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Global Apartheid: Educating Within Colonial Schools

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Educating Within Colonial Schools

Twenty-four years have passed since the end of apartheid in South Africa, yet systemic racial oppression is still the operating reality for the majority Black South African population. During apartheid rule, the white government legislated racial discrimination in social, political, economic and educational institutions that enforced an intentionally racially inferior society for all non-white populations (Mhlauli, Salini, & Mokotedi, 2015, p. 205). Despite the overthrow of apartheid in 1994, myriad forms of racial oppression continue to take place in South Africa (e.g. unequal schools, housing, and employment) (Knaus & Brown, 2016). Nelson Mandela, the anti-apartheid leader and first Black democratically elected president of South Africa, argued that "Education is the great engine of personal development" (Mandela, 1994, p. 99). He continued to frame education as the way to break the cycle of oppression and move the majority Black population into economic prosperity, arguing "It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that a son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation" (p. 99).

While Mandela has become a globally revered icon of anti-racism, positioning education as a vital tool in the transformation from racism, schools in South Africa remain embedded within previous systems of racial oppression. This racial apartheid is seen through state-enforced unequal resource distribution and school funding disparities that mirror and extend the conditions of poverty in Black townships, as well as a white-framed curriculum and white-dominated language of instruction. These racialized educational disparities are not exclusive to South Africa, but, indeed, are globalized; even in the relatively wealthy United States, racial disparities in schools remain rampant. In racially diverse nations across the globe, wealthy populations

attend more well-resourced schools than do those mired in poverty, and these conditions are exacerbated when racial background is considered (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Despite these oppressive conditions within schools and across school systems, teachers empower students and create warm and welcoming spaces. Regardless of insufficient resources and inadequate curriculum, many teachers in South African and U.S. schools manage to engage students (Knaus & Brown, 2016, p. 36). Driven by passion, many teachers aim to serve as positive role models for students, all while navigating daily struggles of overcrowded classrooms, limited resources, and irrelevant curriculum (Rampa, 2014, p. 394).

In light of the continued racial disparities in schools across the globe, this thesis examines the contexts in which schools are used as a tool of racial oppression, using South Africa and the United States as specific examples. Through the implementation of English-dominated curriculum, the unequal distribution of resources and funding, I examine teacher voice as central to understanding educational inequities and offer teacher-informed solutions to larger societal inequities. This research ultimately demonstrates how teachers intentionally resist school infrastructures that reinforce racial oppression. Critical race theory guided the research conducted at Ukholo[1], a Secondary School situated in the geographically isolated South African township of Uthando, in which ethnographic methods, including participant observations, informal interviews with teachers and students, and extensive field notes were taken over the course of three weeks in September 2017.

Literature Review

A review of literature on education in South Africa and the United States suggests that systemic oppression remains rampant in both nations. This section examines how educational

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[1] Pseudonyms have been assigned to the school, community, and all participants to maintain confidentiality.

systems foster oppression through the imposition of colonial languages of instruction, racially biased curricula, and the unequal distribution of resources and funding.

Apartheid History

The European colonization of present day South Africa dates back to the seventeenth century when Jan van Riebeeck of the Dutch East India Company was sent to organize a "provisioning station for ships rounding the Cape of Good Hope" (Fiske & Ladd, 2004, p. 18). The Dutch, later joined by French Huguenots and Germans, colonized Southern Africa through a series of explorations, violent attacks on residents, and wars to eradicate local populations, eventually evolving into a community that described itself as Afrikaners, or "people of Africa" (Fiske & Ladd, 2004, p. 18). Influenced by the Dutch language, the colonizing Afrikaners developed their own language: Afrikaans (Fiske & Ladd, 2004, p. 18). Tensions between Britain and France rose during the French Revolution and in 1795 Britain seized the Cape Colony from the Dutch in fear of losing control of "the trade with the Far East" to Napoleon (Fiske & Ladd, 2004, p. 19; Estreicher, 2014, p. 520). After discovering gold and diamonds, the English merchants gained hegemony over the Boer, which means "farmers" in Afrikaans (Fiske & Ladd, 2004, p. 19).

