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# Journey of Elam: Her Pedagogy as a Public Intellectual

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## **The Journey of Elam: Her Servant Leadership Pedagogy as a Public Intellectual**

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We explore pedagogical moments reflecting the social justice inspired servant leadership of Dr. Donna Elam in her journey as a public intellectual. Using auto/biographical methods, we examine critical moments in her work across contexts: conducting diversity workshops, providing professional development for principals and teachers, and leading district and regional interventions in response to court orders to racially desegregate schools. We focus her leadership through the lens of critical pedagogy. In the journey of Elam we find an expression of critical social justice leadership that is inspired and empowered by the values of public service, spirituality, and humanitarianism. This auto/biography contributes to our knowledge of educational leadership practiced by Black female educators and supports Dr. Elam's motivations to *pass the torch and pay it forward*.

The experiences of women of color in academe have been recently explored in edited books and themed issues of journals such as the *Negro Educational Review* and the *Journal of School Leadership*.<sup>1</sup> However, the pedagogy of their educational leadership is under-explored. The purpose of this article is to fill the gap in the literature as part of this special issue. The experiences of female leaders of color and their life stories help us to understand what has shaped their experience, subjectivity, and practice. As Dillard explains in her work on female educational leaders of color "...our interests originate as much out of our own personal biographical situations and previous and current life circumstances as out of a sense of what we are work-

ing to bring into being."<sup>2</sup>

Our interests in leadership preparation and development among women of color have led us (the first two authors) to collaboratively explore the life of Donna Elam (co-author). We wanted to know more about her work preparing principals for culturally competent leadership. We start by framing our study in a framework of critical pedagogy and servant leadership to describe Dr. Elam's public intellectualism through her life experiences, principles, and pedagogical moments. We conclude with her servant leadership contributions inspired and guided by Civil Rights leaders and mentors. Dr. Elam is *passing the torch and paying it forward* through her service in the sphere of education.

This journey represents for us the leadership development of a public intellectual who is a servant leader for social justice. Public intellectuals "...address particular problems for particular communities as well as for all of humanity."<sup>3</sup> Dr. Elam's method of working for the betterment of people across diverse social groups includes various principles and pedagogical acts. Cusick argues that in addition to the diversity of modes needed to respond to the diversity of wants and interests of the public there is one guiding norm for public intellectualism: "the prescriptions and expectations for local betterment must never exclude or overrule another group or the whole of humanity; your own freedom cannot come at the expense of another's."<sup>4</sup> Bound to this description of a public intellectual are the values of public service, spirituality, and humanitarianism. Despite the calls for leadership for social justice preparation, leadership departments and faculty have not engaged in sustained dialogue confronting race and class nor have we learned "how to incorporate such a dimension throughout our preparation programs."<sup>5</sup> This journey of Elam is an opportunity for educational leaders and those who, like us (first two authors), work in leadership preparation to see the terrain of educational leadership through the window of experience Dr. Elam's auto/biography offers.

In this collaborative journey, Dr. Elam participated in several roles. First, she provided sources of data such as curriculum materials, photographs, awards, protocols, stories, and newspaper clippings. Second, she served as ethnographer immersed in organizations that provided her opportunities to advance equity and mentor on so many fronts. Last, she performed the role of historian who provided detailed recollections of her life's journey as an educational leader. As co-author she graciously provided the data for this auto/biographical account through conversations and storytelling as well as clarification and details during member checks in which we sought verisimilitude or likeness between her recollections, our interpretations, and her interpretations of ours.

Bullough and Pinnegar provide interrelated guidelines for conducting

quality auto/biographical self-studies in teacher education which we apply to this study of leadership.<sup>6</sup> They remind us that: articles need to be readable and engaging, themes should be evident and identifiable across the conversation represented or the narrative presented, the connection between auto/biography and history must be apparent, the issues attended to need to be central to teaching and teacher education, and sufficient evidence must be garnered that readers will have no difficulty recognizing the authority of the scholarly voice, not just its authenticity. Our efforts to create a quality auto/biography reflecting these guidelines are supported by the biographic data we have generated and interpreted: conversations, interviews, observations, audiotapes, field notes, stimulated recall, "stream of consciousness" responses, and collaborative authorship. These forms of biographic data have been described by Butt and Raymond in the context of learning from the lives of educators.<sup>7</sup>

We situate this auto/biography in the tradition of critical pedagogy and critical social justice leadership. These are the assumptions of critical social justice leadership identified by Ryan and Rottman: social institutions are human creations which disadvantage some groups more than others, patterns of disadvantage are not always visible, and social justice is more than resource distribution. Social justice is inconsistent with the idea of just desert, favors equity over equality, permeates all aspects of education, and calls for hope.<sup>8</sup> We characterize the leadership journey of Dr. Elam as servant leadership grounded in the ethics of (racial) justice and critical spirituality.

