Breaking the Code: Unlocking scholar identity in a policing state

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Title: Breaking the Code: Unlocking scholar identity in a policing state of schooling

Abstract:
In response to recent events like those in Ferguson, Missouri, and for minority communities in particular, activism and community solidarity around issues of youth development are seen as precursory to the formation of a new type of American public intellectual. Scholar identity development in poor and/or minority communities is moderated by self-concepts related to power and perceptions of powerful people about the powerless. Mediated by networks, capital is built and maintained within systems that support two opposing realities: empowerment or disempowerment. Taking an ecological approach, this theoretical paper presents a model of an empowerment pedagogy process that challenges “poverty pedagogies” in the education and development of youth. We posit that this process improves youth trajectories toward successful adult life outcomes. The authors explore the implications those precursors have to learning and social development for youth as well as the adults who serve them. An underlying thread in the dialogue between these two practitioners—one community based, one school based—is the function of schools in this context. Recommendations for next steps in the discourse and directions for future research are provided from both points of view.

1. Introduction & Rationale

*Education is that whole system of human training within and without the schoolhouse walls which molds and develops men...*
—*W.E.B. DuBois, “The Talented Tenth”, 1903*

With cities on fire because of egregious crimes committed against their citizens, youth need opportunities to exercise their voice and reach full actualization as powerful contributors to society. Twentieth-century education models are still being enacted in spite of considerable advances in technology and social change. Non-dominant cultural groups (Black, Latino and poor of all races) have yet to secure the promises of a world not “left behind” by schooling practices. As is the age-old human tradition, the powerful oppress the powerless. Helping marginalized groups break codes created within this system to alienate, denigrate and oppress them is at its core a human development imperative for the 21st century. As it relates to the lives of children, which institutions are prepared to respond to this imperative? Are schools with increasingly invasive safety and accountability measures the right choice? Or are community agencies better able to take the lead?

1.1 Codes, Power and Access

Power is itself moderated by access. Access to resources builds capital: physical, human, social and multicultural (Achinstein, Curry, Ogawa & Athanases, 2014). Those lacking these various forms of capital are often labeled “unqualified” or “under-prepared”. They are locked out of opportunities based on esoteric knowledge created for, by and within systems. Codes are established to be typically unknowable by persons outside of these systems. Nevertheless,
somehow, the polarizing impact of the over-policing of youth and communities of color has had a unifying impact where adults and youth from non-dominant cultures are working together in solidarity to regain control. Using media to shine a light on their victimization in the name of safety, citizens are being mobilized. Reported by Frederica Boswell (2014) on a National Public Radio website, poignant examples of youth leadership are gaining national attention. When asked where she sees things going in the future as it relates to her work with the student organization Students Against Mass Incarceration, Columbia University student Asha Rosa replied:

*I hope that a moment like this makes people start realizing that the current system of policing needs to change. We need less policing and a rethinking of what contributes to community safety. Is that the police? Or is it a community center and well-funded schools?*

*...*

*Beyond accountability, I hope to see a shift in narratives about violence. At the present moment, the dominant narrative points to black people as being the main sources of violence in black communities. But what our society needs to begin to recognize is that racialized targeting by the police, underfunding and closing schools, lack of access to social programs and so on are all forms of social, political and economic violence on black communities. This is the real violence.*

In the same report, Naisha Soto, a Philadelphia high school student and youth organizer characterizes her work as “fighting for real education reform”. She comments about Ferguson, MO and grassroots efforts in Philadelphia:

*There's a lot of power in the streets. We are frustrated and angry at the fact that one of our young people was killed. I understand the riots. Angry people react by doing whatever they can to take the hurt away. How can we respect the law if the law is attacking us like that? Still, our people are the ones at risk. As organizers we need to bring people together and lead them to attack back in a strategic way...the relationships between cops and communities are not where they should be. Young people in my community don't like cops. We need cops to respect youth and stop treating us like criminals. They should come have a real conversation with us.*

A key theme in their comments is the notion of an expanding meta-narrative about Black people and the police state. Pointing directly to school structures, they implicitly interrogate the place of schools and learning in the development of individual children and whole communities.