South Africa's original inhabitants consisted of the Khoikhoi and San peoples who occupied the southern tip, "the Zulus in the northeast, the Xhosa in the southeast, and the Sotho, Pedi, and Tswana groups in the interior" (Fiske & Ladd, 2004, p. 18). Soon conflict over land stolen from these indigenous nations broke out between the British and the Afrikaners, leading to the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, but this was not just a war among whites, as "hundreds of thousands of Africans played supportive roles on both sides" (Fiske & Ladd, 2004, p. 19). The Union of South Africa in 1910 was ultimately established as a compromise between the

dominant British and Afrikaner groups (Fiske & Ladd, 2004, p. 19). "Endorsed by the British government, the English and Afrikaners moved to place the interests of the country's African majority in the hands of the white minority and excluded Africans from the ballot", which cemented political segregation (Fiske & Ladd, 2004, p. 20). Fiske and Ladd (2004) argued "apartheid is deeply rooted in a colonial tradition of racial segregation that assumed formal status well before 1948", referring to the geographic, social and economic segregation that was de facto prior to the Union in 1910 (p. 20).

Two major political parties materialized in the early nineteenth century; the South African National Congress and the National Party (Knaus & Brown, 2016, p. 13). The South African National Congress fought for the rights of non-whites while the National Party, who "took control of the parliament in 1924", implemented policies that delineated "the differences between whites and non-whites" (Knaus & Brown, 2016, p. 13). The National Party won the election in 1948 and in that same year the Afrikaner-led parliament implemented apartheid policy (Fiske & Ladd, 2004; Knaus & Brown, 2016). Fiske and Ladd (2004) summarized this foundation: "The Nationalist victory in 1948 ushered in a forty-six-year period in which the government dedicated itself to securing the social, economic, and political privileges of the white minority at the expense of Africans, coloureds, and Indians" (p. 24).

There were four racial classifications under apartheid policy; white, African, Coloured and Indian (Fiske & Ladd, 2004, p. 24). The racial classification of African was assigned to the Black majority; individuals of European descent, mostly British and Afrikaner, made up the minority group which was classified as white; individuals classified as Coloured were those of "mixed-race", with parents of African and European descent; and the smallest group, Indians, was comprised of individuals brought to South Africa as "indentured servants" to work sugar

plantations for the British (Fiske & Ladd, 2004, p. 21). The National Party "aimed at furthering

racial separation and white supremacy," which the party did through the intricate construction of

political, social, and economic systems that were "fundamentally about white control of space

and land" (Fiske & Ladd, 2004, p. 25). So while the Afrikaner word 'apartheid' means

separateness, the policy instituted political inferiority.

Ukholo Senior Secondary School, the site of this research, reflects this intentional racial

segregation. According to Goodlad (1996), "The infamous Group Areas Act of 1950 and 1966,

set about designating every square inch of and for occupation by one of four 'racial groups ...'"

(p. 1630). The Group Areas Act was effective in design, excluding Africans from white only

areas unless they were domestic workers (Goodlad, 1996, p. 1630). Permission to live in an

overcrowded township was granted by the apartheid government; these townships were

intentionally located far from the resources and employment opportunities of city centers, thus

forcing long commutes and geographic isolation (Goodlad, 1996, p. 1630). Africans were

forcibly removed from newly designated 'white' areas and relocated to what had been labeled

homelands "intended to provide political rights to Africans, while denying them the full

economic and social rights of participation in the South African economy" (Goodlad, 1996, p.

1631).

Apartheid Schools

Schools are framed as the way out of poverty but are themselves used as a tool of

oppression (Mandela, 1994, p. 99). Knaus and Brown (2016) explain, "Under apartheid, South

African education was fairly clear: Statistics reflected intentional state-sponsored inequalities

built into the education system" (p. 20). The South African education system was designed to

place non-whites at an economic disadvantage in comparison to white counterparts. Whites were

given opportunities to obtain an education that would prepare them to be economically

successful, whereas non-white South Africans were forced to attend schools "designed to

maintain a permanent undereducated workforce" (p. 15). This design intended "...to

communicate to Black learners that they are less intelligent and of less worth than the minority

white population for whom this model of education is designed" (p. 16).

Black South Africans were drastically affected by the educational system; however, those

classified as 'Coloured' and 'Indian' under apartheid laws were also affected. In terms of

funding, Coloured schools were situated just under white schools and just above Black schools

(Knaus & Brown, 2016, p. 78). Classroom sizes reflected this hierarchy, as Black schools

enrolled "more learners than Coloured schools, which enrolled more learners than White schools

(Knaus & Brown, 2016, p. 78). Such hegemony was evident in the curriculum designed for each

of the four racial groups as well (Knaus & Brown, 2016, p. 19). Zungu (1977) argued the

education system in apartheid schools were designed specifically to make all non-whites

"particularly the Africans...fit their subordinate role in the society" (p. 208).

Knaus and Brown (2016) state "while the official end of apartheid led the external world

to celebrate reconciliation of the races, within South Africa not much has changed for the

citizens in the majority Black schools or townships" (p. 78). Students that attend predominantly

Black schools are still subjected to overcrowded classrooms while their white counterparts enjoy

the privileges of having a much lower student to teacher ratio (Knaus & Brown, 2016, p. 79).