While we recognize Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber's assertion that "one of the most interesting omissions in theory and research on leadership is the absence of discussions of followership and its impact on leadership,"<sup>9</sup> we also recognize that the practices of servant leadership among women of color also need to have spaces carved for their expression. We focus on the journey from her perspective rather than those of her followers. According to Greenleaf, assessment of impact should be guided by questions such as: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? What is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?<sup>10</sup> Through the life of Dr. Elam we learn of conditions of those least privileged in society and her impact on these conditions through the dialectical relationship of her leadership and followership.

### *Working in Big and "Small Hateful Places"*

Dr. Donna Elam was born in Brooklyn, New York, to a family that identified as Negro, Colored, and Caribbean. What started as teen rebellion became a political act as she began to identify as Black in solidarity with the

Black Power Movement during the 1960s. Thus her racial identity has been socially constructed over time in response to the political times and shifting meaning of racial terms. That she now identifies as Black is not only a reflection of personal choice but also a response to social constructions of race in which she is geographically and historically embedded. In sharing why she identifies as she does she revealed, "It's the walk." She clarified the meaning of this phrase during a member check. "Being Black to me is political as well as cultural and ethnic. Growing up in my era, claiming your blackness meant I celebrated Black power and attributes of being a woman of color. It was a way of building your own self-concept of self-acceptance—first understanding that you were not always accepted or embraced—but it didn't stop your voice, your advocacy for self and others, and sharing the gifts and talents that God gave you with the world!"<sup>71</sup>

This explanation reflects her standpoint and echoes the argument made by Roseboro and Ross that Black women are subjected and assigned a subjective position (as Black woman) by an oppressive social structure, whether they claim this position or not, and are then expected to transcend hate, espouse care, compassion, and love while uplifting humanity.<sup>72</sup> It also reflects that her lived experience with racism has informed her racial identity in connection to spirituality, self-worth, and sense of purpose. She continues to identify as Black, "even in small hateful places" where de facto racial segregation is still a common practice.<sup>73</sup>

Dr. Elam's entire formal schooling took place in Catholic schools in New York. She graduated (Magna Cum Laude) from York College, majoring in elementary education and specializing in early childhood. She finished her Master's degree in special education from New York University (NYU) and she acquired her Doctoral degree in education from the same university in 1995. In most of her professional work, she has worked to dismantle educational systems cited for discrimination against children of color. Her source of formal power derives from her positions in institutions, i.e., Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and courts. However, she understands that passing a court order or policy does not ensure social or institutional change. She has worked tirelessly at guiding systems "full of hatred" to implement structures and processes, facilitating workshops to encourage people to "shift paradigms, change their views and beliefs."<sup>74</sup>

Her first job in public education was working with boys she described as over-aged with special needs. While working in Long Island, she noticed that many children were misdiagnosed and misplaced into special education, especially minority students and English language learners. She began working to mainstream these children, and found it difficult to move students into general education and shed the label of special education. She later worked at one of ten federally-funded centers for civil rights, the Southeastern Equity

Center, Metropolitan Center for Educational Research, Development, and Training at NYU from 1987 till 1997, where she held different positions working on diversity and equity issues in New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, as well as teaching and supervising student teachers.

One of the first projects while at NYU was to develop systemic training with the Department of Education for New York City on "Children of the Rainbow" curriculum after the school district was embroiled in controversy with one of its units titled "Heather Has Two Mommies." This work ushered Dr. Elam's entry in training and staff development on equity issues that more often than not are marred by resistance and unwillingness of people to engage with what has been known in the literature as "courageous conversations."<sup>75</sup> Later she started a private consulting company and contracted with equity center collaboratives of the OCR to work with school districts in most of the southern states that were placed under court desegregation orders. In her work across the United States she has noticed that "racism is everywhere," not in "some distant time."<sup>76</sup>

Dr. Donna Elam works at the University of South Florida and holds multiple job titles: Associate Director for program development and external affairs of David C. Anchin Center, senior David C. Anchin Center research associate, visiting faculty in the College of Education and director of the Tampa Bay Educational Partnership. Her research and work deal with leadership and public policy analysis in public (K-12) and higher education, data and achievement in urban schools, student resiliency, institutional structures, arts education, learner centered leadership in "urban" contexts, and culturally competent leadership. However, when you ask her who she is and what she does, her responses range from "a leadership resource for diversity," mentor to graduate students, to someone who provides training and a forum for undergraduate and graduate students, principals, and teachers to have "courageous conversations on race" and how it connects to student achievement, to making a difference, and finding solutions to the issues in education that are affected by racism and its effects. While she sees the impact of racism everywhere in education, she states, "It's amazing how little they [students, teachers, and principals] know about [race]." She works to connect courageous conversations on race to student achievement and problem-solving. In addition, she serves on many advisory boards and committees at the federal and state level including state commissioner, faith based initiative and community outreach leader, Attorney General's working committee on hate crimes, commissioner's task force on school choice, president and co-founder of the state's association for multicultural education, regional chair for the National Association for Multicultural Education, executive board member for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Institute for Non-Violence, special director for Magnet Schools of America, and president-elect of the USA/Africa Institute.