One of the critical roles of education then is to enable students’ seamless entry, as active participants, into the most fulfilling aspects of society and, perhaps, position them to play significant roles in shaping society for the betterment of all humankind. Schools— institutions of formal education—are a microcosm of larger society: a predictor of what society might resemble 20 years later. The principal serves as mayor, teachers, the head of households. The policies governing school systems (i.e., hiring practices, classroom assignments, conflict resolution, adult and child discipline, inclusion and exclusion, and pedagogy) have been positioned in the public eye as foundational to all of society, but are they really?
As it relates to the academic and adult life trajectories of African American children, black males in particular, the school/society analogy can be considered from three perspectives: a) school systems as microcosms of society, b) school policies and practices as generators of social caste and c) school systems as an autonomous and closed ecosystem. Each perspective in some way shapes an actor’s self concept. His ability to move beyond what happens in school and subsequent societal events—whether as an individual or as a member of social group—may be predicated on specific protective factors that were developed and cultivated by a single person or observation that challenged the actor to think differently: to solve a problem in that moment or reconcile a conflict in a way that could ultimately serve not just the actor but others. Many times, the “single person or observation” is a teacher or community advocate acting within learning contexts. An ethic of care displayed toward the young actor transforms in those moments the various schema that he will use later.

Formal schooling therefore, is a means to cultural capital for an educated populace — social rules and codes that are followed in school, along with the nature of classrooms allows even the most homogeneous environments to be strangely diverse. In schools, young children become friends even if their parents never come to know each other, gaining critical access to people, places and things beyond what may be known or familiar to them. Pedagogies and practices of teachers help to build small communities that have the potential to enable complex social exchange and build life-long networks. There are unique opportunities in classrooms to both learn codes for success and social inclusion. Similarly, there are ample opportunities in schools for children to devolve toward social isolation. Teachers and school-based others within the community have a significant role to play in supporting student engagement that can lead to empowerment. To empower is to provide a means for an individual actor to participate and serve as a change agent in the community, to move beyond the need to preserve self and control others, and to collaborate in efforts to solve problems. It is time to support a shift from role to responsibility. Training, that which “serves to make persons more alike” (Chickering, 1969, p. 292) is not enough. Education, that which “starts with the learner and uses tasks in the service of his increased differentiation and integration” (ibid., p. 292) into productive social, societal and professional structures is a more appropriate goal for our times.

1.2 Police State and Schools

*My child is no criminal. He is a straight ‘A’ student. The dean of school discipline has sentenced him to a week of In-house suspension because he returned a note to his teacher that I, his mother, didn’t sign. He is sharing space with students who are regularly disruptive, who bring weapons to school, and who are facing expulsion. My son is no criminal. Why is he treated as such?*

—Child Advocate (2014)

