July 2021

Poetic Justice: A Counter-Narrative of the First Black Male Principal in a Coastal Community Since the Desegregation Era

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Poetic Justice: A Counter-Narrative of the First Black Male Principal in a Coastal Community Since the Desegregation Era

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
Department of Leadership, Policy and Lifelong Learning
College of Education
University of South Florida

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Date of Approval:
June 24, 2021

Keywords: organizational autoethnography, appreciative poetic inquiry, transformational leadership, principalship, critical race theory, poetry, brotha circle, thirdspace

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my ancestors that sacrificed their lives and liberation to give me an opportunity to pursue equitable educational opportunities. In the spirit of Sankofa, I would like to give homage to my pioneering parents Ken Anthony and Patricia Mims Anthony for building in me the belief of unprecedented achievement. To my amazing stepparents Jeff Amos and Yolanda Amos, I appreciate your willingness to love my high energy personality. To mis tesoros Adrian Anthony, Jr., Amanda Anthony, Alejandro Anthony, and Augustino Anthony, I implore you to pursue your dreams and wake up every morning at 3:00 a.m. to *Carpe Diem* (Seize The Day!). You can accomplish your dreams, not through perfection, yet through extraordinary action every day. To my blessed bonus children Joshua and Nathan may you see the power in hard work, honesty, and dreaming big.

I would also like to say thank you to my sister Kenitra Anthony for always speaking peace and blessings into my life and my big brother Ken Anthony II (Tony) for his creativity and to my computer genius nephew Dekai and my math whiz niece Alyssya.

With tears in my eyes, I give reverence to my first example of love and success. In memory of my grandparents that paved the way for my internal resilience:

Deacon Willie Mims, Sr. and Bishop Amanda Robinson Mims

To mi cielo Rayda, I give my love and loyalty to you for undergirding me through this perilous journey. My wife, my friend, my future. To eighty-five and beyond!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

"Your words have the power to liberate and elevate the very essence of who I am. I see you and I see the possibilities of leadership. I honor you for your dedication to my growth and to the lives that are being transformed from through your example" (Anthony, 2021).

I would like to give honor to God for continued blessings and protection. "The race is not given to the swift or the strong but he that endures to the end" Ecclesiastes 9:11.

It is with humility and appreciation that I honor the relentless support of my chair Dr. Vonzell Agosto. Her brilliance and critical lens within cultural context inspired me to believe in the power of poetic autoethnography. To my wonderful committee Dr. William Black, Dr. Zorka Karanxha, and Dr. Brenda Walker, I give my sincere gratitude to your unwavering dedication to my matriculation through the academy. I would also be remiss if I did not acknowledge Dr. Leonard Burrello, and Dr. John Mann for your guidance on strategies for prolific principal leadership.

To give homage to my mentor and Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, inc. brother Dr. Sam Wright for never giving up on me. Your constant reminders to write, write, then write some more exemplifies achievement.

To my spiritual parents Sam Massey, Carollyn Marr, Charlene Brinson, Leroy Brinson, Vonceil Williams, Cheryl Joe and Ernest Joe, again, I say, Thank You. To my Brothas and Sistas Lawrence, Gabrielle, Tayanna Richardson, Melanese Marr-Thomas, Ginetta-Gayle Marr, and Nathan Marr, I love you! Thank you to the educational leaders that inspire me every day.

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ABSTRACT

Entering a new school as a new principal, and the first black male administrator in a community since the desegregation era, was fraught with challenges that have a universal cadence. Additionally, the three-year school turnaround initiative I entered had its own unique barriers. My voice quivers, my head sinks low, my eyes averted but this no more, for I uphold the mantle of men of bronze, for I will lead within this challenge and my voice will go on (Anthony, 2020). Using critical race theory as a framework with counter-storytelling I examined leadership and different forms of racial and gender discrimination (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). My path started with a dream turned nightmare which I documented through reflection and journaling. My dream turned nightmare begged for interpretation and questions that provoked further analysis. I answer two research questions: What perspectives did I develop as a new principal in a rural school district under differentiated accountability? What was my experience as the first African American male principal since desegregation? I turned to prose, poetry, and organizational autoethnographic research to express the myriad of internal and external trials that came with my first appointment as a principal, and the expectation I would turnaround a school in ten months that was faced with the imminent threat of closure during a national health crisis. Emergent themes are discussed: 1) Vulnerability: open up through reflexivity, 2) Authentic Assimilation: wearing the mask, 3) Mentorship: mentorless, and the 4) FEAR: make me wanna hallah, facing the fear. I discuss the implications of these lessons for the study and strategizing of

black men seeking the principalship and provide recommendations for the broader educational leadership preparation and practice.

CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

We sink,
we swim,
we rise,
we fall
- We meet our fate together.
Excerpt from Principal Joe Clark, 1989

I am a bald headed, brown skinned, 6 feet, 0 inches, athletic built African American male with a beaming smile that greets staff, parents, and students with "How may I support you?". My name is Adrian Armon Anthony (AAA). Students and staff call me "Mr. Anthony or The Principal!" At the time of this writing, I was an educator and student (a doctoral candidate), as well as the product of a *failing urban* (Title I designated) elementary school, a self-proclaimed dreamer, and a *black man* in the southern region of the United States. In the academic year of 2019-2020, I was appointed as the first African American male principal to lead a public elementary school in a Florida county (Flamingo County School district) since the desegregation era. Paradoxically, this appointment manifested a professional dream and unleashed a professional nightmare.

There have been two major shifts in the history of the K-12 American education system 1) the Civil War, and 2) Civil Right**s** in the early 1950's, 1960's, and 1970's toward equity and inclusion. Following the emancipation proclamation of 1865, the United States began to create systems for all people to access the America dream of prosperity. The first educational shift toward equitable access occurred directly after the Civil War during a timeframe deemed the

Reconstruction when newly freed slaves and abolitionist made swift political and legal reforms for that unfortunately yielded extreme back lash from the broader white southern community.

The reconstruction efforts to produce equitable access to education within the public school system was continued in the 1950's during the civil rights movement that brought major reforms for African Americans, Latinos, and persons with disabilities. In 1954, a unanimous decision from the Supreme Court of the United States of America struck down the discriminatory practices of segregation and black folks gained a major victory towards equitable access to public education.

However, after desegregation, Black educators were disproportionality disenfranchised, and the act of integrating the schools saw the increase of white teachers and the decrease of black teachers and a significant decrease in black male principals. Historically, Black teachers were applauded for seeing the potential in their Black students, setting high expectations for post-secondary achievements, and considered the students to be intelligent. "Teachers and principals collaborated to help students build on their strengths and improve their weaknesses" (Tillman, 2004). Black teachers and principals in the Black communities, have historically been the cornerstone of the public educational system and their classroom leadership has been linked to student achievement. However, the hard work and professional leadership that black educators demonstrated in the classroom and as department heads did not result in equitable promotions and pay increases to the role of an administrator in public desegregated school districts (Hilliard & Sizemore, 1984).

Despite two centuries of American progress in offering education to the masses, little has changed with the educational infrastructure. "The school district policies still rest on the national government's ability and willingness to support the safety and prosperity of the local

governments" (Barr, Moore, Johnson, Forrest, & Jordan, 2014). Ultimately, the school-based principal must reinforce the national governments belief system through the normalization process of students. The principal has historically managed "multiple contradictory responsibilities, wearing many hats, and moving swiftly between multiple roles in one day" (Hampel, 2014, Rousemaniere, 2013). Despite admonitions about "the rise of a *post-racial* society today, race still plays a central role in the education of Black males in the United States" (Howard & Flennaugh, 2011; Jennings, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this autoethnographic research is to reflect on the successes and failures of becoming a first-year African American male principal in a southern county within the state of Florida. I will examine my first year as a principal and the challenges I navigated through school reform and school closure in a coastal community. I critically examine the experiences in a *turnaround schoo*l without mentors of color to inform principal preparation programs. To do so, I narrate this research using the first-person perspective reflected through my experience as a new principal with almost entirely new staff. My research underscores the pressure of attempting to *turnaround* (transform) an elementary school in differentiated status within 10 months. The literature suggests an average of 3 – 5 years to realize the gains from the *turnaround* process.

To accomplish this herculean task, I synthesize my thought process, the programs I implemented, the fight for innovation, my successes, and failures that I learned during the journey.

Silenced Voices

The study of Black folks' narratives has a "long history in sociology, covered by early social thinkers ranging from W.E.B. DuBois to Max Weber to Harriet Martineau, were

counterstorying is not just a matter of economic activity but a social arrangement that conveys legitimacy, power, and even citizenship to various segments of the population" (Wingfield, 2020). There is a need for studies on the preparation, support, and retention of black men entering educational leadership roles in spaces with racially homogenous communities known for hostile racial overtures. This area of focus in the study of educational leadership also contributes to the much-needed educational discourse of African American male attitudes, beliefs, and life experiences as principals meeting the needs of a growing multicultural population (Black, 2012).

Research Questions

Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, and Morales, (2007) described the path of the research and researcher: "after selecting an interpretive paradigm, the researcher identifies research questions that informs the approach or design used in qualitative research to collect and analyze the data" (p. 238). Instead, my path started with a dream that turned into a nightmare. This sense of my experience, documented through reflection and journaling, begged for interpretation and questions that provoked further analysis. In order to learn more about my principal leadership matriculation, from decision making as a manager to advocating in special education, and the complicated role my race plays in the principalship, I will answer the following research questions.

1. How did my professional perspectives develop as a new principal in a school district under differentiated accountability?
2. How did I experience being the first African American male principal since desegregation?

Significance of Study

In this autoethnography I synthesize leadership lessons I learned as new principal while drawing from multiple leadership ideologies to navigate an elementary school pending closure during a pandemic. The data from the research is relevant to aspiring leaders, turnaround leaders, and school reformists as it provides strategies I used to comply with state mandates while implementing innovative ideas to build a collaborative culture during a public health crisis. The ethnographic combination of analyzing intrapersonal information with chronological importance makes for a volatile mix" (Barton & Levstik, 2011, p 7). I use this academic space to intentionally reflect on theory and practice of leadership strategies including appreciative inquiry focused on strengths, critical race theory, and distributed transformative leadership to increase a school's grade as a proxy for a host of improvements. As a leader within the public education system, I offer my journey as the first African American man appointed principal in this (desegregation) era - and a new principal at that – in a school steeped with many challenges to the greater academic society. I chronicle the "awesome adventure" of *turning around* a school, an experience filled with hills and valleys.

This research concerns the principalship in connection to my professional life, which builds on my personal life as a foundation for the courage I mustered to meet the challenges associated with becoming and remaining a Black (race), African American (ethnicity), male principal. I chronicle my first time serving as a *transformational principal* using a poetic appreciative inquiry leadership lens. I turned to prose, poetry, and organizational autoethnographic research to express the myriad internal and external challenges that came with my first appointment as a principal, and the expectation I would *turnaround* a school faced with the imminent threat of closure. At times I found myself at a loss for the *right* words within the

politics of school leadership knowing that any word from me would challenge the hegemonic framing of leadership in a district that was nearly absent the voices of people color, and void of black male leadership specifically. My success would pose a counternarrative to white colleagues' perceptions of (people like) me as threatening, menacing, or overly aggressive – a living image of the "angry Black man" (Wingfield, 2007, p. 202).

This reflexive work allows me to explore my lived experiences through autoethnography to let go of the plantation pedagogy (Braithwaite, 1973), which resides below the surface of educational leadership preparation and practices and affects my inner sense of self. This study also allows me to honor other principal practitioners, other black men navigating spaces that may not welcome them with open arms, and my ancestors' sacrifices through storying my journey through the micro-cultures of educational organizations. In consideration of the insight, I bring to problems of identity (*i.e*., race, sexuality, gender) that are often overlooked in studies of leadership within organizational cultures, I ask readers to consider things and do things differently (Chang, 2008). My narrative has broad implications for all teaching and learning to support "the preparation of principals" (Hilliard, 1995, p. 19). In the next section, I reflect on some of my first experiences coming to understand the need for, or lack of, principal leadership in my urban elementary school.

Background of the Researcher: *It Began with a Simple Dream*

My educational leadership journey began on *January 28, 1986*, the day the NASA Challenger spacecraft exploded. As such, my principal leadership voyage starts in the trauma of my youth and narrating it takes me down the major American interstate US-19. This route and I traverse historical racial boundaries, educational disparities, fiscal inequities, and major governmental county lines. US-19 ran through the heart of the Black community of my

childhood years. This interstate feeds into the failing urban elementary school of my youth where I met my first principal and crisscrosses the campus of the only Black high school that operated during the segregation era (which I attended post-segregation) and continues up to my current experiences as a school principal.

Awaken My Child from the Dream. Growing up in a divorced home in an impoverished, urban, and primarily black neighborhood, the day-to-day reality of educational achievement was more dismissal than the far-fetched dream of being the first African American male to land on the moon. I remember the day my dreams drastically changed. We did not have many *smart kids* in my urban elementary school (or so I thought). I wanted to be smart really, really bad, but I felt like no one cared for us at my school, especially not the principal. The principal was the big white man with the big paddle, nothing more and nothing less. So, I did two things: 1) Worked really hard to avoid the principal at all cost and 2) I worked really hard on my spelling words, especially the super smart word: Antidisestablishmentarianism! My 4th-grade teacher told me that this word was the longest word in the dictionary (we still had dictionaries then), I knew if I learned the longest word in the dictionary, I could be smart and if I could be smart, I could be an astronaut or even the first black president, despite what most of the teachers said, despite what the assistant principal said, and especially despite what the principal said or did not say about my ability to achieve outside of the ghetto. It was January 28th and I had finally earned the right to be a part of the *Smart kids' party*!

The pre-party began with a final examination. The cupcakes were set, the decorations were hung, but you had to complete the final examination to remain in the room for the "smart kids party." I was the third person in line and I nailed the other average spelling words, and now it was time for the really, really smart-sounding word: Antidisestablishmentarianism. I began to

sound it out A-N-T-I-D-I-S-*A*. Before I could finish spelling the really smart word *Anti-disestablishmentarianism* . . . my teacher told me to be quiet! I could clearly see her face, it was distorted. The expression on her face was a mixture of horror, fear, and extreme sadness.

I turned slowly around to see what she was she was watching on the TV behind me and witnessed the horror that was unfolding on the news. The Challenger space shuttle had successfully launched from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) notorious Pad 39B, then exploded in midair and broke off into two huge balls of gaseous infernos that fail back down towards the earth. The reality of my urban education, the reality of my poverty, the reality of my *broken home* hit me like the exploding rocket. It was the first time that I had to face the possibility that sometimes dreams explode and come crashing down. The prolific words of Langston Hughes (1951) came bursting forth in my mind as I watched Ronald Erwin McNair, the second African American astronaut breathe his last breath in the Challenger Space shuttle.

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

like a raisin in the sun?

Or does it explode?

Excerpt from Hughes, L. (1951). Montage of a dream deferred (Vol. 195, No. 1). New York: Holt.

I felt myself gasping for air in my small broken urban elementary school. As the news anchors scrambled to make some meaning of this catastrophic event, my teacher began to weep uncontrollably. I resolved at that moment that my dreams to help others would not explode

I reminisced about my mother reading me the works of the Harlem Renaissance during the long summer vacations. She wanted us to know more than the homogeneous "whitewashed" literature that was taught in school and she knew that as an African American male in the United States of America that I would need more than nursery story rhymes to survive our urban environment. I also became keenly present to the notion that the principal should be doing more to change our educational experience: to keep us safe and despite our poverty and to create an environment of equity and achievement. As I accepted my first principalship at Riverside Elementary school, I carried this heavy load with me. I knew that I wanted to challenge the standard tropes of the principal as a harsh disciplinarian or the "police officers" in the schools (Marshall and Hooley, 2006; Mason, 2007; Richard, 2000; Varcoe, 2015).

Navigating the state mandates to become the new principal of the most intense turnaround elementary school Flamingo County was a trial by fire. In 2015, **t**he State of Florida implemented new rules under the Florida Department of Education's Bureau of School Improvement (BSI) to begin to severely limit the number of teacher and principal applicants based on their prior experiences with **t**urnaround leadership and their successes within those failing schools. The Bureau of School Improvement's TOP 2 Plan (2019) was explicit about the criteria for principal applicants. The district "shall ensure the principal and assistant principal have a successful record in leading a turnaround school and the qualifications to support the student population being served" (Bureau of School Improvement, 2019). The leadership biography I submitted (*pseudonyms inserted*) for the BSI Top Plan included the following excerpt:

Principal Adrian Anthony is a result orientated, highly acclaimed leader with a proven track record of data driven success in multiple schools for school improvement, pseudonyms provided below:

– "A" from a "D" Jonto High School, Drop Out Prevention/Graduation Coach

– "A" from a "D" West Haven High School Grade, Graduation Coach

– "D" from a "F" Shiny River Elementary School Grade, Assistant Principal [only 7 points from a C]

– "A" from a "B" Mountain Crest High School, Assistant Principal

Growing up in an impoverished community on the other side of the tracks, I could relate to this Title I school, and the necessity of employing leaders that believed in transformation. I also learned quickly that words have power and, if you could connect with the best part of people, you could save yourself and more importantly help save others. Vocabulary is not just semantics; words create worlds (Burrello, Beitz, & Mann, 2016). Transformational leadership and appreciative inquiry resonate with my lived experiences as a student, as a corporate manager, community advocate and as a new principal.

Background of the Study

Within a small country corner of southwest Florida, Flamingo County was being created after a split from Hernando County in 1887 (Cannon, 2012, p. 1). Within this county on the western ocean front was a sleepy community nestled between many rivers and the Gulf of Mexico called Riverside. The Riverside School House was launched in 1881 east of present-day Highway 19, shortly after its inception the school burned down, and a new edifice was rebuilt (fivay.org, p2). The Riverside community was settled over 130 years ago as a small fishing

village and in the early days of education, pupils spent only three months out of each year in classes, fishing and farming were students' primary responsibilities (fivay.org, p. 3).

> On Sundays the school was used as a church and had a central position in the community. The building was also used for town meetings and it became a polling place at election time and in the early days the schools were financed by residents and not by the county or state (fivay.org)

The school calendar has drastically changed since the riverside community inception, extending the in-school attendance from 3 months of voluntary learning to a compulsory 10 months. As is custom today, the schools of the Riverside area are still the heart of the community. The current school building was erected in 1966 and deemed as a state-of-the-art facility over 53 years ago but since then it has seen its fair share of environmental calamities including hurricanes, tropical storms, and flooding.

The Riverside community has historically been a rural white only, working class, lower socio-economic community. The statistics paint a picture of despair:

> Nearly 14% of adults do not have a high school diploma and only 12% of the adult population have a college degree. An average of 23% of adults and children are without health insurance, and over one third of all law enforcement activity transpire in Flamingo County occurs in the western region. There is an alarming escalation of poverty 2008 – 62.8% 2018-71.5%. (US Census Bureau, Quick Facts, 2019.)

The school still supports the community fiscally as a center for charitable donations, food distribution, and mental health support from elementary school to high school.

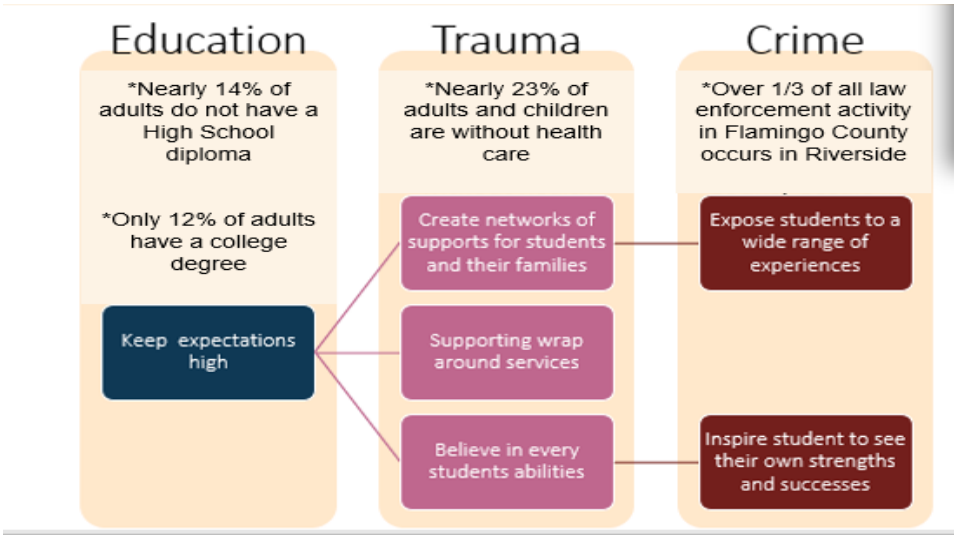


Figure 1: Excerpt from State of Florida Community Assessment Team, (US Census Bureau, 2019**).**

Given the declining school grade for a plethora of reasons, the school has been placed under the State of Florida Department of Education review. The school's grade has consistently fallen with a slight peak, followed by several years of deep decline.

School Name	Grade 2019	Grade 2018	Grade 2017	Grade 2016	Informational Baseline Grade 2015
RIVERSIDE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	D	D	C	F	F

Figure 2: School Grades for Riverside Elementary School, 5-year data 2015 - 2019

Subgroup Data. Riverside Elementary school is a public school with a declining enrollment of 561 students down from around 580 students from the 2018 – 2019 school year. The subgroup data reveals a four-point drop in English/Language Arts achievement level for students with disabilities and a fifteen-point increase for learning gains for the same subgroup in English/Language Arts. Conversely, students with disabilities increased their math achievement

from fifteen points to eighteen points, and significantly increased their math learning gains from twenty points to fifty-two points. Within differentiated accountability school grades, there is a consensus that it is extremely difficult to move a school grade in a year. However, it is more probable to increase learning gains in year one than student achievement in the same timeframe.

I use this this section to synthesis the trends for learning gains and proficiency, as it drives hiring decisions, reorganization of fiscal resources, and restructuring of departments. This data prompted me to allocate over $40,000 to hire another teacher that specializes in supporting students with disabilities to decrease the teacher-to-student ratio on their individual education plan (IEP) caseloads. The students with disabilities support facilitator's (case manager's) goal is to directly impact the ELA learning gains to continue the upward trend, and to decrease the downward English/Language Arts trend.

The special education support facilitator's work also includes continuing the upward trend of math achievement scores, and the impressive growth of mathematics learning gains. Figure 3 displays the School Grade Components by subgroup based on the Florida Department of Education's audit conducted every year. The data compares the 2018 school year performance of students with disabilities (SWD), English Language Learners (ELL), Hispanic, multi-racial, white, and Free and Reduced Lunch to the same demographics in 2019. The data reveals how students at the school are trending from the 2017 - 2018 school year to the 2018 – 2019 school year after fully implementing strategies in conjunction with the state of Florida's differentiated accountability team.

Subgroup Data

2019 SCHOOL GRADE COMPONENTS BY SUBGROUPS

Subgroups	ELA Ach.	ELA LG	ELA LG L25%	Math Ach.	Math LG	Math LG L25%	Sci Ach.	SS Ach.	MS Accel.
SWD	15	45	60	18	52	67			
ELL	58			42					
HSP	36	48		33	46		14		
MUL	40			20					
WHT	28	45	66	29	37	47	24		
FRL	26	45	62	26	34	49	20		

2018 SCHOOL GRADE COMPONENTS BY SUBGROUPS

Subgroups	ELA Ach.	ELA LG	ELA LG L25%	Math Ach.	Math LG	Math LG L25%	Sci Ach.	SS Ach.	MS Accel.
SWD	19	30		15	20	20			
ELL	40			27					
HSP	26	26		26	16				
MUL	40			55					
WHT	33	35	56	30	32	25	35		
FRL	29	32	50	27	28	26	28		

Figure 3: School Grade Components by Subgroup, 2018 - 2019

In March 2008, United States Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings "announced a differentiated accountability pilot to allow states to distinguish between those schools in improvement that are just missing the mark and those that need significant reform" (No Child Left Behind, 2008). Florida was one of nine states to participate in the U.S. Department of Education differentiated accountability pilot project in 2008 and continued to provide Differentiated Accountability services through Race to the Top (RTTT) funding and smaller Differentiated Accountability Plan (DAP) grants (Florida Office of Inspector General, 2015). This announcement essentially launched the modern Turnaround Leadership initiative. Within "Florida's Differentiated Accountability Program (DAP) the focus is to reduce the achievement gaps between students in accountability subgroups through more distinctive forms of intervention that consider individual schools' and/or districts' needs" (Florida Department of Education, 2008; Simon & Black, 2011, p. 161).

In July of 2019, Riverside Elementary School was placed into differentiated accountability status by the Florida Department of Education. Specifically, the Differentiated Accountability Program (DAP), which is a federal incentive policy designed to afford states flexibility in aligning improvement efforts with individual schools' specific needs according to each school's Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) status, requires schools in needs improvement status (SINI) to develop action plans with professional development and curriculum and instruction among targeted components. Schools subsequently incorporated the action plan into individual differentiated accountability School Improvement Plans (SIP) as a roadmap for school reform (Florida Department of Education, 2008; Simon & Black, 2011, p. 160).

To Close or Not To Close? After implementing multiple tactics to transform low performing schools over the last decade, the superintendent of Flamingo County School District was faced with an ultimatum from the state of Florida's differentiated accountability team, 1) to increase the school grade, 2) to close the elementary school 3) to convert the public elementary school into a charter school, or 4) to hand the school over to be managed by a state appointed school agency in 2021. Flamingo County School District asserts that its relentless focus on school improvement created a reduction in the number of Differentiated Accountability (DA), turnaround, and Lowest 300 schools. The counties DA schools saw the most dramatic improvement, dropping from 23 schools. Within the "2016 school year several schools met the turnaround criteria, and of those four schools they were able to make the necessary corrections to be released from the state mandate the preceding school year" (Flamingo County School District, 2017). However, in 2019, the turnaround efforts with the lowest performing schools resulted in two schools remaining in differentiated accountability status: Riverside Elementary and Rooster Elementary. Riverside Elementary was at the most risk of school closure.

RIVERSIDE	ELA Ach	ELA LG	ELA LG L25%	Math Ach	Math LG	Math LG L25%	Science Ach	Total Points	% Total Points	Grade
2015-2016	28	38	34	23	34	32	28	217	31	F
2016-2017	38	58	63	32	42	40	29	302	43	C
2017-2018	32	32	51	30	30	24	32	231	33	D
2018-2019	30	46	64	29	37	49	22	277	40	D

By Grade

HES	SCORES					AVERAGES	
	2016	*2017*	*2018*	*2019*	*2018/2019*	*District*	*District/School*
ELA							
3rd	32	33	41	34	-7	60	-26
4th	30	53	22	36	14	59	-23
5th	21	32	29	28	-1	55	-27
MATH							
3rd	15	34	39	37	-2	59	-22
4th	33	46	17	37	20	62	-25
5th	19	21	28	17	-11	57	-40
SCIENCE							
5th	29	28	31	23	-8	53	-30

Figure 4: School Grades by School Year, Tested Grade Level Scores

Title I Program

Historically, Title I schools have < 40% of their student demographics receiving free or reduced priced meals, based on their social economic poverty levels (United States Department of Education, 2014, p. 2). The focus of education is teaching and learning within public education. However, within schools that are deemed as low socio-economic the principal is responsible for provide additional support such as breakfast, lunch, weekend snacks, and clothing. These essential items become barriers to the core mission of teaching and learning if they are not sufficiently met. The literature suggests that traditional ways of governing schools are inadequate to restructure and improve schools today (Wasonga, 2009, p. 201). The U.S. Department of Education "promotes grants based on deficit accountability, which is divergent from international approaches in a country like Finland, which develops procedures and distributes resources under the assumption that achievement is a collective responsibility, the educational policy process described in differentiated accountability programs emanates from a policy ecology that seeks to provide equal individual access and opportunities through grant in aid programs like the Title I" (Itkonnen & Jahnukainen, 2007; Simon & Black, 2011). The

National Center for Education Statistics asserts "that School districts in the highest poverty quarter (*i.e.,* the poorest districts) had the highest total Title I allocations per formula-eligible child, and districts in the lowest poverty quarter (*i.e.,* the least-poor districts) had the lowest total Title I allocations per formula-eligible child and school districts in the highest poverty quarter had the highest total Title I final allocation per formula-eligible child ($1,381), and districts in the lowest poverty quarter had the lowest allocation ($1,023) directly impacting student outcomes" (NCES, 2019, p. 2).