Students that attend predominantly Black schools also lack basic school and technological

resources (Knaus & Brown, 2016, p. 78). Classrooms in predominantly white schools are

equipped with computers and Smart Boards while the only form of technology found in

classrooms of predominantly Black schools are chalkboards accompanied by broken and worn

pieces of chalk (Knaus & Brown, 2016, p. 79). Knaus and Brown (2016) argue:

> "Limiting the ability of Black and Coloured South Africans to participate meaningfully in
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> education and society decreases their ability to have a positive impact on the nation. By
>
> ignoring the historical and present effects of apartheid, South Africa continues its
>
> investment in racism as an outcome of schools" (p. 24).

The current condition of schools across South Africa challenges the notion that education is a

way out of poverty, and indeed, demonstrates that schools perpetuate the systematic way in

which racial oppression was fostered by the previous apartheid government.

Resource Allocation and School Funding Disparities

One of the major ways in which schools remain unequal in both South Africa and the

United States is through the unequal allocation of resources and funding (Knaus & Brown,

2016). In South Africa, "The available resources for the white schools far surpassed those of the

black community in the townships and rural areas. The Indian and Coloured schools, while better

funded than those of the black townships, still did not match those of the white community"

(Chick, 2002, p. 466). According to Knaus and Brown (2016), the one thing that stuck out the

most when visiting Black township schools was the utter "lack of basic teaching resources" (p.

63). At Black township schools, due to the intentional lack of resources to stock libraries and

computer labs, any available rooms were converted into classrooms to address overcrowded

conditions. Black township schools often lacked "sufficient furniture, electricity, lighting or

shelter from bad weather", while classrooms at "Coloured schools were operationally decent" (p.

62). Meanwhile classrooms in white schools "were well stocked, with relatively new desks,

computers, power outlets, lighting, clean windows (with glass still in them), and the latest

technology, including Smart Boards," (p. 62).

Funding disparities across racial groups can also be seen in U.S. schools. Ladson-Billings

(2006) argued "The funding disparities that currently exist between schools serving white

students and those serving students of color are not recent phenomena," and that differential

funding between "urban" and "suburban" schools has historically existed (p. 6). The annual

spending per pupil in schools that predominantly serve students of color are widely different than

schools that serve a predominantly white student body. Spending differs by roughly $9,000

between Chicago public schools and Highland Park (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 6). "The Chicago

public schools spend about $8,482 annually per pupil, while nearby Highland Park spends

$17,291 per pupil" with an "87% Black and Latina/o population" and a "91% White population"

respectively (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 6). Similar per pupil funding disparities can also be seen

in Philadelphia and New York schools, with the predominantly white schools receiving $8,000 to

$11,000 more than the schools that serve a predominantly student of color population (Ladson-

Billings, 2006, p. 6). Card and Krueger (1996) argued "that in areas where blacks were more

numerous, a greater share of school resources were diverted from the black schools to white

schools, raising the resources in white schools and depressing them in black schools" (p. 43).

Students of color often attend schools that face concerns of dilapidated buildings, over-

crowded classrooms, along with unsafe and unhealthy environments (Condron & Roscigno,

2003, p. 20). According to *The Funding Gap 2005*, a report by the Education Trust, school

districts that have a higher minority population receive less funding than districts with a lower

minority population in 30 states (p. 2). The report also stated "Funding gaps undermine one of

our most powerful and core beliefs that we as Americans cling to: that no matter what

circumstances children are born into, all have the opportunity to become educated and, if they

work hard, to pursue their dreams" (p. 2). A study done to determine if Pennsylvania public

schools received more funds based on poverty levels alone revealed that race was also a

determining factor (Mosenkis, 2014). Mosenkis argued that, based on what the schools were

expected to receive according to their respective poverty levels, predominantly white districts

were receiving more than expected and more racially diverse districts were receiving less than

expected.