### Pedagogical Moments

In the search for pedagogy, educational researchers "must not only focus on the observable dimensions of pedagogy, but also actively investigate the personal, relational, and improvisational dimensions of pedagogy in teacher education."<sup>17</sup> We use Freire's framework, pedagogy of the oppressed, to describe Dr. Elam's critical pedagogical stance.<sup>18</sup> We begin with autobiographical contextualization and continue to trace her practice as a female educational leader through pedagogical moments. Pedagogy of the oppressed, as a humanist, libertarian, and pedagogy of praxis (dialogue, reflection, action), leads to transformation of the oppressed.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Hope, high expectations and equitable excellence*

Critical Social Theory (CST) builds a language of criticism and depends on mutual engagement with the social world as we construct and interact with it. CST theorists bring a discourse of hope in their writings. "Critical social theorists have made it known that quality education is as much about teaching students the ability to read the world more critically (ideology critique) as it is imagining a better world that is less oppressive (utopian critique)."<sup>20</sup> It is about building a better community for all people where hope is a "constitutive part of everyday life."<sup>21</sup> Dr. Elam asserts, "You have to give teachers the hope and let them know how much power they have that no matter what, they can make a difference. And they keep motivating (students) and they keep pushing (students)." She found inspiration in the current president's (Barack H. Obama) speech on education and the value of the profession. The centrality of hope in her work manifests itself as she encourages principals to persist.

When the Washington D.C. Education Trust brought her in to work with 75 principals to address diversity issues in struggling school systems and schools facing closure, she compared their "failing" schools to those in all the cities that reflect similar characteristics and are succeeding. She told them, "... you didn't come here to fail, you came here because you thought you were going to make a difference in a child's life. So what happened and what can we do to help you get back to your dream?" Additionally, Dr. Elam saw the need to focus on the connection between beliefs and expectations. "When I started working with these educators, it became so clear that we have to enable educators to take their beliefs and expectations through a process that allows us to measure those beliefs and high expectations in a class or in a school and show teachers – what their beliefs about high expectations look like in policy, practice, and instruction when we have high expectations." Dr. Elam's quote shows her focus on high expectations toward education steeped in equity and excellence—equitable excellence—that developed in her early

practice as a novice teacher. Whether watching a Broadway play or musicians—she would observe an excellent performance and think of how it contributed to a "formula for excellence" in education. She argues that educators have to be so good at what they/we do because "we can make a difference... we just have to get teachers to believe that they have the power within to make the difference. I try to encourage teachers when I'm working with them even when they give up." From Martin Luther King's dream tied to protests for civil rights to critical pedagogues to visions of revolutionaries, hope has been a virtue of servant-leaders.<sup>22</sup>

#### *Critical spirituality*

The role of spirituality in teaching and leadership has been described as pedagogy of the soul and of the spirit.<sup>23</sup> Spirituality continues to be underexplored although it is a theme in recent research on the educational practices of women of color.<sup>24</sup> Scott argues that the ambiguity in researching spirituality for its multiple meanings and expressions, which can change over time, requires that researchers have some comfort with uncertainty.<sup>25</sup> He advocates for a narrative inquiry approach that relies on storytelling. "It is not about mastering an understanding of spirituality in order to research it but rather opening a space for engagement and for narration of experience that requires participation and shifts in our epistemological certainty."<sup>26</sup> To engage in spiritual narratives is to engage in counter-narratives to the dominant discourse in educational leadership where critical spirituality is marginalized.<sup>27</sup> The necessity of discourse on the role of spirituality for women of African descent who navigate work in departments of education within the academy continues.<sup>28</sup>

We had noticed Dr. Elam say "I prayed" multiple times, so we asked her about the role of spirituality in her life and work. Here is her description:

[The role of spirituality is] major. If it wasn't for my belief in God I wouldn't be able to breathe. That's how I hold on. I pray everyday, every single day before I speak, and sometimes well I pray a lot but I have learned how to really step into prayer, I ask that my words touch the hearts and the minds of (people) that I am allowed to speak to in order to make a difference. I pray right before every keynote. Every day I wake up I ask God to let my words make a difference. Guide me wherever you [God] want.