Conceptual Framework

American history reveals that many black teachers, principals, and to a less extent, black superintendents lost their jobs as a result of the *Brown v Board of Education* decision" (Tillman, 2004, p. 285). Since that Supreme Court ruling, there has not been another black male principal in Flamingo County School District. The principalship, however, is not homogenous, and the roles and responsibilities change in accordance with the community setting, educational environment, and societal beliefs of the broader community. "We know less about school leaders than about any other set of chief executives in our nation, the largest school systems run operations larger than many corporations including transportation services, library, technology, equipment purchasing, counseling, school construction/renovation, finance management, community outreach, public relations, athletics, arts, health services, and personnel" (Hodgkinson, H. L., & Montenegro, X., 1999, p. 8). I use the concept of the "Thirdspace" to express my "otherness" within this new leadership position (Soja & Chouinard, 1999).

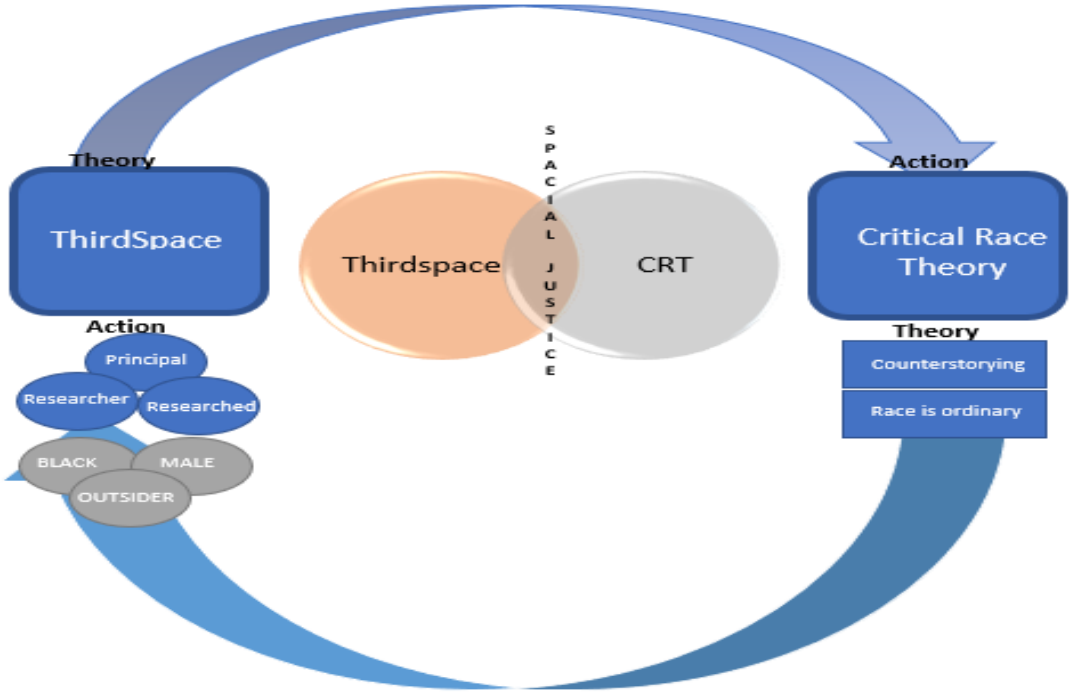


Figure 5: Praxis within the conceptual framework bridging Third Space framework and Critical Race Theory

Living in the Third Space

Through this research, I reclaim the territorialized spaces that have been colonized by an oppressive narrative as it intersects with principal practice, principal preparation, and administrative research, particularly for persons of color. I use poetic autoethnographic literature to channel a third space as defined as a momentary space between one's day-to-day world and other worlds (Bhabha, 1994). Within this context, Bhabha further asserts that we are the poets of exile who can unsettle what is accepted problematically as nation, culture, subject, national identity, citizenship, and human community. Third space is the intersection of lived spaces of representation, between *first space* (spaces of representation) and *second space* (rethinking of spatiality, change, and resistance) and in coexistence (Soja & Chouinard, 1999). I use this concept of third space to explore race, gender, and leadership through poetic autoethnography.

Tenets of Critical Race Theory

My conceptual framework undergirds my fight against "the angry Black man image as a middle-class, educated African American male who, despite my economic and occupational successes, is aware of the pervasive racial discrimination everywhere and consequently is always perceived as enraged" (Wingfield, 2007, p. 202). I employ tenets from critical race theory to inform how I process my leadership journey. I acknowledge that "gendered racism structures control the images and the ways in which Black professionals respond in a work environment" (Wingfield, 2007, p. 201). I utilize cross-disciplinary sources as "I seek to challenge the status quo of knowledge production with poetic prose" (Coles & Knowles, 2001, p. 64), while drawing insight from others similarly positioned by race and gender. I place value on confronting the connections between historical systems of oppression, white privilege, and the lived experiences of colored folk that manifest in the context of the current educational system.

This research aligns with the proposition that "race continues to be a significant determining factor in how inequity is distributed in the United States" (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). As such, I employ several tenets of critical race theory as a framework to reflect on aspects of societal structures, the experience of disenfranchised groups, community relationships, and the self in space in which "passion can bridge individual and collective experiences" (Ellington & Ellis, 2008, p. 448).

Interest Convergence. The interest-convergence principle proposes "that change benefitting people and communities of color only occurs when those interests also benefit Whites" (Alemán, Jr. & Alemán, 2010). Derrick Bell introduces the concept of "interest convergence, as a tenet of critical race theory, to be used as an analytic, explanatory, and conceptual tool in the study and analyses of policies and practices in teacher education" (Bell,

1980). Richard Milner IV (2008) asserts that "interest convergence is a tenet of critical race theory, conceptualizes some broad themes of "raced" interests in teacher education, applies the interest-convergence principle to teacher education, and introduces an evolving theory of disruptive movement in teacher education to fight against racism in teacher education policies and practices" that directly impacts the matriculation to the principalship.

Counterstorytelling: Using critical race theory as a framework and the principles of "counter-storytelling to examine the different forms of racial and gender discrimination" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). The master narrative reenforces the majoritarian ideology of "stories about the low educational achievements of people of color and the superiority of White privilege" (Montecinos, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Goessling promotes the "exploration of counterstorying *Thru the Lenz* of critical race theory through art, photography, and narrative" (Goessling, 2018). Critical race theory recognizes that the "experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). They further assert that "counter stories are a method and a tool that enable a deeper understanding of people of color lived experiences which can be expressed through photos and art to challenge the majoritarian stories told about them, their school, and community" (Goessling, 2018; Solórzano and Yosso in Qual Inq 8:23–44, 2002a). I narrate my story as a principal within a poetic discussion of the tensions and challenges of "engaging in counterstorying as critical, emancipatory praxis that elucidates the linkages of personal experiences and macro policies" (Goessling, 2018; Stovall, 2006). My story as the first man of color in a principal leadership position is a counternarrative to hegemony of the American education system that contextualizes normalcy through the lens of a non-disabled, middle class raised, white maleness.

Many leaders are called, but the chosen are few (Bible Gateway passage: Matthew 6:25-27 - New King James Version, 2018). There are many frameworks for leaders within education administration including: servant leader, emotional leader, transactional leader, transformational leader, appreciative leader, social justice leadership, among others. I identify with two in narrating my principalship at Riverside: transformational and appreciative leadership. I give my leadership journey, as an act of service to mankind, as a bridge of healing my past hurt from attending failing schools, as a medium of processing the trauma of my first principalship, and as reference to the advocates seeking to prepare principals to transform schools worldwide. Ultimately, I wish to motivate and encourage leaders to become advocates for social equity for the broader socio-economic needs of underserved communities and specifically for equity within failing schools.

Educational leadership is the source of great debate within county, state, and federal politics. Defining the principalship and preparing principals is a part of an ever-changing political battle over choices over how much education an administrator should ascertain, the quality of leadership preparatory programs, developing leadership competence, and allocating resources that help a principal transform a failing school. These are decisions I have wrestled with during my journey as a new principal.

In conducting this autoethnographic research, I am guided by the principles in James MacGregor Burns' theory of Transformational Leadership. Within his framework transformational leaders motivate their staff to stretch their goals to achieve at higher level by cultivating their beliefs and axiology's (Burns, 1978). According to Mathew Anderson (2017), transformational leadership style has a significant impact on school performance:

> Transformational leadership styles' have a positive impact on teacher commitment, performance, job satisfaction, and other areas that help facilitate overall school success, and based on its established positive correlations to employee performance, motivation, and job satisfaction in business organizations, transformational leadership style seems to be a viable approach for education leaders to test in transforming schools to meet new stakeholder demands (Anderson, p. 3).

Leading Through Appreciation

After reading the media coverage surrounding Riverside Elementary' s school battle to prevent school closure and to increase the failing test scores, I began analyzing the historical data of the Riverside elementary school based on the school grade, I started to feel the tremendous weight of the task at hand. I went back to a book I read at the beginning of my doctoral program called Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Appreciative inquiry "is a process that starts with strengths and results in dramatic improvements in the triple bottom line: people, profits, and planet" (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005. p. viii). This is one of the driving frameworks for my leadership to support the staff, students, and community. As a leader I seek to transform schools, as well as, to cultivate my strengths and spend less energy on reconstituting my weaknesses. Through this principalship I sought to be more self-aware of my strengths and lean into them. The appreciative inquiry leadership process "significantly enhances employee engagement, retention, and morale, stakeholder satisfaction, cost competitiveness, revenues and profits, as well as organizations understanding and abilities to meet the needs" (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. viii). The appreciative research asks, "leaders to discover possibilities not just problems through collaboratively articulate the vision then designing solutions while continually experimenting on possible solutions" (Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services, 2019).

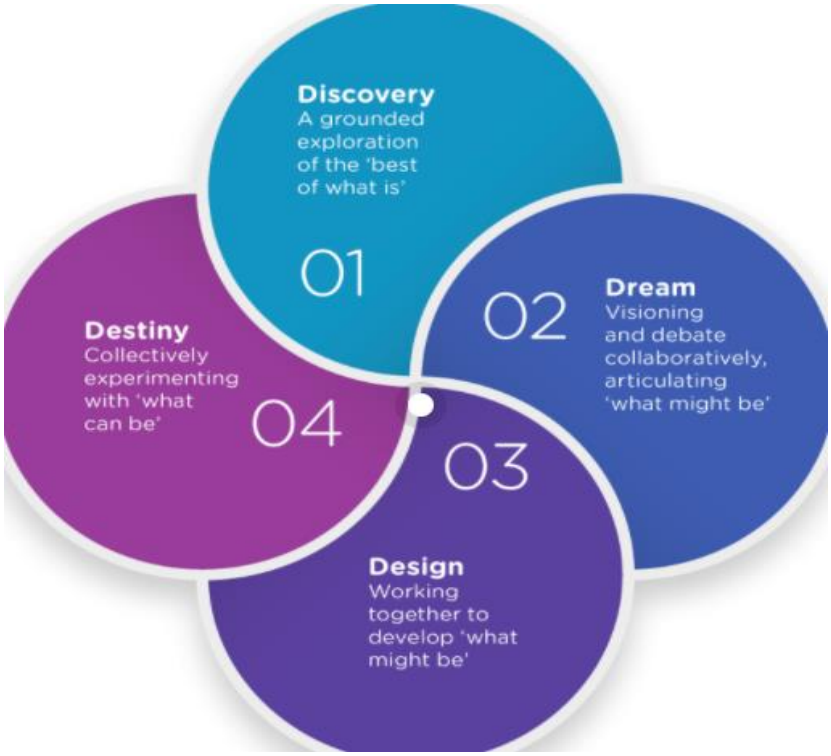


Figure 6: 2019 Appreciative Inquiry Model from the Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative leaders provide "a narrative of growth, not decay; narratives of opportunity, not inequity; and narratives of excellence, not mediocrity" (Burrello, Beitz, & Mann, 2016). There are two different approaches to improving performance that begin with two different questions. One is a deficit orientation, "leading to problem solving, the other is a positive approach, an appreciative orientation leading to increased capacity and innovation" (Barrett & Fry, 2008).

> At its heart, Appreciative Inquiry is about the search for the best in people, their organizations, and the strengths-filled, opportunity-rich world around them. AI is not so much a shift in the methods and models of organizational change, but AI is a fundamental shift in the overall perspective taken throughout the entire change process to 'see' the

> wholeness of the human system and to "inquire" into that system's strengths, possibilities, and successes. (Stavros, Godwin, & Cooperrider, 2015, p. 10)

Transformational Leadership and appreciative inquiry frame my professional work as a principal and the resilience of my ancestors frame my conceptual framework. My coming to understand the racial political intersections of the principal in Florida had been a driving force of my decisions while at Riverside Elementary School and helped to frame my research.

Assumptions

1. As the researcher and participant that I will-reflect my experiences, exposures, and interactions with staff and students based on my lived experiences.
2. Data presented on the demographics about the district are accurate within context.
3. The setting that I observed are presented within the context of the researched timeframe.
4. No historical account can be entirely objective and completely generalizable to all context because historical knowledge always involves interpretation (Barton, & Levstik, 2011, p. 4).
5. Racism in endemic to the United States (Bell, 2014).

Delimitations

This autoethnographic account is limited to my adult years, although the childhood experiences I describe above were formative. Other narrative approaches such as life history or personal narratives could be enlisted to link leadership practice to lessons learned earlier in one's life. However, given the ethnographic emphasis in the methodology and my interest in the problems of practice for leadership in schools I chose to focus my narratives on those most immediate to my experience as a first-time principal. Additionally, I analyzed and inserted poetry from many of the great Harlem Renaissance poets. However, many poems informed my

research but there was still a space not defined by my current context that necessitated that I develop several original works of art.

Definition of Terms

1. School Turnaround – A plan to increase a school grade from a failing grade or multiple failing grades (*i.e.*, F or D), if unsuccessful the school must implement "one of the five state options: school closure, convert to a charter school, employ an external operator, develop a hybrid model, or the district manages the school" (Florida Department of Education 2019).
2. Differentiated Accountability - Section 1008.33, Florida Statutes, "establishes the differentiated accountability system of state support for school improvement, also known as DA, in which graded, non-charter schools and their districts are identified for escalating interventions, support and monitoring based on their school grade history" (Florida Department of Education, 2019).
3. ESSA - Every Student Succeeds Act was entered into law on December 10, 2015 by President Obama. ESSA has provisions that will help to ensure success for students and schools. The law advances equity by upholding critical protections for America's disadvantaged and high-need students. The law ensures that vital information is provided to educators, families, students, and communities through annual statewide assessments that measure students' progress toward those high standards and maintains an expectation "that there will be accountability and action to effect positive change in our lowest-performing schools, where groups of students are not making progress, and where graduation rates are low over extended periods of time" (United States Department of Education, 2020).

4. COVID – 19 - The new coronavirus that causes COVID-19 has spread throughout the world with symptoms can range from mild (or no symptoms) to severe illness (Center for Disease Control, 2020).
5. Poverty. The poverty rate is a key economic indicator often used to evaluate current economic conditions and how economic well-being changes over time. It is an important indicator that affects not only the general public perceptions of well-being, but also public policies and social programs. The current poverty measure "compares families' annual pre-tax money income against a poverty threshold to determine whether or not they are poor. The thresholds are dollar amounts that differ by family size and ages of the members. In 2014, the poverty threshold for a family of four, two children and two adults, was $24,008" (Bureau of Economic and Business Research, 2015).
6. Red-lining. Eighty years ago, a federal agency, the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC), created "Residential Security" maps of major American cities. These maps document how loan officers, appraisers and real estate professionals evaluated mortgage lending risk during the era immediately before the surge of suburbanization in the 1950's. Neighborhoods considered "high risk or "Hazardous" were often "redlined" by lending institutions, denying them access to capital investment which could improve the housing and economic opportunity of residents" (National Community Reinvestment Coalition, 2018).

Overview of the Study and its Methodology

This research implores the principles of the autoethnographic methodology, "which is a synthesis of research, storytelling, and a method through an autobiographical lens with an account of the cultural, social and political" (Ellis, 2004). This research study is viewed through "the eyes of the researcher, individually and contextually through the fundamental relationship of

the general to the particular, the general can best be understood through analysis of the particular" (Coles & Knowles, 2001). It is written in my own voice as a practitioner, researcher, survivor and principal of a Title I elementary school in turnaround status.

I chose autoethnography to drive this study because it "challenges the dominant hegemony and power structures in an intentional attempt to reclaim representation for marginalized narratives and creates new space for shared self-reflective research" (Tierney, 1998). Utilizing this approach bridges the nexus of self and other within a social context of an elementary school nestled within a coastal community. The methods for this autoethnographic research will utilize several data resources and analyze them including state data including the school grade, principal trainings to the staff and leadership team, news articles, and school board data. Creswell (2009) asserts that "data sources provide a basis of analysis that will yield thematic patterns that will give context" to the work at Riverside Elementary School (p. 63). The school demographics, a brief excerpt on who I am, are in the next sections.

This autoethnographic dissertation will implore a four-chapter format consisting of an introduction, literature review, methodology, and findings. Within each chapter there is deliberate structures dedicated to the autoethnographic process. The dissertation contains the scholarly formalities within an innovative poetic autoethnographic structure which is interlaced within the forthcoming chapters.

Chapter 1 introduce and frames the study. It provides contextual information about the setting (Riverside Elementary School) and me as the researcher, as well as the problem, purpose, question, significance, and orienting components of the study: conceptual framework, overview of the methodology, delimitations, and definitions of terms. Additionally, Chapter 1 covers the school context, community demographics, and conceptual framework for this study on

transformational and appreciative inquiry leadership within public education in a southern school district. The school context section outlines a concise overview to the public school of Riverside Elementary. Transformational leadership theory guides the professional work in a coastal community pending school closure during a national health crisis.

Chapter 2 is a literature review that frames the study based on analyzing the academic knowledge base that reinforces the need to address the selected research questions. Chapter 2 also provides a historical perspective of school reform through the lens of a black male principal within the public education and ways of theorizing and studying educational leadership: transformational leadership, appreciative inquiry.

Chapter 3 provides the description of the methodology used to accomplish the research. This chapter focuses on components of autoethnography, the use of poetry, and the role of *critical friends* (*i.e., brothers*).

Chapter 4 offers an analysis in prose and poetry of how I navigated my journey as a new principal, in a school district new to me, while becoming the first African American male principal appointed in that district since the desegregation era. This chapter is framed around specific actions or behaviors that I took a new principal in response to challenges and opportunities and how I as a black male principal came to understand and conceptualize my role as principal in that political and geographic setting. It also includes reflection into the historical archives on the years preceding my taking charge at Riverside Elementary School along with personal and professional experiences that have or have not prepared me to effectively navigate the barriers I faced upon beginning my leadership position and complexities of this historical principalship.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the findings in connection to the Florida Principal Leadership Standards, which helped me reframe my work (in retrospect) as a new principal and one with diverse professional experiences including leadership in corporate America, education, and communities.

CHAPTER 2:
LITERATURE REVIEW

"Whatever you do, strive to do it so well that no man *living* and no man *dead* and no man yet to *be born* could do it any better."

— Dr. Benjamin Elijah Mays

Introduction

This review examines educational leadership, psychology, and political literature to put in context the precarious nature of school leadership, especially looking at the educational leaders in the framework of the rapidly changing student needs and societal demands on the education system. (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999). Effective leadership is integral to school improvement (Sergiovanni, 2005). In the United States there is a need for transformational principals that can implement innovative reforms to shape organizational culture, climate, and systems with student achievement as the central goal (Conley & Goldman,1994; Leithwood,1994; Marks & Printy, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2005). There has been mounting concerns over the last several decades around the role of the modern principalship and their increased managerial responsibilities. This review explores literature that focuses on the increasing technocratic demands placed on transformational principals, to comply with federal, state, and school district guidelines.

The following literature review is an abridged synthesis of the broader ethnographic literature base with a concentration on educational leadership and school turnaround given its

contextual considerations. The literature review includes stories in context, studies of lives situated in the complexities of community, institution, and the principalship at large (Coles & Knowles, 2001, p. 3). I am constructing this review of literature to explore the salient research that informs my principal leadership journey as black, male, principal leading the work of school turnaround and school closure in a rural school. It became apparent to me during the research that "to understand the African American principalship experience and the diverse dimensions of our lived context, the literature review would need to chronicle the plight of African Americans" (Rose, 2013) within the education system, to contextualize my own autoethnographic journey.

I intentionally selected literature that informs the reader of the challenges embedded with the *"many hats"* I wear as an educational leader to give more depth to the contextual factors impacting my decisions in a new school district, in an elementary school, with a turnaround school, in the age of assessment accountability, in a public environment, at a school that was unexpectedly voted for school closure in the middle of the 2019 – 2020 school year, while navigating a global pandemic. Leech & Onwuegbuzie (2007) assert that synthesizing scholarly literature creates a type of outline, and in so doing, the literature helps to distinguish and inform real qualitative data for analyses. This literature review helps me to inform the link of my autoethnographic academic research and the praxis of my multi-faceted principal leadership styles within the broader context of being a principal of color.

The organization of this literature review is segmented into three sections. The first section places emphasis on the plight of the principalship, school reform, and educational leadership. The second part will give a richer context of the African American experience within the educational system. The third part is the poetic prose that connects the context of my

personal and professional narrative. I draw upon a body of salient literature to undergird this autoethnographic study, as researcher, poet, and subject.

Principal, I AM

Principal, I AM,
standing in the doorways with confidence for all to see
Finally, here for my first year, the Principal, I am he
Smile as if you have all the answers
Assure all, it will all, be alright
But be assured that the support I need, will not come to me like a Savior in the night

Adrian Anthony, 2019

Literature Review Process

This literature review uses an "interdisciplinary approach to embracing works from the fields of history, sociology, education, and more specifically, educational leadership" (Tillman, 2004a, p. 103). I searched for salient literature within academic databases, comprising JSTOR, PRO QUEST, and ERIC. Furthermore, I analyzed articles from the Journal of Education Administration, Journal of School Leadership, International Journal of Leadership, and the Educational Administration Quarterly. The literature search yielded over 159 empirical publications, including articles and books. The results are organized into four major categories: principalship, school reform, African American history within education, and black males in the education system. The literature yielded three major themes: (a) principal burnout (b) school reform (c) and poverty. The literature results provided a counter narrative to the hegemonic ideologies that are "embedded in the American educational systems, such as the resistance to ideologies that are opposed to the education of Black students, teachers, and ultimately counter cultural perspectives of the Black principal" (Tillman, 2008, p. 590). Finally, I employ poetry from the African diaspora as a medium for communicating the deeply rooted emotions of my ancestors that resonated with me through my leadership and academic journey. I also use original

poetic pieces produced by me as a cathartic exercise to bridge my inner selves as researcher and practitioner.

Being a Black Leader Like Me

Colette Bloom and David Erlandson assert that school district leadership's ideal principal candidate is a white prototype (2003). As more school campuses across America become more diverse based on the rising minority majority, the archaic stereotypes may need to be revisited and reformed. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that there are over 67,000 white principals in America with a majority of the 46,000 positions being held by women. As more African American males seek opportunities in the educational system, there is a need for more research around understanding marginalized groups based on the intersection of race, gender, and leadership (Murtadha & Watts, 2005).

There is a gap in the literature pertaining to the "issues and understandings of African American males in the position of the school-based principal that are being hired and managed by predominately White superintendent staff" (Black, 2012; Brunner, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1989; Capper, 1993). Also, there is a need to understand "gendered racial principal appointments based on secondary or primary level leadership "women are primarily placed as principals in elementary and middle schools while men are placed in high schools because of society's perceived sense of sternness and machoism regarding male and female positionality or traditional societal roles" (Humphreys, 2007, p. 1). Additionally, African American principals must embody the perfect ideological counter story to the embedded narrative that label black children as deficient and inferior (Hilliard and Sizemore, 1984).

Furthermore, neither higher education nor school district preparation programs have valued research about African American male leadership by African American male principals

(Black, 2012). Thus, there is a great need for further research in the growing area of black men in the principalship. Consequently, this literature review will explore challenges of African American male principalship, while contextualizing it within the broader history of African Americans within the educational institution and critical race theory.

The Principal Problem: Sustainability and Burnout

A *quick-fix* mentality within the school system, is especially prevalent in the United States education culture, resulting in "many schools being poorly prepared for their plans for change and therefore implementing change in a superficial and less-than-high-quality way" (Hord, 1997, p. 3). Principals are under extreme pressure to quickly fix systemic problems within unrealistic timeframes, resulting in principal burnout, poor job satisfaction and high attrition (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012). Moreover, principals must manage internal and external expectations that arise from politicians, the press, school board members, parents, staff, teachers and students. "Many administrators believe effective leadership can turn around most troubled schools, but politics and bureaucracy, not lack of funding, are the biggest hindrances" (Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, & Foleno, 2001). Moreover, the implementation and progress monitoring of these responsibilities are virtually impossible and requires the principal to cope with that impractical reality and have an internal self-efficacy to function against unattainable demands.

As a new school-based turnaround principal I often question "Are these quick results sustainable?" In a word, NO! The quick fix school reform strategies require tremendous energy and supervision, which in their own right cannot be sustained for long, resulting in principal burnout, turnover, and work overload (Zepke, 2007). Whitaker further asserts in his research that "pressure to achieve and sustain these impractical goals causes principal burnout that result in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreasing personal accomplishment in the

principalship, resulting in leaders not wanting to continue in the principalship despite intrinsic rewards associated with the job" (Whitaker, 1996). Zepke (2007) contends within his research, that leader's motivation to continue turnaround work was high, as long as results were improving; but questions what happens when improvement plateaus and it takes the same effort to just to stand still (p. 7).

Principals must respond to a variety of tasks, "that often times have contradicting expectations. Such conditions have implications for principals' levels of self-efficacy, burnout and job satisfaction which in turn may have implications for turnover intentions and motivation to quit the profession" (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012; Møller, et al., 2009). Cohen (2014) establishes that principals have become normalized by the accountability regime and that principals who would engage in productive resistance to performative culture must exercise a critical reflexivity with their school communities, problematizing a policy culture that has become taken-for-granted (p. 7). I utilize this literature review as a medium for academic understanding and a space to reflect on my exhausting school reform journey and to better comprehend how to support schools in the position of a principal.

Losing our Leaders

Within the United States, over half of the principal workforce is close to retiring and potential leaders graduating college are choosing other professions. Research from the "National Center of Education Statistics reported that 38% of public-school principals were looking for a more desirable opportunity to come along or are in some phase of transitioning out of the principal profession" (2018, p. 10). Principals have important "management roles, including responsibilities for teachers, curricula and budgets" (Miller, 2013). Among the many challenges facing public schools are "high levels of principal turnover, which in the literature

broadly includes principal changes to other schools, districts, or positions as well as exits from the school system all together" (Snodgrass-Randal, 2017).

Given the high demands of the present accountability system, coupled with the restrictive union contracts in many school districts, principals are pushed to mandate teachers to work harder, but are unable to pay them for the extra hours and materials they pour into education. Teacher's efforts must correlate to state assessments results. Principals have the challenge of indirectly influencing student achievement, through developing a culture of professional development and progress monitoring to increase teacher proficiency and planning (Grubb & Flessa, 2006). Fullan asserts that the "attrition of our principals is a major challenge because of the essential role that principals have in the accountability driven system, given that research indicates it takes five to seven years for the principal's results to show in student achievement" (Fullan, 2001).

School Turnaround and Reform

There is a need for innovative educational leadership within turnaround schools. School turnaround "focuses on building the capacity of states and school districts to improve student outcomes, and sustain the reforms, in their lowest-performing schools" (United States Department of Education, 2019). Snipes, Doolittle, and Herlighy (2002) assert there are nine key drivers of school reform in high poverty school districts that have implications for school-based leadership school districts, and state senators:

1) student achievement, curriculum standards, and the instruction of teachers,
2) an accountability system that correlates to data driven results,
3) a reallocation of resources to the lowest performing schools,
4) researched based district curriculum and instructional resources,

5) districtwide professional development to support the effective implementation of curriculum,
6) collaborative culture with the district office and schools that emphasize reform strategies in the classroom,
7) a districtwide commitment to data-driven decisions,
8) school reforms started at the elementary level with systematic articulation,
9) intensive emphasis on reading and mathematics in middle schools and high schools. (p. 5)

The Office of School Turnaround under the United States Department of Education is "responsible for helping to coordinate federal programs and initiatives focused on the lowest-performing schools and for working collaboratively with the state departments and school districts to develop strategies, guidance, and networks to assist those schools that are underperforming" (United States Department of Education, 2019).