Language of Instruction

Language policies in South Africa have had a huge influence on curriculum over the last

century. Chick (2002) explained, "In the period 1910–1994 language policy in South Africa was

one of a formidable range of strategies both coercive and ideological through which the state

maintained the hegemony of whites over blacks" (p. 464). Greenfield (2010) stated, "Majority-

group students whose first language was English or Afrikaans experienced their education

without linguistic interruption; conversely, the vast majority of schoolchildren in the nation were

seriously disadvantaged by these policies" (p. 519). The Afrikaner-led government solidified "its

dominance in the minds of Black students" with the forced use of Afrikaans as the language of

instruction (Ladson-Billings, 1998a, p. 251). English and Afrikaans were required as the only

languages of instruction in white schools up until 1948, when the government decided to

segregate white schools into those who spoke English and those who spoke Afrikaans "so as to

reinforce and preserve Afrikaner culture and identity" (Fiske & Ladd, 2004, p. 44). In line with

the government's goal of perpetuating the separation of cultures, mother-tongue instruction was

similarly required in African schools through grade four (Fiske & Ladd, 2004, p. 44). In 1953,

the introduction of the Bantu Education Act extended the period of mother-tongue instruction

through grade eight after which students would then be expected to take half of their classes in

English and the other half in Afrikaans (Fiske & Ladd, 2004, p. 44).

Moloi, Ndlovu, and Nieftagodien (2006) stated the Broederbond, an all-male Afrikaner

secret society, thought of African schools "as strategic sites where Afrikaner hegemony could be

implanted by using Afrikaans as a medium of instruction" (p. 325). With the increased

enforcement of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in the 1970's, African students began

protesting (Moloi, et. al, 2006, p. 362). Moloi, et. al (2006) argued "Township schools across the

country were awakening politically and developing well-articulated demands on educational

issues" (p. 320). In 1976, two years after a new language mandate forced instruction in Afrikaans

only, eliminating any mother-language from being spoken in schools, students in Soweto

rebelled in what is now known as the Soweto Uprising (Fiske & Ladd, 2004; Ladson-Billings,

1998). The ANC united in response to the imposed language policy, ultimately shaping the

foundation of apartheid resistance in South Africa.

According to Ncoko, Osman and Cockcroft (2000), after the fall of the apartheid regime

in South Africa, the Department of Education established the "Language in Education Policy

(Department of Education, 1997)" which stated that the policy "allows schools to determine their

own language policy in consultation with parents and the school community. The Language in

Education Policy states that all children have a right to learn in their mother tongue and that the

school must fulfill this right where practical and reasonable" (p. 226). The very wording of this

policy is problematic as schools are given the responsibility to define what is "practical and

reasonable" without having linguistically relevant curricular resources (Ncoko, et. al, 2000, p.

226). While there are 11 official languages in South Africa (Zulu, Xhosa, Afrikaans, English,

Northern Sotho, Tswana, Sotho, Tsonga, Swazi, Venda, and Ndebele), the two white colonial

languages (Afrikaans and English) are the only languages tested for matric exams that are required to graduate high school (Knaus & Brown, 2016, p. 71).

In the United States, hegemony over indigenous people was paralleled by the forced removal from ancestral homelands, the destruction of food sources, and the forced separations of families (Legters, 1988, p. 773). Many children were taken from their families and placed in boarding schools, where they were forced to learn English (Adams, 1995, p. 140). Students who were caught speaking their native languages faced harshly violent punishments (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998, p. 63). Emdin (2016) argues "The Carlisle school employed a militaristic approach to "helping" the Indigenous Americans assimilate to white norms" (p. 4). He continued to argue that teachers believed the students "came to the school lacking socialization, intellect, and worth" (Emdin, 2016, p. 5). The curriculum in Indian boarding schools was intentionally designed to strip indigenous people of native languages with the goal of making them more civilized so they could obtain citizenship (Adams, 1995, p. 143). Assimilation practices continue to be seen throughout U.S. schools, with immigrant and non-immigrant populations as the target, especially "for members of historically subordinate groups" such as individuals who speak Spanish and are from Mexico (Valenzuela, 1999, p.26).

Valenzuela (1999) argued "The very rationale of English as a Second Language (ESL)— the predominant language program at the high school level— is subtractive" (p. 26).   She continued to frame ESL programs as subtractive by design arguing "they neither reinforce their native languages nor their cultural identities" (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 26). English bilingual programs are designed to devalue an individual's native language by enforcing the notion that the maintenance of native language is unnecessary and the best practice for learning English is through assimilation and submersion (Chick, 2002, p. 469). Despite the fact that the U.S. is a

multilingual nation, "white standards of English persist, supreme and unquestioned, in these United States" (Jordan, 1988, p. 364). White English is not the only language that is spoken in the U.S., however White English is the only language that is considered acceptable (Jordan, 1988, p. 363). South Africa and the U.S. have used schools as a means to devalue indigenous languages, while associating school success directly with the ability to speak dominant languages.