According to post 9/11/2001 research conducted in Chicago Public Schools, “the public nature of accountability provisions [have] pitted schools against the parents” (Lipman, 2006, p. 61), a
major stakeholder group in the school system. Defining the “policing state” in the context of urban schools is necessary if questions about the function of schools are to be answered. Increasingly, school policies have been put in place that espouse ideas of criminality and rehabilitation among children rather than constructivism and potential. School safety practices are becoming increasingly more punitive. Phenomena described by Irby (2013) as “net widening and net deepening” express how penalties for a wider range of behavioral infractions are leading to more severe (deeper) penalties for students including suspension and expulsion. Similar alarms are being sounded on behalf of indigenous youth in Australia who, in spite of their 1 - 2% minority status in the population, are incarcerated at higher rates (Brown, 2012) and Black youth across the United States of America (Lowery, 2013). There is even the belief that smart kids are being criminalized (demonized) under the aegis of zero tolerance policies (Casella, 2003; Whitehead, 2011). With little understanding of the law and compromises in the civil rights of their children, well-meaning parents have endorsed safety measures like cell phone regulations uniform policies that have damaging consequences if compromised. Ushered into existence by a rapidly changing safety context in public buildings, laws like the Gun Free School Zone Act of 1994 and the School Safety Drill Act of 2005 have created a climate of constant surveillance and tension within the student-teacher dyad. Given the post-9/11 culture that we all face, policies have been put in place that allow for profiling of students of color (Lipman, 2006). Systems put in place to protect add the burden of hypervigilance to an already overwhelmed teaching and administrative demand on adults perhaps inducing fear and distrust among the very actors who are supposed to be the keepers of safety. Furthermore, time constraints and the ever-growing need to police students tax teachers’ patience and students’ tolerance. Teachers yell, scream, and bark out commands to students as if they were herding prisoners from recreation to lunch and into their cells:

- Open that bag!
- That is the wrong color of uniform!
- Take your hands out of your pockets!
- You, go to the office, you know not to bring a cell phone into the building!

When we consider the ubiquity and availability of various technologies in schools (personal and public), we find students capturing teachers’ (and teachers capturing students’) “bad behavior” with mobile devices in the same way that distrusting citizens capture police officers over-policing and terrorizing their neighborhoods. The persistence of increased tension within the student-teacher dyad is a clearly unintended consequence of greater “safety measures” in schools.

1.3 Scholar Identity

Understanding “scholar identity” formation” (Welch, 1996; Whiting, 2006) for disadvantaged populations is also vitally important to this work. Developing an identity as a scholar is different from just being smart. It means that the actor is willing to engage in complex and varied conversations with a diversity of people; the actor is willing to listen critically to opposing sides of discourse while also being patient enough to weigh arguments against sound evidence rather than emotional conjecture; the actor is willing and able to enact change within narrowly and perhaps broadly defined communities. “A sense of identity frees interpersonal relationships”
(Chickering, 1969, p. 15). Building on the psychosocial paradigms of student development proposed by Arthur Chickering in the late 1960s, leadership identity development (Komives et al., 2006) and subsequent scholar identity development (Whiting, 2006) are predicated on strong relationships with others.

Using evidence from doctoral research conducted by the authors, we are building a grounded theory of pedagogy. Two completely different research streams feed the same conclusion—scholar identity formation for African-American and Latino youth is a process of empowerment dependent upon the networks in place to help those youth overcome barriers.

1.4 Positionality Statement
We are practitioners in our fields. The first author is a career science educator. The second, a scholar-practitioner, is a career human services provider, veteran police officer, and minister. At the core of our latest discussions (and this paper) is the essential question: what is the real function of schools? Understanding that Black and poor youth/communities generally use schools differently than higher status (socioeconomic) others, we interrogate this issue from our experiences and positions as practitioners. Because we perhaps have stronger “sociological imaginations”1 than other practitioners — owing in large part to our experiences as first generation Ph.D.s — we present our thoughts as a request for expanded discourse about this very important topic.

2. Relevant literature
There are multiple perspectives from which problems (and solutions) in a setting or field can be viewed. Just as our identities are shaped on multiple levels, so too are our ideas. Unilaterally, most of our ideas are born from “strong-tie” (Granovetter, 1983; Louch, 2001) conversations we have with self and within corporate structures like our family, immediate peer group/social circle, neighborhood or local community. We “trust the pictures in our head” (Lippmann, 1921, p. 4) previously validated by others within our strong-tie groups. These conversations impact how we feel, what we believe and how we think about regional and national issues and may also determine our global perspectives forming “spheres of influence”. Structural holes (Burt, 2009) that exist in our networks actually act as binders that could potentially help mediate weak ties and provide benefits (Burt, 2009; Gargiulo & Benassi, 2000; Seibert, Kraimer & Liden, 2001).