Fullan (2005) further asserts that school district leadership is critical to the success of large-scale school reform. Effective school district leadership for turnaround initiatives must then be supported by having innovative principals in high priority schools.

Leadership Style and Models Matter

A school leaders' leadership style and framework influence how a principal prepares for a situation, implements resources, and progress monitors school systems. "Leadership style can be expected to have an influence on the followers' experience of chronic stress because leader-led relationships usually last a long time, and because of the potential influence of leadership behavior on stressors and coping resources of the followers, not only influencing productivity but may also have an important impact on occupational health" (Rowold & Scholtz, 2009, p. 38).

Informing leadership styles are frameworks for leading. For example, Sergiovanni (2010) provides a pragmatic discussion on how principals act based on their leadership framework:

> A principal who operates from a "human relation" model, for example, might consider interpersonal relationships as the critical administrative priority in a school. This principal would then employ specific techniques such as having teachers participate in decision-making to improve these relationships and then would progress monitor effectiveness by judging the positive changes in the morale of the staff. However, another principal that operates from an "accountability" model might consider increased performance as the critical concern in this same school. This principal would then employ specific techniques such as management by objectives (MBO) and teaching by objectives (TBO) to improve performance and would then judge his/her effectiveness by the number of objectives achieved. The behavior and orientation of each principal is governed by the model from which the principal is working (p. 12).

In addition to frameworks, leadership is also an expression on personal attributes perceived as style. For instance, Fullan (2005) asserts that there are eight elements of practice guiding educational "leaders: (1) public service with a moral purpose, (2) commitment to changing the context, (3) lateral capacity building, (4) intelligent accountability, (5) deeper learning, (6) dual commitment to short and long-term results, (7) cyclical energizing, and (8) the long lever of leadership" (Fullan, 2005, p. xi). Neither of these models address the racial politics and the stress that can permeate for black men leading schools who have the moral purpose, commitment and capacity to lead in an energizing way that promotes deeper learning leading to long-term positive change.

School Leadership Models in Practice

African American leadership styles are connected to overcoming racial discrimination through educational achievement (Hilliard & Sizemore, 1984; Lomotey, 1989; Wingfield, 2007). Black professional men's experiences with gendered racism take the form of encounters with controlling images that evoke the narrative of the "angry Black man"(Wingfield, 2007, p. 201).

> "The spiritual journey that leaders must take, and inspire others to take, begins with ourselves but not necessarily by ourselves. . [It] will require both an internal exploration of soul and an external search for communion . . . we need a revolution in how we think about leadership and how we develop leaders (Bolman & Deal, 2001, p. 1).

To better understand black men who take on the mantle of the principalship we need a scholarly revolution.

There are multiple leadership theories within the educational industry including transactional leadership, transformational leadership, appreciative leadership, and distributive leadership servant leadership, emotional leadership, and several emerging theories. My review will discuss four school leadership models: appreciative leadership, transactional leadership, transformative leadership, and distributive leadership. I utilized appreciative leadership and transformative leadership as a first-year principal to intentionally present a counternarrative to the angry Black man narrative.

Appreciative Inquiry. "Appreciative Inquiry relies explicitly on input from individuals at all levels to uncover the organization's positive core strengths" (Fifolt, & Lander, 2013, p. 22). Tracy Orr and Marti Cleveland-Innes (2015) asserts in the "International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning from their article Appreciative Leadership: Supporting Education Innovation that Appreciative leadership is a strength-based practice that intentionally explores

the positive in people and in organizations, and the strategic role appreciative leadership has in organizational innovation and school transformation" (2015, p. 1). Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom, and Kae Rader (2010) further affirms in "Appreciative Leadership: Focus on what works to drive winning performance and build a thriving organization that Appreciative Leadership is a philosophy, a way of being and a set of strategies that give rise to practices applicable across industries, sectors and arenas of collaborative action" (2010, p. 3). The positive change core of the organization is seen to be a vast and untapped resource in organizations. "It is the energy of this core of *positive stories* and accounts of mountain top moments and most memorable achievements collected from the people in organizations that fuel the change in the organization" (Orr and Marti Cleveland-Innes, 2015, p. 236). Orr and Cleveland-Innes further assert that there are five principles to Appreciative Inquiry including the Constructivist Principle, the Principle of Simultaneity, the Poetic Principle, the Anticipatory Principle, and the Positive Principle" (2015, p. 236).

Table 1: *Five Principles of Appreciative Inquiry*

The Constructivist Principle	"The Constructivist Principle acknowledges that organizations are living, human constructions. To be a leader, according to this principle, is to know and understand an organization as a human construction, as ever changing, and is 'how' one knows an organization" (Orr and Marti Cleveland-Innes, 2015, p. 236).

Table 1 (Continued

The Principle of Simultaneity	"The Principle of Simultaneity sees inquiry as intervention. Rather than one following the other, the questions we ask and the changes we make are not separate moments but are considered to be simultaneous. AI sees change as embedded in the types of questions we ask. What results from our questions becomes that which shapes our future. Leaders, then, guide which questions are asked, what changes are made, and encourages movement toward a new future" (Orr and Marti Cleveland-Innes, 2015, p. 236).
The Poetic Principle	"The Poetic Principle reflects the metaphor that an organization is much like an emerging book. However, this story is constantly being co-authored and re-interpreted. All topics, like all human experience, are open to exploration and re-consideration. There is no need therefore to rehash and relive the same reality over and over again. We can ask new questions. The Appreciative Leader makes the story, and its unfolding, explicit. Each

Table 1 (Continued	
	participating author of the story in acknowledged and validated for contributing, wherever the story may go" (Orr and Marti Cleveland-Innes, 2015, p. 236).
The Anticipatory Principle	"The Anticipatory Principle is based on the observation that human beings are forever looking to and anticipating the future. What we imagine about the future and our conversations about that future guides present behaviour. Inquiry, the kinds of questions we ask, helps to shape that Appreciative Leadership: Supporting Education Innovation Orr and Cleveland-Innes This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. 237 anticipatory reality. An Appreciative Leader encourages positive inquiry and an imagery which leads to new, even multiple, future realities. This plays out as a communal forum which involves all its participants" (Orr and Marti Cleveland-Innes, 2015, p. 236).

Table 1 (Continued)

The Positive Principle	"Appreciative Inquiry is ultimately relational. Positive affect, caring, shared meaning, and purpose fuel change efforts. The more positive the central driving question, the more momentum for change is created and the more lasting the change experienced" (Orr and Marti Cleveland-Innes, 2015, p. 236).

Orr, T. and Cleveland-Innes, M. (2015) Appreciative Leadership Supporting Education Innovation, *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning,* 16(4)

The Poetic Leader. Storytelling serves as the means by which individuals gather holistic information from one another, including facts but also "feelings and affect that a person experiences and the recognition that stories, like all good poetry, can be told and interpreted about any aspect of an organization's existence" (Fifolt & Lander, 2013; Watkins, Mohr, and Kelly, 2011). As an appreciative leader, I resonate with the poetic principle and my need to co-author reality and re-construct the stories for innovative counter stories for school reform initiatives. As an Appreciative Leader encourages positive inquiry and an imagery which leads to new, even multiple, future realities which plays out as a communal forum which involves all its participants (Orr and Marti Cleveland-Innes, 2015, p. 237). By sharing "stories and experiences with one another, AI encourages individuals to look at their organization and its people at their best and focus on what they want more of" (Fifolt & Lander, 2013; Kelm, 2005). As a principal, I embed the poetic appreciative leader as my core principle.

Transactional Leadership. "Max Weber coined the term transactional leadership in 1947 to promote a manager that leads based on compliance and Bernard M. Bass further defined

the leader that promotes rapid change by employing a style in which leaders promote followers' compliance through both reward and punishment in 1981" (Duemer, 2017, p. xxxv). "Exhibiting transactional leadership meant that followers agreed with, accepted, or complied with the leader in exchange for praise, rewards, and resources or the avoidance of disciplinary action" (Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Berson, 2003). As a principal, I was determined not to be a transactional leader, merely demanding compliance to commands for fear of discipline. The school district superintendents staff utilized this frame to drive an agenda with little to no meaningful input from the principal or school-based staff. Rowold & Scholtz define the linear nature of transaction leadership as:

> "As a transactional leadership factor, contingent reward entitles a task-oriented leadership behavior, that provides followers with rewards (materialistic or psychological) depending on the fulfillment of certain tasks. In active management-by-exception, the leader watches and searches actively for deviations from rules and standards in order to avoid divergent behavior. If necessary, corrective actions are taken. In contrast to active supervisory behavior, management-by-exception passive describes a leader who intervenes only after errors have been detected or after standards have been violated" (Rowold & Scholtz, 2009, p. 37).

I experienced the impact of transactional leadership or, as I deem it, lazy leadership by my educational superiors. Transactional leadership devalued my creativity, my culture, and my voice because it was based on the mechanical interactions between the "leader and follower as a simple exchange system of well-defined transactions with the leader (or manager) rewarding (promoting) or disciplining (firing) the follower with regard to his/her performance" (Rowold & Scholtz, 2009, p. 36; Dumdum, Lowe & Avolio, 2002). This fear-based structure was used to

promote a system of oppression. Transactional leadership does not value the voices and input of the subordinate. This neglect of the subordinate creates work-related stress (Rowold & Schlotz, 2009, p. 36).

Transformational Leadership. In contrast to a transactional leadership approach, I intentionally began my principalship studying transformational leadership. I wanted to be the leader that was a counter story to my boss. Scholars assert that transformational leadership has been the most contested and researched concept in the field of education within the previous three decades (Diaz-Saenz, 2011). In 1973, James V. Downton introduced the concept of transformational leadership in his pioneering work *Rebel Leadership*, leading to a new framing of the leadership literature (Downton, 1973). Downton's theories of leader-follower relations considered the nature and function of rebel leadership given follower transactional commitments in relation to charismatic and inspirational leaders (Downton, 1973). Bernard M. Bass and Bruce J. Aviolo (1994) identified several defining keys of transformational leadership.

First, the "leader must stimulate interest among colleagues and followers to view the work from a new perspective" (Bass & Aviola, 1994). Rowold and Schultz (2009) assert that transformational leadership is the articulation and representation of a motivational vision that will "foster a positive attitude concerning the future resulting in the staff being motivated to perform well" (p. 37). The staff must have an awareness of the mission or vision of the team and organization, and the part they play in the bigger picture of the organization (Bass & Aviola, 1994).

As another factor of transformational leadership, "intellectual stimulation includes leader behaviors such as challenging the assumptions of followers' beliefs as well as analyzing subordinates' problems and possible solutions" (Rowold & Scholtz, 2009, p. 37). The leader

"seeks to develop colleagues and followers to higher levels of ability and potential" (Bass & Aviola, 1994), with a focus on individual needs. Individualized consideration contains the consideration of individual needs and the development of followers' individual strengths (Rowold & Scholtz, 2009, p. 37). Finally, idealized influence (attributed) relies on the attribution of charisma to the leader. The leader must be able to "motivate colleagues and followers to look beyond their own interests toward those that will benefit the group" (Bass & Aviola, 1994). If a leader is thought to display certain positive attributes (e. g. perceived power, focus on higher-order ideals and values), his/her followers will develop an emotional tie to their leader building trust and confidence (Rowold & Scholtz, 2009).

Bass (1985) asserts that the materialization of transformational leadership is reliant upon the context of the interaction. He further asserts that the idealistic context for transactional leadership is in a well-ordered society and during times of uncertainty and rapid change transformational leadership is often reflected in the organization (Bass, 1985, p. 154). Transformational leaders focus on the communication of a long-term vision which is based on higher-order values and commonly shared goals. For this reason, it might be argued that transformational leadership helps to establish a "meaningful - and, consequently, stress-preventing - frame for everyday work" (Rowold & Scholtz, 2009, p. 39). In contrast, transactional leadership (*i.e.*, management-by-exception passive) increases stress when "supervisors solely intervene if standards are not met or if errors are detected, only providing negative feedback to followers, yielding dissatisfaction" (Rowold & Scholtz, 2009, p. 39).

See me, Do you see me,

You said you wanted me, but do not look at me.

Your ambivalence is crushing me,

but I still have the faith of the mustard seed.

What you do not say, I see.

Enslaved in your blindness, I must be free

Do you see me, Adrian Anthony, 2020

Distributive Leadership. Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001) assert that distributive leadership is a multi-faceted leadership concept that originated in the early 1950's from social psychology literature. Zepke (2007) defines distributive leadership as a leader's proclivity to allocate expertise and leadership opportunities widely in a group (p. 303). Distributive leadership has a foundation in distributed cognition and activity theories that suggests that human knowledge and cognition are not confined to the individual, but are distributed in the interactive webs of actors, artifacts and situations (Spillane, et al., 2001).The distributive leaders seeks to "build professional capacity in 'an emergent group or network of interacting individuals' with several key elements, and intentionally blurs the boundaries of leadership and redefines how leadership is being distributed will the goal of leadership being disseminated very widely, although it can also be restricted" (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001; Zepke, 2007).

In the school's context, distributive leadership is largely used to "describe a broadly disseminated pattern of leadership operating throughout a school and school community, the organization being led collaboratively by many participants rather than by a single authoritative being with the power of delegation" (Keppell, O'Dwyer, Lyon, & Childs, 2010). Within the educational setting, distributive leadership often has four drivers: 1) school-based leadership team, with representatives being selected for their content knowledge or pedagogical expertise not their years of employment, 2) then systems for collaborative progress monitoring are

developed including: content specific professional learning communities, observation and coaching cycles, tracking student data with intervention focus, and providing targeted professional development, 3) principals and assistant principals set the conditions for collaborative and individual professional work by developing systems and removing barriers, 4) administration creates a culture of shared responsibilities focused on high quality teaching and learning (Yun, 2017). The central premise is that "good leadership is foundational to good learning and teaching practice and focuses on collaboration, shared purpose, responsibility and recognition of leadership irrespective of role or position within an organization" (Keppell, O'Dwyer, Lyon, & Childs, 2010). Principals that lead in the context of poverty, have additional challenges to conquer.

The Landscape of School Poverty

In the United States, more than "56,000 public schools across the country used Title I funds to provide additional academic support and learning opportunities to help low-achieving children master challenging curricula and meet state standards in core academic subjects" (NCES, 2019). Historically, Title I schools have suffered from poverty, staff attrition, the threat of school closings, a lack of school resources, federal and state bureaucracy, discriminatory practices, community deficits. The concepts of "democratic community, social justice, and learning are discussed and written about as though they are mutually exclusive, creating a quandary for school leadership" (Wasonga, 2009, p. 200). I believe, schools are a microcosm of our communities and a snapshot of our broader civic beliefs. The notion of Justice for the less fortunate is the cornerstone of our American social construct and the virtue of our public institutions (Rawls, 1971, p. 3).

Social justice is not a monolithic term and takes on many meanings within various academic disciplines and public sectors. I believe that social justice goes beyond the concept of equality but seeks equity in all sectors that have historically disenfranchised the populace including housing, healthcare, criminal justice system, financial institutions, and education. As an African American male, who was raised in a predominantly impoverished community, in a historically redlined negro neighborhood, I witnessed many injustices in our society. Education was supposed to be the great equalizer but did a better job of reinforcing the oppressive norms of the inequitable society. “Calls for social justice and democratic community can be acted on only through greater understanding of the concepts and practices that perpetuate them” (Wasonga, 2009, p. 201). Social justice in schools of poverty should be a reflection of our broader communal values as advocates for student children achievement through fiscal and academic systems such as Title I, *Professional Learning Communities, Social Emotional Learning, and Trauma Informed Care.*

Serving Children in Poverty Populations. The United States Census Bureau asserts that in 2018, there were 38.1 million people in poverty (US Census Bureau, 2018). There are approximately 120 large school districts in the United States, collectively educating over 12 million children living in poverty (Haberman, Gillette, & Hill, 2017). “Between 2017 and 2018, poverty rates for children under age 18 decreased 1.2 percentage points from 17.4 percent to 16.2 percent. Poverty rates decreased 0.4 percentage points for adults aged 18 to 64, from 11.1 percent to 10.7 percent” (US Census Bureau, 2018).

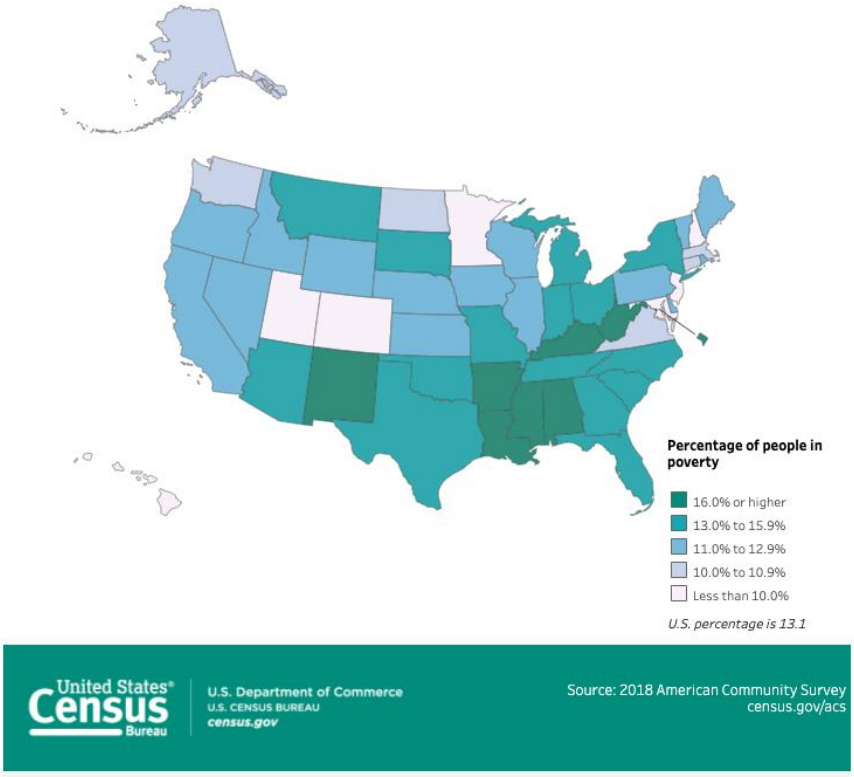


Figure 7: American Community Survey

Serving Diverse Populations of Poverty. The demographics of school-aged children of poverty are rapidly changing. Over "37 million Americans struggle with hunger, the same as the number of people officially living in poverty" (Feeding America, 2017). Within the mainland United States, the three largest school districts are New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, while one-half of the other 97 large school districts are situated in Texas, California, and Florida (American School & University, 2014; Haberman, Gillette, & Hill, 2017). As a Florida principal in a southern state within the United States of America, the poverty data is alarming. Based on annual income, 72% of the households the Feeding America network served in 2014 lived at or below the federal poverty level with a median annual household income of $9,175 (Feeding America, 2017). The states with the largest number of families below the national poverty level

are situated in the southern United States, including Mississippi, Arkansas, Alabama, and Louisiana (Center for Public Education).

In fall 2016, the percentage of public-school students in high-poverty schools was higher than the percentage in low-poverty schools, 24% as compared to 21%, and both percentages varied by race/ethnicity. “The percentage of students who attended high-poverty schools was highest for Hispanic students (45 percent), followed by Black students (44 percent), American Indian/Alaska Native students (38 percent), Pacific Islander students (24 percent), students of Two or more races (17 percent), Asian students (14 percent), and White students (8 percent). In contrast, the percentage of students who attended low-poverty schools was higher for Asian students (39 percent), White students (31 percent), and students of Two or more races (24 percent) than for Pacific Islander students (12 percent), Hispanic students (8 percent), American Indian/Alaska Native students (8 percent), and Black students (7 percent)” (USDOE, 2010).

Challenges to Schools in Poverty.

In the school system, the methods to support students of poverty have become increasingly debated. The challenges are varied and complex in nature. Three primary challenges perpetuate the challenges and solutions including community ecosystem, parent engagement, and race. The United States Census Bureau asserts that the “official poverty rate in 2018 was 11.8 percent, down 0.5 percentage points from 12.3 percent in 2017, which is the fourth consecutive annual decline in poverty” (2019, p. 1). Since 2014, the poverty rate has fallen 3.0 percentage points, from 14.8 percent to 11.8 percent. In the years previous to the “last recession, between 2005 and 2007, the national poverty rate was around 12.5 percent in the U.S., while the poverty rate in Florida was remarkably lower, around 11.7 percent on average”

(Bureau of Economic and Business Research, 2015, p. 2). Between "2017 and 2018, poverty rates for children under age 18 decreased 1.2 percentage points from 17.4 percent to 16.2 percent and poverty rates decreased 0.4 percentage points for adults aged 18 to 64, from 11.1 percent to 10.7 percent and the demographics of persons that were 65 years and older was not statistically different from 2017, with the poverty rate reaching 9.7%" (United States Census Bureau, 2017). Albeit be, there are significant places of poverty, within this current decade, national poverty is on the decline.

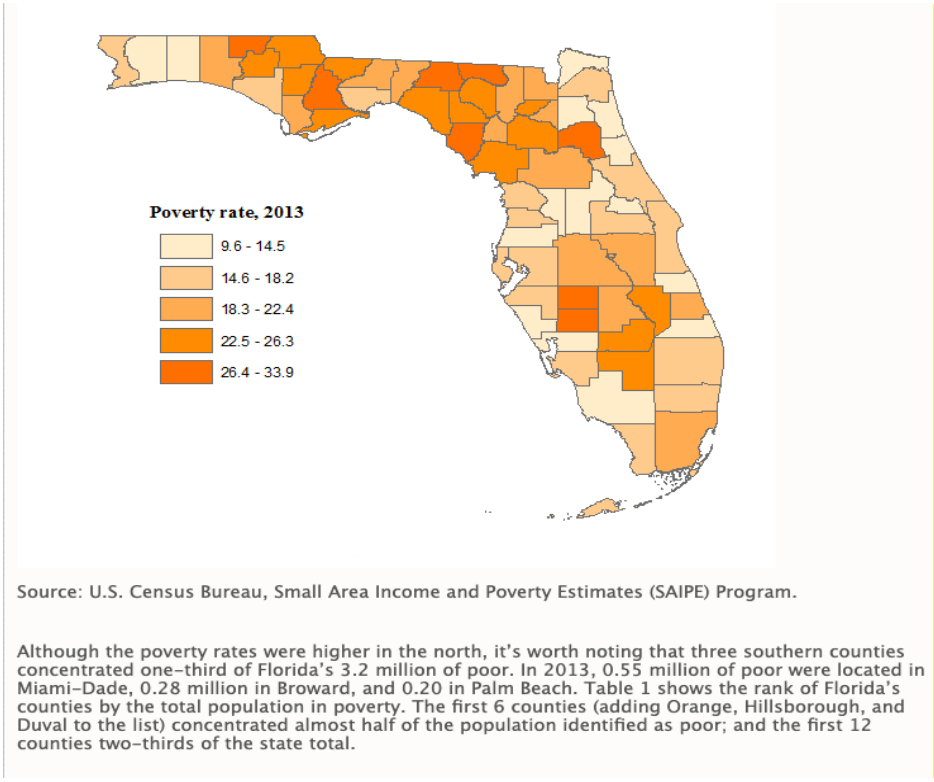


Figure 8: Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE), U.S. Census Bureau, 2013

Historical Context of Black Bodies in Educational Leadership

It all starts with the money trail! Colonization, Slavery, and Imperialistic expansion into every continent on the globe began with the insatiable desire for wealth, riches, and fame by

several European countries including Spain, Portugal, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. In Daniel P. Barr's (2014) "the book, A Colony Sprung from Hell: Pittsburgh and the Struggle for Authority on the Western Pennsylvania Frontier, 1774-1794, he asserts that the western expansion of the British mega power in, offered unprecedented opportunities for wealth and power" (2014, p. 2), at the detriment of indigenous people and the entire African diaspora. As the new Americas grew, education has been a necessity to the productivity of the once fledgling British colonies. The role of the evolving principal has been increasingly vital to the success of the indoctrination of children within the educational system. The eighteenth- and nineteenth century principalship consisted of a teacher that was a tactful intermediary in small public schools that were beholden to influential outsiders (Hampel, 2015). The key to the American economic success lay in the calculated conquering of lands, building economic empires, and gaining political control, and these, in turn, relied on educational systems that supported local interests (Barr, 2014).

The Early Era: Colonialism and Nation-Building

Prior to the Industrial revolution, most school districts were small, community-based entities, embedded in decentralized structures, with no real need for a principal or superintendent positions (Kowalski, 2005). Many public schools consisted of one room buildings that were led by a teacher that may have graduated high school. In the early 1700's, American society was relegated to very small, regionalized communities, and most citizens and recent immigrants lived in small towns and villages or on farms in rural areas. In an agrarian society, there were only sporadic needs for formal education, following the farming calendar took precedence over education (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005). Formal education was mostly provided by private

institutions, for wealthy white men, which reinforced racial and gender inequities and continuing to place discrimination at the substratum of the educational system.

As the Industrial revolution gathered steam in the early 1700s and the Civil War was rapidly approaching the American landscape, there was a demand for a more literate workforce (Kowalski, 2005). This societal shift began the early era of *public* education, which started in the early 1800s and the core restrictive formula for the school system was set into motion, and that antiquated formula still dominates the educational system in this current era (Houston, 2001). During the 1700's the education of the negro slave was illegal and punishable by fine for the white educator and punishable by death for the slave. Some groups defied that law such as the Quakers and supported the education of the slave.

There were other counter narratives to the proliferation of the education norm of education for the wealthy white elite and promoted more access to the public educational school system. Horace Mann advocated for a "common school system, a free, universal, non-sectarian, and public institution to achieve the moral and socio-economic uplift of all Americans" (Warder, 2017, p. 2). Warder (2017) further asserts that "common school reform movement sought to create the virtuous republican citizenry needed to sustain the American political institution, this required an educated workforce to expand the American economy" (p. 1).

Early era responsibilities of the school leader included instructional delivery and the managing of new school structures, while maintaining facilities and being responsible for the disbursement of state funds to pay employees (Campbell, et al., 1990). As states began to develop larger school districts, they began to receive federal funding through annual fiscal credits. School districts sought out a representative to function as the chief bursar or accountant responsible for the expenditures of state funds (Glass, et al., 2002; Kowalski, 2005). The first

superintendent was similar to the modern-day department head in a larger school system with the requirements of teaching and managing minor budgeting responsibilities (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Houston, 2001; Konnert & Augenstein, 1990; Kowalski, 2005). The early superintendent was essentially a bookkeeper who was in charge of examining financial ledgers and analyzing the accuracy of how state tax dollars were being disbursed (Glass, et al., 2002; Kowalski, 2005). This position was not intended for executive level leadership but to merely account for fiscal efficiency.

As American society benefited from the innovations of the industrial revolution, funding sources increased in the public sector. As the federal funding increased, the management demands led to the necessity for a full-time superintendent position (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Houston, 2001; Konnert & Augenstein, 1990; Kowalski, 2005). American education from its inception was closely correlated with fiscal efficiency (Glass, 2015). After the Civil War, Union soldiers marched through the South deconstructing the vestiges of the established system of slavery, thereby effecting the existing of the public educational system. According to the census of 1860, almost 4 million human beings were free and allowed the legal right to an education (Glass, et al., 2002; Kowalski, 2005). Moreover, after the Civil War, America began to grapple with who was to be educated? What gender would be educated? and to what extent?

During slavery, there were no primary, secondary, or post-secondary educational institutions established legally for people in bondage. The newly freed slaves began setting up small one room schools or meeting in churches with the purpose of educating the over 3,900,000 curious melanated minds. According to Tillman (2004):

> "Black educators helped to build and operate schools, secure funding and other needed resources, worked with the Black community, and worked as advocates for the education

of Black children, with new educational philosophies reflecting the collective ethos of the Black community that believed education was the key to enhancing the life chances of their children" (p. 282).

After the "Civil War, rapidly developing urban school systems established normative standards for public elementary and secondary education, and their principals and superintendents were viewed as master teachers" (Callahan, 1964 in Kowalski, 2005, p. 4). The evolution of the early era principal as a "bookkeeper" began to transform into an educational *thought* leader in the professional era (Kowalski, 2005). Principals began to evolve from being teacher of teachers (Callahan, 1964), to being responsible for running the *business* of schools, and they became primarily responsible for ensuring the systems of operation (Kowalski & Bjork, 1999). Black folks use schools to reinforce community values and served as the community's ultimate cultural symbol, even though the school was segregated, it was "valued" by the Black community (Dempsey & Noblit, 1996; Siddle Walker, 2000, Tillman, 2004). The Black educational system was a "place of employment and inspiration, rendering over 63,697 black teachers in the United States in 1940, with a majority black educator being employed in the Southern states, equating to over 46,000" (Foster, 1997, p. xxv).

