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Education Is Transformation: The Impact of Attitudes

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EDUCATION IS TRANSFORMATION: THE IMPACT OF ATTITUDES

By

ROBERT DECAUL

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in the Liberal Arts program in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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Robert DeCaul

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Arts in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

Education Is Transformation: The Impact of Attitudes

By

Robert DeCaul

Advisor: Susan Semel

Attending college in the United States has made it impossible for me to not reflect on my education experience in the Caribbean. My memories of school reach as far back as kindergarten, and though I only attended college here, my course work in urban education policy has exposed me to the theoretical and real-world problems facing education in the United States – past and present. I struggled with and hated school at times in my education career. I believe that in some small way education in the United States is a fraud – the money and the politics at times do not seem to work in the best interest of the student. Despite my belief I also consider myself successful because of my education. And my conflicting thoughts prompted me to start thinking about what truly informs success? Is it one's education, career type, and socioeconomic status? I believe that more than ever before these three criteria appear to define our understanding of what success is. However, the development and transformation of education in the United States, which is marred by racism, has historically disadvantaged segments of our population especially in cities with a predominantly black population. New Orleans being a perfect example. Hurricane Katrina put the spotlight on education in New Orleans as the storm's devastation of the city exposed the myriad of problems education was facing. This thesis is an exploration of my life and a discussion of the attitudes I have experienced towards education and educating in the

United States. It illustrates that the way education is perceived, the support a student receives, and the attitudes about who is deserving can be caging or liberating for the student. Further, it discusses other aspects affecting the success of education including socioeconomic status, ethnicity, funding, and politics and demonstrates that education leads to transformation through a synopsis of three films, each with a different education focus.

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Introduction

This thesis is composed of three parts. It begins with a brief autobiography sketch. I am foreign born and received my primary and secondary¹ education in the Caribbean. I moved to the United States in young adulthood and was amazed by the differences and similarities in the attitudes about education at my colleges and through my studies – including my minority counterparts’ attitudes and attitudes about educating minority students. These attitudes along with mine will be explained and later contrasted against historical attitudes towards educating minorities in New Orleans. A brief examination of education in New Orleans is ideal within this context because the historical development of education in that city exemplifies the longstanding effects of racism and the shaping of attitudes toward education attainment for certain populations. Throughout the institution and particularly affecting the city’s black population, socioeconomics, ethnicity, and other factors show high correlation with the degree of success blacks in the city obtain if success is measured through education attainment (Sirin 445). This examination will begin with a brief history of education for blacks in New Orleans and provide details on the status of education in the city post hurricane Katrina while trying to define a purpose and importance of education through the foundations perspective. I conclude my thoughts by examining three films which tell different stories about the impact of education on the teacher, the student, and society. The overarching goal of this concluding section is to demonstrate that education is transformative and that to ignore, dismiss, or downplay any issues that exist whereby attainment disadvantages individuals is to do the individual and society an injustice.

¹ This is the equivalent to junior school and high school in the United States

Chapter 1: My Story

Writing this thesis made me anxious, very anxious, and I felt like a bomb was dropped on my thoughts. However, I knew I was interested in writing about my education experience in one way or another. I wanted to – I needed to share how what I learned and experienced during my time at school in the Caribbean and in the United States impacted my life. What made me most anxious was understanding that I needed to be honest and share things about my life that I had not shared before. Situations that seem unconnected but are; and that my story could only be told through my connection to education. Some of those thoughts also included the way I felt about my family, about colleagues, and other aspects of my life. But, while writing, I realized it was so much more than sharing situations and circumstances about my life. I was puzzled by the differences in my outlook on education, the apathetic attitudes of my classmates throughout my years of study, and how education translated for different people depending on socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and other factors. Why did I possess motivations about education different from my classmates? Did an “A” minus (A-) mean I was failing? I felt like it did. Yet, on several occasions in different classes at different schools I overheard some of my classmates say that they “would be happy just to get a passing grade” on a project or for a class. Then, I had to consider factors of my upbringing before immigrating to the United States. Did my family’s attitudes towards education influence me more than I thought? Was my pride so strong that my need to prove myself became my driving force? Did attending private school and having good financial support play a bigger part in my educational success than I previously realized? Did the color of my skin influence my experiences? And what I realized is that my ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and other factors played a much bigger role in my education experience and outcomes than I previously cared to believe.

It was early in my graduate studies that I identified with and discovered that I am heavily interested in the state of education in New Orleans. Especially the racially driven, historical aspects of how a predominantly black city appears to marginalize the educating of certain ethnicities. Education and the institution in New Orleans continue to suffer from reverberating attitudes of racism while ignoring the historical context as a factor hindering achievement and success for blacks in the city. These factors cannot continue to be ignored. As Al Kennedy of the University of New Orleans explains in *The History of Public Education in New Orleans Still Matters*, “[t]o ignore the history of racism” (4), not only diminishes the struggle and strides of those who have made tremendous gains in education for blacks in New Orleans, but it also endorses and ignores the cost of white supremacy. I hope that while writing this thesis I will gain a better understanding of my interest in education in New Orleans and what changes I would like to see. And so, I believe for both of our understanding I must begin with my story.

I come from a broken family. My mother and father were separated before I was born. Growing up with my father’s parents, or as my mother calls them, “my white grandparents,” it became apparent through my mother’s stories that issues of ethnicity and class existed in my household. I now recognize more than before the stark differences between my mother and father’s attitudes about life, and towards education. Thus, I will talk a little about my parent’s history for context. Due to difficulties communicating with my father, this discussion is primarily based on interactions between my mother and me. Her story begins with how she interprets the events leading up to her immigration to the United States. My mother’s story as she tells it reads:

During my early twenties, I began dating your father though our families didn’t like it. They [his family] saw me as the poor black girl from the country, and not good enough

for their son. We however refused to stop seeing each other and the growing strain on our relationship forced us to elope. But word soon got back to your grandfather², who immediately set out to break us up, and he succeeded. We got back together briefly two years later. During this time, you were born, and shortly after that your father disappeared again. I eventually found out he was dating someone else. This other woman however, your father's parents approved of and your father tried to get sole custody of you saying that he will give you a real mother. After years of fighting with your father and his family, I gave up. My freedom was one thousand dollars and a multiple-indefinite visa if I agreed to turn you over to them...

That day it was as though you knew something was wrong. You put your arms around my neck and began to cry. Nothing I did would get you to stop crying. You liked ice cream. I bought you some and you threw it on the ground. You liked money. I gave you a hundred-dollar bill and you threw it away... until finally, I could not take it anymore and I ripped your arms from around my neck and I left you crying on the floor in their office...

I find my mom's perspective confusing, perhaps a little fabricated, but nonetheless interesting. She is now sixty-two years old. I am thirty-four, and we currently live together as she recovers from breast cancer treatment. She verbally expresses emotional distress and remnants of physical trauma. She sometimes talks about being sexually abused as a child, her victimization, abandonment, and separation, which trumps the fact that we are now reunified³. She constantly says that her experiences influence her decision-making and perspectives. She says her life experiences began with sexual abuse by her stepfather. Abandoned by her mother, she says she

² My father's father.

developed a very close relationship with her grandmother, which helped her to cope. However, she expresses regret for not having finished high school. And I see her struggle daily with her regret.

My mother says she is misunderstood and expresses this sentiment in bouts of ‘irrational’ anger and through arguments. She is very intolerant of opinions that vary from hers. This is usually why we argue when we do. She thinks that I hate her and says that I do not know how to love. During our arguments, she refers to the treatment that she received from her mother and says that I will miss her when she is dead because “she is the best mother I will ever have.” I feel as though she wants my validation and attention while reliving her mother’s rejection of her. She does not agree with my choices and says that I am this way because she did not raise me. I feel like she projects her guilt of her past onto me, unable to internalize/externalize the circumstances of our separation. I dare not mention that she was not around when I was growing up as this takes our arguments to new explosive levels in which she reacts with threats of violence.

At other times, when I engage her, she goes to great lengths to make me happy. Though I am now an adult, she asks if I need anything, is concerned about my safety outside our home, and will cook dinner for me. This feels strange and forced at times. However, she grows angry when I am not hungry. Matters escalate when I do not eat everything she has cooked for me. This is very stressful for me. My mom says she must care for herself because no one does. She constantly compares her well-being to that of my father, and makes negative remarks about me to other people by comparing me to him. The most appalling aspect of my reunification experience with my mother has been the sense of entitlement that she projects with her expectations of how she thinks I should treat her. Not having the experience of raising children –

³ See Putnam 150 – 159. A discussion on the effects of childhood trauma.

she has four, but cared for none – my mother was almost incapable of delivering any of the support that I needed after our reunification and my subsequent transition through emerging adulthood. An artifact of her own life circumstances, she is unable to see the impact her decisions and behaviors have on me and others. I also contribute this to her lack of education.