Dr. Elam follows in the tradition of public intellectual educators like Anna J. Cooper who wrote, "It is God's own precaution to temper our self-seeking by binding our sympathies and interests indissolubly with the helpless and the wretched."<sup>29</sup> Dr. Elam conveys a belief that her work is also

guided by God and directed toward the education of children; "I have been blessed with a gift." Cusick urges "everyone [to] devote their labor to improving the situations of the worst off: the poor, the starving, the homeless, the sick all need to be cared for and given the chance for a productive life if any of our lives are to have any worth."<sup>30</sup> Dr. Elam has answered this call by dedicating her life's work to improving education of poor children of color.

According to Daniel Hay, spirituality is relational and underpins all ethics.<sup>31</sup> It is subversive and politically significant because it counters the dominant secular and individualistic culture. He advocates for spiritual education. In a similar vein, Ryoo, Crawford, Moreno, and McLaren advance a pedagogical notion of spirituality that resonates with ideas of intersectionality and anti-oppressive education.<sup>32</sup> They describe critical spiritual pedagogy as a pedagogy of integrity that recognizes all aspects of identities as opposed to the fragmentation which occurs when educators only recognize the intellectual subjectivity of learners. Critical spiritual pedagogy works toward humanization as it counters fragmentation, Othering, and exploitation. It instead provides interdependent communities of support and love that uplift the capacity of others to act against oppression.<sup>33</sup>

#### "The Elam Method"

Dr. Elam uses "The Elam Method" to lead toward academic achievement for students of color. This method allows movement along a continuum of cultural competency assessment and prepares teachers to utilize the knowledge and skills necessary to work with diverse populations.

There has to be a balance between the affective domain and technical skills. We can keep training teachers on the instructional skills and it's going to work with 70% of the population ideally, that 30% is still tied to cultural competence of how do you reach the children you are not connected with? What is it in their background that you're not connecting with? They can be in the same class, what is it that we are not doing?<sup>34</sup>

She asks that educators know their students as well as their content and profession.

#### Culturally competent leadership

According to Elam, Robinson and McCloud, Cultural Competence in the school setting is a process based on a clearly defined set of core values and principles that support policies, practices, behaviors, attitudes, and structures that enable educators to work effectively across the cultures their students represent. A second element of cultural competence is the acquisition and

institutionalization of cultural knowledge and the adaptation to diversity in the contexts of the communities being served.<sup>35</sup> Culturally competent leaders must be able to gather, analyze, and report disaggregated student achievement data in such a manner as to not alienate teachers and parent groups – nor inadvertently undermine the reason it is required that may result in confirming racist and stereotypical attitudes that they are meant to dispel. It requires school leaders to examine the academic and cultural implications of the data. Elam, Robinson and McCloud further contend that cultural competence is necessary, but not sufficient, for cultural competence cannot be separated from achievement as students need access to rigorous curriculum, highly effective teachers (with deep content knowledge), comprehensive staff development and support services for teachers, and use of data to monitor achievement.

Dr. Elam tries to ensure that people of color have the rights guaranteed by the Constitution and the courts. She argues, "This is what people deserve; I am not asking for something people are not due. Poor minority people have the right to access public education of quality." She continues, "I don't beat people up. I want them to work and make a difference in children. Therefore, your approach must be direct about what the real issues are and talk about racism and talk about inequities and injustices ... and hope you can impact the people. I hold on to prayer to resist responding to the negative remarks made about groups of people, when I know that they are speaking through frustration and not through total malicious intent."

#### Work with principals

The role race plays in leadership preparation and promotion of people of color is also important to note. According to Dr. Elam, principals are not prepared to confront racism in schools, noting how little principals know about race. She perceives widespread, persistent, and inequitable support for principals of different races. Dr. Elam recalls, "Every time that I visited the White female's school there were central office people in that building all the time, high visibility, coverage in the newspaper, on panels. Black female [at the school headed by a Black female] never saw anybody that was there for extra help from the central office, nor did I see it with the Black male. The assistance provided (or not provided) to minority principals is often inequitable." Dr. Elam's statement is consistent with Brown's findings on the inequities in the employment conditions of African American leaders who tend to be employed in urban school districts that are underfunded with scarce resources, uncertified teachers, and underachievement.<sup>36</sup>

#### Dehumanization meets humanizing pedagogy

Dr. Elam sighs, "There have been days when I thought 'there is no hope,'

when I thought 'I can't teach you. I cannot teach you to care about children as human beings.'" Just over a decade ago, while working in Mississippi, she entered a school district that was cited for its over-referrals of African American children for disciplinary intervention. In a meeting with about 70 high school teachers, she highlighted issues of achievement and asked teachers about related issues. The following interaction was Dr. Elam's introduction into a year-long endeavor to address the disproportionate discipline referrals between Black and White students.