Critics have argued that the principalship may be the most radically reformed position within all of public education, given the mounting pressures on school-based principals, classroom teachers, states legislatures, and federal mandates (Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown, 2003; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Patillo, 2008; Waters & Marzano, 2006). Kowalski (2005) asserted that there were several federal mandates supporting various aspects of educational reform directly impacting the responsibilities of leaders within education:

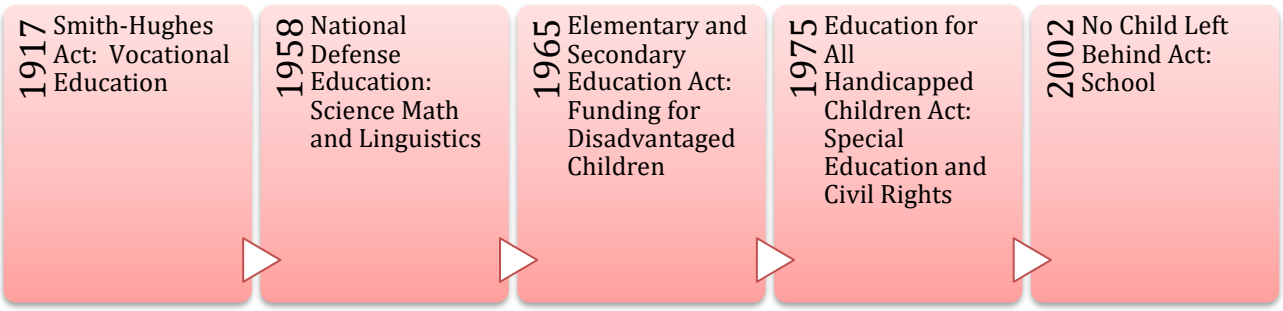


Figure 9: Critical incidents influencing American Education.

Bullets and Books

The 1900's witnessed an increased in scholarly literature debating pedagogical and philosophical concepts in the realm of education (Cuban, 1988; Kowalski, 2005; Peterson & Barnett, 2005), resulting in many educational scholars becoming superintendents and college presidents and advocating for a more instructional focus of principals (Kowalski, 2005; Peterson & Barnett, 2005). However, the principalship was still largely a managerial position but the demographics of education was rapidly changing. From the early 1900s through the 1960s, over 12 million immigrants landed on the shores of Ellis Island, bringing with them their cultural beliefs and varying levels of educational proficiencies and literacy skills (Cuban, 2013). As food shortages arose in Ireland and governmental reforms unfolded in Germany, Italy and China, families looked to lady liberty as a beacon of hope, which ushered in an era of mass immigration and societal assimilation. A rapidly changing and culturally diverse society demanded a standardized American educational process to train a workforce that would fill the excessive job shortages fueled by the origination of the industrial revolution. Literacy would be the fuel for the industrial revolution.

World Wars I and II created the need for a highly proficient and literate industrial workforce. As a natural recourse, states and school districts were forced to again expand the responsibilities of the principalship. An influx of multiple funding streams and increased funding complexity culminated in districts hiring a financial officer to assist with matters of school finance (Campbell, et al., 1990). As the demographics of society changed due to millions of starry-eyed refugees crossing the global borders thereby increasing the federal funding budget for education allocations, the principal's responsibilities began to exponentially increase. These changes ushered in an educational renaissance and increased the demands on the newly formed urban and rural school districts.

As World War II ended, the 1950's emerged with the United States entering an intergalactic battle with Russia. The world witnessed the first space race, and the tenuous Cold War, ultimately creating a high demand for the "hard" sciences, including engineering, mathematics, and career scientists (Powell, 2007). This legendary "race to the moon" rechanneled billions of governmental dollars and simultaneously placed a demand on the private sector and public educational system to support this international competitive endeavor. These dramatic changes in funding and re-appropriation greatly complicated the managerial and leadership duties of the modern principal.

Brown v. Board of Education **(1954) Changes Everything**

Brown v. the Board of Education federal Supreme Court decision ended the racist practice of separate schools for white children and negro children. However, it had a tragic unanticipated consequence, the displacement, dismissal, and demotion of thousands of African American educators, in particular principals, in the southern states of America (Karpinski, 2006). Prior to integration, "there was a unique system of Black education that could

be found in both public and private schools and African American leaders served dual, but complementary roles as educators and activists whose collective vision for the education of Black children was the impetus for an agenda for Black education" (Tillman, 2004, p. 282). Black principals had to lead segregate schools with lack of resources that created significant challenges to the position; the lack of resources coupled with a deficit of funding and when increased federal mandates have been an historical challenge for leaders of color.

Pre-*Brown v. Board of Education*, the black principal was the archetype of the black intelligentsia or the talented tenth (Dubois, 1903): educated, employed and advocates for free black children. By the second half of the 20th century, "Black principals were important role models and respected leaders in their communities, comprising a significant proportion of the African-American community's middle-class" (Henig, Hula, Orr, & Pedescleaux, 1999, p. 44).

> "Black principals served as connections to and liaisons between the school and the community. They encouraged parents to donate resources to the schools, helped to raise funds for schools, were models of servant leadership, and were professional role models for teachers and other staff members. As instructional leaders in these segregated schools, Black principals provided vision and direction for the school staff, helped to insure the inclusion of relevant curriculum, and transmitted the goals and ideals of the school to a philanthropic White power structure" (Tillman, 2004, p. 283).

Pre-*Brown* principalship was more than another job in the Black community, it was a symbol that gave hope to recently liberated people. Black principals were pillars of the community, and in Black Americana, they loomed like legends.

Post *Brown* Era Principalship Funding Shortfalls and Federal Mandates

After the infamous Supreme Court decision, education was wrought with unique challenges including the logistics of desegregation, fiscal inequity, busing, and the distribution of black principals. The law mandated integration but could not mandate the moral character of the community and superintendents.

Biases of the Early Era Principal Selection Process. In the early 1900's, the rationale underlying the appointment of administrators varied greatly (Kowalski, 2005). The selection process was primarily subjective, benefiting wealthy, white and well-connected men. Educational competency was not the deciding factor for selecting a principal but gender, race, and extremely subjective measures such as height and facial features. The rationale for these ancillary criteria was that a certain appearance would garner public trust from the broader affluent community (Kowalski, 2005). Idiosyncratic hiring criteria ranged from being effective teachers to the importance of the family's political connections (Kowalski, 2005). After the American Great Depression, school districts were forced to revamp hiring practices based on a candidate's budgetary acumen and management experience. Although the lack of diversity in today's teaching force has multiple origins, a reexamination of one of its roots deepens our understanding of the past, illuminates the present, and bears on the future belated (Karpinski, 2006).

No Child Left Behind. Moreover, the public perception towards public education became adversarial during the latter 1900's with the publication of the controversial *A Nation at Risk* and its perspective on the ills of education (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The document produced rhetoric that challenged the assumptions of the competency of local schools and the autonomy of the school boards, which caused federal and

state legislatures to divest local district-based public school board electorate of their authority, and state level stakeholders seized a substantive degree of power (Palmer, Davis, Moore III, & Hilton, 2010).

This non-demonstrative shift in federal educational policy reform began to significantly limit the principal's executive autonomy. The mid '80's brought more legislation modifications and further indulging the narrative of the incompetent school system ushering in legislation deemed No Child Left Behind (NCLB), curtailing the breadth of authority of the local school districts and superintendents (Hayes, 2008). The movement simultaneously increased metrics for accountability and began to require more statistical demographic data to ascertain federal and state funding (Palmer, et al., 2010). Buckley, Shneider, and Shang (2004) "stated that a major component of the No Child Left Behind Act mandated that all teachers in core subjects be "highly qualified" by 2005-2006." (p. 2). Given the debate over the dubious definition of the term "a highly qualified," teacher, Superintendents and principals have significant difficulty recruiting, hiring and retaining highly qualified teachers and staff due to the mounting fiscal and political pressures.

"A modern principal's responsibilities are far more convoluted than the initial job description of managing one school house and being a "teacher of teachers"" (Glass, et al., 2002; Hoyle, 2002). The new millennium also witnessed a decline in principal recruitment and retention. In the beginning of the 21st century, the position suffered a high attrition rate averaging over 30% within the initial year of employment and significantly increased to over 70% after half a decade of service (Meyers, 2010). High attrition is a significant barrier to school district productivity and school reform (Kerr, 1988; Bennett, 1991; Murphy, 1991). This national emphasis on assessments, cultural competency, and fiscal management pressures has spurned

decades of local and school district reforms, negatively impacting the recruitment and retention of the modern principal.

Summary of the Historical Trends of the Principalship

The principalship has been a territorialized position since its inception. Kowalski (2005) found that the initial "emphasis of educational leaders was implementing a state curriculum and supervising teachers" (p. 4). Schools were institutions in which societal norms of racial inferiority are engrained and reinforced into the next generation. The onslaught of World War I and World War II drastically changed the moral code of American culture, ushering in another wave of educational reform that was more inclusive of people of color, at least, legally inclusive.

Concurrently, counter narratives in education such as the common school movement determined that schools were vehicles to assist in assimilation "of students into the American culture by having schools deliver a set of uniform subjects and courses, Kowalski further contends that this strategy required centralized control and standardization (Kowalksi, 2005, p. 4). These reforms resulted in dramatically increasing the political, instructional, managerial, and accountability pressures of educational leaders and ushering in significant turnover and instability in the fledgling positions. Efforts by the federal government, educational associations, and other groups to reverse the trend were inadequate and belated (Karpinski, 2006).

Dealing with Diversity and Building Cultural Capital

"Differences in cultural capital are reinforced by an educational system that privileges certain racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups" (Gisladottir, 2010, p. 47). Hannay (2009) further asserted that multicultural changes in the U.S. population in both urban and rural spaces have presented barriers to supporting the increased cultural and ethnic diversity within the United States. The crisis viewed from the perspective of educators explores the decimation of

Black principals whose removal contributed to drying up the "pipeline" of teaching recruits among African Americans belated (Karpinski, 2006).

Why Cultural Capital? "Cultural capital is paramount in both urban and rural schools. The literature affirmed that students with higher cultural capital support systems are more likely to perform better in mathematics and science" (Huang & Liang, 2016, abstract). Cultural capital "draws on the knowledges students of color bring with them from their homes and communities into the classroom" (Miller, Wanless, Weissberg, 2018; Torrente, Johnston, Starkey, Seidman, 2015; Yosso, 2005, p. 5). Bourdieu (1973) and Browder (2007) posited "that cultural capital consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence and a relationship of familiarity with culture that can only be produced by family upbringing" (p. 80). Bourdieu (1973) further asserted that the educational system demands that everyone assimilates into the system but does not give credence to what assimilation requires people to *give up* while matriculating through the system. The devaluing of indigenous and native cultures is embedded in the historical fabric of American society. Emphasis is placed on the necessity to assimilate, rather than encouraging the assets of diverse cultures. Diverse "interactions with the wider community and all the learning opportunities these could afford is overlooked in the push for each student to meet prescribed content area standards through decontextualized classroom instruction" (Gruenewald & Smith, 2014, p. ix).

Cultural Currency. Dumais (2002) stated that "to acquire cultural capital, a student must have the ability to receive and internalize the dominant culture" (p. 3). Cultural capital is like socio-ethnic currency or *cultural money*. Since 1918, all students in all states were compelled to attend school (Katz, 1976), with the expectation of assimilation of all students into environments led and taught by mostly white Anglo-Saxon protestants. Urban and rural school

districts still struggle to systematically value the ethnic assets of low income Hispanic and African American students compelled to attend these public schools. Albeit be, state laws require students to attend, the law does not prepare students to navigate the micro socio-political aspects of the public education system, they do not provide strategies for them to ascertain an education and retain their cultural assets. The free and forced assimilation of American ideals through public education comes at the cost of losing family traditions, languages, and indigenousness knowledges. Tara Yosso (2005) "frames the concept of community wealth or cultural capital with six pillars: (1) aspirational, (2) navigational, (3) social, (4) linguistic, (5) familial, and (6) resistant capital" (p. 5). These cultural currencies act as a counter narrative to the hegemonic ideals of white privilege and the socio-economic caste system that privileges the "knowledges of wealthy white men of members of the upper classes and diminishes the assets of the lower socio-economic classes, and minorities" (Bourdieu, 1973; Dumais, 2002; Yosso, 2005; Yosso, 2015).

The Council of Great City Schools (2014) conclude that school districts have increasingly accepted student populations that are diverse based on race, gender, and socio-economic status. Yosso (2005) further asserts that these educational institutions are directly shaped through a long history of inequitable practices. School districts across America grapple with the best strategy to support diverse students in both urban and rural environments. School district structures emanate the education processes they received over time and thus often teach from a place of privilege (Dickerson, Salaam, & Anthony, 2017). These hegemonic systems create contention in their narrow ways of knowing based on wealthy, Anglo-Saxon values that are often counterintuitive to the cultural assets of the urban and rural youth.

Distinct Urban School Organizational Contextual Factors

The distinctive challenges of large urban schools are many including systematizing policies, procedures, professional development, and programs for district wide equity (Stroh, 2012). Central Comprehensive Center at the University of Oklahoma, (2019) assert that urban schools are traditionally larger than rural school districts, and rural schools are often able to make academic and behavior systems more uniform in design, implementation, and progress monitoring within these smaller school district structures (2019, p. 2). One of the most significant barriers that negatively impact students in large urban schools is equitable discipline practices.

Barriers to Equitable Discipline. Large urban school districts struggle with implementing consistent districtwide policies, exposing schools to inequitable "exclusionary disciplinary practices in response to behavior management challenges in classrooms and schools" **(**Flynn, Lissy, Alicea, Tazartes, & McKay, 2016, p. 7). The literature showed that African Americans and Latinos disproportionality receive increased consequences to minor infractions in large urban school districts. Inequitable "discipline practices have been used with students across ethnic backgrounds, and are disproportionately meted out to African American students, particularly males in urban school districts" (Harry & Anderson, 1995, p. 5).

"The school discipline of both dominant culture and ethnic minority children and youth has raised concerns" (Townsend, 2000, abstract). "Inequitable practices are of great concern given data that predict negative outcomes for students, including repeat suspensions and higher dropout and incarceration rates" (Flynn, Cissy, Alicea, Tazartes, & McKay, 2016, p. 2). These outcomes are due to a lack of systematic policies, procedures, and professional development for staff and faculty in large urban school districts disproportionately punishing African Americans

and Latinos (Townsend, 2000). These inequitable results "are consistent with a long history of similar findings and that argue for reforms in policy, practice, and research to address ubiquitous racial and ethnic disparities in school discipline" (Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2011, p. 3). "Notably, studies conducted with middle-school learners in large urban school districts have linked school disciplinary patterns with trends in childhood delinquency and recidivism" (Gottfredson, Gottfredson, & Hybl, 1993; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997, p. 7). Scholarly literature indicated that students in large urban school districts who have "African American and Latino families are more likely than their White peers to receive expulsion or out of school suspension as consequences for the same or similar problem behavior" (Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2011; Johnson, 2014). Significant size differences in urban school districts present unique challenges contrasting their rural school district counterparts.

Distinct Rural School Contextual Factors

Rural schools are often thought of as the heart of small communities; however, these schools face several challenges that their urban counterparts do not face (Laub & O'Connor, 2009). "Characteristics unique to rural areas include geographic isolation, small populations, and declining enrollments" (Webb & Williams, n.d., abstract). The convergence of these issues coupled with the lack of economic transfer in job mobility and a depleting technological infrastructure placed further pressure on rural school districts (Glass, et al., 2002). These economic and topographical barriers place significant limitations on the fiscal resources of the rural school district bringing into question the sustainability and economic viability of rural school districts (Condron & Roscigno, 2003).

Rural Sustainability. The literature overwhelmingly emphasizes the problems in urban schools, giving the impression that rural schools were vanished relics of a bygone age (Crow,

2010). The national trend has been a migration of families to out of rural areas to larger cities (Orfield & Lee, 2004). Reeves (2003) found that, due to small populations and declining enrollment, rural schools were frequently "forced to cut programs and/or staff or close schools and/or consolidate" (Central Comprehensive Center at the University of Oklahoma, 2019). The rural community are staunch advocates for their local schools because the school building is the recreational hub for weekend events and summer activities (Copeland, 2013; Hadden, 2000; Salinas 2000).

"Faced with declining enrollments, rural schools have to cut expenses or raise revenues; as students left schools, so did funding" (Central Comprehensive Center at the University of Oklahoma, 2019). Indeed, so dramatic was the consolidation of rural schooling that most researchers came to see rural schools as a decreasingly important bit of nostalgia and focused solely on the forces of urbanization (Sutton & Pearson, 2002).

Urban and Rural School District Context Summary

Urban and rural spaces are not homogenous in size and demographics. However, they grapple with similar political, fiscal and diversity challenges. On average, urban public schools are more likely to serve low-income students, it is possible that any differences between urban and nonurban schools and students are due to this higher concentration of low-income students (National Center for Educational Statistics urban-centric: Office of Management and Budget locale categories, 2006). Students in urban school have higher concentrations of poverty and the teachers in urban areas also have significant barriers. Urban school districts, challenges are exponentially magnified by the large student and teacher count. "Urban teachers have fewer resources available to them and less control over their curriculum than teachers in other

locations" (National Center for Educational Statistics urban-centric: Office of Management and Budget locale categories, 2006, executive summary).

Literature Review Conclusion

Principals have been required to lead and manage more complex educational environments where institutional theories, norms, and practices challenge the traditional understanding of the authority of the principalship to provide more than energy and direction to the organization (Tillman, 2002; Wasonga, 2009; Wheatly 2000). More importantly, principals leading school reforms must be able to implement systems to support the trauma associated with schools of poverty to ascertain successful student achievement. Many principals are facing burnout trying to manage far too many federal, state, and school district mandates that often are disconnected to schools of poverty. As such, many principals struggle under the pressure of the rapidly changing requirements to be a school leader, especially in a school with poverty, food insecurity, and trauma.

"School reform has and will continue to be an important cornerstone of school district's economic growth plans, and principal's strategic implementation of professional learning communities are key to transformation" (Williams, 2006, p. 1). For principals to sustain the intense levels of leading school turnaround and reform work, the literature asserts there needs to be "more support systems, greater professional development opportunities, and a system to prepare principals better for the realities of the job" (Whitaker, 1996). The success of a "school reform rests on the shoulders of the principal and their leadership. School transformation is based on a principal's approach to school leadership that relies substantially on principals' capacity to adopt a collaborative leadership style" (Williams, 2006, p. 1). Principal's must grow in their leadership paradigm to set school wide priorities, manage staffing, develop systems for

interventions, and engage with the community. Research on leadership indicates that positive efficacy beliefs are vital to leaders' success because it determines the effort and persistence on a task as well as the aspirations and goals they set, self-efficacy is essentially the individual's belief about what he or she can achieve in a given context (Bandura 1997; Federici & Skaalvik, 2012; Møller, et al., 2009; Gist and Mitchell 1992). For principals to sustain the level of energy to support schools in crisis, they must have a clear understanding of self, and the support of staff.

The section of the review synthesizes the parallels and variances amid urban school districts and rural school district contexts. In the literature on urban school districts, the relative importance of rural school district sustainability has been subject to considerable debate. One major issue that has dominated the field for many years concerns convergent pressures of diversity on both urban and rural school district environments. Urban and rural school districts have similar pressures of building cultural capital in increasingly diverse school environments. Shifting school district culture is a trial (Kowalski, 2013; Wood, et al., 2013). Leithwood (2005) insisted "that successful leaders must be able to respond effectively to the unique school contexts in which they work" (p. 7). Urban and rural school districts have similar struggles with supporting diversity, however, there are increasing challenges that each school district encounters.

The literature underscores that there are some distinct barriers in urban and rural school districts spaces. Rural schools were thought to be close to extinction. Over a decade later, research still purports that the essential nature of the rural school district is vital for the survival of the rural community (Dunklee, 2000, p. 32). Rural "schools that do not have the resources to compete with larger, wealthier urban and suburban districts and schools will be less able to meet mandated requirements" (Central Comprehensive Center at the University of Oklahoma, 2019).

However, Sutton & Pearson (2002) assert that "rural schools were equal to or superior to larger schools on important dimensions such as the range of courses taken by a typical student, rate of extracurricular participation, access to leadership responsibilities, and feelings of responsibility" (p. 7).

In Chapter 3, I describe the organizational autoethnographic process I used to reflect on my leadership as a new principal, in a new school, in a new county during an unforeseen school closure process and my reflections are also embedded with the knowledge of conducting this work as the first African American principal male since desegregation in this southern county. In Chapter 4, I will write stories of vulnerably filled with anxiety to share my lived experiences as the first African American, black, negro, or colored male principal since segregation. I accomplish this goal by examining Riverside Elementary School through reviewing culture and context, which consists of chronological evidence of prior to and during my principalship in a rural school district. I perform autoethnographic research to add to the literature. Through poetry and prose, I chronicle intimate professional and personal leadership experiences echoing others' use of artful forms of expressions in research, including short stories, poetry, and art (Holman-Jones, Adams, Ellis, 2013). In Chapter 5, I will discuss the responses to the research questions and how they destabilize some hegemonic assumptions and narratives within the male-dominated, white supremacist institution, namely the K-12 school system (Ashlee, Zamora, KariKari, 2017).

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

"This is an institution of learning, ladies and gentlemen.
If you can't control it, how can you teach?"
Excerpt from Principal Joe Clark, 1989

Introduction

This autoethnographic research explores my journey while becoming the first African American male principal in a southern school district in the United States of America. The research questions are: *1) How did my professional perspectives develop as a new principal in a school district under differentiated accountability? 2) How did I experience being the first African American male principal since desegregation?* Narrative prose is most common among a variety of writing styles and expressive formats, yet there are other experimental writings such as poetry or performance scripts that have been published as autoethnography (Chang, 2008, p. 141). I use poetry, narrative, and (in combination) poetic prose to deepen my understanding of my position as the first Black male principal in a public school system since the desegregation era who navigated the intersectionality of race, gender, disability, and micro-political structures. I situate my experience in the broader narrative on the journey of Black men navigating leadership in the education system.

Interpretivism. Scholars assert that theoretically the interpretive paradigm allows researchers to view the world through the perceptions and experiences of the participants to understand "the world of human experience" (Cohen &Manion, 1994; Cresswell, 2003; Thanh & Thanh, 2015, Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2011). Thomas A. Schwandt (1994) asserts that

interpretivism has an "abiding concern for the life world, for the emic point of view, for understanding meaning, for grasping the actor's definition" (p. 221). According to, James L. Paul, "interpretivism is self-consciously value-centered rather than pretending to be value free and being closer to literature than physics it privileges stories rather than theories" (2015, p. 44). Interpretations are offered because one of the main functions of research from a narrativist point of view is to foster reflection and restorying by the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989). "Interpretivism asserts that reality is mediated by language; because the world does not exist in the shape of our sentences, the mind plays an active role in the construction of reality" (Paul, 2005, p. 47).

Margaret S. Barrett and Sandra L. Stauffer (2009) state that "artful writing draws the reader into the Verstehen, building among those involved in the inquiry and makes visible the otherwise invisible worlds of participants" (p. 25). Thomas A. Schwandt (1994) asserts that "interpretivism supports the goal to understand (Verstehen) or grasp the *meaning* of social phenomena" (p. 223). Understanding the world, or the reality of social phenomena, evolves from several ontological assumptions: "reality is mediated by language; because the world does not exist in the shape of our sentences, the mind plays an active role in the construction of reality" (Paul, 2005, p. 47). The storying of a person's experience as a member of the subculture provides a counter narrative to the pervasive research focusing on the external observer. Epistemologically, interpretivist research proceeds from the perspective that "knowledge and the knower are inextricably linked; events are placed in intelligible frames by a mind that actively engages the world, attaching significant to those events" (Paul, 2005, p. 47).

My research is seeking to understand my leadership narratively and poetically, this study is primarily an interpretive process of wanting to better inform the educational leadership

literature. This poetic autoethnographic work is grounded in evocative, analytic, and organizational research to describe and create for readers a "thirdspace." As a Black principal and educator, I honor the pillars of the black community, the teachers of color that promoted an "epistemology of teaching and leading" rooted in cultural norms of Black excellence (Siddle Walker, 2001). Methodologically, this included constructing an understanding with a critical friend to provide context anew, as he challenged me with uncomfortable conversations that enhanced the relationship. Our conversations cultivated constructive critique about the educational leadership and structural racism (Swaffield, 2007, p. 206).

Afro-American Autoethnographic Traditions

My Culture within the Micro-Culture. Within the subculture of autoethnographic work, I am reclaiming my culture within the macro-culture. Autobiographical traditions that connect the person to the collective has been a part of the African diaspora since Lucy gave birth in the Olduvai Gorge (Johanson, Johanson & Edgar, 1996). African American scholars continued to provide voice, despite the marginalization of storying from persons of color, through autobiographical sociological narratives, such as witnesses for Freedom by Rebecca Chalmers Barton (1943), and there was a new enlightenment in the 1960's with the works of Charles Nichols, Langston Hughes, and James Baldwin, that garnered attention from the larger scholarly community to their critique of America (Andrews, 1989).

Birth of African American Autoethnographic Traditions. Mildred A. Hill-Lubin (1991) asserts that within the African American community the black grandmother continued the autoethnographic oral traditions of the African griot:

> "The African-American grandmother is one of action, involvement, hope, and dignity. In examining the works, we observe her functioning in three areas: as the preserver and most

> tenacious survivor of the African extended family; second, as repository and distributor of the family history, wisdom, and black lore; this role places her at the foundation of the Black, oral and written, literary and creative traditions; and third, as the retainer and transmitter of values and ideals that support and enhance her humanity, her family, and her community. This function emphasizes her spirituality. It is suggested that the grandmother, having played an important role in the growth, development, and artistic flowering of the autobiographer, can become a model and source of empowerment" (Mildred A. Hill-Lubin, 1991, abstract).

The tireless efforts of the black community to produce autobiographical counternarratives to white supremacy was channeled through the matriarchal lineage resulting in many great autoethnographic works being produced in scholarly literature during the Harlem Renaissance. The soul of the scholarly Afro-American autobiography is rooted in the critical truism of the antebellum slave narrative (Andrew, 1989).

The Philosophy of a Dream Interpreted: The Core of My Personal and Professional Values

The motivation to matriculate through my trying times in the worst elementary school in the urban county, was inspired by the *I Have a Dream* speech by Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Some of my earliest memories was hearing the community advocate for a federal holiday for this civic icon. In middle school I went to a dusty bookshelf in my mother's house and began to read the poetic works of Langston Hughes and was able to articulate my ever-present fear that I would be murdered before my 18 birthday and that I would never realize my dreams for a better life. Then ironically, in high school I became the first African American male senior class president within the school's storied history, but the position of president was not glorious title for my own self-aggrandizement, but I utilized the position to advocate for equity

among the student body. This advocacy did not allow ample time to celebrate the achievement. The ultimate goal as a young black man was to survive the community devastated by the crack cocaine epidemic, racial disparities, results of red-lining housing disenfranchisement, underfunded educational institutions and to avoid white police officers at all costs.

Grandma's Hands

I learned the value of leadership at a young age by watching the work, intensity, service and charisma my grandfather and grandmother manifested. Willie and Amanda filled my earliest recollections from the sweet aromas emanating from my grandmother's makeshift galley kitchen, wedged in the corner of the home my grandfather-built by his hands, room by room, and brick by brick. She was a strong woman even in her seventies and she enjoyed giving words of wisdom as she served her 12 children, over 30 grandchildren and over 50 great grandchildren. She spoke of advocacy, leadership, and civic responsibility served with a plate of collard greens, cornbread and black-eyed peas. She was humble, but others spoke volumes of her leadership, entrepreneurship, and heroism in the community. There were many barriers for women and especially women of color. She knew crossing those barriers could result in death by lynching. Hilliard and Sizemore noted that American deficit ideologies have historically served to marginalize African Americans, and they argued that African Americans must mount independent efforts to educate their children that "must never leave the total education of our children in the hands of others!" (Hilliard and Sizemore, 1984, p. 21). My grandfather believed in ascertaining the highest educational level while having a passive income stream through entrepreneurial endeavors as to not fully rely on the government or corporate America. There was a real fear of depending on the public services-based support your family based on the systems of racial oppression.