I feel like my relationship with my mother has negatively influenced my struggles with my autonomy, friendships, academics, conduct, career, and romance. According to the American Psychological Association, emerging adulthood encompasses ages eighteen through twenty-nine and concludes five defining characteristics: identity exploration; instability; self-focus; feeling in between, and the age of possibilities (Munsey 68). In 2004, the results from a longitudinal study conducted by Roisman, Masten, Coatsworth, and Tellegen, realized that successful development into and through emerging adulthood is highly predictive based on links between friendships, academics, conduct, career and romance. Roisman et al., referenced these factors as salient developmental tasks and defined a salient developmental task as one in which “the benchmarks of adaptation that are specific to a developmental period... are contextualized by prevailing sociocultural and historically embedded expectations” (123–133).

Returning to the five defining characteristics of emerging adulthood, I suffered primarily with not knowing who I was, or rather, not understanding who I am. I did not feel like I belonged or was welcomed in my family or at school. Though it was partly my choice to immigrate to the United States to be with my mother, my expectation at age twenty-two was that I would easily embrace a new form of freedom. This would come from being in an environment in which my biological mother fostered my development through encouragement of my personal goals supported by her own experience, wisdom, and care. Instead, what I experienced was a complete sense of turmoil because we constantly fought as she was trying to mold me to be everything that

she was not, and that she could not be. She offered no supportive direction, and instead she constantly diminished my sense of worth and self-esteem by demanding I adhere to her authoritarian style of parenting. My mother went so far as to threaten to lock me out of the house on many occasions because “I was not the person she wanted me to be,” calling me dog shit, and reiterating how stupid she thought I was. I had no choice but to forego adjustment into any positive new identity in my unfamiliar environment. This in effect was the catalyst of a downward spiral, which surfaced through extreme rebellion, and ultimately my loss of interest in returning to school to advance my studies and my planned career goals. Later, it became apparent that I lacked the emotional competency to be in any sort of romantic relationship and instead based my romantic relationships strictly on sex. According to Roisman et al., my mother had failed to provide the “domains for which adaptation in one development period [would] anticipate [adaptation] success in the next” (130). In retrospect, I realize that at age thirty-four, I am now developing the social and personal skills necessary to succeed in my environment. I have finally broken through a majority of my self-sabotaging behaviors not with the help of my mother, but with the help of supportive friends, coworkers, and teachers who see my potential and are willing to help me. My mother had successfully channeled her emotional distress onto me as is explained in *Immigrant Children and Youth: Psychological Challenges*, where Bursztyn & Korn-Bursztyn, discuss the effects of immigration and trauma and outline that:

traumatized individuals may seek to avoid revisiting [their] experiences... they may enter potentially self-destructive repetitious patterns to gain a sense of mastery over the initial traumatizing event... [they] will have greater difficulty establishing trusting

relationships, following routines, and modulating their emotions ... (Bursztyn & Korn-Bursztyn 5)

To date, my experiences with my mother closely reflect Bursztyn & Korn-Bursztyn's findings. I am now aware that my tense relationship with my mother after immigrating to the United States was predicated on my arrival and the subsequent stirring of memories from her experiences. Essentially, my arrival revived a generational, perpetual cycle influenced by her own traumas, which she now transfers through her treatment of me. A cycle that began with her mother or possibly her grandmother and was influenced by her minimal education, and issues that she believed to be related to her ethnicity, socioeconomic status and other factors.

My environment felt so uncomfortable and so empty. It was a period in my life that I never felt more alone and contemplated suicide. According to research conducted by Masten, Best, and Germezy in which they studied (a) good outcomes in high-risk children, (b) sustained competence in children under stress, and (c) recovery from trauma, they "concluded that human psychological development is highly buffered and that long-lasting consequences of adversity are usually associated with either organic damage or severe interference in the normative protective processes embedded in the caregiving system." (425-444). As such, I was separated from my mother for nearly two decades. During that time, I received what I felt like what was minimal support from my secondary caregivers while tackling their demands that I get an education and succeed (not be like my parents) all while having had minimal contact with my mother. Upon reunifying with my mother, I soon realized that I had substituted minimally supportive caregiving for even less supportive caregiving. During the first few years with my mother, issues surrounding relationships, religion, autonomy, and money immersed. I felt trapped and

contemplated suicide as issues of sexual identity also began to surface. On these issues, I was harassed and verbally abused by my mother. According to research conducted by Lenore Terr, my mother exhibited these behaviors because of her own traumas. She “visualized or otherwise repeatedly perceived memories of her traumatic events, repetitive behaviors, trauma-specific fears, and [changing] attitudes about people, life, and the future,” (Terr 322–334), which she played out in her behaviors and attitudes towards and about me. Still seeking the love and support of my mother, I found that I wanted her validation so badly that I subjected myself to her wishes despite her treatment of me (Walker et al. 332–339). To the outside observer I appeared to be a normally functioning person. However, inwardly I began to isolate myself and my interest in school and having a successful future were further arrested.

Another major issue that developed between my mother and I was that of my ethnicity, also linked to the question of my identity as a mixed person. Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, discuss the topic of biculturalism and the effects of race and identity (101–114). Their paper touched on the growth of diversity, globalization and what acculturation now entails. Growing up in the Caribbean in a primarily black country, I was racially stigmatized because I am light-skinned. Upon arrival in the United States, I quickly learned about other depths of *racism*. It went beyond what I would experience outside my home, but rather, was a primary topic during our arguments, at which time my mother would raise the issue of skin color and education in defense of what she considered to be me mistreating her. In turn, I developed exasperated issues related to my education, complexion, and ethnic identity because I felt like there was no safe environment to which I belonged. Thus, like Fisher, Appiah-Kusi and Grant explain in “Anxiety and Negative Self Schemas Mediate the Association between Childhood Maltreatment and Paranoia,” I developed irrational behaviors in the belief that people “were out to get me” (Fisher et al. 323–

324; Appiah-Kusi and Grant 323–324). I was a bad person because of my skin color. And I feel it was because my education made my mother [feel] inferior to me.

I hit rock bottom after freely exploring my sexuality. Living in the United States opened many doors to sexual experiences that I had never had before or even thought about. I began to engage in same-sex encounters through which I suppose I was receiving a type of attention that I felt I never had before. Unfortunately, one of my sexual encounters led to me being sexually assaulted, which I feel I have never fully recovered from. According to Goyer & Eddleman, victims of male on male rape “reported subsequent mood disturbances such as fear, depression, and anger; disturbances in sleep and appetite; and difficulties in peer and interpersonal relationships” (576–579). To date I have been unable to develop a secure and trusting relationship with any romantic partner of any sex. I had essentially exaggerated my longstanding issues by being a victim of an incident for which said issues correlate. Some years after my assault, I went to therapy through which most the issues discussed in the paper were brought to the forefront.

I am learning day-by-day to release the negative feelings I harbor. I search for who I should appropriately blame, and defeated, I regretfully admit that some of my choices were not good. Should I have reunified with my mother? Before leaving my former country, I envisioned my reunification with my mother as a wonderful, loving experience in which I would receive the care and affection I had seen others receive from their parent(s). What I had not considered, which I did not have the tools to make an adequate assessment of, is that I did not know my mother or her history. I did not know the truth behind why she chose⁴ to leave the country and me to move to the United States. I could not have perceived that after twenty years she would

⁴ Despite the circumstances I believe it was her choice to leave because she was looking for an easy escape.

still harbor such strong feelings as to drive her own negative behavior and treatment towards me. In retrospect, I realize that my mother never at any point-in-time asked if I wanted to come and live with her.

Therapy has helped me tremendously by being able to identify my mother's behaviors as abusive. That abuse I do attribute to the sequence of poor decisions that I began to make shortly after moving to the United States to be with her. Drinking, fighting, sexual promiscuity, same sex hookups, smoking, and a general disinterest in developing myself as a functional individual I feel stemmed from my mother's inability to impart the tools that would help me developmentally during reunification. As a result, I sometimes still question my identity in many respects. As years go by and I reflect on some of the situations that happened between my mother and me, I cannot help but wonder how differently she may have handled our relationship if she had the opportunity for more experiences, and access to more education. My mom, who became almost reclusive after separating from my father never finished high school because of a lack of financial resources. These details I learned much later after living together.