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1 Direct reference to the work of American sociologist C.W. Mills
Building on ideas presented by Granovetter (1983), Louch (2001) and Seibert, Kraimer & Liden (2001): field specialization and work create weak social ties. “Individuals with few weak ties will be deprived of information from distant parts of the social system and will be confined to the provincial news and views of their close friends” (Granovetter, p. 202). When additional stressors are placed on social systems (language differences, racial differences, religious differences) value-differentials and even political gradients surface and may further widen gaps within systems. Bound only by weak ties, barriers are created, “new ideas spread slowly…[and] subgroups separated by race, ethnicity, geography, or other characteristics will have difficulty reaching a modus vivendi (ibid., p. 202-203)”.

Louch (2000) describes work done by Burt, Feld, Fisher, Marsden and others in the identification of characteristics and effects of homogeneity and homophily on networks from various sources of social survey data. Analysis of relational triads generated several hypotheses about ties and connections: cleavage points and foci could be affirmed or rejected within networks. This line of thinking has shaped our own views of networks. Functioning at the micro- (or family) level, mezzo- (or community) level, and macro- (societal) level networks range in size and impact. Mentors, caring adults not within a nuclear family structure, exist within these layered fields of influence. More than ten years ago Seibert, Kraimer & Liden (2001) issued a future research challenge to consider mentoring networks and their relationships to career satisfaction and success outcomes. We have responded and are issuing the same challenge to school settings.

Empowerment is a core value of mentoring and like networks occur in layers and at levels. Interestingly enough we believe that what happens at the intersections of these layers tells a unique and important story about power structures and systems. For example, between the nuclear family and the at-large community exist smaller circles: neighborhoods. In these physical and social spaces, familiarity and comforts perhaps foster allegiance and intimacy. Further entrenchment in the mezzo-level network of the community provides opportunities for nespotic relationships or “hook-ups” that bridge access points between the community and society. Business relationships are built in this intersection. A child rarely (if ever) navigates these “spheres” alone. We do not discount the role of self-determination (“Kujichagalia”) in this process but believe strongly that the journey from micro- to macro- world systems is mediated itself by mentors and role models willing to help children explore.
2.1 Identity Development Theories

Even though we locate this work in human development of black and brown people, we are purposely not addressing theories of racial identity formation. It is our belief that in the cases we discuss here, racial identity was firm—the participants in both studies were secure in their identity as African-American/Black and Latino people reaching the last two stages of the process, what Cross (1991) calls either the internalization or internalization-commitment stage of racial identity formation. Instead we derive our thinking from the work of Albert Bandura (1982; 2003) in conceptualizing self-efficacy and two complementary theories of human development proposed by Chickering (1969) and Komives et al. (2006). Arthur Chickering published his first thoughts about student development in 1969—early findings from a five-year study of student development (NIMH Grant MH: 14780-04). At that time, he described seven major dimensions of development that occur during college years that have since been explicated as stages of development with specific attributes (Chickering, 1993):

1. **Competence**: intellectual, physical/manual, interpersonal
2. **Emotions** *(anger, fear, anxiety, hurt, desire, guilt, shame)* management
3. **Autonomy**: self-sufficiency and independence that leads to the acknowledgment and acceptance of interdependence
4. **Identity**: stabilizing norms of self-acceptance
5. **Interpersonal relationships**: human responsiveness based on trust and intimacy
6. **Purpose**: connectedness to a greater good
7. **Integrity**: actions based on humanizing beliefs and social core values associated with healthy and balanced integration of all of the other dimensions of development

Notably, Chickering describes how pivotal identity development is for young adults. “It involves gaining a sense of how one is seen and evaluated by others. It leads to clarity and stability and a feeling of warmth for this core self as capable, familiar, worthwhile” *(ibid.)*. Unlocking identity clears the way for the higher
dimensions described by the latter vectors—interpersonal relationships, purpose and integrity. Modified in the early 1990s, these seven dimensions are now often described as vectors, representing fluidity and directionality that was hidden in the first model. The vectors are neither self-aggrandizing nor self-deprecating but instead self-preserving in context. Like the model we have described for spheres of influence (Fig. 1) and various network strata (Fig. 2) that exist between people, student development articulated in this way is more nested than it is exclusive.