Dr. Elam recounts this episode. "... This White teacher raises her hand and she says, 'you're here because of the Office of Civil Rights cited us for discipline.' I said 'yes I am.' 'Well we think that if corporal punishment was not banned we wouldn't have this problem.'" According to Dr. Elam, this type of comment surfaced three times by both Black and White teachers. They claimed that ever since corporal punishment went out, their scores went down. She continued, "Jokingly I said, so do you think if you beat children they'll learn to read?" "To this, the woman raised her hand and sought clarification. "So this is about the discipline problems we have had with Black children?" Dr. Elam, responded, "Yes it is." The woman continued, "So if we found someone Black to beat the children would that be OK?" Dr. Elam's response was, "How could you say that?" Then she replied, "Thank you for saying that." Dr. Elam conveyed to us, she thanked the woman for speaking what she imagined others were thinking. She continued to state "Right now all you want to do is beat the children into submission... and think that's going to impact their learning [positively]. That has nothing to do with it. I said thank you for trusting me to say this but we have some work to do." Dr. Elam persisted in her work with the group.

According to Freire, "the oppressed, having adopted the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines," are fearful of freedom.<sup>37</sup> The images of beating children into submission help us to recall that in times of slavery it was not uncommon for Black people to be beaten as a punishment for attempting to gain freedom, instilling a sense of fear in association with the quest for freedom. As Freire describes, confusing freedom with the maintenance of the status quo can serve to camouflage the fear of freedom. This fear can threaten the awakening of critical consciousness as it appears a threat to the status quo and thereby leading to this confusing sense of freedom. In the situation she described, both Black and White teachers spoke in defense of corporal punishment. Those who might have disagreed remained silent during this meeting.

Our analysis of this situation through critical pedagogy returns to Freire's description of the oppressed who have adapted to the structure of domination in which they are immersed. He argues that the oppressed who are resigned to the structure of domination "are inhibited from waging the strug-

gle for freedom so long as they feel incapable of running the risks it requires. Moreover, their struggle for freedom... threatens their own oppressed comrades who are fearful of still greater repression."<sup>38</sup> Dr. Elam describes how people of color would approach her in the bathroom and say what they would not say in public or thank her for the opportunity to speak anonymously. She later describes a pedagogical strategy that allows anonymity.

As an outsider working with school districts under court order, Dr. Elam is aware of how oppressive spaces promote silence. She explains:

In Mississippi and Alabama there were Black people who would not say how conditions truly were because they lived there. Once we (outside consultants) left they remained. So, I started asking teachers to write anonymously about concerns or issues on blank sheets of paper. What would you like me to consider as I am working in your district. I started this practice because teachers would not speak in the group sessions, even when the sessions were small groups, but as soon as we would go on a break, individuals would approach me to speak confidentially. The use of note cards allows people to name issues but remain anonymous. As a result, I would begin a session announcing the use of the note card and state, "identify what you have experienced or observed someone experiencing that presents a challenge to your instruction." Some teachers work in an environment of fear. The voices of teachers of color can be silenced, requiring pedagogical acts that encourage participation without added risk.

#### *Pedagogy of love*

Dr. Elam worked with a school district in Georgia where, as she described, "the little Black children... had colds and their faces were crusty, dirty, runny noses and it was dried up on their faces. I noticed it because there were so many of the children." At one point she approached a child and said, "Baby come here and go to the bathroom, go wash your face." She describes her expression of connectedness, concern, and care. "I just followed him to the bathroom, I took a towel [and said] 'wash your face.' They were (White administrators and the superintendent) watching..." as she continued approaching many other children in the halls and classrooms handing them tissues and helping them clean their faces. Dr. Elam continued to describe this situation, "They're acting like our children are lepers. There is no excuse to have children look like that in a classroom. They were treated like untouchables. I said I have never seen anything like this. All the teachers were prim and proper and the children and their faces ... unbelievable!"

In this instance, enactors of domination and dehumanization reveal

"lovelessness" while Dr. Elam shows her love and care for "the unwashed" as "an act of courage not of fear, [for her] love is commitment to others... commitment to their cause—the cause of liberation."<sup>39</sup> Her experiences raise questions about the equity of access that students have to learning environments enriched by connectedness, concern and care. According to Freire, "lovelessness ... lies at the heart of oppression."<sup>40</sup>

#### *Problem posing pedagogy*

Dr. Elam uses "problem posing" as opposed to "deposit-making" of information to facilitate the cognition, provide connection, and raise the consciousness of those (students, teachers, principals) in education in relation to the world.<sup>41</sup> Data usage is a way for Dr. Elam and educators to bridge their differences and come to a common understanding of the issues. For example, when she works with school districts under a desegregation court order or cited by OCR for discrimination, she reads directly from the consent decree without summarizing or paraphrasing. In this way, the seriousness of the situation is identified and addressed in a serious and targeted manner. When issues of inequities and/or injustices are addressed, authentic solutions can be developed to modify or eliminate the policy or practice in which the malpractice occurs.