Chapter 2: Education Autobiography

As a child, I was sure that I wanted to be a pilot, a chef, a doctor, and anything else that I could imagine. I was told I could be anything I wanted to be; like so many of my classmates I am sure. However, I always feared school and my fear increased as I got older. Not because I performed poorly, or because I did not have friends. But because I went to a very competitive school. Some would argue it is the best school in my country. I grew up in Grenada, and my junior and senior school, or as they are called in Grenada, primary and secondary school are private. Parents paid an exorbitant amount to send their children to learn in small cohorts where each child would receive one-on-one time with their teachers. The performance pressure was tremendous. Starting with about ten subject areas in primary school, each successive year in secondary school meant the addition of one or more new subject areas. At grade thirteen I was carrying about fifteen subjects a week, which ranged from mathematics to physical education, arts, and languages. It was not until the end of grade thirteen that I could pick which subjects I wanted to focus on in preparation for final testing and graduation, which we call CXC⁵. I could pick twelve subjects for CXC⁵ my based on my interests and my performance throughout secondary school. And, despite this level of pressure and expectation, it was normal that the wealthiest families – the most “cultured” – sent their children to this private school.

In secondary school, once a quarter term we had mark reading. Mark reading was a summary of each student’s performance for the given quarter and showed parents where their child placed performance-wise against their peers. Parents could also visit the school on mark reading day and further discuss their child’s performance with his/her teachers. There was also a half year and an end of year testing assessment besides regular quizzes and interval tests. End of

⁵ See Caribbean Examinations Council

year testing reports were much more in depth. The principal of the school spoke with each child's teachers and gave a written assessment along with an average grade in each subject area.

Typically, I placed in the top five students in my class, and yet I was embarrassed to show my report card. I felt that to place fifth in a class of thirty was not good enough. Especially because after seventh place the gap in grades starkly fell off. Imagine how nerve-wrecking something like that was; the pressure to perform was intense.

In recollection, I did not perform poorly. At the time, I was hard on myself because of my perception of the general expectation compared to my classmates. Later my self-assessment was relative to what I saw and experienced in my education post my departure from school in Grenada. Placements were tight with the top three positions typically rounding out to ninety-eight or ninety-nine percent based on performance in the fifteen subject areas. As the final year of secondary school approached I lost sight of what I thought I wanted to do with my life – what I wanted to be when I left secondary school. It did not help that I was constantly compounded by my family with the demand that I attend college and “make something of myself.” If at that time someone could have clearly explained to me what that statement meant my life may have been different. I now realize that my grandparents' level of education only allowed them to explain things to me as clearly as their struggles allowed them to.

Another aspect was that in my school we typically graduate early. At around fifteen or sixteen years old the average student is finished with high school and may move on to O Levels⁶, which is a two-year education bridge before entering university. I opted to skip O Levels because it meant I would attend a public school. I was terrified of being around other local students, who, as it was told, despised kids going to my school. Coming from a wealthy family and going to

⁶ The equivalent of obtaining an Associates of Arts degree

private school all my life had skewed my perspective on the type of education I wanted. Forced to continue school before I felt like I was ready to, and without being able to pick the school I wanted to go to, I reluctantly attended a local Americanized university and made a total mess of my time there. Just days before the semester began my grandfather handed me a blank check and said, "Take this and make sure you get into school." I did not even apply for the college. But luckily the university very welcoming of locals as it was helping to build the school's reputation. A few days later I received confirmation that I was enrolled at the St. George's University School of Medicine in the business management program. I did well enough to remain enrolled, but I did not really try. I was lazy about school and failed to see the value in what I was doing because it was not my interest. I spent most of my time hanging out with campus friends and after two years I had had grown bored. I needed a way out and decided that my only option was to move to the United States. I was a spoiled child. Traveled but with no experience of living on my own or taking care of myself. Under those circumstances, my only quick solution was to move to New York and live with my mother, who I barely knew. With the promise to myself to continue school and to study what I wanted to when I decided to, I hastily had the arrangements made, packed, and left – goodbye Grenada. I did not feel any remorse for leaving abruptly.

My life in New York was a bigger mess than it was in Grenada. Years passed and I never enrolled in school. I managed to get a job with a law office and made a relatively decent amount of money, and I used it to party every week. As the days, weeks, months, and then years passed, I diverted further and further away from any plans I had when I was younger. Until I had my first "adult" relationship. And, I must admit I was proud and jealous of my partner. A special education teacher, leader of several education interest groups, and still on an ambitious path to

make life what they⁷ wanted to be. I still question their interest in me and the answer is always, “I see potential.” Something awoke in me and shortly after meeting I was inspired to enroll in an associate’s degree program and did so at the Borough of Manhattan Community College. The fear of school welled inside of me. I had not attended classes for almost eight years. And while I ambitiously decided to start from square one to obtain my degree⁸ I was truly scared. Scared I was stupid; and scared of how competitive it would be in a class filled with younger minds. Scared of judgment and failure. But then, with my first semester report, I maintained a perfect GPA and was whole-heartedly motivated. I met brilliant and caring professors along the way who opened my eyes to my new possibilities by simply believing in me. I felt like education had opened the doors to a whole new world once again. One in which I began to push myself harder and harder with each semester. I was determined to go all the way – i.e. a Master’s degree, perhaps a Ph.D., – in as little time as possible with the best grades possible. All who said I would be a failure; those who thought I would do nothing “good” with my life I would prove wrong. I obtained my associate’s degree in a year and a quarter. I did that by taking the maximum number of credits each semester, and by taking the maximum number of credits during the six-week summer intensive. The summer intensive was truly intensive. It consisted of two parts, six credits over three weeks, and classes Monday through Friday for two hours with coursework equivalent to that of a regular semester. And I was glad I did it. Graduation came quickly as a result and I moved on to undergraduate degree at John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

As I matured in undergraduate at John Jay some of my professors took an interest in me. I was told that I had a look in my eyes that read as a desire or a thirst for learning. And I truly did,

⁷ I prefer to speak in gender neutral terms.

⁸ I did not want to include any of my former college education towards my degree work. In some way I felt ashamed and was fearful of judgment.

initially. I felt like undergraduate school was an amazing experience as an adult. At the time, I was determined to be a forensic psychologist. I thought the field would suit my personality. I considered myself analytical, keen, clever, detail oriented, and interested in the morbidity that would be attached to a career in that field. But I was also ignorant of the reality of that area of study, but then again, I was not truly sure. And it was in my first semester that I picked a course that I thought was ethics, when on the first day of class I realized it was a course on ethnics. I mean what the hell is ethnics – I did not know and I felt stupid. I did not drop the class even though it was not part of my academic plan. I found the course very stimulating. It was a discussion of the evolution of the African American and it spotlighted the ill-treatment of blacks in the United States. After writing my first term paper for the course the professor approached me and asked me to join her in her office. It was a stimulating conversation, which did not surprise me as the course was also. In our conversation, I discovered that I was not sure what I wanted to do with my life. That hurt because I had convinced myself that I was going to be a forensic psychologist. I was told two things based on my term paper for the course. I should consider applying for the Ronald E. McNair program⁹ and that I might want to think about changing my area of study to something anthropological. It took me some time, but after carefully considering how my academic progress would be affected, I officially changed my degree work to culture and deviance studies with the department of anthropology. I also applied for the McNair program and was accepted after an intense interview process. Two semesters later though I still had good grades I dropped out of the McNair program because I could not decide what I wanted to study for my program project.

⁹ The McNair program has strict guidelines on who qualifies for entry is a way for undergraduate students to begin the process of Ph.D. work. See <https://mcnairscholars.com/about/>

My grades in general were still good and I was not too far from graduating. The rest of my time as an undergraduate felt less and less fulfilling. I met other brilliant and friendly professors, but I felt like I was on an education path that led to nowhere. My mind was so unsettled. I felt defeated and so wasteful. School became pointless because I did not know what I was doing anymore or why. I was close to graduating and I had no idea what I would do for my professional career. I was not sure what would happen after I graduated and I felt stupid once again for not knowing who to talk to and about what. Graduating magna cum laude from John Jay and without any real forethought on what I would do after undergrad I applied to the CUNY Graduate Center and was accepted into the women's, gender, and sexuality program. In recollection, what was I going to do with a degree in women's, gender, and sexuality studies?

I cannot say I entirely liked the CUNY Graduate Center. Some professors were snooty and standoffish and seemed like they only favored you if you were a part of their following. I was not there to worship anyone. I was there to learn and receive guidance, which came far and in between. Administrative staff knew so little I was better off just trying to figure things out on my own. There are many instances that I regret asking questions. At times, I regret applying to the Graduate Center master's degree program. I shared my dissatisfaction with friends who were attending other CUNY schools such as City College, and their sentiments were almost the same. It was not all bad though. Once again there were a couple of professors who still possessed a passion for teaching and learning and that was easy to pick up on. Those few professors are really who kept me going when I felt like completing a master's degree was useless.

And I tried to surround myself with them as much as possible. It was through their guidance that I switched my area of study from women's, gender, and sexuality to urban

education policy. I did not think that classes at the Graduate Center were particularly hard but they did require a greater level of effort.

