



Final Paper

**Creating Inclusive Pedagogies:** Using a set of questions given in class and related to your dissertation thesis or chapter you will select an issue idea or themes emerging from the readings and be prepared to write and create your own inclusive curricular pedagogies supported by the texts covered in class.

When I decided to become an educator, I saw a system continuously failing the children they were supposed to serve. Having been a student in the same system, I saw great teachers go above and beyond to get their students to succeed while the system would not provide them with the necessary funding to do their jobs the right way. I thought about the high school I was in, where while they had great teachers, they had a college advisor who was not encouraging the students to go to college but would instead let them know maybe they should learn a trade. I saw many of my peers in gangs, some selling drugs, while many became dropouts, with a school system not being held accountable for failing them. Over the years, the education system in America has created one failed policy after another, which failed because there was no investment in making real change in a failing system.

For years, the U.S. Department of Education and many government leaders have professed their devotion toward our children's proper and fair education. With one policy after another being enacted in the name of saving our children, education has been a whirlwind of "paper concepts" that make up the foundation of education in this country. One of these many policies is "The No Child Left Behind Act," borne in 1998 and approved in 2002, pledges to do as its name states, "leave no child behind." As the critics swarm to either sing the praises of this Act or point out the flaws of the educators (teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators) were expected to ensure that the ideas of the "No Child Left Behind Act" were brought into the classroom to the students. The problem then became that while NCLB made news, those in the trenches were told that there was limited funding to get the work done.

Interestingly enough, we saw the wealthier school districts boasting about their graduation rates and college acceptances. At the same time, the minority, low-income neighborhoods struggled with the same problems they have had since public schools

opened to all students in America. Are these policies enacted to do as they say they will do or are they simply paper concepts? When will America realize that the failure of the children is the failure of the school system that serves them and ultimately the failure of America?

I remember reading the Osgood Files, which reinforced much of my thoughts, and in an even greater way, spoke to the American Education system as we know it:

### Pretty Good (1986)

*There once was a pretty good student  
Who sat in a pretty good class  
And was taught by a pretty good teacher  
Who always let pretty good pass.  
He wasn't terrific at reading,  
He wasn't a whiz-bang at math,  
But for him, education was leading  
Straight down a pretty good path.  
He didn't find school too exciting,  
But he wanted to do pretty well,  
And he did have some trouble with writing  
Since nobody taught him to spell.  
When doing arithmetic problems,  
Pretty good was regarded as fine.  
5+5 needn't always add up to be 10;  
A pretty good answer was 9.  
The pretty good class that he sat in  
Was part of a pretty good school,  
And the student was not an exception:  
On the contrary, he was the rule.  
The pretty good school that he went to  
Was there in a pretty good town,  
And nobody there seemed to notice  
He could not tell a verb from a noun.  
The pretty good student in fact was  
Part of a pretty good mob.  
And the first time he knew what he lacked was  
When he looked for a pretty good job.  
It was then, when he sought a position,  
He discovered that life could be tough,  
And he soon had a sneaking suspicion  
Pretty good might not be good enough.  
The pretty good town in our story  
Was part of a pretty good state  
Which had pretty good aspirations*

*And prayed for a pretty good fate.  
There once was a pretty good nation  
Pretty proud of the greatness it had,  
Which learned much too late,  
If you want to be great,  
Pretty good is, in fact, pretty bad.*

Anyone educated in America has to first be recognized as a person. For a slave to be educated, it was not only harmful to their existence but also in the minds of the enslavers, harmful to the practices of enslavement they held on to for dear life. There were many, like Douglass, who were fortunate to have slave masters who initiated their learning experience, creating in them a desire to learn how to read and write. There were others who, by mere desire, realized that the pathway to true freedom was through academic and vocational learning. The problem with that desire was that they could not agree on exactly which route was best.

Similarly, today's educational systems cannot decide which pathway to education, freedom, and independence is best for our children. We see the lack of funding for vocational programs, increased unnecessary testing in academic programs, and an increase in cost for schools of higher education. The disparities are even more significant in schools in southern states today than before the civil war. Those disparities seemed to have increased over time from that time to today. Indeed, they all believed that educating the Black male and female would be their pathway to freedom. However, they did not all agree on how to acquire that education. In discussing various aspects of the process, the creation and implementation of educating Black people in America, it is pretty clear that we have the same issues today, in many cases, as they did then.

The Dred Scott case of 1857 was clear in its landmark decision that Black people in America would not be considered citizens under the Constitution and would therefore not be entitled to the rights and privileges enjoyed by American citizens. This meant that education, freedom from enslavement were not to be considerations for them. Plessy vs. Ferguson in 1896 followed suit. Many like Douglass, Forten, DuBois, and Garvey

believed it was the Black man's right to an education and freedom from the white man. Their very existence in America would be one of separateness, with the perception of equality. It took *Brown vs. the Board of Education* of 1954 to declare that public schools should be integrated. What this meant was that Black children, like white children, would not only be educated within the public-school systems that existed but that they would attend integrated schools and benefit from the use of better utensils for learning afforded to white children. Interestingly, while the practice in all states should be equity of funding for all schools, we still see a huge disparity in funding, quality of teachers, certification requirements, and utensils for learning in almost every state in these so-called United States of America even today.

Over the years of building education in America, what has happened is that the foundation has not been a solid one. It has also not been inclusive, which are the cracks that were there from the inception and seem to be widening today. Systemically, funding has always been an issue, which has rooted itself into the very fabric on which the education system was built. This system that has not made much headway from being simply "Pretty good" (Osgood, 1986). Add to that all the inequities and disparities that are also very much a part of that.

It is very shameful that while so many fought for the rights that many of us enjoy today, it took over 100 years for America to integrate schools, yet we still have schools that currently exist with inequities. While hailed as a landmark case, *Brown vs. The Board of Education* should never have had to be in a court system. Shamefully, it was. The 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the Constitution seemed to have only been paper concepts. W.E.B. Dubois asked, in *Souls of Black Folk*, whether or not it made sense to get all the rights described in those Amendments but not be able to get an education. We see where in *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, the courts upheld the decision to keep schools segregated. While it spoke of equality in its "separate but equal" doctrine, we must look at the funding that predominantly black and brown schools received during that time and even today.

Our education system, at its core, continues to struggle because we still have those who lack the understanding of why we should educate all children. Instead of asking ourselves why we should fund our schools and ensure a level playing field and equity, we should all face our fears of the outcome and say why not?

Is there a one size fits all cure? Absolutely not. However, if we begin by putting educators in place as the primary decision-makers, that might be a positive first step into a better future in education for all involved.

### References

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