Albeit be, the possibility of being murdered was a constant fear in my southern urban community, my grandmother dared to achieve and create change. She believed in shifting the narrative of a community wrought with so many disparities. She created the first black drive-in movie theatre in the black community and invested in opening the grocery store near the segregated hospital, while inspiring others to be community activist and dare to vote. She was ordained to be the first female bishop in St. Petersburg, Florida within her religious denomination. My grandfather and grandmother believed in hard work and collective leadership. My grandfather would talk about the old days growing up in South Carolina and the values of hard work and owning your own land. My grandmother spoke of gratitude for life, health, and strength. She was a walking miracle to me. She was pregnant 21 times with 12 surviving children. She was married at 14 years old and experienced the heartbreak of divorce, remarrying and raising a blended family.

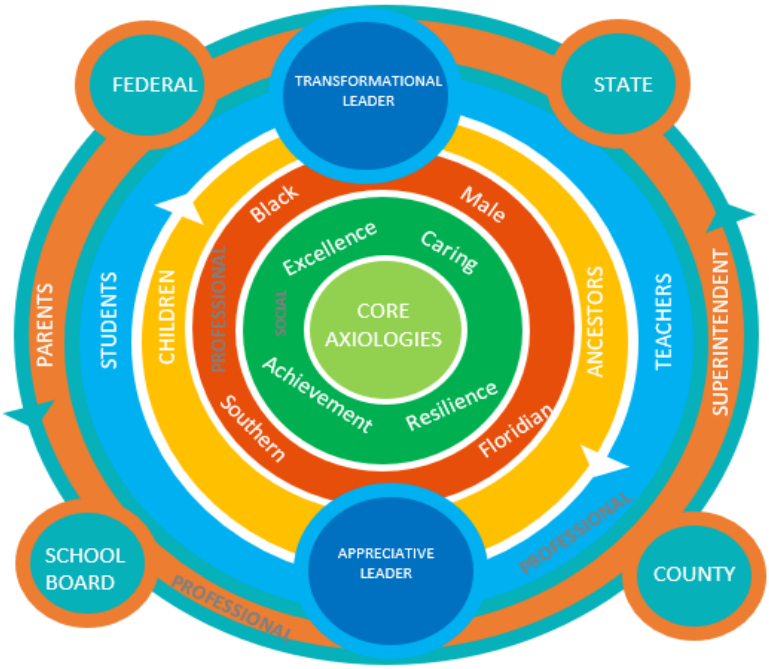


Figure 10: Contextualized Valued Space

Converging Axiologies. The words of my ancestral griots formulated my core axiological values, my professional identity was shaped by the policies of oppression, the resilience of my grandparents, my mother's Black Panther library, my father's corporate and political swagger, and my desire to serve the African American community develop my social and professional conceptual framework. As a principal, I am mandated to comply with federal and state laws in conjunction with school board and county policy. I use transformational and appreciative leadership to navigate the complexities of multiple ecosystems. I have intentionally chosen to include numerous direct quotes from my ancestors and myself, given the use of direct quotes is an approach that is consistent with the oral tradition of African Americans, and my intent is to give voice to the issues that are critical to the education of African Americans (Foster, 1997; Jennings, 2013; Stanfield, 1994, Tillman, 2008).

Autoethnographic Poetic Prose

Langer (1953) asserts that the "poet's business is to create an "experience," the semblance of events lived and felt, and to organize them so they constitute a purely and completely experienced reality, a piece of virtual life" (p. 212). According to Clandinin (2006), "poetry can bring the reader to "live the emotions, the tone, the physicality, the voiced and not-voiced moments", and when it is complex, poems can "spotlight particular events in ways that lift them out of the often-overwhelming flood of life so that they can be understood" (p. 575).

Poetry in Autoethnography. One by one, Autoethnographers explore expressive, transactional, and poetic modes of writing, with poetic writing creating energy and emotion through literary text (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015). For this research, I first constructed its poetic title from a seminal piece of cinema within the African American subculture of the Generation X

experience. The 1993 film Poetic Justice placed the controversial rapper and activist Tupac Shakur opposite pop icon Janet Jackson. This movie sought to bring the gap between rap music and poetry. Daniel White Hodge (2006) asserts in *Baptized in Dirty Water: The Missiological Gospel of Tupac Amaru Shakur* "that Tupac embodied the rebel, idealist, socialist, and social activist through his poetry" (p. 181). The director John Singleton purposefully juxtaposed the rawness of rap with the princess of pop to create a film that glorified poetry, reflexivity, and autoethnographic writing within an urban context. John Singleton's movie about persons of color combating self-doubt and societal oppression impacted me viscerally. This movie would later have more significance when I met my fraternity brother John Singleton at a convention, allowing me to unlock my apprehension of young black men being open to the poetic process and it is one of the critical factors for me being able to be vulnerable through this poetic autoethnographic research.

Gaining Voice through Poetry. Writing poetry pushes me to stay open and authentic with my reflections. I was raised primarily in a single mother household with an older brother and younger sister on the south side of the county or the "black side of town." The six asymmetrical miles was my world, and I was forced to attend severely underperforming urban schools. Except for one year, my mother garnered a scholarship for me to go to Saint Joseph Catholic School, it was only about three blocks away from my mother's wooden framed house with yellow stucco and prickly green cactus out front but the red brick catholic church with the sloping roof that housed the elementary school in the rear, felt as if I was in another dimension. The school was strictly orchestrated by nuns with their long black habits that veiled their stoic faces. Our school uniforms consisted of crisp white button-down shirts with crisp collars, dark blue neck ties with creased dress pants. I enrolled at the school later in the school year after

being attacked at my former public school by a mischievous bully. The teacher was a young bubbly emotional white woman with long curls that draped down to the center of her back. On my first day, she encouraged us to write a poem. A simple "getting to know you assignment to her. She articulated her expectations of excellence in the rubric: she wanted her students to dig deep with emotion, honesty and for us to express our "truth" (*whatever that meant*).

Growing up in the "hood," as we called our neighborhood of older homes adjacent to the projects, black men were encouraged *not* to be emotional, and to be especially guarded around white people, and for men to keep our "truth" to ourselves. The penalty for violating those rules could result in physical violence against you or becoming a victim of "the dozens." The dozens is a game or verbal combat, played mostly by young black children in school and their community. It is designed to teach participants to maintain control and keep cool under adverse circumstances (Lewis, 1994, p. 1). Losing could be catastrophic to your "rep" or reputation but winning could be worse and your quick wit could get you punched in the face. Unfortunately, in school, I had been punched and slapped enough for trying to be a Renaissance man like I read in my mother's books about the Harlem Renaissance.

However, this was my first day of school at a private school and I felt like this was an opportunity to recreate myself. I was nervous because the headmaster was white, the nuns were white, but the students were majority black and I had a hard time being vulnerable to both old white people and young black people. I closed my eyes and began to sound out the words to express the turmoil I felt inside, and then I slowly opened my eyes and began to write my first poem:

Middle Child Blues

I have a problem, can't you see?
I am in the Middle and nobody sees me!
You may think you see me but my parents won't
Because I am the Middle Child
the child that nobody wants
My brother is the oldest and gets to do everything
I gotta stay home and that ain't no fun
My sister is the baby and she gets to frolic in the sun
I can't wait till I am older, I am going to be big and strong
I am going to do great things
Just wait and see
I will no longer have the Middle Child Blues
I will be an extraordinary me!

Adrian Anthony, 1981

I wrote the poem and was immediately embarrassed and afraid to share my first poem with the teacher and students. What would the students think if the teacher read it out loud? Would my mother be angry if the teacher sent it home? Would the teacher approve or disapprove? If the teacher disapproved, then this would be my first unsatisfactory grade in my new school. That poem is the foundation for my liberation within my doctoral research. That poem told me to push past the pain, push pass the embarrassment, push past the fear, and provided me a space to connect my pain to a broader context. Using poetry within my autoethnographic writing provides a deeper understanding of my journey to the principalship. Poetry allows me to resonate with the story, reflect on it and for the reader to become a part of it (Ellis, 1999, p. 676).

This research also draws upon narrative inquiry. Ellis (2013) asserts that "narrative research methods counter positivism, which emphasized systematic data collection and traditional analysis over imagination and storytelling" (p. 17). Autoethnography has

anthropological foundations in ethnography and was birthed out of narrative inquiry such as autobiography. My methodological journey is evocative, analytic, provocative, and poetic.

Autoethnographic Purpose

Narrative inquiry. "Narrative as a method follows from its character as a phenomenon, the aspects of narrative's phenomenal character focus on experience and time, personal knowledge, and reflection and deliberation" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989). Narrative inquiry research explores the lives of individuals, placing value on the stories and re-telling of their lived experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The narrative cocreates context with the views of the participant and research in a narrative chronology. Burke and Kern (1996) further assert that narrative inquiry methods offer practitioners an opportunity to understand what might otherwise remain unspoken and informal in interactions. The process of narrative inquiry is to "find what can be described or accounted for within the experiential texts being created in the shared narrative inquiry process" (Clandinin & Connelly,1989). Autoethnography has earned a space in the discourse of scholarly research by exploring postmodern traditions of connecting autobiographical stories to the broader political and social culture (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005).

Leon Anderson (2008) asserts that "autoethnography has emerged as one of the more interesting and popular 'ethnographic alternatives', going by many names, and defined by often conflicting and overlapping models, some precise, some intentionally vague, autoethnography offers a confusing, fuzzy set of opportunities for integrating personal experience and social analysis" (p. 493). Emerging from postmodern philosophy, in which the "dominance of traditional science and research is questioned and many ways of knowing and inquiring are legitimated, autoethnography offers a way of giving voice to personal experience to advance

sociological understanding" (Wall, 2008, p. 3). "Combining ethnography, biography, and self-analysis, autoethnography is a qualitative research method that utilizes data about self and context to gain an understanding of the connectivity between self and others within the same context" (Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Chang, 2010, p. 1). Ellingson and Ellis (2008) assert that "autoethnography displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural through a variety of forms-short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose" (p. 448).

Historical Roots of Autoethnography

Ellis, 2004 and Holman Jones, (2005) assert that "autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (cited in Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Ethnography explores environmental perception, spatial practices, biographies, social architecture and social realms (Kusenbach, 2003). Brewer (2000) asserts that ethnography was popularized by anthropologists but utilized as an interdisciplinary method in the fields of sociology, social policy, psychology, communication studies, cultural studies, human geography, education, criminology, and political science. Anthropologists use ethnographic methods to explore societal context. "Ethnographers seek to "get under the skin" of the participant to get a deeper understanding of the participant, processes, and context. All scholarship is inextricably connected to self, personal interest, experience, and familiarity" (Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Chang, 2010, p. 1). Ethnography promotes the exploration of culture as a first-hand contributor to learn the behaviors and interactions of groups in a societal setting. Raudenbush (1994) asserts that the fundamentals of ethnographic research derived from European human science professors using their stories as foundational data. It was the pioneering anthropological work by Harry Wolcott

in The *Man in the Principal's office* that set the precedent for the ethnographic research to come. In 1973, Wolcott analyzed his work as an elementary school principal in an urban center using micro-ethnographic methods (Wolcott, 1973). He masterfully blends the praxis of anthropological methodology into public education research. Raudenbush further asserts that this seminal research has been the cornerstone for most modern qualitative research, particularly in the realm of education (1994). Wolcott's research reveals the culture and gives the audience access to the subculture.

In-situ. Ethnographic researchers immerse themselves in the participants physical space *(home, school, office)* to observe people interactions, process implementation, and complex context associated with the research. Ethnography exposes subtle meanings of place in everyday practices through participant observation accesses some of the transcendent and reflexive aspects of lived experiences in-situ (Kusenbach, 2003). James Holstein & Jaber Gubrium, (2008) assert that "ethnographic fieldworkers typically strive to capture as much *in-situ* verbatim detail as possible, preserving the opportunity to later "unpack" talk-in-interaction for the constructive work entailed. Sometimes this amounts to close-to-verbatim records of key spates of talk, noted as much as possible in speakers' own words" (p. 386).

Autoethnography Deeply Rooted

Autoethnography is "deeply rooted in epistemological notion that knowledge and the knower are inextricably linked" (Paul, 2005, p. 47). Ivan Brady (1991) describes "autoethnography as the integration of anthropology and literature "art-ful science," where the beauty and tragedy of the world are textually empowered by the carefully chosen constructions and subjective understandings of the author" (cited in Bochner, 2000, p. 270). According to, Clandinin & Connelly (1998) "school reform emphasizes that knowledge was both formed and

expressed in the contexts in which teachers and administrators lived, continued conversations with teachers and administrators displayed complexity and context in their study" (p. 5). Their stories are lived within interwoven and multilayered scenes and plot lines. "When researchers record field notes of participant observation, there is an interpretive quality involved. Richardson", (1990, p. 131) asserts that the "narrative turn had planted the seeds for the development of non-alienating research practices by emphasizing the dual functions of narrative as a way of knowing (a method) and a way of telling (a discursive practice), and as ''a site of moral responsibility'' (cited in Bochner, 2017, p. 68).

Cole and Knowles (2005) assert that "narrative inquiry research relies on the storied nature of lives, both are concerned with honoring the individuality and complexity of an individual's experiences" (p. 20). The two-methods part company, however, with respect to the broad purpose and analysis. Life history research takes narrative inquiry one step further; that is, life history goes beyond the individual or the personal and intentionally places narrative accounts and interpretations within a broader context.

Part of the concern in narrative inquiry is with the audience, and narrative researchers must consider issues of representation and audience. Narrative researchers set out their narrative purposes and an appropriate context; they then counsel readers to play the believing game to ascertain the truth of the story placing the onus on the readers to participate in the narrative experience of another and the reader must be prepared to see a story's possible meanings and, through this process, come to see other ways of telling their own stories (Clandinin & Connelly,1989).

Evocative and Analytic in Educational Organizations

Hunt & Junco (2006) assert that autoethnographers have begun to distinguish themselves from one another by separating evocative from analytic autoethnography. "Analytic autoethnography focuses on developing theoretical explanations of broader social phenomena, whereas evocative autoethnography focuses on narrative presentations that open up conversations and evoke emotional responses" (cited in Ellingson & Ellis, 2008). Within a conversation between Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner (2016) they deliberate on the evocative and analytic distinctions: "Language has a constitutive function and the term 'autoethnography,' at least as we meant it, is intended to constitute a genre of writing or performance that is distinct from modernist or realist texts. That's the reason we called our book series *Ethnographic Alternatives.* We saw autoethnography as an alternative to traditional, realist ethnography." (p. 436). This research uses a blended frame of evocative, analytic, and organizational autoethnographic to convey the "thirdspace" through which to come to understand what it means to rethink the cultural community of education through the discourse of a Black male (Saja & Chouinard, 1999).

Evocative Autoethnography. Leon Anderson (2006) asserts that within the current genre of autoethnography the research refers almost exclusively to "evocative autoethnography" that draws upon postmodern sensibilities and advocates not distancing themselves from realist and analytic ethnographic traditions (p. 12). Ellis and Bochner (2006) further emphasize that the turn toward evocative narratives was set in motion by the desire to set off research storytelling, such as autoethnography, from traditional empiricist approaches to the analysis of narratives. If you turn a story told into a story analyzed, as Leon Anderson often does, you sacrifice the story at the altar of traditional sociological rigor (Ellis & Bochner, 2006). You transform the story into

another language, the language of generalization and analysis, and thus you lose the very qualities that make a story a story." (p. 440). Ellis (1999) further asserts in Heartful Autoethnography:

> "The autoethnographic author seeks to develop an ethnography that includes researchers' vulnerable selves, emotions, bodies, and spirits; produces evocative stories that create the effect of reality; celebrates concrete experience and intimate detail; examines how human experience is endowed with meaning; is concerned with moral, ethical, and political consequences; encourages compassion and empathy; helps us know how to live and cope; features multiple voices and repositions readers and "subjects" as coparticipants in dialogue; seeks a fusion between social science and literature" (p. 1).

Chang (2016) asserts that "doing, sharing, and reading evocative autoethnography can help transform researchers and readers, given that transformation may not always be the conscious goal of autoethnography" (p. 53). Evocative autoethnography is a journey of caring, empathizing, and dwelling in the flux of lived experience (Ellis & Bochner, 2006). As such, my autoethnographic journey is also an emotional release.

Organizational Autoethnography. Organizational autoethnographic illuminates the relationship between the individual and the organization in a way that crystallizes the key conceptual and theoretical contributions to understanding the relationship between culture and organization (Boyle & Parry, 2007). Organizational autoethnography allows for the telling of story by moving the lens inward and outward to shed light on culture (Hermann, Barnhill, & Poole, 2013). Furthermore, everyone interprets organizational experience through her own positionality, based on beliefs, attitudes, values, experiences, emotional state, and access to resources (Hermann, Barnhill, & Poole, 2013). It is a tool for understanding the demands placed

upon employees within a broader organizational culture (Brannan, Pearson, & Worthington, 2007).

Storying, Reflecting, an Educational Process. Storying, reflecting, and restorying during the writing process provide context for autoethnographic research. Researchers develop their stories through their unique experiences, and this genre allows for personal adaptation and critiques. Hewson Chang (2008) affirm that educators should understand themselves and their own identities as members of a team or learning community, as well as the dynamics of *isms*. Hilliard (1984) argued that African Americans must resist the ideology of a *mainstream* society, which leads to assimilation.

To interpret is to construct a reading of meanings – to construct from the constructions of the actors one studies (Schwandt, 1994). Autoethnography as a "social constructionist approach that enables critical reflection on taken-for-granted aspects of society, groups, relationships, and the self" (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008, p. 448). Black principals who seek to resist the pressures of assimilation would find support in autoethnography (Hilliard, 1984). Autoethnography can bridge passion to individual and collective experience, while enabling "richness of representation, complexity of understanding, and inspiration for activism" (Ellingson and Ellis, 2008, p. 448). In my role as the inquirer/researcher, I am challenged to elucidate my process of meaning construction and clarify what and how those meanings are embodied in my language and actions as well as those of social actors (Schwandt, 1994). Thomas A. Schwandt (1994) asserts that within "autoethnographic work there is a sense of advocacy and these social agents are considered autonomous, intentional, active, goal directed; they construe, construct, and interpret their own behavior and that of their fellow agents" (p. 225). I explore this this counterculture with my fellow black brethren practitioners and academics as critical friends. I

next discuss the role of a critical friend to support me in this process. A synthesis of race, gender, leadership, and space within a westernized socio-political structure. The autoethnographic findings from the research were analyzed to answer two research questions:

1. How did my professional perspectives develop as a new principal in a school district under differentiated accountability?
2. How did I experience being the first African American male principal since desegregation?

The next section outlines the seven step process for data collect and analysis from the first year principals 1) principal reflection as a first-year principal, 2) ethnographic reflection with principal mentor, 3) synthesis by autoethnographic researcher, 4) Brotha Circle organic conversations, 5) final synthesis by the autoethnographic researcher, 6) poetic reflective writing by the researcher, and 7) connection to the broader literature.

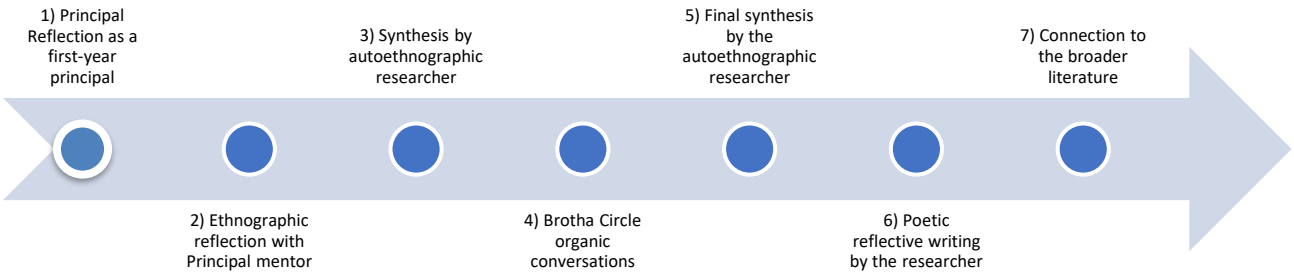


Figure 11: Method process for Data collection and analysis

Fraternal Bond of Black Scholars: Emerging Brotha Circle

Finding a critical friend who is a Black male educator with a passion for special education on the leadership journey and who was "woke" was daunting and discouraging to say

the least. There is an underrepresentation of minorities (Black and Latino) who are U.S. citizens or permanent residents (National Science Foundation, 2020). The data does shows a slow increase as evidenced by a "31% increase in the number of doctorates awarded to blacks or African Americans over the past 10 years and a 71% increase in the number of Hispanic, Latino and/or Latinx doctorate recipients" (National Science Foundation, 2020). However, finding a critical friend is more complex than the increasing numbers of diverse persons seeking a degree around the nation displays. Despite the growth in doctorate degrees, in America there are still an abysmal total number of minorities striving for the degree and they are dispersed over 2.27 billion acres of American soil (United States Department of Agriculture, 2020); resulting in only 6.5% blacks or African Americans earning a doctorate, and the proportion awarded to Hispanics or Latinos was only 7.0%. Having to search for a critical friend was dispiriting (National Science Foundation, 2020).

A critical friend has been described as a detached outsider who supports the researcher through questioning, reflecting and providing another viewpoint (Warfield, 2007; Wetzel & Ewbank, 2013). Also, a critical friend is a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critiques of a person's work as a friend (Costa & Kallick, 1993). The critical friend "prompts the other person towards honest reflection and re-appraisal" (Swaffield, 2007, p. 206). I define a critical friend as someone who seems to *see/understand* me and honors my values and voice (political expression) while providing constructive feedback. Within my doctoral cohort, there were no Black male principals and very few black males in K-12 education in the district who I had met and had remained in primary or secondary education.

I built a brotherhood with a fellow scholar and K-12 educator to explore the idea of the intersection of race and masculinity in my "school life" and academic life, as an African American male (Jennings, 2014). We had "woke" conversations or critical consciousness conversations about the intersecting systems of oppression with the nation (Ashlee, Zamora, & KariKari, 2017). He was "cool" and we connected on a professional and personal level. Professionally we both worked in Flamingo county and the adjacent Grand County. We both had extensive experiences in special education and placed special education at the center of our pedagogical approach. We both acknowledge the micro-aggressions embedded in education, and the amplified aggressions in Flamingo county. He challenged me to "stay woke" in the midst of adversity.

To be woke

is not just a political ideology,

It is an unretractable existence

A contradictory remedy of healing and pain.

The cultivation of a deep and necessary consciousness of survival

that slices white patriarchal supremacy

Our eyes never shut. Our voices never seize.

We are courageous, we are fierce, we are exhausted.

And yet we persist. We are Alive. We are here.

We are WOKE.

Excerpt from Ashlee, Zamora, and KariKari, 2017

The Brotha Circle consisted of black men that entered and exited the doctoral program during different years, but we still took some of the same courses. They were "wordsmiths" and I

was fascinated how they were educational leaders but still "down." They could navigate the king's English and the subtle nuances of black men vernacular with an extensive vocabulary. They pushed me to be transparent and not to hide behind the safe mask of assimilation. In my research, a critical friend is "not only a methodological approach to qualitative reflection, but also a form of empowerment that facilitates survival, solidarity, and resilience" (Ashlee, Zamorea, & KariKari, 2017).

During my principalship, I learned that critique meant harsh judgement from upper management, and when I was being critiqued, I braced myself for a barrage of negative comments (Costa & Kallick, 1993). I share my stories, leaning on my ancestors that risked it all to have tough conversations about the context of systems of oppression in American education. My critical friends challenged me to share my story of wokeness and identify common themes across my experience as a counternarrative by using autoethnographic research as a call to action (Ashlee, Zamora, & KariKari, 2017).

Generating and Navigating Data Through Reflections with a Mentor

As I ended my chaotic term from my first principalship, I wanted to intentionally take a moment to reflect on the litany of experiences, celebrations, and challenges I encountered. I wanted to slow down and take moment to have a deeper understanding of what occurred and be proactive to use this to enhance my professional practices. To gather this data was also personally and professionally cathartic. The first phase of data collection was gathered from three virtual ethnographic conversations with my principal mentor. I co-created several questions to prompt myself around areas I wanted to highlight. In the second round of analysis of the conversations I synthesized themes related to challenges, reflections, and counterstories through poetry, prose, and poetic prose. I extrapolated from archival data from a principal mentor

conversation, from presentations I gave to parents, and statistical data from the state. There are three critical incidents that arose from the data: The Exodus, To Close or Not to Close, The Pandemic Cometh. The third phase of the analysis was a synthesis that consisted of the Brotha Circle reading the written analysis, research, and poems. The circle was a series of virtual sessions to discuss, critic, and reflect on themes in the data from phase one. These circles were maintained through virtual social gatherings, write-in sessions and phone conversations to analyze the data while being empathetic to the heavy workload of Black male leaders (paraphrased from Cupid, 2020).

I use the *Brotha Circle* framework as a method of analysis for navigating and (re)negotiating the narratives of black men in predominantly white educational spaces. "The theoretical framework also served an analytic tool for interpreting the professional experiences of the participant" (Johnson, 2015, p. 14). To accomplish this aim, I drew upon my sisters as the navigate the intersections of race, gender, higher education, and leadership. Sista circle methodology is simultaneously a qualitative research methodology and support group. Sistah Circle research has been used to addresses gaps in qualitative research by examining the professional experiences of present-day Black women teachers using a new culturally relevant, gender-specific methodology called sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015). The Brotha Circle supported the study to offer important implications regarding culturally relevant ways of mentoring and researching Black male educational leaders (paraphrased from Johnson, 2015). The Brotha Circle shared a common sentiment *"I have been dealing with so much emotion that it has disabled me from, allowing myself to re-immerse myself in the research and writing that I did in order to complete my own doctoral process, and dissertation process. The foundation of my doctoral process is embedded in race and ethnicity"* (Brotha Circle, 2021).

Brotha and Sista Circles move "beyond traditional methodology to include research practices that draw on the wisdom and social relations of Black people transnationally" (Johnson, 2015). Using the Brotha circle methodology, as a principal I discussed the professional experiences that validate need for alternative support in school settings and beyond the school walls (Johnson, 2015). These circles were maintained through virtual meetings due to the social protocols mandated by the COVID with the hopes of social gatherings if the global pandemic will permit (Cupid, 2020). The first invitation to join the Brotha circle was sent via email and text message. A sample of the message is outlined in the field notes below:

> Brothers,
> Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedules to meet tomorrow. Per my conversation, she has suggested I used the concept of Critical Friend to analyze the autoethnographic data and develop rich reflective stories.
>
> Albeit, critical friends is a concept within qualitative research, I have been approved to draw upon a body of literature that uses people of color to create "Sister Circles" to make analyze and develop counterstory to a racialized hegemony. Our process will be called Brotha Circle. The purpose of the meeting is to develop some norms, structure, and timeframe for the research. The ultimate goal is to DEFEND during Black History Month 2021 on February 15, 2021.Thank you again Brothers, Adrian
> **Field Notes, 2020**

The Brotha Circles did not use a traditional semi-structured interview process, given the autoethnographic framework. However, the Brothas used pre-planned topics and organic conversations that presented themselves from personal experiences (pressures of racism, expectations of marriage, children, weight loss for men in their f**or**ties, maintaining mental health, etc.), professional experiences (pressures of racism, leading adults (andragogy), navigating careers job promotions, etc.), and global dilemmas (COVID-19 pandemic, Black Lives Matter movement, Presidential elections, etc.).

Using the Brotha Circle methodology, we discussed professional experiences that validated a need for alternative support in school settings and beyond the schools (Johnson,

2015). Given the challenges of COVID 19, the circle persevered through write-in sessions and technology-based virtual meetings with the hope of social gatherings if the global pandemic will permit (Cupid, 2020). The Brotha Circle created an in-between space for the black men to celebrate accomplishments, lament over racial challenges, lift each other up with hope, and offer leadership concepts for achievement. "As I became enveloped in what I was reading it just it connected me with our history" (Ramon, Brotha Circle 2021).