Every so often my two closest friends would ask me what I was studying at the Graduate Center and I replied quickly saying urban education policy. They in turn responded with “what does that mean, what can you do with that, and how will you make money?” I remember one evening on the phone with a friend who at the time was attending City College. She said to me that she was glad that I did all the things I wanted to do in school, but now what since I am close to being done. And that got me thinking, and scared, and worried. What would I do? It was that evening that I got online and started searching for jobs in education. On the New York City Department of Education website, I found a listing for an internship. The application period was to close in one day so I hastily prepared my resume and cover and applied. A few days later I received an email inviting me to interview for the internship. After two interviews, I was offered the internship and happily accepted. It has been almost two years and I still work with the same unit I applied for the internship with. I have grown so much and can say that I never thought I would enjoy what I do as much as I do. I currently hold the title of data analyst and every day at work is a joy. The focus of my work is data collection and analysis through a drive to change the culture of employees in administrative offices at the New York City Department of Education. Known as the Employee Engagement and Development Initiative, we oversee that employees in Central offices have access to resources that can help them grow professionally and find satisfaction in their work.

Our overarching goal is the hope that the engagement work that we do trickles down to positive outcomes for New York City students¹⁰. With everything that I learned throughout my time at the Graduate Center and at my other schools I now wonder how the experience of education translates for others and how those experiences are influenced by the attitudes of those who operate the education field. I now understand some of the historical attitudes about who is deserving of education in New Orleans, and how those historical attitudes still influence student outcomes today.

¹⁰ The Employee Engagement and Development Initiative (EE&D) is a people management strategy that provides learning opportunities for all Central, Field, and Superintendent Office employees, in an effort to build capacity and retain talent across Central Office. Access to high quality development opportunities; An environment where continuous learning is valued and supported; A system of supports for ongoing feedback and professional growth; and Opportunities to actively engage with each other, leadership, and new ways of thinking across functions.

Chapter 3: A Seed Is Planted

Horace Mann believed that the social goals of schooling should be “to reduce crime through moral instruction, and [serve] to break down the barriers between the rich and the poor.” Mann thought that the social issue of crime could be abated from an early age through schooling and instruction. Worried that industrialization would widen the gap between owners of capital and the laborer, Mann shared his thoughts on the rise of inequity because of growing social stratification and felt that education would be that which would “counter-work [the] tendency to the domination of capital and [the] servility of labor,” as result of such relationship (Morgan web 1936).

James Baldwin was heavily influenced by Horace Mann’s philosophy on education (Morgan web 1936). As a result, and as advocate, Baldwin in 1841 funded the first school in New Orleans¹¹ under the intention that all classes and color of people in New Orleans were to be allowed to attend. Yet, from the onset blacks were significantly disadvantaged in terms of education attainment. Despite the pledge to be a nondiscriminatory school system on foundation and practice, governance adhered to the ideology of the 1724 Code Noir, which placed severe limitations on what educating blacks meant. Black learning thus was relegated to “what was necessary for religious life” (Baker 15). Similarly, through the 1830s, local ordinance prevented the education of slaves through the fear of punishment of up to “a month in prison” should a white person be found teaching a slave to read (Baker 15).

The first major act of desegregation in schools in New Orleans began in 1868 and lasted through 1871. Following the Civil War and Louisianan’s surrender to the Union, public schools were opened to all freed slaves by way of the free schools established by federal troops. During

¹¹ See New Orleans Parish School Board (2016). History of Education in New Orleans

this brief period of desegregation public schools housed up to one thousand black students across nineteen mixed race schools (Cowen Institute web 2010). In response to the inclusion of blacks into public schools, all-white schools were opened for families who did not want integrated schools, and could afford to send their children to such private schools (Cowen Institute web 2010). Soon after Union troops left New Orleans in 1877, education segregation once again reemerged. In response to resegregation in education attainment, and the unfair treatment of blacks, attorney Paul Trévigne filed a lawsuit against the New Orleans Parish School Board, holding the opinion that “re segregated schools worked an irreparable injury to the entire colored population of the city” (Holley-Walker 1–132).

The Reconstruction Era, circa 1870s through 1880s – a period of great separatism and inequity – broadened the educational divide that has followed New Orleans through the city’s history. Recognizing the increasing number of blacks in school post Reconstruction, the estate of John McDonough funded the construction of eighteen schools for whites only and white student enrollment doubled between 1887 and 1910 (Baker 31; Cowen Institute web 2010). The New Orleans public school system once again saw an increase in the divide between blacks and whites in education attainment.

The race to educate intensified as private sources funded the building of schools around the city when New Orleans experienced a second spur of education establishments in the years 1910 through 1940. Through the funding of the McDonough estate, the first all-black high school, McDonough #35 was opened in 1917 (Cowen Institute web 2010). It was also during this time that black enrollment in school quadrupled (Cowen Institute web 2010). By the end of the Reconstruction era, two separate school systems existed based on ethnicity. White schools emerged resource rich and had less students on average, while black schools emerged resource

deficit and were superbly overcrowded¹². “The funding and public-school facilities for the education of black children deteriorated significantly during this period because of the lack of resources for maintenance (Holley-Walker 1–132). Recognizing that schools established for white children fared better than those established for black students in the new “dual and unequal system,” (Holley-Walker 1 – 132), A.P Tureaud filed suit against the New Orleans Parish School Board because as he stated “it [is] unconstitutional to deny admittance to a school based on race”¹³. Tureaud’s case entered the courts on the heels of the *Brown vs. Board of Education*¹⁴ lawsuit in which it was argued that separation by race is unconstitutional. There was tremendous pushback from the New Orleans Parish School Board¹⁵ along with the White Citizens Council¹⁶, which was formed to abate desegregation of schools following the Brown decision. However, in 1956 Judge Skelly Wright overturned the School Board’s efforts to block desegregation citing segregation as unconstitutional.

In the years following the Brown decision ineffective resistance to desegregation led to white flight (Mayeri 245). Through 1970s white student enrollment fell by fifty percent. In the 1980—1981 school year, blacks constituted eighty-four percent of the New Orleans public school system.

By the mid-1970s, the public schools in New Orleans were overwhelmingly populated by black students from households below the poverty line... The population of New Orleans pre-Hurricane Katrina was 67% African American,

¹² See Tables 1 – 3

¹³ See *Bush vs Orleans Parish School Board* 138 F. Supp. 226, 337 (E.D. La 1952) (Decided 1956)

¹⁴ See *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483, 488 (1954) at 495

¹⁵ See <http://opsb.us/about/our-history/>

and 28% white, but the public schools were 93% African American and only 4% white. Forty percent of the students in the Orleans Parish school district lived below the poverty line (Holley-Walker 134).

White flight increased as blacks dominated schools. As conditions worsened from a lack of resources, upper and middle class black families began to withdraw from the city and the New Orleans public school system became “poor(er) and [more] at risk” (Cowen Institute web 2016 and Sirin 417–453). New Orleans’ at risk status was reflected through testing when the Louisiana State Department of Education ranked the Recovery School District (RSD) sixty nine out of seventy school districts within the state (Sanders 1–2). Compounded by problems with administrative governance, from 1998 through 2005, New Orleans public school administration had eight superintendents, and was under investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation for funds mismanagement resulting in criminal indictments and a debt of two hundred and sixty-five million dollars (Schwam-Baird and Mogg 163 – 511).

¹⁶ See White Citizen’s Council <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/emmett-citizens-council/>

Chapter 4: Education and Katrina

Education in New Orleans continues to represent systemic inequality for blacks. In its inception language, this first school was to operate without bias towards sex, class, caste, or color (Baker 15). And, despite the pledge to educate all children, the first public schools in New Orleans, which opened in 1841 were highly discriminatory towards blacks, thus making school almost exclusively accessible to white children (Baker 15). This bias can be traced through the history of education in New Orleans (Baker 15). In 1902 Superintendent Warren Easton, and assistant Superintendent Nicholas Bauer produced a report that clearly evidenced a “commitment to the history inequity of education in New Orleans.” (Bauer 18) The report read as follows:

...to teach the negro is a different problem. His natural ability is that of low character and it is possible to bring him to a certain level beyond which it is impossible to carry him. That point is the fifth grade of our schools ... (Bauer 18)

Inequality and access to education in New Orleans was marred by this kind of thinking through the *Brown vs. Board of Education* case of 1954¹⁷. In the years following the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, black children were still disenfranchised by the policies of the Louisiana State Boards of Education and its measures to keep schools segregated. Justice Skelly Write however, in 1956 overturned the Louisiana State Board of Education policies labeling them unconstitutional and thus began full desegregation of public school education in New

¹⁷ Argument on de jure segregation and how it negatively impacted African American children.

Orleans¹⁸. Post the 1956 decision white flight¹⁹ ensued leaving the city's poorer families behind (Cowen Institute web 2007). Conditions within the education system quickly worsened as resources were further stifled and the terms 'poor, at risk, and failing' were appended to represent the condition of education and academic performance in New Orleans (Cowen Institute web 2007).