Critical Race Theory

The theoretical framework of critical race theory (CRT) is beneficial as a tool of analysis for the field of education as CRT lends itself to help understand institutional racism. CRT stems from critical legal studies, a legal movement that challenged the legal structures that justified the norms and standards of American society (Ladson-Billings, 1998b, p. 11). Legal scholars developed CRT in response to critical legal studies' failure to include racism as a critical aspect of US society (Ladson- Billings, 1998, p. 12). CRT has been applied "to the field of education" as an analytical tool used to examine racial oppression (Gillborn, 2008, p. 26). Many scholars have noted that the primary tenet of CRT is the notion that racism is normal and functions in every aspect of society (Gillborn, 2008; Knaus, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1998b). Ladson-Billings (1998) argued "racism requires sweeping changes but liberalism has no mechanism for such changes. Rather, liberal legal practices support the painstakingly slow process of arguing legal precedence to gain citizen rights for people of color" (p. 13). This critique of liberalism is derived from "the inability of traditional legal discourse to address anything except the most obvious and crude versions of racism" (Gillborn, 2008, p. 29).

CRT views schools as colonial institutions that reinforce the white supremacist master narrative through the implementation of white-framed, English only curriculum (Ladson-

Billings, 1998b, p. 22). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) explained "Critical race theorists (or "crits," as they are sometimes called) hold that color blindness will allow us to redress only extremely egregious racial harms, ones that everyone would notice or condemn" (p. 22). They continued to explain that in order to ameliorate racism there needs to be "aggressive, color-conscious efforts to change the way things are" (p. 22). Critical race theory thus informs the literature review, research methods, and frames the findings of this thesis.

Methods

Case studies are often described by scholars as detailed investigations of a single case that may suggest a broader understanding of a larger phenomenon (Lipson, 2005; Gerring, 2004; Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2009). Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe (2009) argued "The purpose of case study research is twofold: (1) to provide descriptive information and (2) to suggest theoretical relevance" (p. 6). Descriptive information allows the researcher to gain in-depth understanding of the case, while theoretical relevance helps the researcher explain concepts that shape theory (Mills et al., 2009, p. 6). In conducting a case study of teaching at Ukholo Senior Secondary School, I engaged in participant observations of various classrooms. I observed and engaged with Mr. MC, a teacher who taught both eighth and tenth grade mathematics, Mrs. Nkuta, a ninth grade English teacher and vice principal, and Mr. Mana, a ninth grade mathematics teacher. In addition to these participant observations, I conducted informal interviews with teachers in their offices and in the staff room, as well as with students. Extensive notes were taken in every setting to capture additional details. The research conducted at Ukholo was guided by two research questions, which are as follows:

RQ1: What are the conditions teachers at Ukholo face?

RQ2: How do Ukholo teachers challenge the oppressive conditions of their schools?

Ukholo Senior Secondary School

Ukholo Senior Secondary School sits in the geographically isolated township of Uthando, approximately 23 kilometers from the city center of Cape Town, South Africa. The maze-like streets that lead to Ukholo are lined with makeshift houses made from cheap materials, including recycled wood, metal and plastic. Electrical wires are intricately strung from house to house, resembling spider webs. On the end of rows and rows of houses are public toilets, not nearly enough to accommodate the population of roughly 200,000. In the mornings, residents make their way to work in the city, walking along highways or queuing for taxis.

Ukholo's brick school building looks more like a prison than a high school, circumferenced by barbed wire fencing. Only two things help delineate the school from a prison, uniformed school children and the school sign. The large open field at the back of the school is large enough for a soccer field, but instead lays desolate. During the time of research, Ukholo Secondary School had a student body count of 1440 students and 43 teachers, all of whom are Black South Africans.

Findings

While analyzing the data collected, three themes emerged; continued apartheid conditions, code-switching as an instructional tool, and radically compassionate teachers. The continuation of apartheid conditions, such as the dissemination of colonial school curriculum and inadequate school funding and resource distribution, are a clear reflection of what many critical race theorists defined as the normalization of racism. Teachers challenged these conditions by utilizing code switching as an instructional tool to resist the white supremacist master narrative that was evident in the state-enforced English-only curriculum and by being radically compassionate towards both their fellow teachers and their students (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Continued Apartheid Conditions

Ukholo was housed in an uninsulated brick building, making classroom temperatures freezing during the winter and sweltering hot in the summer. To make conditions worse, classroom windows were mostly broken, resulting in a continual influx of additional cold air during winter months. Students wore thick coats inside classrooms, restricting their movement. The school's lack of funding was also apparent in the absence of an adequate cafeteria or kitchen for the preparation of student meals. Three to four parents, whose children attended Ukholo, would prepare the students' meals out of a small storage room that was converted into a makeshift kitchen, where they worked hard and fast to provide the students with breakfast and lunch every day, using some of the vegetables that were grown in the garden located on school grounds. Unfortunately, there was rarely enough food to go around.