Analysis and Voice: Am I My Brotha's Keeper

I use the *Brotha Circle* as a method of generating narrative data with black men navigating and (re)negotiating their career paths and positionalities in predominantly white educational spaces. They are educational leaders in their own right and face challenges juxtaposing race and educational space. This method is based on the emerging Sista Circle method, which is a qualitative research method and support group for examining the lived experiences of black women (Johnson, 2015), and guided by black feminist philosophy. Sista Circles have been used to center the experiences of black/African American participants (Cupid, 2020), and interpret the professional experiences of Sistas with experience navigating the intersections of race, gender, higher education, and leadership (Johnson, 2015). Brotha and Sista Circles move beyond "traditional method of focus group interviews to offer an approach that draws on the transnational wisdom of Black women (and Black men) that is situated in social relations" (Johnson, 2015). To ensure the privacy of the Brotha Circle, I converted their names, and professions into pseudonyms with their consent and input on the anonymous descriptors to be used.

Artifacts and Archives

There are many salient artifacts that impacted the implementation of my school reform process and the reflective analysis of the leadership work at Riverside Elementary School. The selected artifacts were identified through a critical race theory and appreciative inquiry lens: 1) the Riverside Elementary School (SIP) School Improvement Plan; 2) Staff meeting notes; 3) the Riverside Elementary School (RED) plan: Rigor, Emotional and Social Support, and Discipline Professional Plan; 4) poems by the researched/researcher; and 5) Eagle Café Parent Engagement Plan. The themes will be analyzed to the broader literature within Chapter 5. The themes that emerged in Chapter 4 were: *the fear of vulnerability (To Trust or not to Trust, that is the question?), a need for mentoring (order my steps in your word), the principalship as an aspect of the Americans society broader fight for equity (I too Sing America).*

Context and Organization Framing. This autoethnography is based on explicit details from events that occurred during my first principalship while implementing the fluidity of feelings that are expressed in evocative poetic autoethnography. In this segment context and organization, I outline the research questions and the connections to the historical context and thematic emergences during my principalship. The table synthesizes the process in Figure 9 below:

Section Segment	Research Question Answered	Data Resources	Analysis	Emergent Themes
Introductory Poem	Schema	African American Poet	Framing the Conversation	My place as an African American Male within Americana
Introduction: Twilight	**#1**	Autoethnographic Story	Introduction of Limbo	History of living in the Thirdspace
Critical Incidence: Exodus	**#1 & #2**	Round 1: Field Notes, Reflective prompts	Round 2: Brotha Circle Accountability	Vulnerability

Critical Incident: To Close or not to Close	**#1 & #2**	Round 1: Field Notes, Reflective prompts	Round 2: Brotha Circle Accountability	Trauma and Vicarious Trauma
Critical Incident: COVID cometh	**#1 & #2**	Round 1: Field Notes, Reflective prompts	Round 2: Brotha Circle Accountability	Resilience

Figure 12: Thematic Emergences

My voice is embedded in the poetry, they are not ancillary words used to fill a void, they drive the counternarratives of the past and bind them to the present leadership experiences within an educational context. The introduction sets the tone of this chapter detailing the twilight hour that has provided an in-between space for meditation and resilience. The counterstories are bridge the past with the present principalship leadership experiences written int the present tense.

In the following stories, I weave the occurrences together with a tapestry of self-developed poetry that provides a medium for me to capture the essence of the moment. Poetry is a space for reflection, the poems were also selected from the African diaspora that speak to counternarratives being produces throughout the centuries. Ultimately, the stories I tell are of interactions that impacted my profession from previous situational events of my youth that solicit a particular action or reaction during my principalship as the first black man since desegregation. To reiterate, each poem alludes to a particular theme that builds a foundation for the succeeding sections.

CHAPTER 4
ANALYSIS

I, too, sing America.
I am the darker brother.
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—
I, too, am America.
Excerpt from Langston Hughes, 1970

Introduction

As I stand in the limbo of night, yielding its darkness unto the light, I stand feet firmly planted in the early morning dew resting upon the grass, and I breathe, and I breathe in slow-l-y. Count to three cherishing each breath in and appreciating this moment created by the creator, for it may be my last. I open my mouth and emit the words "Thank you," as I look up into the calming light of a full moon. I repeat this mantra three times, in honor of the trinity in hopes that they can save me from systems of race and gender that preceded my creation. At this early hour, there is a natural stillness in the "*foday*" air as my grandmother called it or the twilight hours as others refer to this in-between time. My, senses are alert, yet not overwhelmed by the sounds of modern distractions such as cars, cellphones, and the exasperating dings of urgent text messages.

This twilight ritual began in my early childhood to reduce the anxiety of waking up in an urban oasis. The process to navigate two worlds began at 5 am in the morning, hoping to survive the bullies of my neighborhood and the bigots of the suburban community I was bussed into to a strange wonderland to adhere to the federal laws of desegregation. I was caught between a nexus

of the known world with people of color and an unknown world of upper middle-class white wealth.

I endured the middle school bus stop waiting game for two hours for fear of missing the school bus. The first hour consistent of dodging the *jones or cracking* with rambunctious black boys at the bus stop, then being whisked from the hood to the disapproving stares and sneers of the suburban boys in the classroom. However, my school district did comply to the federal order mandatory integration from the "1954 U.S. Supreme Court landmark ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. This unanimous decision found racially segregated schools to be unconstitutional and in violation of the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment" (United States Department of Education, 2020).

Reflecting on my childhood, the thought of circumnavigating the school system has always caused me to wake up early with excessive anxiety. My world centered around compulsory education and the racialized factors that I had to negotiate daily by walking through the community during the notorious crack epidemic era, catching the segregated school buses, leaving the quirky comforts of my black neighborhood, arriving by bus to the predominately white institution that did not welcome those "ghetto kids", performing for teachers that called us "those bus children," because the wealthy white students were all walkers and car riders. I always felt the queasiness of being "in limbo" in my youthful years.

I was attempting to excel in between two worlds with conflicting rules of engagement. There were federal laws, state policies, and school board mandates, urban and suburban rules that bound me to a system that did not honor my voice or my presence as an urban black male. For as long as I was in the compulsory education system, the twilight hours have offered me refuge.

Too Dark to be Day, Too Light to be Night

The chilly breeze ushers a reassurance that it will be alright
I give homage to the creator
I say a silent prayer
If I am to live this day
I will honor your way
Please honor these words
May the tears of the past not tread upon my future
I breathe in hope
I Exhale all fear
Guide me through this day
May your hand be ever near

Adrian Anthony, 1988

I lost this youthful morning meditation between the chaotic life of ascertaining a bachelor's degree, master's degree, specialist degree, working two jobs, switching careers, getting laid off one job, getting married, getting divorced, getting remarried, completing the Florida Educational Leadership Examination (FELE), witnessing the birth of my four children, supporting a blended family of six children, completing a masters degree, graduating from a specialist degree, and beginning a doctoral degree. Albeit be the angst never left me, I thought I had it under control.

However, as I accepted my first Principalship, I also began to traverse my first principalship pressures: turnaround school reform, county politics, curriculum implementation, and district policies. I yearned for that sacred space. My world was in chaos, and I had given my life to a process that systematically excluded black men, I was spiraling out of control. I had to learn to love, live, and lead in the limbo again. I had to embrace the *Third Space*.

Embracing the Third Space. This third space is a metaphor for the intersection of gender, race, and space in the context of my professional and personal life**.** Moles (2008) asserts that "increasingly, academic attention is being turned to using multiple methodologies in social

science research, partly in recognition of the importance of generating understandings of more dynamic understandings of space and place." These excursions into "thirdspace are at once insightful, provocative, confusing, frustrating, and inspiring" (Soja and Chouinard, 1999). I use this thirdspace to reflect on the challenges that I faced, the victories that transpired, and the growth during my first principalship. The concept of "'Thirdspace' (the lived spaces of representation) that coexist with 'Firstspace' (material space) and 'Secondspace' (spaces of representation)" (Soja & Chouinard, 1999).

Physical space of the school building, context of the school district system, nuanced subterfuge of racial dynamics in a southern school district in conjunction with being the first black, male, principal since segregation while being the researched and the researcher constitute the dynamics of my thirdspace lived experiences. Soja and Chouinard (1999) juxtapose the physical in-between space with reflection on the awkward space during this leadership journey. In overcoming the anxiety to analyze my autoethnographic research study about my arduous and advantageous experiences at Riverside Elementary School (RAS), I sought the comfort of the thirdspace. In the twilight hours were dawn wrestled with day, I wrestled with gaining the courage to tell my tales that unravel the multifaceted spaces of being a principal, being black, being the first, of being seen, and being hidden, similar to the days of me traversing the urban and suburban spaces of my youth. The proceeding section details how I traversed my first principalship as the first Black male administrator in a fishing town since desegregation.

The purpose of this section is to examine my counterstories as I navigated being the first black male principal since the United States denounced racial segregation. I wanted to explore my experiences navigating an organization with no Black male principals and my professional practices at a school nestled in a small fishing city. This chapter outlines the stories and

counterstories that emerged from the autoethnographic data. I emphasis three critical incidents as I approached the position, navigated the situation, and concluded the first year. This qualitative autoethnographic research synthesizes "counterstories based on field note presentations, news articles, and school improvement plans" (Chang, 2008).

Stories, Stories, and Counterstories

In The Beginning Was The Word. It all began with a few simple words, "I need to talk to you?" That is how I started my principal journey to Riverside Elementary School. Several leadership cycles within public education occur during the Fall, Spring, and Summer. There are notable benchmarks of a rising educational leader including the first day of teacher planning, the first day of school for students, state testing window, monthly assistant principal meetings, and summer leadership training. These cycles have some of the highest level of contact with school district leadership that can result in your name being applauded or stigmatized . As the only Black male high school assistant principal, I was very afraid, cautious, and cognizant of how my image was portrayed during these mandatory interactions. My journey into the principalship began at the summer leadership conference of 2019.

I parked my car under a sturdy palm tree to provide a little shade in the blistering Florida heat. I looked in the rearview mirror to check my crimson bowtie, crisp white collared shirt, and navy-blue vest with a sharkskin shimmer. It was time to take a deep breath, readjust the smile and get ready to face the "big wigs" from the Flamingo County School district office. This conference was the big show for the *movers and shakers,* including the Flamingo County school board, every Assistant Principal, and over eighty-four principals at one of the largest high school/middle school campuses within Florida. I walked slowly toward the complex, stopped, looked up toward the blazing sun, closed my eyes, and took three deep breaths letting in the

humid Florida breeze and said “Thank You” to the beautiful blue sky. Although this was my third leadership conference within this county, I was unaware that this particular leadership conference would change my administrative career trajectory.

The Simple Words Came First, But the Gory Details Came Much Later. As I opened the heavy wooden double doors to the High school auditorium, I heard a cacophony of chatter. Competing with calming music that erupted from the space were voices that echoed in the room with a cadence that harkened to old friends gathering for a family reunion. I could hear principals reciting tales of the “good old days” when education was more flexible, and principals had more autonomy. These conversations reinforced the narrative of the feeling that nepotism was pervasive in this county, with a distinct dividing line of local insiders and all others considered outsiders. I was keenly aware that one misstep or mistake could brand me for life. As I walked into the vestibule, there were district-level dignitaries on the left and right greeting the principals and assistant principals as they entered the building. They exchanged simple pleasantries with me and handed me an agenda that outlined the speakers and break-out groups. As I proceeded to enter the auditorium, I smiled warmly and firmly grasped the greeters’ hands.

I said to myself “Here we go!”

As my foot crossed the threshold of the entrance, the Assistant Superintendent of Student Achievement put her hand on my shoulder and said, “I need to talk to you!” My heart dropped, and I assumed it was not going to be a good conversation. I began racking my brain about what incident may have occurred with curriculum, behavior incident, or an unresolved parent concern.

The anticipation during the meeting was eating me up inside. I listened to the introductions as the conference meandered on and on until it was time for lunch. I anguished on what was to come and continued to reflect on any outstanding responsibilities that could have

demanded this urgent conversation with a district leader. As I walked slowly through the serving line that wrapped around the high school cafeteria during the leadership conference's only formal break. I was then approached by the Director of the professional development.

Director: How are you doing?

Adrian: Great! (With a Smile), how are you doing?

Director: Quick question, you have turnaround leadership experience, right?

Adrian: Yes, I have had the opportunity to work in elementary, middle, and high school in Turnaround status.

Director: That's great. I would like to talk to you a little later.

Adrian**:** Awesome. (I inch forward in the buffet line and begin making my lunch).

Expecting the worst possible outcome, I pushed myself to remain optimistic. I debated whether to *poke the bear* and further explore this inquisition or to slowly gather my lunch and await the verdict of the silent dialogue that I was unwittingly involved on the school district level. So, I decided to poke the bear.

Adrian: Veronica (pseudonym), may I ask you what is the context of the questions? (I said with a big smile and sincere eyes.)

Director: Well, we can discuss it later.

Adrian: (I did not relent) If possible, can you give me a little hint?

She pulled me out of the lunch line (I followed, but I was famished).

Director: Have you heard what has been happening at Riverside?

Adrian: Riverside High School?

Director: No, Riverside Elementary.

I thought this was very odd for several reasons. I was currently an assistant principal in a high school. In a county this size, secondary (middle and high school) and elementary school (kindergarten to fifth grade) were on two different continents. They had different professional developments, testing requirements, and curriculum. My current school Green Mountain High was in the central suburban zone, and Riverside Elementary was in the western coastal zone. The suburban and coastal areas did not often collaborate or interface. However, I continued my line of questioning to uncover this great mystery.

Adrian: No, I haven't, should I have?

Director: Well, their principal is being moved to another school.

I was intrigued but still could not understand what all of this had to do with me. I had been an assistant principal in an elementary school, but I had currently been using my over seven years of high school experience to support my current high school position. My current principal had about a year to two years remaining in his current position before retirement, and the principal at the middle school next door had about the same amount of time before his retirement. I had worked to build relationships with both staff, engage families while supporting students and parents in crisis, and collaboratively increase the school grade from a "B" to an "A."

Director: Would you be interested in a school like that?

Adrian: Uhm (I hesitated).

I felt flattered that I was being considered to be a principal, but I also felt something strange. I was an outsider, and the Riverside community is a very tight-knit community with over 100 years of history and several assistant principals that were principal ready.

Adrian: Can you tell me more about Riverside?

Director: Ok, it is a Title I school.

Adrian: Oh, that is good. I have worked many years in Title I schools.

Director: Also, it is a turnaround school.

Adrian: What stage of turnaround are they in currently?

Director: Great question, I am not sure, but they have received a failing grade a "D" or an "F."

Adrian: That happens often. However, the school can be supported with the proper systems.

At this point, I believe I took a sip of a cocktail of hubris, naivete, and pure excitement. I felt that I had what it took to turn around the school with the limited information provided. I had a long track record of raising school grades in a non-principal leadership role within elementary, middle, and high schools. I was excited about a real opportunity to be considered for the principalship. What I came to realize is historical context, culture, and politics matter in vying for a principalship and I simply did not have a clear understanding of the Riverside community. The proceeding section will discuss the background and context I entered as a new principal.

Riverside Elementary Background: A Community in Crisis

Historical context matters. The data within this section is culmination of my professional conversations with my principal mentor.

Dr. Amanda: Good to be with you this afternoon, Mr. Anthony. I am looking forward to talking to you about your school and the experiences you've had this year as a first-year principal. The first thing that I think would be interesting would be for you to describe the factors that make your school unique in terms of the demographics of your school in terms of the academic performance of your school or any other aspect of it. It's worth noting.

Adrian: Oh yes, my school is an elementary school in what would be considered a coastal area. It is a part of a county that's more of a rural-based county growing and becoming suburban. It is a more transient community, which is unique, being that it is right on the water. It is a Title I school which means that it has a population of families with low income. Students also have other challenges, including trauma, mental health, and food shortages. Our student enrollment numbers fluctuate very frequently. The school zone that we are in has a significant number of apartments and trailer homes. These dwellings support low-income habitation based on federal assistance or section 8. Our student enrollment numbers were so sporadic, and we witnessed children coming and going daily and weekly.

Additionally, we had a significant number of students with disabilities, resulting in me allocating a significant portion of my Title I budget to hire what we deem as an additional Exceptional Student Education (or special education) teacher that helps support our students with academic and behavioral needs. Additionally, we had a noteworthy number of students that were homeless. We refer to families that are having challenges with housing stability, as students in transition. We have about 15 students experiencing the trauma of a homeless shelter and transitional housing.

This and other factors contributed to our wide-ranging population of trauma manifesting in several challenging area: situational poverty, drug abuse, and violence. I noticed students suffering from trauma, homes divided due to one or both parents being incarcerated. There was trauma, lots of trauma resulting in our school earning a 1 out of 10 ranking from an online school demographics site.

Figure 13: Riverside Elementary 2020 ranking on greatschools.net

Helping the Homeless. Our school also was bordered by two heavily wooded areas that were occupied by two illegal homeless camps. One homeless camp was reported to be relatively benign, with the occupants seeking refuge from the humid Florida days. The other homeless persons had demonstrated violate behaviors such as yelling at the students during recess and climbing the trees. It was reported that staff witness people carrying firearms within the homeless camp. As we conducted our campus safety checks, we discover contraband indicating drug and alcohol usage, including used syringes and empty alcoholic bottles. Bordering on the school's northern corner was a volatile trailer community that had several families experiencing poverty and trauma. The trailer community had several families that were cohesive and working. Still, a band of young people ranging from 15 to about 20 were quarrelsome and would threaten students and parents.

Unfortunately, for many of our students, the statistics stated that many will drop out of high school or be the first in their family to graduate high school. Post-secondary outcomes were also dismal, stating that many of the students would not seek collegiate opportunities.

Connecting to the Community. My goal was to connect to a community in crisis immediately. I had conversations with parents, community leaders, and the media during my transition to the principalship. My focus was high impact instruction through rigorous teaching and learning strategies, social-emotional support through supporting trauma informed care for

the students and parents and working with the community around the concept of discipline. I wanted to improve the lives of my students through education. I consciously entered Riverside Elementary with a focus on developing strong community ties. However, there was a staunch reality about my several disconnects and connections with Riverside elementary school.

Disconnects. Given my desire to turn the school around, there were some disconnects between my elementary school experience at Sunny Stream elementary that consists of over 80% black students, 4% Hispanic, two or more races 4%, and only 4% white students, and the demographics of Riverside Elementary School consisting of 75% white, 16% Hispanic, two or more races 5%, and only 4% black students (Greatschools, 2019). Additionally, I went to high school, middle school, and elementary in the adjacent counties. The county I graduated high school in and launched my educational career in is currently the seventh largest school district in America, and the county I attended elementary school in and began turnaround elementary leadership in is now the twenty second largest school district in the United States. I developed many professional relationships and a network of cultural resources, in contrast to my limited knowledge and connections in the Riverside community. This lack of social and historical context in conjunction with my race and gender was a source of my major disconnect from Flamingo County, which takes pride in promoting *homegrown* principals.

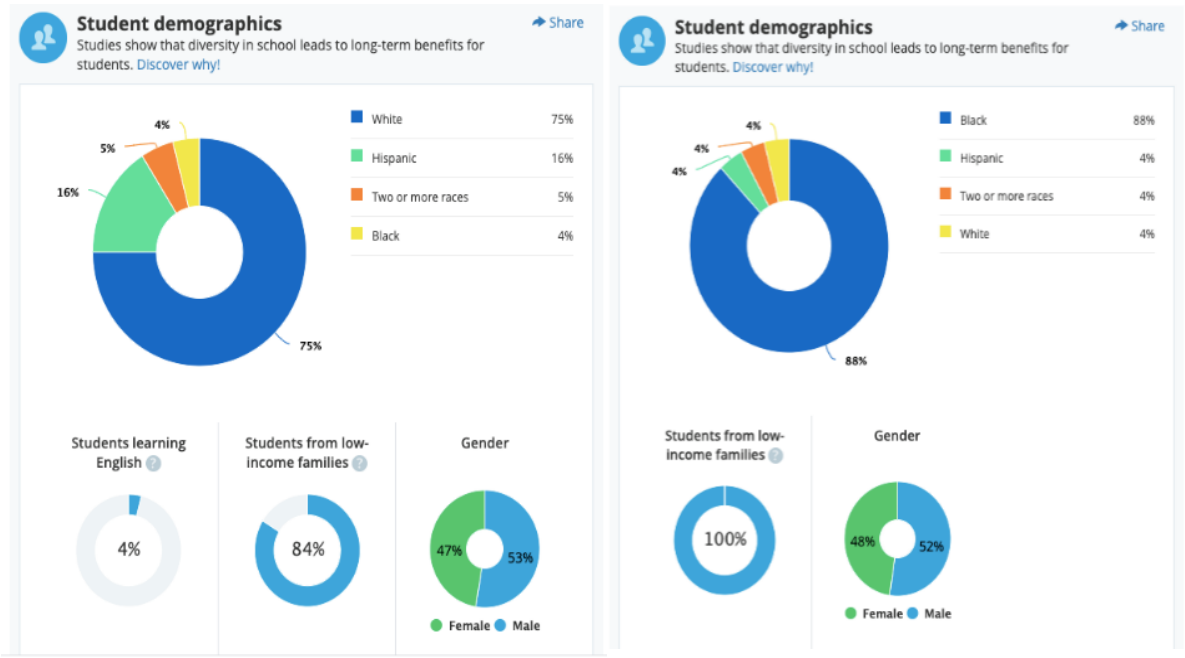


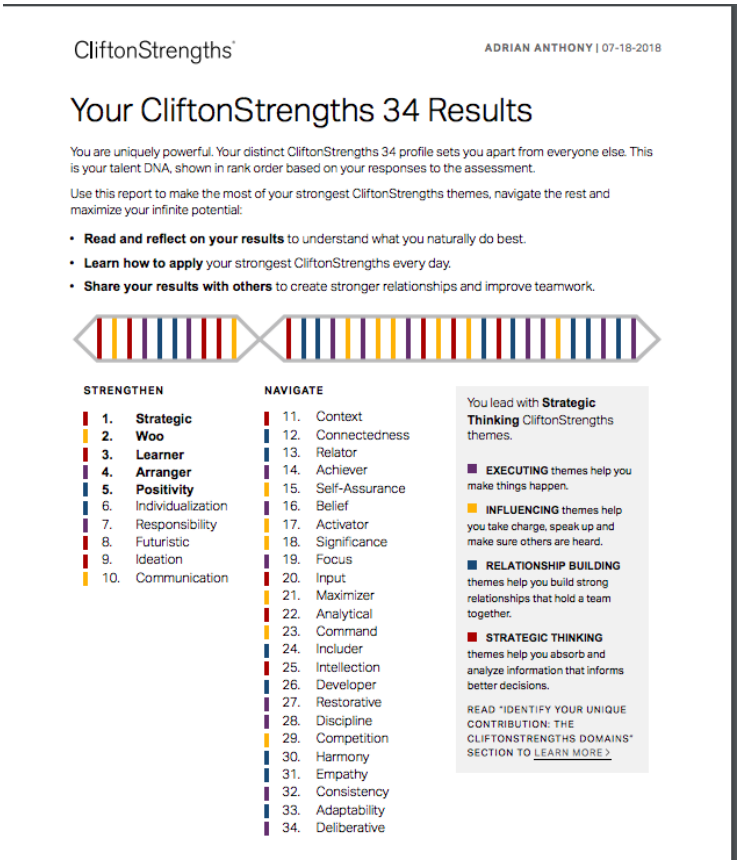
Figure 14: Riverside Elementary School race and gender demographics

Connections. In my early childhood, I survived a Title I elementary school that consisted of over 80% of the children living below the poverty line. I grew up in an educational environment with families needing free lunch or reduced-price lunches. Also, I experienced being an administrator in an elementary school in turnaround status. I related to the frustrations of leading a failing school while attempting to implement unfunded federal mandates within the state of Florida. Most of my career has been supporting students and staff within the Title I framework. I was an assistant principal at a Title I elementary school four years before joining Riverside Elementary School. Learning to trust the lessons learned from my previous leadership experiences connected me to Riverside Elementary but was a professional evolution during my first principalship.

Trusting Me. As a new principal leading a school with an unprecedented attrition of over 80% staff, two consecutive failing school grades, community dissatisfaction with the movement of the leadership team, inadequate positive publicity, a decaying building, a new administrative

team, and new school district plan to consolidate schools polarized the local community. I had to learn to trust myself. Given the differences and disconnects with the broader community and micro-level school-based community undercurrents, I had to lean into my strengths.

Within the State of Florida, prior to becoming a principal, there is an exhaustive gauntlet of certifications, graduate degrees, interviews, preparation programs, processes, and assignments you must complete. During one of the Principal Preparatory Programs, we were tasked with defining our strengths. The premise of the assignment is that you optimize your strengths to drive educational leadership transformation, not your leadership deficits. First, we had to define our Top 34, Top 10, and ultimately our Top 5 areas of strength. However, the process was not random but very systematic based on over 20 years of research by the CliftonStrengthFinder program through GALLUP. The "Clifton StrengthsFinder is a powerful online assessment that helps individuals identify, understand and maximize their strengths . . . By exploring the ways in which you naturally think, feel, and behave (GALLUP, 2019). My Top 5 CliftonStrengthFinders results were *Strategic, WOO (Winning Others Over), Learner, Arranger, & Positivity*. See the entire results below:



CliftonStrengths®

ADRIAN ANTHONY | 07-18-2018

Your CliftonStrengths 34 Results

You are uniquely powerful. Your distinct CliftonStrengths 34 profile sets you apart from everyone else. This is your talent DNA, shown in rank order based on your responses to the assessment.

Use this report to make the most of your strongest CliftonStrengths themes, navigate the rest and maximize your infinite potential:

- **Read and reflect on your results** to understand what you naturally do best.
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- **Share your results with others** to create stronger relationships and improve teamwork.

STRENGTHEN

1. **Strategic**
2. **Woo**
3. **Learner**
4. **Arranger**
5. **Positivity**
6. Individualization
7. Responsibility
8. Futuristic
9. Ideation
10. Communication

NAVIGATE

11. Context
12. Connectedness
13. Relator
14. Achiever
15. Self-Assurance
16. Belief
17. Activator
18. Significance
19. Focus
20. Input
21. Maximizer
22. Analytical
23. Command
24. Includer
25. Intellection
26. Developer
27. Restorative
28. Discipline
29. Competition
30. Harmony
31. Empathy
32. Consistency
33. Adaptability
34. Deliberative

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EXECUTING themes help you make things happen.

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RELATIONSHIP BUILDING themes help you build strong relationships that hold a team together.

STRATEGIC THINKING themes help you absorb and analyze information that informs better decisions.

READ "IDENTIFY YOUR UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION: THE CLIFTONSTRENGTHS DOMAINS" SECTION TO LEARN MORE >

Figure 15: CliftonStrengthFinders Results

As a new principal, I learned to lean into my WOO, which is defined as *winning others over* as my top leadership strength. I became immersed in the school and surrounding community, building relationships, and earning their trust. I had to build trust and relationships rapidly to gain advocates to keep the school doors open. I prided myself on building relationships, but I never fully trusted people to help me in a crisis. I felt like a little black pawn in a broader countywide chess match and my professional life depended on the success of negotiating these relationships.

Additionally, I had to relearn elementary structures, learn the Riverside community's socio-political nuances, and become accustomed to the western region of the county's politics. To accomplish this Herculean task, I would need to lean into another Gallup strength. For that, I

leaned on my Learner strength and began "seeking to understand" the gradations of the leaders in the community and school dynamics.

Dr. Amanda: You stated it was essential to trust yourself and build relationships with the community. How did you build these relationships?

Me: I had to rebrand the school while communicating hope and inspiration to the broader community. I first wanted to tackle the stigma of the community head-on. The perception of the broader community was of poverty, peasants, or being less than. I believed in creating a counternarrative to that pervasive perception. I used the word noble or nobility to elevate the perception of the community in crisis. Secondly, I rebranded the eagle mascot. The prior mascot was a childish caricature of an eagle with wimpy talons. I wanted a mascot the community could rally behind, akin to a National Football League (NFL) team. I reimagined the eagle with a strong jaw, a thick neck, and deeply determined eyes to signify that we were alive and relentless. We were the Eagles, and we were going to fight until our last breath. Simultaneously, I'm also telling myself as a new principal, *"I am strong, and I am worth this, even though I am new and I might not know everything, yet I know what I know, and I will win!"* I wanted the logo to make you feel like a conqueror!

Dr. Amanda: Were there other reasons that made you feel like you could not win?