Poor academic performance and outcomes in New Orleans made national headlines in the years after hurricane Katrina devastated the city. Some of the neighborhoods most adversely affected housed clusters of the city's poorest residents (Schwam-Baird and Mogg 163–511). When Hurricane Katrina made landfall in 2005, New Orleans was ranked as the second poorest city in the United States and had a concentration of fifty-five percent of its black residents living in extreme poverty (Brookings web 2005)²⁰.

Alongside the damages to private property, the New Orleans public school system faced extensive damages and setbacks because of the hurricane. As hurricane Katrina swept through the city, many of the school buildings were so severely damaged that they were deemed unsafe and unusable (Logan 16). However, hurricane Katrina was not solely responsible for setbacks in public education in New Orleans. Prior to the summer of 2005, New Orleans public school administration was under investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation for embezzlement and mismanagement of resources (Schwam-Baird and Mogg 163–511). In the years leading up to Hurricane Katrina, the New Orleans public school system was already classified as academically

¹⁸ See also: Earl Benjamin Bush et al., Plaintiffs v. Orleans Parish School Board et al., Defendants, 138 F. Supp. 337 (E.D. La. 1956)

¹⁹ The move of white city-dwellers to the suburbs to escape the influx of minorities.

²⁰ See Table 4

in crisis²¹. Scores in Math and English Language showed that elementary schools had a proficiency of approximately twenty five percent and high school Graduate Exit Exams (GEE) performance leveled-out between thirty and thirty-five percent²² (Holley-Walker 125 - 163). School buildings were in disarray as well as most of these public structures were built in the early 1900s and suffered from lack of funding for improvement and thus, had poor maintenance (PBS web 2015). The state's reaction to the amalgamation of poor outcomes led to the passing of the Recovery School District Act (RSD), with the purpose of redefining “failing schools” and deploying stringent standards to align performance with the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act²³.

The 2005 realization of education failures and shortcomings in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina illustrated the long-standing systemic degradation of education in this Southern state, exacerbated by poor management and embezzlement (Schwam-Baird 163–511; PBS web 2015). Kathleen Blanco, then Governor of New Orleans, in conjunction with the New Orleans Parish School Board, “determined that to reopen New Orleans’ public schools... they would have to expand the definition of failing schools” (Holley-Walker 16). By labeling more schools as failing they would be immediately transferred under the control of the Recovery School District and undergo reform in accordance with the provisions of the Act²⁴. Of the one hundred and sixteen public schools that existed in New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina, one hundred and seven were immediately placed under the control of the Recovery School District²⁵. The city of New Orleans now had an opportunity to start over by rebuilding their school system on a more

²¹ See LA. Rev. Stat. ANN. § 17:10.6(B)(1) (2007) (Definition of academically in crisis)

²² See Recovery School District Act, § 6.

²³ See LA. Rev., 2007 – LA. Rev. Stat. ANN § 17:10.5(A) (2007)

²⁴ See Recovery School District Legislature Plan 8 (2006)

practical and effective foundation. By the end of the 2007 school year, New Orleans had converted approximately sixty percent of its public schools into charters (Holley-Walker 16).

²⁵ See Recovery School District Legislature Plan 8, 2006

Chapter 5: Post Katrina School Recovery

The Recovery School District Act (RSD), which existed prior to hurricane Katrina's devastation of New Orleans was signed into existence in 2003 under Act 9 of the Louisiana Legislative Session (Cowen Institute 1). Governor Kathleen Blanco, Governor signed the legislation into law in May 2005. Under the administrative control of the Louisiana Department of Education, the purpose of the Act is to facilitate the takeover of academically failing schools (Schwam-Baird and Mogg 163–511). According to the Louisiana Department of Education, an academically failing school is one that does not meet the “minimum academic standards for at least four consecutive years, thus making them eligible for state takeover” (Schwam-Baird and Mogg 163 – 511). Louisiana statewide program of school accountability determines the level of failure as implemented by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and is also based on the Louisiana Education Assessment Program (LEAP) (Decuir 2). Under the Recovery School District, schools have five years to reformulate and meet state minimum standards with a School Performance Score of seventy-five. Failure to meet the minimum standards at the end of five years results in the closure of the school (Schwam-Baird and Mogg 163–511). As of 2010, 120 schools have been taken over by the state under the Recovery School District Act with only seventy schools remaining open. The Recovery School District Memorandum of Understanding states the following:

Academically unacceptable schools are taken over and run by the RSD or placed under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). A MOU is a binding agreement between a local school district and the Louisiana Department of Education that outlines necessary actions that must be implemented at a failing school to avoid

its placement in the RSD. The district must comply with the recovery plan set forth in the MOU within the first year or the Department may exercise the option of placing the school in the RSD. Twenty-five schools are under MOUs. (Schwam-Baird and Mogg 163–511).

After the hurricane, sixty-five thousand students and seven thousand five hundred employees were displaced. Sixteen of the city's one hundred and twenty-eight school buildings were unusable. Five months after Katrina, the Louisiana Department of Education declared all schools "failing."²⁶ In the school year following hurricane Katrina (2006–2007), thirty-seven of fifty-eight reopened schools converted to charters under the control of several entities (public and private) (Cowen Institute 2). According to a 2010 report by the University of Minnesota Law School, Institute on Race and Poverty, post Hurricane Katrina has resulted in the rebuilding of a five-tier system of public schools through which "not every student received the same resources." (Institute on Race and Poverty web 2010). In 2013 the fiscal budget was eight billion seven hundred thousand dollars, of which fifteen percent came from federal grants, thirty-eight percent from the state's minimum foundation, which ensures that all districts have a minimal operation budget, and the remaining forty-seven percent is acquired through local taxes²⁷. In 2011 Dr. Kristen Buras, professor at Georgia State University produced a report in which it was stated that:

New Orleans charters are less about responding to the needs of racially oppressed

²⁶ See Recovery School District Legislative Plan 8 (2006)

²⁷ See "Hot Topics." FY12 school budget breakdown

communities and more about reconstruction of the new newly governed South - one in which white entrepreneurs (with black allies) capitalize on black schools and neighborhoods by obtaining public monies to build and manage charter schools... (Buras 143–161)

Policy may have done little to address the historical impact of inequality in the New Orleans public school system prior to hurricane Katrina, but things may be on an upturn thanks in part to reforms made after the hurricane.

Chapter 6: Education is Transformation

Education has been transformative for me and continues to be. The contrasts and the processes from the importance of academics to instilling discipline are vastly different in Grenada, which is where I was born and raised. But as I become more self-aware I also expand my understanding of the battle from both sides. How does a population break historical attitudes towards educating and how does that population receive the opportunity of a good education? I have learned that these two questions are far from easily answered and are viewed as subjective. However, to further demonstrate the impact the effects the attitudes of teachers and society have on students and why those attitudes need to change, I will use the following films: *Educating Rita*; *Stand and Deliver*; and *Dead Poets Society*. The foundations perspective will also be used to support how attitudes impact students, teachers, and society and why it is more important than ever before to recognize the impact that defining the purpose of education has.

The foundations perspective – history, philosophy, politics, and sociology – is a framework for creating an approach to understanding the connections between student, teacher, school and society. The four components that comprise the foundations perspective embody the dynamic connections that occur between the student and teacher, society, and its schools. Encompassing theory, practice, organization, and process – as they relate to the foundations perspective – through the aggregation of all its parts, a meaning and a purpose of education can be established. However, because of the dynamic factors that influence student, teacher, school, and society, the meaning and purpose of education can evolve to parallel that of the society it serves. The core meaning and purpose of education as defined by the foundations perspective forgets the influence that opinions and beliefs have on the efficacy of educating, especially in

mixed race and minority societies, for example, in a large city such as New Orleans that is predominantly black.

In “Educating Rita,” (1983) we meet a young hairdresser, Rita, who seeks to improve her life and social status through education. Rita is an almost overbearingly candid adult woman, and this is immediately evident upon her meeting Frank Bryant, the professor she wants to study with. Rita however also has an extremely inquisitive and gentle side in which Bryant, an alcoholic and jaded lecturer, finds inspiration. Initially Rita has almost no capacity to handle the type of critical analysis required of her, but she remains dedicated to her goal. She sometimes struggles with student life, her personal life, and with reconciling how education will improve her life. We live with Rita through these moments. As she coaches Bryant’s alcoholism, failed romantic life, social relationships, failing professional life, and as she weighs and adapts her identity(s) as an academic. We are witness to an evolution into Rita’s wisdom that social mobility does not guarantee happiness. Rita’s story ends with her as a bright, wistful, intelligent person with offerings of inspiration to middle-class Frank, who desperately needs to intervene his life. It is through Rita’s story of growth that the recognition of the parallels of being educated, and the constructive use of life chances are realized.