There was no modern day technology in any of the classrooms, such as projectors and computers. The only option teachers had to display work was on old, stained, hardly readable chalkboards, probably the same ones from the time the school was built. Students and teachers alike relied on natural lighting as most light bulbs were burnt out. Old wooden desks with attached chairs were the only seating options, complicating any effort to perform group work or hands-on lessons. The desks had decades of carved-in student graffiti and there were rarely enough desks for each student. There was often a shortage of desks in the classrooms, causing teachers to send students in search of extras in other classrooms, leading to the constant moving of desks throughout the day.

Teacher absenteeism was frequent, and while teachers rarely miss work from being sick, they were often not in their classrooms. With classrooms serving upwards of 45 students per class, and a lack of administrative supports (there was just one principal and acting vice

principal, who also taught half a day of classes) to support the 43 teachers, teachers were often in line at the one and only copier or assisting another teacher sort and staple the hundreds of instructional materials by hand.

Along with the lack of classroom resources and limited teacher capacity came a lack of instructional materials. Textbooks were provided to Ukholo Senior Secondary by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED), however the school only received textbooks every five years when they were supposed to be receiving them every year, and even then, they never received enough for each student. The delay in textbook allocation meant teachers were using outdated and tattered textbooks. WCED also allocated materials to schools at the beginning of the new fiscal year which falls in April, four months after the start of the school year in January.

Code Switching as an Instructional Tool

Teachers at Ukholo are well aware that schools were designed to colonize Black students and make them feel inferior. Within this context of limited resources, however, teachers were adamant that their students learn. Every teacher at Ukholo is bilingual and switching back and forth between *isiXhosa* and English is common practice. Often referred to as code-switching, Wheeler (2005) clarifies that "to code-switch is to choose the language appropriate to the time, place, audience, and communicative purpose" (p. 110). The way teachers at Ukholo practiced code-switching allowed for cultural nuances to be present in their everyday classroom languages. Teachers would often joke with students in *isiXhosa*, making culturally responsive references to some of the issues both students and teachers face living in poverty stricken townships. In Mr. MC's eighth grade mathematics class, for example, students were asked to take out their homework. Upon noticing that several of the students either did not have their homework or the homework was incomplete, Mr. MC light heartedly joked "*Ngaba abazali bakho bakhuleka kuwe*

ukucima izibane?" (did your parents yell at you to turn off the lights?). The students laughed.

This was an obvious example of how teachers would code-switch, demonstrate their cultural and

linguistic affinity with the students, and ensure that students recognized that their teachers also

came from the township and understand the struggles that their students face.

Teachers also utilize code-switching as a method to strengthen language skills amongst

their students. Teachers often encouraged students to use *isiXhosa* if they were struggling to find

the words in English. Mr. MC had a knack for reading the climate of his classroom. When he

would ask his students to answer the questions, if there was no response he would then give them

hints in *isiXhosa*. When asked about how language played a role in the acquisition of content

knowledge in regards to Mathematics, Mr. MC stated "it is like learning and using three

languages at the same time; English, *isiXhosa*, and Math" (MC, 2017). He further explained that

there are just some things in Math that cannot be expressed in *isiXhosa*, but since not all his

students possess the same level of English skills, he must continue to provide as many examples

and explanations in *isiXhosa* as he can in order for his students to all have the best chance at

succeeding.

What was evident in Mr. MC's use of code-switching was his ability to allow students to

feel comfortable and validated in their ability to learn English and Math. Code-switching as a

teaching strategy offers more than just benefits for those teaching but also benefits the students

as well by being a "natural…phenomena which facilitates communication and learning" (Ncoko,

et. al, 2000, p. 229). This approach to teaching was effectual in "language and content

acquisition", holding many functions in the classroom; "translation, clarification, checking

comprehension, [and] giving instructions and procedures" (Ncoko, et. al, 2000, p. 239). King and

Chetty (2014) argued, in regards to South Africa, that the ability to think is linked to the ability

to talk and by prohibiting students to use their mother tongues in the classroom is limiting the

participation in classroom discussions (p. 46). King and Chetty (2014) have echoed the

sentiments of Ncoko, Osman, and Cockcroft (2000), stating that code-switching in the classroom

allows for a "natural short-cut to content and knowledge acquisition" (p. 229). Ukholo teachers

understand the importance of code switching in the classroom and utilize the benefits as an

instructional tool as a strategy to assist their students in learning both language and subject

matter while resisting white supremacy.