She recognizes that full exposure to the myriad of special and economic issues that many children face can overwhelm her audience. She describes her pedagogical approach to move participants in their awakening of critical consciousness or *conscientização* which helps to challenge and/or surmount the situation of oppression. *Conscientização* is the deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence into a perception of a situation as an objective-problematic, a movement from emergence to submersion. To do so, "people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity."<sup>42</sup>

We interpret Dr. Elam's approach as one that fosters an awakening of critical consciousness among her participants as she incites personal reaction and provides information to help impact their thinking about the relations between student achievement and structural conditions. According to Dr. Elam, "You have to shake people up so that they see the humanity in the children no matter where they come from. Then take it to research and then impact the thinking of teachers and that's the strategy that I keep on using." By providing a fuller picture of the reality of poor children of color she challenges a deficit view that situates the problem in the child.

She uses data "to address the denial that issues exist in education" and to counter resistance from those who would presume that she is a woman of color who might be operating from a personal agenda or has an axe to

grind.<sup>43</sup> She describes the differences in how Black and White participants respond to data she presents during workshops:

You will have two groups hear the same data, more often whites will try to rationalize the issue or give an example that is an exception to the rule. This is an attempt to dispel what you're doing. Blacks will tend to listen to it so they hold on to that one thing that works so that they can talk about replication. One strategy is in disbelief that solutions exist while the latter strategy is for hope. Both positions are important for change to occur.

Strategically, Dr. Elam appropriates qualitative data for the purpose of continuing the dialogue with a targeted and undeniable focus, removing the debate and subjectivity to a position which becomes solution-oriented. She couples this pedagogical act with others that serve non-dominant ways of knowing and learning such as dialogical walk-throughs and focus groups.

#### *Dialogical walk-throughs and focus groups*

The practice of using 3, 5, or 10 minute walk-throughs to monitor curriculum and instruction among teachers has become a task of the instructional leader.<sup>44</sup> Its roots are in the social efficiency movement of Frederick Taylor and its name varies according to the amount of time taken to conduct a classroom observation.<sup>45</sup> In contrast, Dr. Elam uses dialogical walk-throughs that reflect Freire's notion of the dialogical educator who works in an interdisciplinary team to reveal the themes through investigation and the representation of the themes as a problem in which people can intervene. Dr. Elam reminds us that the most effective professional development in her experience has been job-embedded, where the newly learned knowledge and skills are implemented and time is given for discussions with colleagues that include feedback from administrators. As a way of gauging the issues Dr. Elam conducts walk-throughs of instructional teams in the lowest performing schools. She describes her observations of the performance of a weak team and her interactions with principals and teachers.

"The teacher was there—soda, potato chips, kids running (during class time)—kids saw me and ran to their seats. The principal walked in after me—followed by the area superintendent. They were livid." Dr. Elam understood that this teacher (White male) had given up. Additionally, every fifth grade class was off-task. She told the principal that her response could not be punitive for she feared teachers would not allow her to return. Dr. Elam arranged with the area superintendent to get substitute teachers so that all the fifth grade teachers could visit a high performing school with similar demographics (urban, 98% free and reduced lunch). She designed a protocol for

teachers to use during the visit and accompanied them at the school. Demonstrating a dialogical process, after Dr. Elam visited the school, she and the team "debriefed and prioritized." She helped them with setting up their rooms and brought in additional people to help with instructional issues. Dr. Elam visited the school again. "We went through the classes [and] we couldn't believe that they were even the same classes. That's why I said I would just do walkthroughs. The principal said, 'If you had told me this would have worked I would not have believed you.'"

Dr. Elam also talked with teachers to shift their thinking and start talking about their achievement, successes and challenges, implementing new strategies, and discussing how these strategies were working. She organized focus groups so the teachers had a forum to discuss issues facing teachers in their classrooms, stating: "In the focus groups teachers expressed the amount of professional development received, but reflected on the fact of not having enough opportunity to implement the learned strategies in depth before receiving additional professional development on another new skill." This, in fact, was an unanticipated outcome. The district provided outstanding professional development, but perhaps offered too much, too soon. This oversaturation of professional development had a negative impact on the teachers.

As the above examples reflect, her approach to leadership development includes several if not all of the aspects of Freirean leadership noted by Miller, Brown and Hopson: humility, faith, hope, critical thinking, and solidarity. According to Miller et al., leaders working from a dialogical approach are open to new thoughts, do not assume that they alone have the answers, have confidence in people to name and describe their realities, draw on others' experiential knowledge, are hopeful about change, and find a sense of solidarity with others with the recognition that their realities and those of their colleagues are intertwined.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Carousel of deficit thinking: Round we go - where we'll stop nobody knows*

Excavating people's beliefs and views on any issues is an important and difficult process. The difficulty of such a process is exacerbated when these issues are raced and classed deficit views of students and their families. Awareness of such views is the first step that can lead to critical reflection and transformation. Such transformation then could lead to teachers and leaders taking action to build anti-oppressive schools where all children have access to an education rooted in excellence.