On the other hand, in “Stand and Deliver,” (1988) set at Garfield High School in Los Angeles, Jamie Escalante an enthusiastic and determined teacher tackles the educational needs of a derailed group of students. Escalante strongly believes that his students need to be engaged at a level beyond what anyone else has imagined them capable of. Strewn with difficulties and with poor administrative support Escalante embarks on his mission to educate and he needs to work quickly. Garfield High School is in danger of closing because of poor student performance. Escalante, while encouraging his students to succeed sets a precedent by going beyond the role

of educator. He creates a dynamic and targeted method of encouragement that extends beyond the classroom and hallways. Escalante's commitment to the education success of his students, while a gargantuan endeavor, pays off when the majority pass the advanced placement calculus exam. Unfortunately, the belief that his students could not score well elicits an investigation of accountability. The triumph of this story is revealed upon the students retaking the advanced placement calculus exam. Escalante's students perform equally well, which dismisses any further investigation. *Stand and Deliver* demonstrates through a group of underestimated high school students that any child can learn if engaged and given the right type of support and encouragement.

Like "*Stand and Deliver*" in many ways, "*Dead Poets Society*" (1989) mimics the dynamic relationship between student and teacher; a bond if created fosters the blossoming of the young mind. "*Dead Poets Society*" however, tackles the relationship of student, teacher, society and school from a different angle. These are students from middle to upper-class backgrounds. Their struggles do not revolve in issues of poverty and eligibility, but rather, on how they may grow and create an identity different from the one prescribed by their parents and society. A multi-faceted-multi-talented group of students, they quickly form close bonds. John Keating, their English teacher and recent transfer from Welton (a former position), wants his students to reach their full potential and proceeds to do so through his unconventional teaching methods. "*Carpe Diem*," is the theme and Keating works towards this with his students by having them express themselves through their work in ways they never imagined. Life has no script, and so too, understanding poetry rests in the subjective, interpretive nature of its reader. Of course, Keating's level of unorthodoxy in teaching, which eventually leads to investigations, quickly draws the attention of his superior Gale Nolan.

The dead poets society, credited as the film's title, was an unsanctioned group that Keating was a member of while at Welton. Enthralled by the virtues of the group their teacher once belonged to his students compose a similar group and use it as a means to further build and express their individuality. The many positive notes sold through the character's lives in this story are sadly doused by the unfortunate stifling of their spirits. This story, which embodies the intricate bond between student and teacher, quickly unravels as individual aspirations emerge in a larger context. Submission, suicide, remorse, cohesion, regret, and resentment are elements explored in this film. Keating unwittingly framed as instigator, is eventually fired. This film ends with a revelation of truth and a student salute to Keating's audacious approach to realizing individual talent through his education methods.

In context of the three outlined films, to understand the implications of the foundations perspective, it must be "viewed from interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary perspectives" (Sadovnik, Cookson and Semel 15). These three films – *Educating Rita*; *Stand and Deliver*; and *Dead Poets Society* – explore the purpose of education and educating from a highly stratified, almost classist perspective, deeply engrossed with ideal utilitarianism. Why do we educate and who is education important to? These three films cleverly illustrate the philosophical, political, social, and historical avenues of the institution. The history of education has taught us that it has evolved into a tool that can either endow or discriminate. "For example, those who support it as a goal of society believe that [education molds] citizens to fit into society... [Whereas], those who disagree with its goals believe that school should educate citizens to change society" (Sadovnik et al. 15). These three films embody these contending viewpoints. Further its historical perspective creates a foundation upon which one may begin to ask questions concerning the current state of education. How and when did educating for "social justice" become an

exclusivist principle? More so than in the other two films, “Stand and Deliver” demonstrates the importance of understanding the history of education “providing not only a chronicle of the past, but a deep understanding of how and why the [institution] has come to be” (Sadovnik et al. 15). As such, in *Stand and Deliver*, the importance of educating and stereotypes surrounding minority aptitude are deeply at play.

On the other hand, *Educating Rita* is analogous with the sociology of education. The sociological approach to understanding education posits, “*what is* rather than *what ought to be*” (Sadovnik et al. 17). Rita sets her social mobility in motion by pursuing education. Her experiences in pursuit of her goal demonstrate “the measurable effects of education [on the] individual and on society” (Sadovnik et al. 17). Rita’s educational goals were far-reaching and rippled through the lives of people who did not share her enthusiasm to learn. Her goals are presented as introspective yet manifested in moments of epiphany, and perhaps in a small light, the student teacher relationship in the film demonstrates the effect that a teacher’s idiosyncrasies have on a student. “The sociological method is particularly useful when educational practices are related to educational outcomes” (Sadovnik et al. 18) and this theory plays out in *Educating Rita*.

“Throughout history, schools have been the subject of considerable conflict about goals, methods... and other critical issues” (Sadovnik et al. 15). In *Dead Poets Society* the politics of education, the institution, and “power relations” (Sadovnik et al. 15) are explored. A defining difference between *Dead Poets Society* and the other two films is that the students wear a uniform. This speaks to the political implications on matters such as control and economics, and carries questions of power and democracy. An important question raised in the film is “how do educational interest groups – including administrators, teachers, students, parents [and society] –

arrive at policy” (Sadovnik et al. 15). After all, Keating’s method of teaching is considered highly unorthodox yet effective.

The “interrelated approaches” of sociology, politics and history, as illustrated through the three films have proven to be important to the functionalism of education and the institution (Sadovnik et al. 16). A powerful triad, its true power cannot be realized without the addition of the philosophical approach, making it a robust quartet. The philosophy of education is a key element of the foundations perspective. The philosophy of education, through the “*dialectic method*” asks “what and why... thereby posing questions and offering answers” (Sadovnik et al. 16). Thus, it is through the philosophical approach, in tandem with the other three approaches that education, its purpose, its gains, and its failures may truly be understood. These four approaches highly validate each other. What is your goal as an educator? Why do you do what you do? Asking these questions “helps [one] realize that [their] decisions and actions are shaped by a host of human experiences firmly rooted in culture” (Sadovnik et al. 16). The philosophy of education is more than a theoretical approach to understanding education, but rather a foundation upon which the constructs of education are studied.

Reform is always a necessity of education as our societies are highly dynamic. All four approaches of the foundations perspective are evident in the three films. They reflect a feedback model in which they each not only affect the student, teacher, school and society, but also each other. In *Educating Rita*; *Stand and Deliver*; and *Dead Poets Society* the four approaches are represented from a very personal and individual perspective and as all-encompassing themes. As such, the foundations perspective embodies a “quest for better schools, better teachers, a more intelligent, humane society,” a better education experience, and positive student outcomes (Sadovnik et al. 20).

Chapter 7: Money Can Make Change

Since 2007, billions of dollars have been poured into New Orleans' newly reformed school system with most of its schools operating autonomously as charters (Sanders 1 – 2). As a result, New Orleans is the first “majority charter school system in the United States.” (Holley-Walker 129). If these autonomous schools improve student achievement and outcomes remains unconfirmed (Holley-Walker 129). In a review written by Danielle Holley-Walker for the Connecticut Law Review on the impact of charters in New Orleans post hurricane Katrina, she states that:

The fervor for education reform continues to intensify... acknowledging that quality public education may be the most important civil rights movement of the twenty-first century²⁸... especially where policy and the educational performance of African-American and Latino school children and that of their white counterparts is concerned.²⁹

Charters, which operate primarily as privately run, autonomous institutions “face significant challenges, including the pressure to rapidly increase student achievement” (Holley-Walker 131). Today, a variety of charter models are sweeping across large urban cities in the United States. Privately funded by not-for-profit organization such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, these charters operate under the ideal of creating a “lifelong love of learning, helping to create a healthy economy, providing equal opportunities, helping people become good citizens, and providing self-fulfillment (Spring 46). A brief review of the policies surrounding charter

²⁸ See *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 306, 331 (2003). See also *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483, 493 (1954).

operation illustrates why charters may not perhaps perform as intended or as promised. A few theories abound, most notably that despite claims, there is no concrete evidence that charters improve achievement of low income and minority students³⁰. Because of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) guidelines, charters are more likely to close after five years compared to traditional public schools (Sass 91–22). In addition, under the charter... student performance may not be as expected (National Center for Education Statistics 2006). In the face of these concerns, not-for-profits like the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation continue to devote and award money to charters.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation founded by Bill and Melinda Gates was launched in 2000 and is said to be the largest transparently operating private foundation in the world (Bates 5). The foundation not only focuses on educational gains in the United States, but rather, it is a global organization with endowments in health care, science, and technology, global education, and global policy and advocacy³¹. Operating on six continents the drive is to assist the “world’s poorest people [to] lift themselves out of hunger and poverty.”³² With its headquarters in Seattle, Washington, the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation operates as a 501(c)(3)³³ corporation. In 2006, Warren Buffett pledged most of his fortune to the Gates Foundation and to four charitable trusts created by his family. His gift to the Gates Foundation of ten million shares of Berkshire Hathaway stock³⁴, is to be paid in annual installments, and was worth

²⁹ See Brown, Kevin. (2006). The Supreme Court’s Role in the Growing School Choice Movement, 67 Ohio St. L.J 37, 38.