Me: There were district leaders that continuously challenged my decisions. That would say, "Well, you're just new, or you haven't done this before, you're not from here," and constantly reminding me of the challenges I had to overcome. I would tell myself that the challenges might be true but despite those barriers we will make it, and we're strong, and we know that we are royalty. Just to note, no one that I knew in the Riverside community

was an actual descendant of royal blood (Laugh). I believe in the power of people. And so that's self-efficacy looking inside and reassuring yourself when everybody else says you're not good enough. I can relate to the Riverside community because people were telling me I wasn't good enough, and in the context of the county, school district, local region, Riverside was told they were not good enough. When I called the school district for resources, I got the impression that my school is not good enough to ask for resources as simple as paint. We will put you on the waiting list. You are not worthy of equitable resources. So, do not ask for anything, and do not dare advocate for the community, because supporting you is always more complicated than a simple yes. And that is also how the community felt. The Riverside community felt like they were being told, "You're not worthy to keep a school that you attended, your parents, and grandparents went to. So, don't ask for resources to keep the school open. You have asked for too much already, do not think of asking for anything else. So, we all needed some positivity.

We are still alive

We were struggling as a school, we were struggling as a community, and I was struggling as a principal. "Staying Alive" an iconic song by the The Bee Gees (1970) are etched in my mind from taking my annual CPR class. The instructor would prompt you to remember 100-120 compressions to the rhythm of the melody, equaling 30 compressions to 2 breaths. Taking the CPR course during my first year as a principal was mandatory to support my students but this song was figuratively describing how I literally felt trying to survive the politics, staffing, budgeting, beautification, and COVID 19.

Just smile, stay alive, keep the staff alive, and most importantly, keep every student alive. So, my mindset was, "Yeah, I know how you feel about me, but let me tell

you what we're going to do for me, and I am going to keep telling you what you are going to do to "Save Riverside". I told my staff that I know you feel defeated and that it seems impossible to turn this school around. However, tell me what we're gonna do about it, and give me two action steps." We're going to get that paint, paint the school that's what we're going to do, you know, we're going to get these signs up, we're gonna have this event. We're gonna raise money, we're gonna support the community events we're gonna to save all of Riverside!

Adrian: They don't know we're alive now, but they will know that we are still here and thriving! The school is not dead. It's not closed, we're alive, and we're going to keep working through it.

Through this challenging process, I learned to value my authentic leadership self and trust the axiology's that made me unique. When I accepted the new position as the Principal of Riverside Elementary school (the schools name is a pseudonym developed for confidentiality purposes), I entered with the belief that I would be the principal that I never had in elementary school as a little black child. That I would cultivate these little scholars to achieve their college, career, and lifelong dreams. The essential core of my pedagogical philosophy is that all children can learn. As the new principal, the theme of positivity, possibility and productivity permeated all my communications to staff, faculty, parents, and the media.

The EXODUS

In the summer of 2019, I accepted the position as the principal of Riverside Elementary School. With an expectation that I was entering the school with a veteran staff that had put their job on the line while protesting in front of the school board to keep the school open. Prior to accepting the principalship, I was unaware that the 2018 -2019 staff stormed the school board meeting during the session with matching red shirts demanding that the elementary school

remained open due to a superintendent initiative to close the school in the 2019-2020 school year. The public thought the decision to close the school was a foregone conclusion, yet the staff and parents refused to give up. However, with the negative press, parent pressures, and teacher advocacy, two school board members flipped their school closure decision to keep the doors of Riverside Elementary School open. The news reports stated that the previous principal became frustrated after the superintendent office publicized its plans to shut down Riverside Elementary School to restructure magnet programs and other programs on the western section of Flamingo County.

In my naivete, my expectations of the climate and culture based on the advocacy of the previous staff, teachers, and parents was that I would be entering into a cohesive school environment with highly skilled personnel ready to fight another year to increase the school grade collaboratively. I was in for a rude awakening.

Dr. Amanda: What was your initial experience with your new staff?

Adrian: I was excited to reach out to the staff to build relationships and put a face with their names. I was hired for the school late during the summer break. In July, which only provided the end of that month and early August for planning and preparation, I needed to have everything organized to launch for the staff's return. I began calling the staff roster. I started with kindergarten because that team tends to be a little warmer and bubbly. I continued calling multiple grade levels and departments, including student support services, food and nutrition, media center, special education, English Language Learners, custodial, front office staff, coaching staff, security, first grade, second, grade, third grade, fourth grade, and

ultimately fifth grade. Ironically, I wasn't getting a lot of phone calls back. This silence was a little strange because most Title I and turnaround schools kick off some summer event to unify the school and the staff before school starts. Additionally, when some staff answered, I began to discuss logistics around grade-level preference and room configurations. Their responses were vague, or I felt as if they were evading the questions.

Dr. Amanda: At that time, what were your thoughts about why the staff responded in this manner?

Adrian: So, I was really confused. I was thinking about the previous year's energy to keep the school open and how everyone said we would fight for Riverside Elementary School. So, I rationalized it with, okay, well, you know it's summer, and some people are vacationing and traveling to see family, so maybe it's just the summer thing. But when we started building the master schedule looking at prior school rosters, I knew I had to have every teacher's input, or the year would be doomed.

Dr. Amanda: After the low response rate in staff communication, what were you thinking?

Adrian. Um, I was speechless. I've done turnaround work in elementary, middle, and high school, but I've never been in a situation where over 80% of the staff was gone. And the attrition occurred in phases, so it wasn't like everybody just walked out at one time. Each case was unique, but the essence of the exodus was the same. When I finally communicated with

the staff member and tried to bring them into the fold and the culture building. There was this verbal wordplay, that usually went like this:

Principal: welcoming the staff,

Staff: polite response,

Principal: I am looking forward to meeting face to face on campus

Staff: Awkward silence or chuckle

Principal: Asking specifics about forthcoming year, such as would they like to move to a different grade level or remain in the same grade level

Staff: Oh, I am fine

Principal: Fishing for more information

Staff: Politely ending the call

The communication was always polite, never rude, but never productive. The ship was sinking before it ever set sail. It was not like a capsizing, but it was like a huge ship with many mini holes. I was trying to figure out what's going on. Is it me? Was it race? Was it gender? Was it because of school closure? I struggled with not taking this personally.

Dr. Amanda: Why were you struggling with taking it personally.

Adrian: There are many factors in starting a school year. All of these factors are competing for your attention at the same time. And so you're trying to figure out the *context, cause, and impact* before you make a decision. I had little information on the context, and I had no idea about the cause of the attrition, but I was afraid of the impact of the attrition. So, I blamed

myself initially for the attrition. The reality is the previous Principal resigned before I was considered for the position. I did not force the previous principal out of a job. I believe I was blaming myself because I knew I could not let the school fail.

Dr. Amanda: So why were people leaving?

Adrian: Some people were moving out of town or finding a location closer to home. However, that was not the majority of reasons for quickly departing the school. As I began to speak to additional people, I also was introduced to the rumor mill. I was processing the rumor mill information, the media reports, and antidotal notes from the few staff that I retained.

If I heard the rumor that someone wanted to quit, I stopped everything to call them because I needed more staff, and I cannot open the human resources process based on a rumor.

Dr. Amanda: The first reality was that fourth grade was decimated. So, the rumor was fourth grade, leaving, and I thought I would have no fourth-grade teachers. I needed a retention strategy quickly. I was already losing the school year before it had started. Within education, most teachers already have their jobs by June. I was just beginning the race by starting to hire and advertise in late July. Still, I had to wait for all the official resignations before calling human resources and requesting that they open the slot for public advertisement.

Call me Sherlock Holmes

Adrian: I began the search to track down every staff member from the previous year. I worked on Saturdays and Sundays to track down every person to figure out if they were coming to Riverside. I felt that some people would not call if they noticed the Riverside office phone number. So, I began calling from different numbers, calling from my cell phone, calling from the principal office phone number, and then calling from the media phone numbers and other school phone lines. I was hoping they would pick up one of the numbers. And then I sent a welcome back letter. So, the hiring process was all-consuming.

Dr. Amanda: Tell me a little about the hiring process?

Adrian: The hiring process is very labor-intensive. You must first close out the previous position and collect the resignation letter of the prior employee. As equal opportunity employers, the Principal has to follow federal, state law, and district policies. This process includes clearing the vacancy number to ensure the positions legally open, finding the applicants, screening the applicants, setting up interviews, preparing interview questions, screen references, selecting the appropriate candidate, sending the candidate to human resources, and then verifying degrees and certifications. HR does fingerprints and develops the email criteria with the technology department.

Dr. Amanda: Are there any other items you had to consider during the hiring process?

Adrian: Also, there were processes to consider if someone's a military veteran. Additionally, if there's an internal candidate, some internal policies apply for those already designated as a staff member within the County.

Dr. Amanda: As you were *amping* up your knowledge around all the Human Resources hiring practices. Did you have support with the hiring process?

Adrian: Traditionally, you have your secretary supporting you during the hiring process. However, the previous secretary resigned as well. In my last role as an Assistant Principal, I would hire about four candidates a year at most with the support of a strong secretary. With her support, the hiring process would operate pretty smoothly.

In this new principal position, the initial hiring consisted of hiring about 30 employees with an average of 5 applicants per position. That means you might be managing up to 200 applicants, going through the system without the support of a secretary.

As I was managing hiring, I also had to strategize about the culture and climate that the staff and students would enter while the physical edifice was falling apart.

Beauty is in the eye of the Beholder

Dr. Amanda: What were your perceptions of the principalship before ascertaining the position?

Adrian: I thought I was coming into a school with a highly functioning, highly qualified, highly motivated staff due to all the advocacy work that preceded me. The previous year's staff did an amazing job fighting for the school to stay open - expressing their love for the school. So, my

understanding was I was gonna come into the work, and undergird the current work and implement turnaround systems to help narrow the challenges of the D to get us to a C. But as I entered the school, I realized something had changed. I began in July 2019. During the summer months, teachers are not mandated to work. Traditionally, you do have some teachers that will volunteer based on relationships built from the previous years. However, I was still fairly new to the county and was brand new to Flamingo's west side. The west side of Flamingo was like another world from central county Flamingo. I was unfamiliar with the landscape and the school except for state and school data. I decided to drive by on a weekend to get a better understanding of the school. I was mixed with excitement and anxiety as I embarked upon my journey to the new school. I hopped into my bright red Nissan car and went westward. As I drove toward the school, I began to see the shift in the environment from new Starbucks to several abandoned commercial buildings. Many new builder track homes became cookie-cutter trailer homes. I noticed an increase in homeless persons wandering the avenues. Then I turned right on US 19, going north. Being a Florida boy, I could smell the delicate hint of salt dancing in the air, which provided me a refreshing hint of nature to clear my mind. As I pulled in front of the school, I was petrified! The build looked in disarray. The paint was chipping. The flower beds were overgrown, the signposts were falling, and the school's marquee was missing letters. I honestly thought the building was abandoned. What am I going to do? I started in

July, just weeks until the teachers returned. My sense of urgency kicked into overdrive. Before anyone could believe the school was successful, I had to fix the façade. However, I could not mandate staff support, I did not have community engagement, and the job was too big for me to complete alone in a truncated timeframe. Then came my first realization: I need help.

Dr. Amanda: Was that a learning moment for you, and what did you do next?

Adrian: I needed a team to come began a beautification project. I realized, "I need volunteers." Fortunately, the struggle to keep Riverside alive became somewhat of a David and Goliath story. As I sat at my desk during the summer, a young woman walked in with a youth smile and a bubbly personality. She seemed as if I should have recognized her, but I was drowning in emails, paperwork, and professional development training. She introduced herself with first and last name, and it still did not click for me. She was asking did I need any support. Then it hit me. She was a school board member. I froze. I thought here comes politics, and I did not want to upset her. I went into principal mode, explaining the new strategies I had to improve the school grade, the previous data, and the projected learning growth. I quickly realized that she was simply there to help. I was weary, she wanted to help with no strings attached. Traditionally, school board members came by for a photo opportunity or a town hall meeting, then promptly left after the media departed. I never had

a school board member volunteer to read to children or serve in the cafeteria.

So, I asked her a simple question. How did you feel about the school when you are driving up the parking lot? She said, fine? I said, how did the school building make you feel? She said, well, honestly, it is kind of depressing.

The school board member reminisced about how excited she was as a little girl to attend this school. She was saddened by the sharp decline in the school grade and appearance in recent years. I spoke with her at length about building culture with the community and staff. She immediately began to smile and wanted to know what the next steps were. I had my first volunteer. I told her the first step was to make the school beautiful again!

The Reality: *My perspectives on what I experienced becoming the first principalship.*

Dr. Amanda: If perception was that you would have a stable staff and a school unified for a singular purpose, what was the reality of what you found when you entered the position?

Adrian: So, I found the opposite of my expectation, that we were having whole grade levels exit in masses. With 20- 30-40 people leaving, we were losing institutional knowledge. There's a lot of work to be done, and the school had done a great job with parent engagement. I applaud the school for creating weekly feeding programs to serve the community while educating parents on academics and behavior strategies.

Dr. Amanda: Was the primary reason for the exodus fear of school closure?

Adrian: Yes, fear of the school closing, and despite all of their efforts, they were afraid they would lose their jobs. However, after the initial July and August exodus, we began to catch our breath. Then the state increased their requirements to work at a turnaround school, which impacted administration and the staff's stress. We had four teachers that remained at the school and had their children attend the school. The state reviewed everyone's VAM scores and said based on their schools that had to move out of the tested grade levels, including third, fourth, fifth grades. We began developing strategies around reorganizing the master schedule, informing the parents, revising lunch schedules, and meeting the turnaround criteria. We submitted the new plan to the state, and after their review, they stated the teachers had to leave the premises. We were shocked! We essentially had to let go of four remaining teachers almost halfway through the school year. This loss was demoralizing for the staff, students, and parents. The state further added that the newer assistant principal's credentials did not consist of ample school reform experience. They required the assistant principal's transfer as well. At that point, we were not fully staffed and were struggling with a high level of trauma the students were grappling with on a daily basis. The new hires were adjusting, and I was working seven days a week to develop systems, create a collaborative culture with this motley crew of professionals.

Dr. Amanda: Out of the teachers that were leaving, did you see a trend?

Adrian: Attrition was fluid, and initially, I was under the impression that Riverside would have about three vacancies before accepting the position. So, a lot of the core teachers were leaving. The only teachers that stayed were our specialist teachers (art, music, and physical education). So, the core english, math, and science teachers departed on every grade level, and when it comes to school reform, the art, music, and physical education teachers are not calculated in school grades. From the conversations with the remaining staff and exit interviews with the departing staff, the trend was fear of school closure. The message was to *get out* before the ship sinks because the superintendent and the school district are out to get Riverside.

Dr. Amanda: So, you're getting ready to start the year. You're excited because you think you have this team of people banded together to save the school, and you all will just really work together to get out of that school grade. However, you find out that most of those people are leaving, and kind of your school's heartbeat is gone. Let's paint me a picture of what that looks like. So, what was the first day that you were supposed to report back, and if you don't remember the exact day, just approximately? And how many vacancies did you have? You said you have about 36 teachers and about as many support staff. What was the date you were to report back, and how many vacancies? How did you have time?

Adrian: So, early July was my arrival. I was supporting another school. I was assistant principal at a high school, and I was administrator leading

summer school. The Assistant Principal over school is like the principal of a mini school. It is a major ordeal for high school with almost 2,000 students because, for some students, it's their last chance to graduate. If they don't get the summer school process completed, they will become a drop out. Hence, it's very intense, and it takes a lot of logistics for the master schedule, accommodations for disabilities, behavior support. So, I was transitioning from being the only person who knew the in's and out's of the whole summer school system while preparing to start at a new elementary school. I was balancing closing out one school and launching a new school

The logistics of filling vacancies

It was a chess match, trying to figure out who these 12 remaining staff were and their results with students. I had to dive into student data and prior personality conflicts, looking at their wishes for placement. For example, *some people said, You know I did third-grade last year, but you know I want to teach Fourth grade or kindergarten.* Additionally, there are legal components of certifications prior to grade level job placements. I had to inspect individual certifications prior to making job changes. Staff members tried to negotiate staying at Riverside if I moved them to the grade level or classroom they wanted.

I was drowning in all of the logistics. Taking all those demands and then trying to also fill every vacancy on every grade level while creating a collaborative culture was puzzle that seemed impossible to piece together.

Dr. Amanda: So, in addition to the sheer amount of new hires, what else impacted the decisions?

Adrian: People, Resources, Relationships. A major challenge was having just a certified person in a position, but beyond the Herculean challenge of a large number of vacancies, it was the changing nature of who was coming, their professional competency, what team they were going to work with, and then

Dr. Amanda: It sounds like you were trying to be strategic about hiring and who to put where, when you had a shifting roster, and what gaps developed by moving personnel.

Adrian: Yes, I think part of it is three things: we talked about it for people systems outcomes. So people are not machines and, and they grade level preferences to even classroom preferences. They may also have a great year with a certain quarter students, and other teachers may educate better with a different demographic of students based on their needs. This level of instructional logistics takes time to know the personnel's strengths and challenges and the context of their data.

The primary goal of education is to support student academic outcomes. Still, students need different things at different grade levels, student needs different things for different parts of the curriculum, english, math, science. Also, a certain demographic of students might need different things historically. I created an interest inventory to match up the staff wants with the school needs and grade level needs.

Systems and structures were set up the prior school year, but I was not privy to the structures' inner workings. Traditionally, during the school year, I would gather data from

teachers and staff about expectations and considerations for the forthcoming year, and a staff member may say I did not enjoy third grade this year and I want to teach fifth grade.

School Closure

When the school has been presented to the school board for school closure, it creates a ripple effect on trauma. Staff is struggling with trauma. Students are grappling with trauma, parents are confused and feel stuck at the school. I found myself overthinking some of the potential decisions. I was nervous about the impact on the social, emotional health of the staff and students. So, every decision was far more complex than simply placing a teacher in any classroom. However, the principal is making thousands of decisions every day that impact safety, instruction, discipline, food distribution, and articulation.

The truncated timeline to make significant gains confounds the trauma of social, emotional trauma. I had only ten months to prove through the test scores that I could increase the school grade and prove to the superintendent and school board that doors deserved to remain open. Moreover, you must prove within the first three months that you are making progress for the increased school grade through formative data. Teachers returned mid-August, but the entire school felt the pressure of time, so this is in July school starts middle of August, and you have just to want to know the week before/ So, let's say that's August 7th. I'm just using data, but they want to know a week earlier. So, if you're at the end of July, really getting to work to try to meet people. You got to tell them concrete things that make a difference. And if you don't line it up, they'll want to quit anyway even if it wasn't a school with all other times we had when you put teachers in places where they don't want to be, in that great level, or to work on certain teams with a certain person. They can be very sincere about that. Or they may have had an agreement with the principal before and said, I'm gonna work in this grade level for one year. And the next

year, you're gonna put me somewhere else. But how would I know that that informal guarantee was coming in. So, I was dealing with multiple things while trying to get ready for the retreat because the retreat they would like to know answers, but you can kind of stall a little bit. But really, August 7th was the deadline. Some were holding out for that to see if they got what they wanted. I found out the rumor mill as well. Some are holding out for the pre-planning, and we had some people quit planning before school started based on various reasons. Ultimately, it was weighing down that they knew the school, get a lot of stays open, and didn't know the fate of the school if it was to be closed. My understanding was we would have one full year to do the work on our school one full year, and then based on FSA, they either come out in June or July, the fate of the school would be decided.

Dr. Amanda: You've described many challenges in terms of knowing who is coming and going, having several vacancies and critical areas that impact your school grade, being new to the community yourself, and trying just to get a basic handle on things and not necessarily being privy to all the discussions that were happening behind the scene just different challenges that ultimately, we're going to either set you up for, you know, excellent school year, or, or continue to be challenged, what did you do, how did you tackle these challenges and what progress were you making on them prior to the start of the year?

Rumors, Recruitment, and Retention Bonuses

I quickly realized that people were leaving and "dropping like flies", and I also assessed that my school could not compete with the other newer schools with innovative magnet programs. "What do I have to offer to help staff stay? I knew that there are many restrictions on bonuses, rewards,

and incentives in the Florida public education system. I questioned myself on what I could use to stop the bleeding and get staff excited about turning the school around.

Dr. Amanda: Were you able to offer incentives for recruitment on retention?

Adrian: In places like Chicago or Los Angeles and New York, they offered their staff a $20,000 to $30,000 salary bonus for retention in high needs turnaround schools.

However, I did not have that. So, a lot of staff were not willing to do the heavy lifting of turnaround work. From the first day of school, I had no incentives to come work at my double D school that looked like a haunted house. Initially, during the summer and early fall, I did not have any fiscal incentives.

Dr. Amanda: What could you offer, given all the obstacles?

Adrian: That is the question I constantly asked myself? What do I have to offer? What does the school, the community, and its students have to offer? I began to reflect on my corporate sales and marketing days. When I sold new homes, the CEO would tell me, "cleanliness" is like Godliness. People need to see and feel the dream before it manifests. I thought about Walt Disney walking into the swamps of Orange County, Florida, and seeing the greatest amusement park in the world.

School Closure and Broken Promises

I came to the inevitable understanding that this school was not a priority. Historically, it was not prioritized. Albeit be, in crisis it was still not going to be prioritized as number one. The community felt like promises made by the superintendent and staff were broken. They were

promised multiple layers of mental health support, grade level support, recruitment support, and support with retention. Their promises were made to the remaining staff the prior year, and when those promises were not to be fulfilled, it created frustration. Promises were made before I got there to help the school stay open, and many decisions I made ran counter to the previous administration—every decision, complicated things. I needed time to fully understand the context of the school, which takes time, but I still must accomplish this herculean feat that takes three years, and I have three months to figure it all out.

Dr. Amanda: Did you feel you could fully make use of the school district's resources?

Adrian: Teachers I would hire would take the job then read about the history of school closure and the controversy with the superintendent in the newspaper. I had a teacher start Monday morning, talked to staff, logged onto the Internet, read about the school then walked out – resigned at 10 am; threw the keys on the desk and never returned. Only two hours of employment. I was flabbergasted. I had never experienced that in my life. It was indicative of the constant battle to find highly qualified people who were willing to risk their careers to work for a school that was rumored to be closed.

I was constantly trying to educate children with multiple classroom and support staff vacancies. Even substitute teachers did not want to come to a school with behavior issues and rumors of school closure that scared potential teachers and substitute teachers away.

Themes of Trauma - Self Worth

My ultimate goal was to increase student performance. What I found was that a significant part of my job was building up adult confidence and sense of worth. It says a lot to

adults about who they are, their self-worth, and their performance. So, I like the word that psychological safety. It was a constant reassuring and balancing the trauma of adults.

So something else I added in is I created a Zen room or a meditation room. The Zen room provided a quiet place for the staff to go to for a moment of relaxation. Wonderful, wonderful inspirational quotes and chemistry because I started to learn about vicarious trauma. And that is a real thing. Several staff were caretakers for dying parents and spouses and we could see the vicarious trauma impacting them professionally. Even though you're doing a great act of service, it begins to wear you down. And so, my staff was developing vicarious trauma. They took on the weight of what students were going through and the school's anxiety and pressure, possibly an open posture to being honest. So, that was another thing. I could never let them see me sad.

The Armor

Dr. Amanda: Did you have trauma, and if so, how did you deal with some of the trauma?

Adrian: I wore a crisp collared shirt, necktie, and a vest every day. The primary reason was to reduce the anxiety by wearing the suit as protective armor. Eventually, the staff came to expect the uniform. I did not wear the tie and vest for two days in a row, and the rumor was that they were going to close the school, and the proof was that I did not have on a vest. At that time, I did not know if the school would be opened or closed, but that was not the antecedent - me not wearing the tie and vest.

The vest and tie gave me a sense of security and a sense of stability for the staff.

Dr. Amanda: **What was the reason for you not wearing the tie and vest or armor as you put it for those days?**

Adrian: The reason was that the stress, constant pressure, long nights, and working weekends took their toll on me. I gained a little weight, more weight, and the scale continued to climb. The shirt collars became tight, and the vest a bit snug. The staff did not notice that, but they wanted to know, "Are we closing? What's going on? Are you being fired?

On the one hand, it was just pieces of cloth. However, with this level of trauma, even my attire was a symbol of safety. It said to the staff I was still fighting. If I am okay, then they will be okay.

COVID Cometh

"Throughout this year, especially within the last year, with COVID exposing disparities that existed within our society, magnifying points of views from African Americans, no matter how much we would explain things to them. The murder of George Floyd opened the eyes to many Americans and it also revealed the inequalities in COVID treatments even now. With the disparity of vaccinations, the discrepancies were becoming more and more evident. It was a relief to see white folks starting to open their eyes, but at the same time, It was also a heavy burden on my heart and mind. The constant thinking about the inequities kept me from getting back to doing what you are now doing, finishing the dissertation" (Ramon, Brotha Circle 2021).

Dr. Amanda: Since the arrival of COVID-19 as a global pandemic and all the changes that country made from travel, business, and medicine, how did it impact the educational environment?

The bright side of COVID

Adrian: There were highs and lows with COVID. Ironically, there were advantages to COVID-19. Due to the high attrition, I hired a significant number of new staff that were recent graduates or new to education. Their technological expertise was efficient. I was a digital nomad, and they were digital natives who grew up with cell phones, tablets, and laptops. The emergency switch to digital learning mandated by the Governor brought a certain level of comfort for the newer staff. They preferred virtual systems for teaching and learning. On the contrary, many of the newer staff struggle with behavior management in the brick-and-mortar environment. The anxiety significantly diminished as they jumped right into it, and they created all kinds of innovative ways to communicate with our students and parents.

The challenges of COVID

Adrian: The newbies became the team leaders. However, as we called them or more seasoned teachers around for over 15 years, the veterans struggled in this new normal. The depth of immersion into the virtual environment and the lack of preparation time and professional development were too much. Many teachers struggled because they were used to having their desks, dry erase boards, handouts, and paper copies. They taught the way they had for almost two decades. So, this new mandatory way of work was challenging for them.

Dr. Amanda: What were the pros and cons for you as a principal navigating COVID?

Pandemic Principal Pro's

Adrian: To be very transparent, the pro' was the level of vicarious trauma resulting in violence on campus decreased to zero incidents, due to 100% virtual learning. The number of physical investigations, witness statements, parent phone calls about behavior incidents, sheriff phone calls, Baycare mobile response unit, and discipline referrals went away. We spent over 80% of our time managing extreme behaviors, mental health concerns, suicide threats, or bullying investigations.

Pandemic Principal Con's

As the Principal in charge of setting the culture and climate of the school, I realize I thrive in a face to face environment. I win people over with a glowing smile sitting, a firm handshake or pat on the back. I gained *street cred* with my staff by getting into the trenches with them and working shoulder to shoulder. Having candid conversations when a staff is struggling seems more supportive in person and less punitive. In a virtual environment the message can seem more formal and disciplinary. I prided myself on listening to them during our face-to-face meetings, watching their non-verbal language, and building rapport. I used those conversations to give them voice and choice in the operations of the school. We continued having meetings virtually and via conference calls during the quarantine. However, it was not the same. I learned to value the power of being in someone's presence as a human being, hearing their anxiety, their concerns, and co-creating solutions with them. That interpersonal connection did not transcend to staff and students via teleconferencing and

hurt the moment of rebuilding the Riverside culture. So, it was hard reestablishing the culture we fought to shape in less than one year.

I had several positive teachers contributing to the revitalized culture before COVID that became keyboard assassins while working form home. They wrote derogatory things that they would not have said in person but felt courageous enough to type. I thought they would never have said those hurtful words to my face or the staff if we had remained on campus. I believe the aggression came from the trauma and uncertainty that the pandemic created. It was not just Riverside, but our county, state, nation, and the world were trying to survive and manage the fear of the unknown that was haunting all of us. We were monitoring the mounting infections and deaths. Students, parents, teachers, and staff were losing their spouses, parents, and homes. I had students going to foster care. I had parents looking at me to save them as they lost their livelihood. I could not save their homes, but I could feed them.

A fish and Two loaves of bread

We launched a monumental weekly feeding program. We supported the parents with technology and signed out all of our iPads and computers. We spent days logging devices, delivering school supplies as well teaching the community about battling mental exhaustion. We navigating our own trauma and the vicarious trauma we experienced by supporting hundreds of families. We were all on edge. Sometimes, something simple would set the staff off. None of us were prepared to

create a culture within a virtual environment as people were dying due to COVID and comorbidities. I was sending weekly condolences to families who COVID impacted. When we had our staff meeting, we would send our condolences to staff member's that loss love ones due to COVID, the pandemic became real, it was now at the doorsteps of Riverside. Several staff members were in the high-risk categories based on age or physical health. They were stressed about going outside or coming into the school. We all left campus in a hurry. The global mass closing of schools and public facilities was an unprecedented event. No one knew when or if we would return to school before the end of the school year. The world changed visually our fishing community became a ghost town. In 24 hours, the city was covered with people wearing masks and dispensing hand sanitizer. There was scarcity of cleaning products, toiletries. No one could find hand soap, gloves, or even toilet paper.

