social forces that continue to perpetuate oppression and exploitation.

An example of a model that exemplifies curriculum that based in social justice is what Tara J. Yosso calls “critical race pedagogy”. This is model is composed of five major components:

1.The Centrality of Race and Racism and their Intersectionality with Other Forms of Subordination.

Although race and racism are at the center of a critical race analysis, we also view them at their intersection with other forms of subordination such as gender and class discrimination (see Crenshaw, 1989, 1993). As Robin Barnes (1990) has stated, ‘Critical Race scholars have refused to ignore the differences between race and class as a basis of oppression... Critical Race scholars know that class analysis alone cannot account for racial oppression’ (p. 1868). We argue further that class and racial oppression cannot account for gender oppression. This intersection of race, gender, and class is where one can find some answers to the theoretical, conceptual, methodological, and pedagogical questions related to the experiences of People of Color. We also concur with John Calmore (1997) in that what is noticeably missing from the discussion of race is a substantive discussion of racism. Indeed, in moving beyond a discussion of race, we must name, define, and focus on racism.

2. The challenge to dominant ideology

CRP challenges the traditional claims that the education system and its institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity. Critical race educators argue that these traditional claims act as a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in U.S. society (Calmore, 1992; Soloranzo, 1997). In addition to challenging the way we examine race and racism, Kimberle Crenshaw and her colleagues have argued that critical race theory also tries ‘to piece together an intellectual identity and a political practice that would take the form both of a left intervention into race discourse and a race intervention into left discourse’ (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xix).

3. The commitment to Social Justice

A CRP is committed to social justice and offers a liberatory or transformative response to racial, gender, and class oppression (Matsuda, 1991). We envision social justice education as the curricular and pedagogical work that leads toward (1) the elimination of racism, sexism, and poverty, and (2) the empowering of underrepresented minority groups. Critical race educators acknowledge that educational institutions operate in contradictory ways, with their potential to oppress and marginalized coexisting with their potential to emancipate and empower.

4. The centrality of Experiential Knowledge

CRP recognizes that the experiential knowledge of Faculty of Color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination. In fact, critical race pedagogy views this knowledge as a strength and draws explicitly on the lived experience of People of Color by including such methods as storytelling, family histories, biographies, scenarios, parables, cuentos, chronicles, and narratives (Bell, 1987; Carrasco, 1996; Delgado, 1989, 1993, 1995a, 1996, 1999, 2003; Olivas, 1990).

5. The Transdisciplinary Perspective

CRP challenges ahistoricism and the unidisciplinary focus of most analysis and insists on analyses and insist on analyzing race and racism by placing them in both an historical and a contemporary context (Delgado, 1984, 1992, 1995b; Garcia, 1995; Harris, 1994; Olivas, 1990). Critical race pedagogy utilizes the transdisciplinary knowledge base of ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, law, and other fields to better understand racism, sexism, and classism in and out of the classroom.

This outline is an example of what a set of curricular guidelines should look like when developing curriculum that addresses issues of social justice in a meaningful way.

CULTURE

BCPSS curriculum should be informed by the cultural resources of the community. Maulana Karanga at an Afrocentricity conference hosted by Tony Brown describes culture as a totality of thought and practice from which a people sustains itself, develops itself, and introduces itself to history and humanity. Many of us relegate culture to merely being a reference rather than a resource. The cultural heritage of the students must inform the nature of their education. If not then the curriculum at best acts to neutralize a student's ability to fully develop an understanding of the world that activates the students' ability to fully participate empowering their community. This is distinct from many of the mainstream calls for liberal multiculturalism. Culture should not merely act as something that is referenced in course material, but that pedagogical methodologies that explicitly come out of the cultural background of the students being served be used in all of the academic fields that students engage.

There is a psycho-social, existential quality to Black people that requires that institutions which deal with the development of human consciousness be equipped to engage or else institutions can become a barrier to the salvation of the vulnerable people of Baltimore city's largest ethnic group. Asa Hilliard refers to this as the "deep structure of African people" that is a result of cultural development, which has its origin in the Upper Nile Valley. An important conceptual model that comes out of the African cultural tradition is the idea that education is designed to humanize, and socialize the student being served. This is a paradigmatic statement that comes out of the abundant cultural resources of many of the

communities in Baltimore. These resources must be made a large part of the method for educating the students to be fully equipped to empower themselves and their communities.

An example of using cultural resources of the community in the curriculum would be to use hip hop as the text that students encounter in the classroom. Many students encounter large quantities of text that are external to their cultural spaces. They are often forced to understand text that requires a lens of analysis that embraces alien cultural values. This is often frustrating, and many students withdraw their interest very quickly when they do not see themselves in the educational experience. Hip hop provides the opportunity for students to engage critical issues that will motivate them to engage the material, and will provide the proper cognitive bridge needed to process the information presented to them. Classes made available that were focused on hip hop would surely have the potential to increase attendance in school drastically.

SHORT TERM GOALS

In light of the increased autonomy that principals have in making decision about their schools, individual schools need to have more interactions with community organizations that are explicitly interested in empowering the community. We must present principals with a series of organizations that should be allowed to present to the student body at various schools and provide opportunities for students to work with these organization as a part of their school experience, probably in the form of community service or work study. We also advocate that BCPSS begin to develop programs and academies to facilitate the liberatory education that has been discussed above with the support of willing institutions (i.e. churches, independent academies etc...)

LONG TERM GOALS

Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle advocate that a series of meetings be convened in order to engage to process of reconstructing BCPSS. This should be in the form of a task force that is convened by Baltimore City Council that will assemble a group of organizations to put out a report that will serve as “The Baltimore Citizens Agenda for public education”.

CONCLUSION

This is not at all intended on being a document that outlines exactly what the new education system looks like. This is the general outline of what we have determined is the best direction for our school system. We want to begin to collaborate with education officials, elected officials, community leaders, and others to put together a comprehensive policy that implements the six tenets and other components deemed necessary as a result of the convening of those previously mentioned.

Many of the ideas mentioned in our six point proposal exist in Baltimore in various, isolated spaces in the city. Many may argue that the existence of programs that address the six points in Baltimore suggest that there is not a need for a new educational system. Many of the programs that embody the six points are not central parts of the educational infrastructure in Baltimore city. We argue that these six point must be at the center of a new developed educational system in Baltimore. Right now many of the opportunities that a newly reconstituted education system would provide under the LBS model are not easily accessible to every student in the school. There is no viable infrastructure for students who are pursuing vocational/ industrial skills. And many of the vocational/industrial training that exist in schools do not have the appropriate support and resources to provide reasonable access to the training needed for vocational/industrial skills.

In regards to community building, BCPSS does not have an orientation that places community development at the center of its mission. It describes community development as a means to meet it's current mission which is to meet arbitrary standards for "achievement", which

is vastly different from LBS's vision which posits community building as the core of the educational system. Cooperative economics is the key to the Baltimore's economic survival. While there are a few schools that offer business and financial programs, BCPSS should seek out and help to develop strong programs that train students in economics in such a way that is geared toward collective economic empowerment. Mentoring, culture, and social justice have been endorsed in small ways by various schools and by various programs, but are not focal points of BCPSS. These can not continue to be additions to the current schools system, but the building blocks of a new educational system.

In light of the current decentralized nature of BCPSS we understand that some may say that this proposal must be aimed at individual principals. While the support of individual principals is very important to this proposal we think that BCPSS needs to institutionally support the six components mentioned above to ensure that schools are set up to provide the appropriate services to the students.

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