³⁰ See Saiger, Aaron J. (2006). The Last Wave: The Rise of the Contingent School District, 84 N.C. L. Rev. 887.

³¹ See Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. (2016). “What We Do.” Web. <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/What-We-Do>.

³² Ibid.

³³ See "Exemption Requirements - 501(c)(3) Organizations." Exemption Requirements - 501(c)(3) Organizations. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 May 2016.

³⁴ See Berkshire Hathaway Chairman Donates 85% of His Stock Holding to Five Charitable

approximately thirty-one billion dollars in June 2006 (Loomis web 2008). In 2014 the foundation was recorded to have an endowment of approximately forty-four billion dollars in conjunction with the Warren Buffet Pledge³⁵.

In the United States, the goal of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is “to support innovation that can improve K-12 public and charter schools and ensure that students graduate from high school ready to succeed in college”³⁶. In conjunction, the Foundation has a secondary program that services postsecondary success with the goal of assisting students with obtaining postsecondary degrees. With the aim of “[strengthening] the connection between teacher and student,”³⁷ in partnership with various political entities, parents, and communities, the Gates Foundation claims that it has “[created] clear standards and expectations for teachers and students”³⁸. As part of the Foundation’s operational model, there are three areas of focus: 1) on teaching; 2) learning; and 3) innovation. The Foundation sees professional learning as integral to the advancement of teaching and learning. Under their teaching project, Measures of Effective Teaching – working to help teachers achieve their goals – a collaboration through which effective measures of teaching are evaluated, “thousands of teachers were enlisted to have their classes videotaped and evaluated by experts as well as students.”³⁹ Under the Common Core Standards⁴⁰, the Gates foundation is collaborating with schools to help weave the standards into the fabric of education in the United States. By providing clear understanding and expectations

Organizations. Wall Street Journal, NY. Web. 2006

³⁵ See Consolidated Financial Statements December 31, 2014 and 2013. Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. 30 April 2015.

³⁶ See Gate Foundation <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/What-We-Do/US-Program/K-12-Education>.

³⁷ See Recovery School District Legislative Plan 8 (2006)

³⁸ *Ibid* at 36

³⁹ *Ibid* at 36

⁴⁰ See <http://www.corestandards.org/read-the-standards/>

of learning outcomes, the data collected through the Foundation’s collaborations is used to create “clear pathways towards college and career readiness.”⁴¹ Finally, through innovative measures, the Foundation sees to changing the learning experiences of students by “tailoring learning to students’ needs.”⁴² By employing learning as a social practice based on how students currently interact, they are implementing a wider use of technology such as online learning platforms.⁴³ However, the success of the tools that the Gates Foundation hopes to impart on students and teachers relies heavily on funding.

In 2010, twelve major foundations committed five hundred million to education innovation in concert with United States Department of Education’s six hundred and fifty million “Investment in Innovation.”⁴⁴ The list of involved foundations included: The Gates Foundation, Hewlett, Carnegie, Mott, and Ford Fund – these foundations are jointly focused on promising programs in recruiting and training teachers and school leaders; expanding clear, consistent, college- and career- ready standards and high-quality assessments; and scaling new school designs. This group of foundations believes these innovation, assessed for their efficacy have the potential to improve student learning, especially for those most in need. Their main charge is to address the nations disinterest in STEM⁴⁵ subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) – “61% of middle-schoolers would rather take out the trash than do their math homework” (Schiavelli web 2008) – this is in response to a report that indicated that in the next decade, “80% of jobs will require some master of technology, math, and science.” (Schiavelli web 2008).

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ See *Flagship Collaboration* <http://www.ed.gov/open/plan/flagship-initiative-collaboration>. See also https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/scribd/?toc_id=419222&filepath=/docs/publications/usbudget/BUDGET-2015-BUD.pdf&start_page=71#scribd-open

⁴⁵ See Schiavelli 2008

However, with its capacity to fund education in the United States, the Gates Foundation adheres to provisions set forth through the Warren Buffet donation, thus making the Foundation unable to open its own schools, but rather to act only as a facilitator of change. The 2006 Buffet donation sets forth the following operational conditions. To double the Foundation's annual giving, 1) The Gates' must both be alive and active in their Foundation; 2) the Foundation must maintain its charity status and match the year before in the amount of donations/grants dispensed; and 3) Buffet will match a five percent donation each year until his death, or until all conditions are no longer met (Richardson web 2006).

Below is a listing of donations and commitments made by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation since its inception. Since 2000, the Foundation has made approximately thirty-seven billion in grant payments with an endowment of forty billion in 2015⁴⁶. The Gates Foundation has dispersed across all fifty states and the District of Columbia. Since 2010, the foundation has donated approximately three million to education in New Orleans⁴⁷. Every year since 2006 the Gates Foundation has received approximately one hundred and seventy-three billion dollars in installments through the Warren Buffet Pledge (Baker 31 and Cowen Institute 2). Alongside their donations to public education, the foundation also endows large sums of money to a host of charter schools and charter programs (K-12 included) in the United States. According to language on the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation website, the goal of supporting education development in the United States is to "support innovation that can improve U.S. K-12 public schools and ensure that students graduate from high school ready to succeed in college."⁴⁸ Institutions seeking funding must first apply for a grant. The Foundation then works closely with

⁴⁶ See "Foundation Fact Sheet." Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. (2015) Web. 19 May 2016.

⁴⁷ See Archives "Awarded Grants." Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2015 Web. 19 May 2016.

said institution to develop a concept for funding through partnerships and consultations. What follows concept development is known as the pre-proposal stage in which the concept for funding is refined to better represent the needs of the institution asking for funding. The investment development stage entails the development of a budget and a framework for intended outcomes. This stage incorporates due diligence, the confirmation of tax status, and assessment of risks. The final stage is the management and closing stage. This stage confirms the terms of operation and reporting for the life of the contract between the foundation and the applicant institution⁴⁹. According the Gates Foundation website, they measure and evaluate by:

Giv[ing their] partners flexibility in how they achieve results, [and] *do not require them to report on all of their activities*. Instead, [they] focus on purposefully measuring the most critical metrics of progress that support continued learning, adjustment, and alignment. However, the nature and frequency of measurement depends on the type of work.⁵⁰

Researchers have long found a correlation between one's socioeconomic status and one's education attainment and achievement (Sirin, 417–453). If it is that “public schools have an uneven track record in accomplishing social goals... because of influences outside of their control” (Spring 59), are the mission and goals of the Gates Foundation really facilitating change? One may assume however that if one's socioeconomic status is a determining factor of outcome based on access, life chances, and education opportunities, then the Gates Foundation is

⁴⁸ See "How We Work." Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

influencing positive changes in education from learning, teacher development, to the institutionalization of technology as learning tools by offering funding.

It is hard to imagine that hurricane Katrina positively impacted any aspect of the lives of New Orleanians, but as the Cowen Institute put it in their 2014 *State of Public Education in New Orleans Report*, Katrina was the catalyst for education reform and policies that continue to evolve today (Cowen Institute 2014). The Cowen Institute has been monitoring and reporting on the state of education in New Orleans since 2007. Their mission is to assess public concerns at the juncture of understanding what issues education faces in New Orleans and make recommendations on how such issues may be addressed, whether through reform or policy⁵¹. Contributions through institutions like the Gates Foundation help to add to the improvements that the city's students receive. Cowen's 2014 report makes the case that despite students still face several serious socioeconomic pitfalls, education in New Orleans is showing positive outcomes compared to the years before Katrina⁵². New Orleans remains a predominantly black city and based on the 2012 census, approximately fifty nine percent of its adult denizens were black, and of those, seventy three percent were youth, and further, eighty five percent of black youth made up the public-school demographic (Cowen Institute 2014).

⁵¹ See Public Address from Executive Director: <http://www.speno2014.com/letter/>

Chapter 8: Conclusion

John Dewey was a prominent twentieth century philosopher of education. He believed that there were benefits to bridging social gaps through education. Dewey felt that education was the means through which “ideas and beliefs” could be amalgamated as a means to decrease the tensions and “instabilities” in society thereby ushering a deeper understanding in society (Spring 35). Dewey thought that schools could act as social centers through which moral recreation could be achieved. Further, he felt that schools should act in the capacity of “providing social services and be the social center... through which the interpretation of the relationship between the [student, the teacher & society] is revealed” (Spring 35).