Radically Compassionate Teachers

From the moment I met the teachers at Ukholo, I noticed they were unapologetically

Black. Black Consciousness is the term that helps describe this unwavering confidence in who

they are and the work they do in their community. One of the founders of The Black

Consciousness Movement, Steve Biko was a Black South African anti-apartheid activist. Biko

(1996) stated

> "Black Consciousness is in essence the realisation by the black man of the need to rally
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> together with his brothers around the cause of their operation - the blackness of their skin
>
> - and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to
>
> perpetual servitude" (p. 53).

He continued to argue that Black Consciousness allows Black communities to foster a sense of

pride in being Black. Teachers at Ukholo embody Black Consciousness and have built a

community of teachers that are compassionate to each other and their students. Every morning at

Ukholo, the teachers and the principal meet in the staff lounge for the morning staff meeting,

instead of heading straight to their classrooms. During the morning staff meetings, teachers were

laughing and hugging one another as they arrived. The compassion witnessed amongst teachers went beyond the staff room; teachers at Ukholo genuinely knew their students.

The knowledge gathered from informal interviews with Mrs. Nkuta about her students also proved that she knew more about her students' family life than many other teachers. She talked about how some of her students had migrated with their families from the Eastern Cape, and some had even moved in with relatives, such as aunts and uncles, while their parents stayed in the Eastern Cape. Mrs. Nkuta stated that if students had missed more than a day of school, teachers would often go by students' houses to check to see if everything was okay. When asked about what barriers to success students faced, Mr. Mana responded that "poverty and the housing problem" (Mana, 2017). In an inquiry for more detail on the students' living conditions Mr. Mana's response was "some live in tin houses with shebeen [Tavern] next door. Noise and everything" (Mana, 2017).

Every morning teachers come together to discuss how they are going to lift up their students. When asked how she manages to keep such a positive attitude despite the conditions in which she is tasked to educate learners, Mrs. Nkuta responded that "It is tiring, but we must not complain, we need our learners to be educated because to them education is economic emancipation" (Nkuta, 2017). Biko (1996) argued "the interrelationship between the consciousness of the self and the emancipatory programme is of paramount importance" (p. 53). Ukholo teachers expressed love for their students openly and without hesitation. Witnessing teachers giving students hugs upon arrival and prior to departure at the end of the day was a common occurrence. Compassion was evident in all encounters at Ukholo. While this research was rooted in South African context, these school inequalities parallel racial disparities in the United States and lessons learned in South Africa directly apply to the U.S.

Call to Action

My research in South Africa identified three ideas to improve schools in the United States and globally. The first is that code switching is a beneficial instructional tool that needs to be recognized as such. Next, current school funding formulas do not adequately fund schools and must be changed. And lastly, schools, including curriculum and classrooms, need to be decolonized.

Recognizing the benefits that code switching has to offer as an instructional tool that validates students' identities and languages needs to be done globally. Code switching is a phenomenon that already happens globally; in classrooms and other social settings (Emdin, 2016). Despite its global usage, however, code switching has yet to be validated inside classrooms by incorporating this technique into teacher training programs. We should be arming teachers with the necessary skills that will in turn allow them to arm students with the skills that are needed to be successful in both education and the world (Emdin, 2017). Currently, Standard English is the validated language taught in schools in the United States. However, students possess various languages skills that are different from Standard English. Incorporating code switching as an instructional tool would validate the various language forms that students possess and counter the current devaluation that exists as a product of valuing only Standard English (Emdin, 2016; Ncoko, et. al, 2000). Ncoko, et. al (2000) stated "it is vital that an appreciation of the importance of students' own languages for education be developed and that these students' multilingual competencies be acknowledged" (p. 227). Training teachers to use code switching would acknowledge the multilingual competencies students already possess while simultaneously exhibiting the value and importance of students' own languages. While code switching is an important aspect that needs to be recognized and incorporated into the field

of education more needs to be done to combat the racial disparities that exist in schools across the globe.

Public school funding is another area in which improvement is needed in order to address the racial disparities that plague schools around the world. In the United States, public schools are funded based primarily on a combination of federal, state, and local funds. Leachman, Masterson, and Figueroa (2017) argue that state funding, the largest portion of most funding formulas, "has declined dramatically in a number of states over the last decade" (p.1). While some states have managed to improve state funding in the more recent years, 29 were still contributing less than they were prior to the recession in 2008 (Leachman, Masterson, & Figueroa, 2017, p. 1). The next major funding source for public schools comes from the local level (such as property taxes), which in 2015 was forty-five percent of the funding (Biddle & Berliner, 2002; Leachman, et. al, 2017). Yet funding schools through property taxes is not an equitable method. Biddle and Berliner (2002) argued using local taxes to fund schools contribute to the "differences in funding between wealthy and impoverished communities" (p. 49). Given the current explosions in the housing market, these tax disparities are increasing.