Dr. Elam conducts a carousel activity that challenges participants to respond quickly, without sufficient time to formulate politically correct answers. Working in small groups she asks them to name the challenges and successes in their district. Then she offers sentence starters that groups have to complete quickly: "The teachers are... the parents are ... the children are ..."

Groups share comments and look for agreements and absences. The purpose of the activity is to quickly assess and collect initial thoughts and status of their system, as well as to incite their willingness to participate—to get buy-in. She shares that the activity often exposes patterns of beliefs, lets participants feel listened to, and reveals deficit thinking such as students are unmotivated or the parents don't believe in their children's education.

#### *Why They Marched*

The importance of chronicling the journeys of those who came before in the struggle for social and economic equality is recognized by Dr. Elam in her children's book, *Why They Marched: The Struggle for the Right To Vote*, in which she captures the personal journeys of those who participated in the Selma March during 1965.<sup>8</sup> Inspired and guided by Civil Rights leaders and mentors in her personal and professional life, Dr. Elam is *passing the torch and paying it forward* through her service to education. By documenting her contributions to education we hope to fill in the gap in the scholarship on the leadership of Black women as public intellectuals. Her march continues as she follows in the intellectual tradition of Black leaders working to support the oppressed and advocate for social justice/anti-oppressive ideas and practices. "From the earliest works of Maria Stewart and David Walker through Frederick Douglass and Alexander Crummell, Black speakers, writers, preachers, and teachers have worked to transform society and liberate all those who are subjugated."<sup>8</sup>

As a servant leader, Dr. Elam challenges institutions' and communities' beliefs and actions operating through educators, for such institutions are the result of human creations. She places herself in vulnerable positions toward the humanization of people through transforming education. To do so, she provides evidence that exposes how some people and communities are more disadvantaged, sometimes in ways that are not immediately visible. What she makes visible and clear is that such disadvantages are not isolated instances in educational institutions. On the contrary, systems of privileging and denying privilege are pervasive, systemic, and interconnected across institutions. In addition to advocating for an equitable distribution of resources, she points to injustices in how intangible goods are developed and distributed (i.e., lack of connectedness, concern, and care).

This auto/biography of a public intellectual offers several pedagogical lessons to those who prepare leaders through a framework of social justice. For instance, her notion of culturally competent leadership is informed by the care she gives to structuring workshops, coaching, and conducting dialogical walk-throughs in which she takes into consideration the individual and collective experiences that shape the interpretive lens that learners and edu-

cators bring to the learning context. She also models preparation that is informed by a critical consciousness of the cultural and historical meanings coded into artifacts (i.e., school names, grants, consent decrees). Her leadership model is infused with hope, guided by spirituality, and predicated on the values of public service, spirituality, and humanitarianism. From her pedagogy of struggle educators can learn to lead toward critical social justice through persistence, connectivity, and the dialectical purposes of service and leadership. We conclude with Elam's response to a student who asked her, "Do you really think you can teach people to be culturally competent? Isn't it that you are either culturally competent or you are not?" Dr. Elam responded, "I think we can teach people to a point, and then you hope that it impacts their heart to influence their mind."

## Notes

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<sup>2</sup>Cynthia B. Dillard, "Leading with Her Life: An African American Feminist (Re)Interpretation of Leadership for an Urban High School Principal," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 31, 4 (1995): 539-563, 543.

<sup>3</sup>Carolyn M. Cusick, "Anna Julia Cooper, Worth, and Public Intellectuals," *Philosophia Africana* 12, 1 (2009): 21-40, 29.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, 29.

<sup>5</sup>Nelda Cambron-McCabe and Luvern L. Cunningham, "National Commission for the Advancement of Educational Leadership: Opportunity for Transformation," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 38, 2 (2002): pp.289-299, 295.

<sup>6</sup>Robert V. Bullough, Jr. and Stefnee Pinnegar, "Guidelines for Quality in Autobiographical Forms of Self-Study Research," *Educational Researcher* 30, 3 (2001): 13-21.

<sup>7</sup>Richard Butt and Danielle Raymond, "Arguments for Using Qualitative Approaches to Understanding Teacher Thinking: The Case for Biography," *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 7 (1987): 62-93.

<sup>8</sup>James Ryan and Cindy Rottmann "Educational Leadership and Policy Approaches to Critical Social Justice," *Journal of Educational Administration and Foundation* 18, (2007): 9-23, 12-16.