I realized that staff love leaders with answers. Albeit be, I had no answers, no timeframes, and no guarantees. My staff still wanted me to say *everything is going to be alright.* I had no answers because the president did not have answers, and the Governor did not have answers. How can I give comfort with no solutions? When they felt the world did not care, they wanted their Principal to save them. I swallowed my fears, and I gave them what they wanted, I reassured them and encouraged them, even though I also needed reassurance. It was extremely difficult rebuilding culture in a time of crisis.

I offer this work to my community first, then to the broader literature base. I hope this work will expand the scholar's deep reflection as a member of the community being troubled by the epistemological paradigm within which current autoethnography discourse (Anderson, 2006). "Power does not relieve pressure, but power does not give up. In America, power comes along with the racial privilege of being white. There may be individual white anti-racists, but how do you know who you are meeting in the grocery store and when you enter a school on your first day" (Ramon, Brotha Circle 2021). This exploration into my principalship experience during my first year as the leader of this elementary school was an account of my experiences navigating politics and race.

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

"Knowledge is power.
Education is the premise of progress,
in every society"
Excerpt from Kofi Annan

In this chapter, I take a unconventional approach discussing the findings. I use poetry and prose to bring meaning to what I have learned through this study of my intersectional experiences as a Black man, researcher, researched, principal, and student. These findings and their implications derived from collegial support of critical friends and Brotha circle members who helped me to practice "self-observation, self-evaluation, and self-analysis" (Rose, 2012). I share lessons learned from my journey as a new principal in a public educational system as an African American male in a southern fishing community.

Bristol (2012) asserts in *Plantation Pedagogy: A Postcolonial and Global Perspective that* the representation of self in autoethnography is a form of freedom (2012). I am scripting myself into my own poetic literature as the researcher and researched as a narrative about "Black representation in education rather than continue a process of silent authorship, where the researcher's voice is not included in the presentation of findings" (Charmaz & Mitchell, 1997, Holt, 2003). Autoethnographically storying deconstructs the sense of autobiographical self to intentionally territorialize self-identity, self-awareness, and to author the objective (Clough, 1998).

As I created, analyzed and synthesized this research, I struggled with myself on how to present the depth of this data. The research questions are answered in an unorthodox narrative format with emphasis on prose while presenting the data in poetic formats. During this unprecedented year, the theme to be heard and have voice is provided in these counterstory to the pervasive antiquated themes that subjugate men of color (angry, lazy, untrustworthy). My counternarrative always starting with a piece of literature from voices of the African Diaspora. The stories of my black ancestors' plight of leading within a cultural context whiteness is not isolated to my small fishing village but pays homage to the dilemma of African Americans within the broader American educational system. As Soja and Chouinard expresses it, there is "always an "Other path" of interpretation of multiple and overlapping processes of change that succeeds in drawing us into these other spaces and perspectives, forcing us to confront the limits to our grasp of real-and-imagined spaces and places" (Soja and Chouinard, 1999).

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this research was to explore how I navigated my role and position(ality), as my perceptions of being the 1st Black male principal hired in a school district since segregation, while leading a school in Turnaround status given the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, I hope this research influences the leaders that are seeking the principalship and the leaders that develop systems that are inequitable to black men navigating public education. The research questions guiding this study of my professional leadership journey outlined below:

1. How did my professional perspectives develop as a new principal in a school district under differentiated accountability?

2. How did I experience being the first African American male principal since desegregation?

As I explored my experiences as the first black male principal in this unprecedent leadership role the themes of vulnerability, authentic assimilation, mentorship, and fear.

Vulnerability: Open Up Through Reflexivity

Chatham-Carpenter (2010) questions: “Is there such a thing as being too vulnerable for one’s own good, when doing autoethnography?” (p. 6) (as cited in Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015, p284). A persistent valorization of objectivity over “bias” (that is, situated knowledges constituted within particular political and cultural contexts) and outright denial of the ways that bias, when masked as objectivity, intrudes upon and distorts knowledge in oppressive ways, reflects the palpably conservative academic climate many scholars work in (Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2016, p. 523). My exploration into the world of autoethnography, necessitates me voluntarily becoming vulnerable and releasing my lived experiences to the world, challenges me to value the subjective nuances of ethnographic research. As I began building the foundation of this project with my major professor, I was cautioned not to paint the picture of a heroic figure that was immune to challenges within my writings. Conversely, I was encouraged to explore the literature and construct stories that displayed the arcs and valleys of the full leadership experiences. As a building leader, it is my job to be the anchor of the school while hiding my pain for the sake of others.

I work to shelter my students from the chaos that comes from the community, the state, and the school district. The goal of a principal is to disseminate information but to also be a liaison between the children in the chaos. I continue to consciously urge myself to write with vulnerability. Chang asserts that Autoethnographers’ vulnerable self-exposure opens a door to

reader's participation in the stories, giving the open invitation an element of vulnerability for the readers and evoke empathy (2016, p. 145).

Authentic Assimilation: Wearing the Mask

Principals are actors within a complex micro-system that consist of actors that change frequently depending on election cycles, school years *(not calendar year)* and matriculation of students. Black male principals have an additional burden to mask their culture to assimilate to the majoritarian culture, as an actor acting in a typecast role. "African-American experience has been relegated to "the margins" of society while still binge allowed limited access to society's mainstream workings" (Jennings, 2014). Within this school district black men are keenly aware that they serve under white female notions of education, leadership, and learning.

In these micro-systems, actors are expected to be a representative of the broader cultural norms, principals are expected to create a culture that reflects the most idealistic view of the American culture. The micro-system depends on the cultural tolerance of the actors within the broader school district. My writings are explored through the lens of a leader of color on a stage with an audience teeming with white Anglo-Saxon protestant participants.

How could I express my dilemma and concerns about the racial, gendered, and nepotistic issues I was experiencing within the same educational system I was working. How do you seek solace from the leadership that profits from the system? I asked myself, "Should I shut up and just be grateful to have been given the chance to be a principal? I struggled to write about race. I was concerned that my white readers would feel I was playing the race card, which I heard people discuss in this particular county? On the contrary, would African Americans feel I am being too conservative and not being fully transparent about being black in a predominately white environment? Could I fully express my concerns about the lack of support of black men in

an educational system? Ellis (2015) asserts that "autoethnographic works present an intentionally vulnerable subject unlike more traditional research methods, secrets are disclosed, and histories are made known" (p. 24). It is very tiring trying to reconcile the professional practicalities and parameters with the concerns about authentic writing about my professional journey.

> *"I've been going through a lot of pain. Recently, like to the point where having to slow down what I'm saying. In order not to physically let my emotions out. Just thinking about what is going on in our country makes my eyes swell up.* (Ramon, Brotha Circle, 2021).

Howard & Flennaugh (2011) assert that "despite admonitions about the rise of a "post-racial" society, race still plays a central role in the education of African American males in U.S. society" (cited in Jennings, 2014, p.215). Antoniu (2004, 128) asserts that "As I write, I become public, visible, vulnerable" (as cited in Adams, et al., 2015, p284). I make the conscious choice to take off the mask through my cathartic research.

Mentorship: Mentorless

The reality is being the first black man in any industry essentially means you will unlikely have a black male mentor within the system. Gendered racism manifests as the lack of close ties. As such, exclusion from social networks characterizes many black men's interactions at work (Wingfield, 2007). Wingfield (2007) further asserts that many more black men than black women reported that they were often excluded from collegial workplace interactions and that they had fewer friends or close acquaintances (if any) among their coworkers (p. 206). Specifically, to be a "*woke* person is to hold an unretractable embodied consciousness and political identity acknowledging the oppression that exists in individual and collective experiences" (Ashlee, et al., 2017).

In the beginning, I did not consciously consider the tension between the County's culture and the underrepresentation of black men in leadership. I was just happy to have a job! After receiving the position of principalship, I began contacting my principal peers for collegial advice. This search for peer mentorship brought me to my second awakening: the lack of people of color to call when I experienced internal and external challenges. The irony was as a Black man I knew there was racism, and it was unavoidable, but I also must live in a space that does not dwell on racism, as not to be paralyzed.

I put my head down and worked hard from 3am – 11pm daily, with the knowledge that I had no principal contemporary in who I could confide. How could I trust a system that in its 132-year history had not promoted educator to the rank of a principal of an integrated school. This absence of black male leadership communicated the message: "Black Men need not apply!"

FEAR: Make me Wanna Hallah, Facing the Fear

As I write this, my anxiety increases, and I struggle to allow myself to be honest. Chatham-Carpenter (2010) asserts it can help us resolve inner struggles with our various selves. When I enter the school district spaces, I reconcile the images of the black male janitors and cafeteria workers, I personally identify with our plight, albeit be I hold college degrees that garner a level of middle class professional cultural capital, it is with this perspective that I can better understand the need for mentoring experiences as well as my work as an activist (Chang, 2008, p. 192). Black school leaders, like Black mayors "are symbolic leaders and have an influence beyond their cities, this symbolism is important for Blacks as they have typically been labeled as inferior and incapable of carrying out high-level responsibilities" (Jackson 1995; Tillman, 2004). *"It is difficult for me to understand and expound further because I have reached a point of feeling defeated"* (Ramon, Brotha Circle, 2021).

The process of writing about self and constructing autoethnographic stories created angst about the way I represented “me”. My desire was to portray an authentic first year principalship, but during the ethnographic writing process I became afraid of being completely open about the experiences in the space of the principalship in ways that would perpetuate the stigma historically assigned to Black men in professional spaces such as being lazy, late, aggressive or inept. A way to combat this is to work ten times harder than my white counterparts to simply seem equal to my colleagues. This requires working seven days a week, waking up at 3am in the morning, being the first attendee at meeting and intentionally be the last person to leave the building after a meeting.

Lessons Learned

The first research questions inquire about “How did my professional perspectives develop as a new principal in a school district under differentiated accountability?” As I pored over the autoethnographic data, field notes, and archives I realized that the perspectives I developed as a new principal in a public school district under differentiated accountability were being informed by the shifting political forces to either close the school in turnaround status or stakeholders fighting to keep the doors open. I soon realized that there were four distinct axio-political forces functioning to impact my experiences and perspectives of this turnaround leadership experience: Current federal law and historical legal battles for equitable outcomes for all children, Contentions state of state of Florida election and the new state laws under a new gubernatorial administration, Flamingo county policies that impacted the community, school board practices that allotted resources to Riverside Elementary school. These forces influenced the decisions and strategies I developed to preserve the school and create counterstories to

dominate narrative that was pervasive about the broader school context but for me as a black man entering a territorialized leadership shape reserved for white women in this space.

The second research question inquiries about "How did I experience being the first African American male principal since desegregation?" As I explored my experiences as the first Black male principal in this unprecedent leadership role the themes of vulnerability, assimilation, and finding my voice within this in-between space of examining my professional leadership, personal lived narrative, and academic research progression. Operating in "the "in-between space," or the Thirdspace that is connected to the postcolonial notion of "hybridity" whose perspective insists that cultural and political identities are constructed through the process of alterity" (Soja & Chouinard, 1999). I use my voice throughout the in-between spaces to connect my experiences as the first Black male principal in a southern school district since desegregation to the broader experiences of black men navigating modern educational spaces. I connect past, present, and future through a tapestry of poetry, archival documents, and historical prose of African Americans to explore turnaround leadership.

The Onyx Ceiling. The process of becoming a principal felt like there was a glass ceiling, which I prefer to call the onyx ceiling. "I've overcome every obstacle that was placed in front of me . . . and the main thing I have come to learn is that regardless of the work I put in there is always underlying institutional racism" (Ramon, Brotha Circle 2021). We had similar experiences. I had to move schools or move counties, or move to different systems, because I would go in. I'll be the best overqualified for the job better than my competitors. You know I have more degrees more experience more certifications I had to add to something extra. I got the job the parents would love me, students would love me, I'll get all these great notes. but after about two years, maybe three years. It was kind like I hit the onyx ceiling, where like I was

receiving messages such as you'll never be AP, then you'll never be a principal. Even though my evaluations were awesome, and I brought innovation, it was like, yeah, if you wait about another 25 years maybe you'll get a chance. Other people who are not as degreed, experienced, loved, or personable are getting opportunities to go to the next level. I only got a promotion by going to another county or another school, but then about two to three years later if was like I hit the onyx ceiling. "I realized I'm a person who's going to the truth, and I'm going to always do what's in the best interest of students despite politics" (Ramon, Brotha Circle 2021).

I realized I'm a person who's going to pursue truth, and I'm going to always do what's in the best interest of students. Unfortunately, it is common that things are done for political reasons in this county. County politics, community politics, school district politics are coupled with school politics. My unwillingness to assimilate and totally bend to the will of the political machine repeatedly put me in opposition with people in power. I realized they were not going to want me moving up and it resulted in me deciding to go elsewhere.

Reducing my blackness, code switching, assimilating, or just trying not to *sound too black* has always been a part of my professional consciousness and a complex negotiation in my work environment. As I examined the literature, the more I noticed a broader problem for black people navigating authentic representation within white public education spaces. Adia Harvey Wingfield asserts, some black male professionals decide to be invisible "no more" (cited in Damaske, 2014). I began to understand the broader context of the diaspora and the struggles of other black male stories regarding the enormity of their decisions to stay complacent, stay quiet, to be seen but not heard, or to abandon their career all together.

Many black professional men perceive that their white colleagues and superiors secretly expect them to fit a negative prototype and painstakingly try to avoid behaviors that might be

interpreted as difficult or angry by crafting docile demeanors to lessen the perceived threat or intimidation (Wingfield, 2007).

Finally, the lesson I learned that was most helpful through this research process was the cathartic process of poetry. I use my poetic voice throughout this study to make sense of the in-between spaces to connect my experiences as male, educator, leader, researcher and researched to connect past, present, and future through a tapestry of narrative writing and poetryPoetic autoethnography provided me a space to explore the tension of gender, race, and space in a format that narrates my existence in educational leadership as an African American man. Also embedded in this reflective process are the critiques of other participants feeling outside, othered, or in-between states and spaces. Chang synthesizes the complexities of being other than, stating:

> My personal and professional integration process has paralleled my ethnic/racial identity development process. Overall, I have come from rejecting my home experiences and culture in order to assimilate and be accepted into the mainstream, to embracing my heritage with a vengeance (rejecting anything that represented the dominant culture), to negotiating the knowledge, dispositions, and skills from both worlds (Chang, 2010, p. 191).

The nature of the "African American experience has been relegated to "the margins" of society with limited access to society's mainstream workings" (Jennings, 2014, p. 217). This broader exclusion impacts the pathways of black people who identify as African American through the principalship pipeline.

Poetic Analytic. I analyzed the poetic words of my ancestors to create a cathartic third space to interact with my professional experiences and the academic research process. James

Baldwin (1961) asserts to be a black man in America is to be in a constant state of anger. Langston Hughes (1951) equites this crushing positionality as to having your dreams explode. To bring hope in a desolate place, principal practitioners such as Joe Clark assert that we meet our fate together. It is within the collective autoethnographic voice that we resist the systems of oppression embedded in our collective American experience.

Implications for Future Research

My autoethnographic study highlights the positionality of being male, black, and outsider while being the researcher and researched of the study. These stories and counterstories are of the experiences and perspective of one principal, in one school district, in one southern state. This data is not written to be generalizable to all educational leaders in all contexts. However, the counterstories serve to bring awareness to leadership challenges experienced by many black men in homogeneous public-school spaces. The only human subject of the investigation (auto-ethnographic study) was the researcher. This Autobiographical research involves data that is in the context of the individual and is not generalizable beyond the individual experience.

Supplementary research of black male principals with a more principals in multiple educational contexts. I propose that the direction of research have a significant focus on black men in public education while examining several concepts:

- Expanding the research to social networks and mentoring programs within support black men professionally and personally within public educational spaces
- Utilizing the poetic autoethnographic framework for future research
- Research that focuses on black men in elementary school, a segment that is traditionally staff by white men for white women.

- Use multiple demographics within the United States, outside of the southeastern segment of the country.

The implications above impact academic research and principal practice. Furthermore, this autoethnographic research raises questions of educational leadership practice. Given the gender and racial barriers present within the public educational space, how do black men navigate those spaces for professional advancement? Additionally, how do black men navigate the praxis of the technocratic components of school turnaround, the politics of the principalship, while developing culture within environments of trauma?

Hopes and Dreams

When I accepted the job, I foolishly jumped into the work by focusing on supporting students, staff and the community. My ignorance came in my underestimating the political landscape of the principalship. The school district had many political players. This district also had a unique layered of legal complications given its superintendent being elected through public community vote, counter to the surrounding school districts that have superintendents appointed by standing school boards. This simple school district distinction created another level of maneuvering among leaders, especially in a forthcoming election year. As, I worked to build school culture, it often created great anxiety as it put me at odds with school district culture. I felt that I did not have the coastal community, county-specific, institutional knowledge that local leaders prided itself on.

There was a tremendous amount of pressure professionally to improve the school grade and look good doing it, as to allow another black man to be deemed worthy of also becoming a principal in the future. I carried the weight of internalized propaganda of inferiority as reminders

of what not to do (*i.e.*, do not mess up, do not make a mistake or it will be another 60 years before a black man will be given this opportunity).

My autoethnographic literature brings attention to one new principal's experience within Florida. However, based on my research, I have several thoughts for black men aspiring to the principalship in a turnaround school. To my Brothas:

1. Actively seek out mentors of all genders and races,
2. Intentionally find black men you can trust within the public educational system, and
3. Focus on self-care and systematically implementing time to exercise and rest.

Being a black man in America is not a monolithic conversation among black men. As an offering to my brothers, I give this poem, manifested from my collective experiences as a black man achieving a milestone despite the generational illegality of *de jure* (by law) racial segregation we have endure collectively within America. I encourage you to win with reflexivity, develop sustainable systems, and get serious about self-care.

A Poem to Black Men

Harken unto me, so I can tell you the secret.
The secret that has been kept from you through the ages.
It was stolen from you at the shores of the Gold Coast,
ripped from you deep in the Mississippi Delta,
torn from you in the urban mecca amidst the chaos of the L-Trains and subways.
The secret my Brotha is you.
You are the secret to unlocking the greatness of education.
Your very existence gives testament to results of resilience.
Your blackness, Your boldness,
Your broad shoulders create a safe space.
Now is your time to systematically change the narrative, one smile at time.
You know your presence creates fear.
They will fear what they do not understand.
They will fear the bass in your voice, the swag in your stride
The eyes that do not bow down and run away.
Simultaneously your broad smile and melodic laugh
unlocks endless possibilities of wonder.
You speak like no other, you mentor like no other.
You give permission to the ostracized to soar.
The secret to success my Brotha is you.
Make us Proud

Adrian Anthony, Harken My Brothers, 2021

In the spirit of Sankofa, I offer poetry as a counter narrative, a method of "succession" and the goal to build our village while fostering educational success. The counter narratives act as a conduit to empower the next generation to replace me while dismantling institutional gendered racism in educational leadership.

Conclusion: In the Spirit of Sankofa

The Adinkra Dictionary proclaims that "Se wo were fin a wo Sankofa a yenkyi" (It is not a taboo to return and fetch it when you forget). (Willis, 1998; Tillman. 2010). As I end my principalship, I take a moment to reflect on my personal growth, professional voyage, and to inform my research. Within this exploration, I offered a counternarrative to the "deficit

ideologies and notions of "oppositional identity" that shape teacher and faculty beliefs about African American males in the education system" (Cokely, 2003; Lundy, 2003). Also, through my account of my principalship journey in a turnaround school recited in my own voice with the support of Dr. Amanda Birdsong for the first round of reflection May 2020. The second round of reflection is incorporated from the Brotha Circle in 2021, which provided a safe place to explore the concept of Sankofa by connecting the past with the present through poetic prose. So, tying this back to what I said about your poems. The history that I know did not come from my elementary school, it came from my Historically Black College (HBCU) experiences, from me doing my own research and also from listening to my mother, my first educator, and my grandparents, and my elders discuss the trials of our past. They urged me to survive and thrive through stories of the resilience in the face of racism. Reading poetic accounts from the Harlem Renaissance was a reawakening to the power we possess, how everything is all connected. You know how we're going through the same thing again, not exact same but we keep repeating the struggles, because we have never fully overcome those struggles" (Ramon, Brotha Circle, 2021).

I share my life experiences through poetic autoethnography with other ethnographers who have the desire to refine our research (Anderson, 2006). The counterstories I weaved intersect into a tapestry that unveils a deeper understanding of who I am as a principal and as a black man. I called upon the concept of Sankofa, requiring me to reflect in this space on my ancestors to give forward to my descendants. My final word is the west African term in Yoruba meaning to call in existence and give life… Ashe!

They will kill you and say you liked It … Excerpt from Zora Neale Hurston

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – USF Approval/Fair Use: Langston Hughes

University of South Florida

INSTRUCTIONS

Check all boxes that apply, and keep a copy of this form for your records. If you have questions, please contact the USF General Counsel or your USF Tampa Library Copyright Librarian.

Name: Adrian Anthony Date: 6-23-2021

Class or Project: USF ETD

Title of Copyrighted Work: Langston Hughes Dream Deferred

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Likely Supports Fair Use	Likely Does Not Support Fair Use
☐ Educational ☐ Teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use) ■ Research or Scholarship ■ Criticism, Parody, News Reporting or Comment ☐ Transformative Use (your new work relies on and adds new expression, meaning, or message to the original work) ☐ Restricted Access (to students or other appropriate group) ■ Nonprofit	☐ Commercial ☐ Entertainment ☐ Bad-faith behavior ☐ Denying credit to original author ☐ Non-transformative or exact copy ■ Made accessible on Web or to public ☐ Profit-generating use

Overall, the purpose and character of your use ■ supports fair use or ☐ does not support fair use.

NATURE OF THE COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

Likely Supports Fair Use	Likely Does Not Support Fair Use
☐ Factual or nonfiction ■ Important to favored educational objectives ■ Published work	■ Creative or fiction ☐ Consumable (workbooks, tests) ☐ Unpublished

Overall, the nature of the copyrighted material ■ supports fair use or ☐ does not support fair use.

AMOUNT AND SUBSTANTIALITY OF MATERIAL USED IN RELATION TO WHOLE

Likely Supports Fair Use	Likely Does Not Support Fair Use
■ Small amount (using only the amount necessary to accomplish the purpose) ■ Amount is important to favored socially beneficial objective (i.e. educational objectives) ☐ Lower quality from original (ex. Lower resolution or bitrate photos, video, and audio)	☐ Large portion or whole work ☐ Portion used is qualitatively substantial (i.e. it is the 'heart of the work') ☐ Similar or exact quality of original work

LeEtta Schmidt, lmschmidt@usf.edu and Drew Smith dsmith@usf.edu
Reviewed by USF General Counsel 08/11/2015

Overall, the amount and substantiality of material used in relation to the whole ■supports fair use or ☐does not support fair use.

EFFECT ON THE MARKET FOR ORIGINAL

Likely Supports Fair Use	Likely Does Not Support Fair Use
■ No significant effect on the market or potential market for the original ■ No similar product marketed by the copyright holder ☐ You own a lawfully acquired copy of the material ☐ The copyright holder is unidentifiable ☐ Lack of licensing mechanism for the material	☐ Replaces sale of copyrighted work ☐ Significantly impairs market or potential market for the work ☐ Numerous copies or repeated, long-term use ■ Made accessible on Web or to public ☐ Affordable and reasonably available permissions or licensing

Overall, the effect on the market for the original ■supports fair use or ☐does not support fair use.

CONCLUSION

The combined purpose and character of the use, nature of the copyrighted material, amount and substantiality of material used in relation to the whole and the effect on the market for the original

■likely supports fair use or ☐likely does not support fair use.

Note: Should your use of copyrighted material not support fair use, you may still be able to locate and request permissions from the copyright holder. For help on this, please feel free to contact your Copyright Librarian.

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Cornell University's Checklist for Conducting A Fair use Analysis Before Using Copyrighted Materials: https://copyright.cornell.edu/policies/docs/Fair_Use_Checklist.pdf

Crews, Kenneth D. (2008) Fair use Checklist. Columbia University Libraries Copyright Advisory Office. http://copyright.columbia.edu/copyright/files/2009/10/fairusechecklist.pdf

Smith, Kevin; Macklin, Lisa A.; Gilliland, Anne. A Framework for Analyzing any Copyright Problem. Retrieved from: https://d396qusza40orc.cloudfront.net/cfel/Reading%20Docs/A%20Framework%20for%20Analyzing%20any%20Copyright%20Problem.pdf

LeEtta Schmidt, lmschmidt@usf.edu and Drew Smith dsmith@usf.edu
Reviewed by USF General Counsel 08/11/2015

Appendix B – USF Approval/Fair Use: James Baldwin

University of South Florida

INSTRUCTIONS

Check all boxes that apply, and keep a copy of this form for your records. If you have questions, please contact the USF General Counsel or your USF Tampa Library Copyright Librarian.

Name: Adrian Anthony Date: 6-23-2021

Class or Project: USF ETD

Title of Copyrighted Work: James Baldwin Go tell it on the mountain

PURPOSE AND CHARACTER OF THE USE

Likely Supports Fair Use	Likely Does Not Support Fair Use
☐ Educational ☐ Teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use) ■ Research or Scholarship ■ Criticism, Parody, News Reporting or Comment ☐ Transformative Use (your new work relies on and adds new expression, meaning, or message to the original work) ☐ Restricted Access (to students or other appropriate group) ■ Nonprofit	☐ Commercial ☐ Entertainment ☐ Bad-faith behavior ☐ Denying credit to original author ☐ Non-transformative or exact copy ■ Made accessible on Web or to public ☐ Profit-generating use

Overall, the purpose and character of your use ■ supports fair use or ☐ does not support fair use.

NATURE OF THE COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

Likely Supports Fair Use	Likely Does Not Support Fair Use
☐ Factual or nonfiction ■ Important to favored educational objectives ■ Published work	■ Creative or fiction ☐ Consumable (workbooks, tests) ☐ Unpublished

Overall, the nature of the copyrighted material ■ supports fair use or ☐ does not support fair use.

AMOUNT AND SUBSTANTIALITY OF MATERIAL USED IN RELATION TO WHOLE

Likely Supports Fair Use	Likely Does Not Support Fair Use
■ Small amount (using only the amount necessary to accomplish the purpose) ■ Amount is important to favored socially beneficial objective (i.e. educational objectives) ☐ Lower quality from original (ex. Lower resolution or bitrate photos, video, and audio)	☐ Large portion or whole work ☐ Portion used is qualitatively substantial (i.e. it is the 'heart of the work') ☐ Similar or exact quality of original work

LeEtta Schmidt, lmschmidt@usf.edu and Drew Smith dsmith@usf.edu
Reviewed by USF General Counsel 08/11/2015

Overall, the amount and substantiality of material used in relation to the whole ■supports fair use or ☐does not support fair use.

EFFECT ON THE MARKET FOR ORIGINAL

Likely Supports Fair Use	Likely Does Not Support Fair Use
■ No significant effect on the market or potential market for the original ■ No similar product marketed by the copyright holder ☐ You own a lawfully acquired copy of the material ☐ The copyright holder is unidentifiable ☐ Lack of licensing mechanism for the material	☐ Replaces sale of copyrighted work ☐ Significantly impairs market or potential market for the work ☐ Numerous copies or repeated, long-term use ■ Made accessible on Web or to public ☐ Affordable and reasonably available permissions or licensing

Overall, the effect on the market for the original ■supports fair use or ☐does not support fair use.

CONCLUSION

The combined purpose and character of the use, nature of the copyrighted material, amount and substantiality of material used in relation to the whole and the effect on the market for the original

■likely supports fair use or ☐likely does not support fair use.

Note: Should your use of copyrighted material not support fair use, you may still be able to locate and request permissions from the copyright holder. For help on this, please feel free to contact your Copyright Librarian.

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Smith, Kevin; Macklin, Lisa A.; Gilliland, Anne. A Framework for Analyzing any Copyright Problem. Retrieved from: https://d396qusza40orc.cloudfront.net/cfel/Reading%20Docs/A%20Framework%20for%20Analyzing%20any%20Copyright%20Problem.pdf

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Reviewed by USF General Counsel 08/11/2015