While some researchers claim funding alone does not equate to school achievement, Baker (2016) argued positive outcomes are associated with resources that cost money such as "smaller class sizes, additional supports, early childhood programs, and more competitive teacher compensation" (p. i). Funding is an issue when teachers are spending precious teaching time preparing materials for students on a single copier, much like the teachers at Ukholo Senior Secondary School in South Africa. Globally, the need to find more equitable and adequate ways to fund public schools cannot be greater. However, funding alone will not create equitable spaces for students of color, as institutionalized racial disparities remain in all aspects of schooling.

Educators need to push for the decolonization of curriculum. The current white-centered curriculum in the United States and South Africa, as well as many other countries, lacks historical and cultural relevance to students of color "whose cultures and histories have been made to seem—by systematic hegemonic discourse—deficient, illegitimate, and at-risk for failure" (Villanueva, 2013, p. 24). Providing students with a curriculum that is culturally and historically relevant will encourage them to feel valued in the classroom. Curriculum is and has been historically colonial, blatantly ignoring topics or perpetuating biased perspectives.

Decolonizing the curriculum would allow for "themes of race, racism, ethnicity, slavery, colonization, and oppression" to be centered, which is in drastic opposition to current themes commonly found in classrooms (p. 24). Villanueva (2014) argues racial hierarchy that situates whites at the top is exacerbated in school curricula, where "white European/Euro-American authors have been given primacy" over authors of color (p. 26). The dominance of white authors in curricula perpetuates the reproduction of white supremacy globally and including authors of color would counter master narratives currently found in classrooms (Steele, 2018). This inclusion of authors of color would also challenge the dominant white male perspective that has long been centered in classrooms around the globe and allow for a global perspective to permeate such spaces. Globally, educators need to transform the way we think of knowledge, but at the minimum, we need to center authors and perspectives of color.

Decolonizing the curriculum will lend itself to the decolonization of the classroom as well, allowing for the voices of students that are normally silenced by the white dominated curriculum and teachers that enforce a colonial structure to be heard and valued (Au, 2014). Schools also need to hire more teachers that are comfortable teaching children of color, that are comfortable being in communities of color. This can be achieved by supporting, and valuing,

teachers that are culturally and racially representative of students of color. Kokka (2016) argues studies show that students of color are positively impacted by having teachers of color, "as measured by standardized tests, attendance, and advanced level course enrollment" (p. 169). Representation in the classroom is highly important, as the current norm of white dominated teachers coupled with white dominated curriculum creates a very hostile environment for students of color in the U.S. and in elite schools in South Africa. While validating code switching as an instructional tool, changing the way public schools are funded, and decolonizing the curriculum are a foundation on how to transform public schools, South Africa teaches there is a lot more work to do to address racial inequalities that schools foster.

Conclusion

While schools across the globe continue to function as colonial institutions that oppress students of color, reinforcing the racial inequalities that are produced through white-framed curricula and white-dominated languages of instruction, teachers continue to use their position in schools to create spaces of resistance and empower students of color to succeed in societies that are designed for them to fail. Mrs. Nkuta, Mr. MC, and Mr. Mana strive to reduce the hostility created by a racist school system by code switching in classrooms and being compassionate to fellow teachers and students.

To conclude, I share the story of Sinosidanga, a student at Ukholo. Sinosidanga grew up in Uthando, living in poverty where food was often scarce. His mother would send him and his three siblings to stay with aunts and uncles to ensure that they were fed. Although Sinosidanga is a member of what is commonly known as the "born free" generation, which means that he was born after apartheid ended, he and the majority of Black South Africans continue to experience the effects of the apartheid regime (Mpongo, 2016, p. 95).

The continued apartheid conditions that plagued Ukholo Secondary School, were all too common for Sinosidanga. However, he found refuge in the warm and compassionate classrooms that the teachers at Ukholo created. When asked about the impact his teachers had, Sinosidanga replied "They have been so good to me. Spiritually, physically, and emotionally." He continued to explain to me that the teachers at Ukholo would have extended their help but "money was always a problem." With the help and encouragement of his teachers to persevere in a system that was designed to hold him back, Sinosidanga passed his matric exams in October of 2017 and started university that January. Sinosidanga's story is not unique, he represents many Black students across the globe who rely on their teachers to help them navigate the racist school systems. The world's youth needs strong teachers like Mrs. Nkuta, Mr. MC, and Mr. Mana to continue to resist against the colonial institutions that seek to oppress students of color.

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