<sup>9</sup>Bruce J. Avolio, Fred O. Walumbwa and Todd J. Weber, "Leadership: Current Theories, Research and Future Directions," *Annual Review of Psychology* 60 (2009): 421-449, 433.

<sup>10</sup>Robert K. Greenleaf, *The Servant as Leader*. Greenleaf Center for Servant

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<sup>11</sup>Elam quote.

<sup>12</sup>Donyell L. Roseboro and Sabrina N. Ross, "Care-Sickness: Black Women Educators, Care Theory, and a Hermeneutic of Suspicion," *Educational Foundations* 23, 3-4 (2009): 19-40.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Glenn Singleton and Curtis W. Linton, *Courageous Conversations about Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 1995).

<sup>16</sup>Elam quote.

<sup>17</sup>Alexander Cuenca, "Self-Study Research: Surfacing the Art of Pedagogy in Teacher Education," *Journal of Inquiry & Action in Education* 3, 2 (2010): 15-29, 17.

<sup>18</sup>Freire, Paulo, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2003).

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Zeus Leonardo, "Critical Social Theory and Transformative Knowledge: The Functions of Criticism in Quality Education," *Educational Researcher* 33, 6 (2004): 11-18, 16.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Antonia Darder, *Reinventing Paulo Freire: A Pedagogy of Love*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002): 19; Thomas J. Sergiovanni, *Rethinking Leadership: A Collection of Articles*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2007).

<sup>23</sup>Parker J. Palmer, "Teaching with Heart and Soul: Reflections on Spirituality in Teacher Education," *Journal of Teacher Education* 54, 5 (2003): 376-385; Cynthia B. Dillard, Daa'iyah Abdur-Rashid, and Cynthia Tyson, "My Soul is a Witness: Affirming Pedagogies of the Spirit," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 13 (2000): 447-462.

<sup>24</sup>Sheryl C. Cozart, "When the Spirit Shows Up," *Educational Studies: Journal of the American Educational Studies Association* 46, 2 (2010): 250-269; Cynthia B Dillard, "The Substance of Things Hoped For, the Evidence of Things Not Seen: Examining an Endarkened Feminist Epistemology in Educational Research and Leadership," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 13 (2000):661-681; Jean-Marie, Gaetane and Anthony H. Normore "The Impact of Relational Leadership, Social Justice, and Spirituality among Female Secondary School Leaders," *International Journal of Urban Educational Leadership* 4, 1 (2010): 22-43; Noelle Witherspoon and Dianne L. Taylor, "Spiritual Weapons: Black Female Principals and Religious-Spirituality," *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 42, 2 (2010): 133-158.

<sup>25</sup>Daniel Scott, Storytelling, "Voice and Qualitative Research: Spirituality as a Site of Ambiguity and Difficulty." In *Spiritual Education: Cultural, Religious and Social Differences: New Perspectives for the 21st Century*, eds J. Ericker, C. Ota, and C. Ericker (Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic, 2001): 118-129, 127.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 127.

<sup>27</sup>Michael E. Dantley, "Critical Spirituality: Enhancing Transformative Leadership Through Critical Theory and African American Prophetic Spirituality," *International Journal of Leadership in Education* 6, 1 (2003): 3-17.

<sup>28</sup>Sheryl C. Cozart, "When the Spirit Shows up," *Educational Studies: Journal of the American Educational Studies Association* 46, 2 (2010): 250-269.

<sup>29</sup> Carolyn M. Cusick, "Anna Julia Cooper, Worth, and Public Intellectuals," *Philosophia Africana* 12, 1 (2009): 21-40. Cusick cites Anna Julia Cooper, p. 171.

<sup>30</sup> Cusick, Anna Julia Cooper, 35.

<sup>31</sup> Daniel Hay, "Spirituality Versus Individualism." In *Spiritual Education, Cultural, Religious, and Social Differences: New Perspectives for the 21st Century*, eds. J. Erricker, C. Ota, & C. Erricker, (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2001): 104-117.

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Elam quote.

<sup>35</sup> Donna Elam, Stephanie Robinson and Barbara McCloud, *New Directions for Culturally Competent School Leaders: Practice and Policy Considerations* (Policy brief, University of South Florida, David C. Anctin Center, 2007).

<sup>36</sup> Frank Brown, "African Americans and School Leadership: An Introduction," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 41, 4 (2005): 585-590.

<sup>37</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 47.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>43</sup> Elam quote.

<sup>44</sup> Nancy J. Brooks, Sharon G. Solloway and Louise A. Allen, "Instructional Supervision and Curriculum Monitoring: Reinterpreting the Principal's Role Through the Arts of Inquiry," *Journal of Personnel Evaluation Education* 20 (2007): 7-16.

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<sup>48</sup> Cusick, Anna Julia Cooper, 24.

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