New Orleans remains a city with a large and predominantly impoverished black population. Researchers have long contended that poverty is correlated with performance and achievement (Sirin 417–453). Recognizing that one’s socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and other factors play a significant role in the likelihood of success and achievement is a step in the right direction. Although poverty, and institutionalized segregation in New Orleans’ schools still exist as the schools under the umbrella of the Recovery School District (RSD) rebuild and reform, work still needs to be done. Education problems in New Orleans are systemic and closely related to a history of discrimination, segregation, and poverty. Historical reports indicate that from the onset black schools dramatically lacked resources compared to white schools. Prior to hurricane Katrina, performance on the part of the institution and the student were less than favorable especially in predominantly black schools. Teacher effectiveness and student academic outcomes suffered as a result. Corruption and greed were added to the list of problems in the late 1990s as schools continued to perform poorly. However, hurricane Katrina’s devastation of New Orleans

⁵² See Cowen Institute Report: <http://www.speno2014.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/SPENO-Small.pdf>

put a spotlight on the education disadvantages that students and the institution faced, especially blacks. The RSD Act and subsequently, hurricane Katrina, were massive turning points for education in New Orleans. Reports by the Recovery School District, in conjunction with the Department of Education through the Louisiana Believes Network have indicated improvements in administrative management and academic performance because of the Recovery School District. Further, the Cowen institute put forward a very compelling report in the state of education in New Orleans in which they outline and discuss the tremendous growth education has made in the last several years. It is also clear from their report that work still needs to be done (Cowen Institute 2014).⁵³

This essay was not written to necessarily provide workable solutions to the city's education problems. However, it was through reading about the education disparities in New Orleans that got me thinking about my education so deeply and the factors that contributed to my present success. It was the same thoughts that got me thinking about what success is and how it is defined. I began by examining my journey and realized that education is now my foundation, I cling to it daily and contribute my successes to it. While not a unique realization, I feel that it is special nonetheless. I wrote this essay to share my story with the hope of highlighting how important each student's story is and that each student's story is much more complex than anyone may understand. Some may not find my story traumatic, joyous or inspirational. But it is my story and I experienced what I considered to be the traumas and the joys of it. Today I look at education with passion. I recall my missed opportunities, reflect on how my choices affected my later chances, and how the decisions and attitudes of those around me influenced my life. I think about other students and wish that they have the support and direction needed to help them get

⁵³ See Cowen Institute <http://www.speno2014.com/>

somewhere, or where they want to be. Especially for New Orleans as reform sweeps through their education system; I hope that the longstanding attitudes and unrecognized biases are acknowledged and are reformed as well.

Tables

Table 1: State Expenditure Per Child

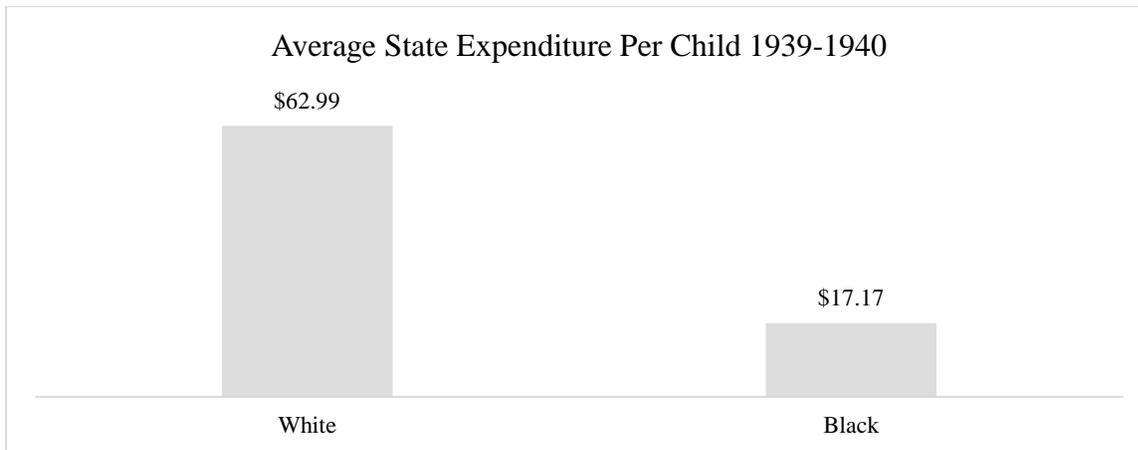


Table 2: Annual Salary Per Teacher

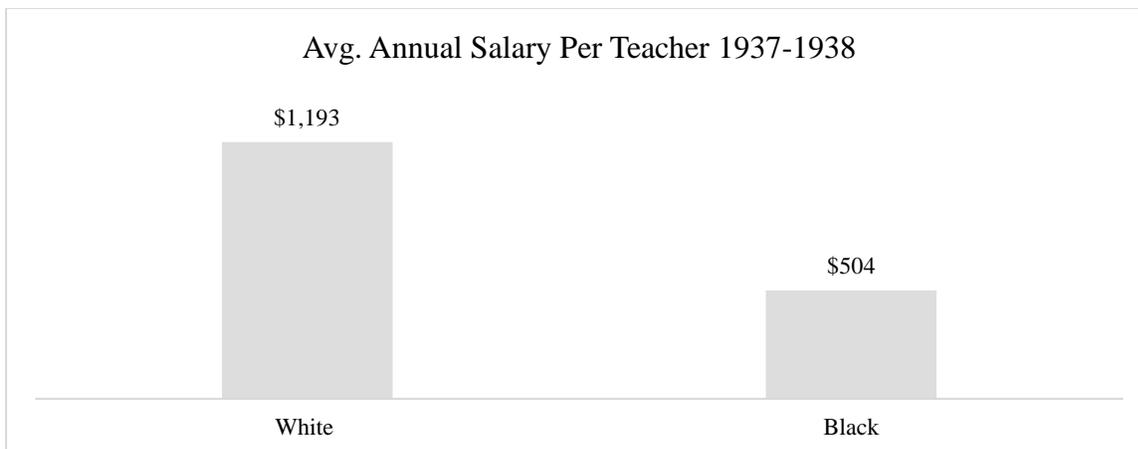
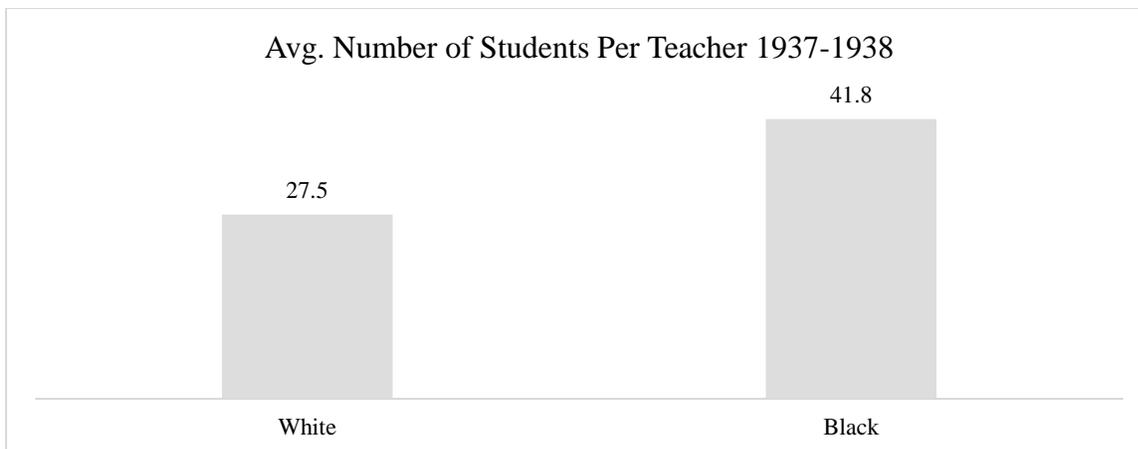


Table 3: Number of Students Per Teacher



Source: Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives, 2010.

Table 4: Social and Economic Disadvantage

New Orleans' Extremely Poor Neighborhoods Exhibited High Degrees of Social and Economic Disadvantage

Indicator (2000)	Extreme Poverty Neighborhoods	Rest of New Orleans	Metro Area outside New Orleans
Population	99,317	385,317	853,052
Individuals below poverty (%)	54.6	21.6	13.1
Average household income	\$21,267	\$47,918	\$52,577
Average poverty gap*	\$9,640	\$8,563	\$5,880
Children in single-parent families (%)	80.5	46.7	28.1
Adults (age 25 to 64) with college degree (%)	8.5	29.5	20.8
Population (age 21 to 64) with disability (%)	29.0	21.8	19.9
Adult (age 25 to 64) labor force participation (%)	59.5	76.4	76.8
Renter households with housing-cost burden (%)**	49.7	46.7	38.3

* Average amount by which income of poor families falls below poverty line

**Paying at least 30% of income for rent

Source: Census 2000

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