

Brown v. Board of Education, Interest Convergence,
and The Need to Revamp Teacher Education Programs

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Although meant to be a step toward educational equality, the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) is more accurately an example of enclosure. Despite the fact that desegregation was rejected by many white Americans, as evidenced by the decades of denial to acquiesce to court orders, the courts managed to overturn the long-held belief of “separate but equal” put forth by *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). This paper is a brief look into the possible underlying reasons for a reversal of *Plessy*, forced desegregation across the nation, and the negative impact (foreseen or not) on Black education.

The current system of education was developed based on the Freedman model for education. However, this model was not to exist without the overlay of White supremacy through the formation of government oversight (Anderson, 1988, p. 4). During the Reconstruction Era and prior to the *Plessy* decision, Black people experienced a very short period of inclusion. Such inclusion paved the way for excellence in education. (Anderson, 1988, p. 2) However, this inclusion was not to last. The control for education would be further removed from Black communities by the “separate but equal” doctrine. But this doctrine would eventually prove costly as subsequent court rulings would order that separate and unequal schools be made equal, presumably through the balancing of funding inequities. (Bell, 1980, p. 524). If American schools were to continue in this vein, then the control of Black education would slip away.

Bell (1980) argues that the *Brown* decision was based on external issues that resulted in what is termed “interest convergence”. Bell (1980) posited, “The interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites” (p. 523). That is, *Brown* would afford several benefits to White supremacy culture: (1) “...provide immediate credibility to America’s struggle with Communist countries to win the hearts and minds of emerging third world peoples,” (2) respond to the fear that disillusioned Black people would rise up the Soviet Union, and (3) segregation was “viewed as a barrier to further industrialization in the South” (Bell, 1980, p. 525).

Desegregation efforts could be seen as a type of enclosure. Clyde Woods (1998) argued that enclosures are “processes enacted by regional blocs during particular historic moments in an attempt to ‘gain control over

resources and over the ideological and distributed institutions governing their allocation' (p. 26 as cited in Sojoyner, 2013, p. 242). By this definition, the Brown decision was an attempt to gain control over Black education and thereby gain control over the "commodity" of Black labor.

The overall effect of the Brown decision and policies meant to enforce this ruling is that it served to usher American education into a new era of colonialism. Whereas under "separate but equal" predominantly Black schools were gaining autonomy and traction as courts ordered that underfunded schools be made equal, *Brown* changed the trajectory of Black education. Today, Black children attend schools that are both racially segregated and inferior - thus the education debt has not only been maintained, but has increased (Bell, 1980; Ladson-Billings, 2006, Gay, 2014). Furthermore, "...U.S. school enrollments are concentrated by race, ethnicity, and economics, and students of color in urban areas are not receiving education comparable in quality to their peers in other residential locations (Center for Public Education, 2012 as cited in Gay, 2014, p. 354). Despite desegregation efforts spurred by *Brown* and subsequent policies, the fundamental complaint of unequal education continues.

Existing solutions attempt to address the effects of enclosure. Solutions such as culturally relevant teaching (Gay, 2014) provide insight as to the specific methodology of connecting to students in the current multicultural landscape. It uses "the cultural orientations, heritages, and background experiences of students of color as referents and resources to improve their school achievement" (Gay, 2014). Culturally relevant teaching seeks to address the issues that stem from segregation. Despite the concentration of racially and ethnically diverse students in urban areas and the positive possibilities of culturally responsive teaching, this information has not made its way to teacher preparation programs (Gay, 2014; Kumar, Zusho & Bondie, 2018).

One possibility is to revamp teacher preparation programs to include a more robust preparation for teaching diverse students. Ladson-Billings (2013), in the consideration of interest convergence, urges civil rights leaders to "look for ways to align the interests of the dominant group with those of racially oppressed and marginalized groups" (p. 37). One facet of culturally relevant teaching is to move from a deficit mentality to a possibility mentality. And as Gay (2014) argued, "Precedents for this logic exist in other educational ideologies such as scaffolding, or building on students' prior knowledge and experiences, expanding horizons of learning, and zones of proximal development" (p. 359). In short, culturally relevant teaching is just "good teaching". Inasmuch, all students -- regardless of race or ethnicity -- will benefit from good teaching.

There are several reasons to implement culturally responsive teaching into teacher preparation programs. First and foremost, it works. Aronson and Laughter (2016) reported that “engagement in CRRE [Culturally Relevant and Responsive Education] was associated with increases in students’ motivation to learn, interest in curricular content, and sense of academic competence” (as cited in Kumar et. al, 2018, p. 85). Additionally, Cochran-Smith (2000, 2004) and Ladson-Billings (2011) both attributed high attrition rates to lack of preparation (as cited in Gay, 2014). Furthermore, “motivation research assumes that individuals are motivated toward competence” (Kumar et. al, 2018, p. 84). Therefore, just as students are motivated by competence, high attrition rates may be mitigated by increasing the competence of teachers to work in diverse settings.

To accomplish this goal, university programs will need to investigate the stated goals and actual impact of their teacher education programs. Over 15 years ago, a large number of teacher education programs were geared toward “social justice.” If one is to assume that these programs were successful, then there should be a large number of socially and culturally adept educators flooding the school systems. However, there has been no change in the achievement gap. Therefore, universities must honestly review their impact versus their intent. Rueda (2011) outlines such change as he describes the revision of the University of Southern California’s Rossier School of Education. Rueda (2011) stated that “A schoolwide 3-day conference was held, with the primary goal to create a new direction for the Rossier School and to overcome its problems” (p. 63). This work resulted in “[t]eams of faculty work[ing] intensely on new courses, requirements and other features of the program, starting with an analysis of who the students were and what their needs would require in their urban school settings” (p. 64). Rossier School of Education has moved beyond publishing and research and has taken action. The hope is that many more universities - and educators - will do the same.

References

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