Using similar language and ideas, Komives et al. (2006) articulate six stages of leadership development: awareness, exploration/engagement, leadership identification [by self and recognition by others], leadership differentiation, generativity and integration/synthesis. Key transitions between stages are characterized by reflective self talk and sense-making. The changing view of self from dependent to independent to interdependent is moderated by mentoring networks and influence. In addition to explaining the vital role that adults and older peers played in helping students navigate their path toward leadership, the authors explain how “experience with people different from themselves was a crucial pathway to the interdependent stages [the latter stages] of leadership identity” (*ibid.*, p. 413) linking this exposure to work ethics, self-efficacy, and multicultural capital.

2.2 Self-concepts: Efficacy

Self-efficacy is a very well researched construct. The work of Albert Bandura to understand the potential (and the limits) of research about efficacy remains among the most often referenced works concerning beliefs and self-concept. At the time of this writing [Fall, 2014], Bandura’s 1982 work “Self efficacy: Mechanism of human agency” had been cited by 11648 publications according to Google Scholar. An Authormapper.com search for “self efficacy” shows 21645 articles that use the same key words. Gist & Mitchell (1992) do an exhaustive review of relevant literature concerning self-efficacy; 2192 additional studies and conceptual papers cite the Gist & Mitchell (1992) review according to Google Scholar [Fall, 2014]. Numerous studies use the subscales of self-efficacy—personal self-efficacy and outcome expectancy—proposed by Bandura to explain how subjects feel about their own abilities/capacities to perform. Self-efficacy is a personality feature influenced by positive or negative social interactions or within positive or negative mentoring relationships. Research regarding self-efficacy tends to focus on self-evaluation, regimented behavior, and task accomplishment. Two characteristics of efficacy relevant for consideration in this paper are the self-referent and task-specific (Bandura, 1982) nature of self-efficacy itself. In this way we conceptualize self-efficacy as an antecedent to scholar identity. We further articulate self-efficacy to be “the extent to which an African American adolescent male perceives himself to be an independent agent of positive change, capable of self-improvement and social and economic ascendency” (Author2, 2013, p. 24). We also believe that self-efficacy is the remedy for social violence; it is what distinguishes successful African American males from those who are not successful (Stevens & Griffin, 2001).


Whether used to describe school systems, schooling practices, school structures or school policies, the school/society analogy is one worth articulating more clearly. At the core of this paper is the question “what is the function of school”? We believe there are three perspectives from which the school/society “question” can be critiqued. Each perspective is presented here.
3.1 School systems as microcosms of society
It is a widely held view that schools are influential predictors of students’ transition into adulthood (The class president becomes mayor. The school troublemaker and in-school suspension frequent flyer grows to become a criminal). In an empowerment pedagogical model, each is an independent agent who is solely responsible for her/his life outcomes.

3.2 School policies and social caste
School practices contribute to the class systems that polarize adult citizens and broaden gaps between “the haves and have nots”. The school is an active agent of social dysfunction, partiality, the low performance of some students and the high performance of other students. This scenario is truly an example of the disempowerment potential of schools. Although it may seem efficient to track students it places greater stress on the systems that students will have to operate in beyond the school day and schooling years.

Not all suspensions are created equal—zero tolerance policies that fail to consider the perpetrator holistically can end up contributing to higher degrees of truancy and ultimate disengagement (Lowery, 2013); the difference is usually mediated by a network of caring others who can help students make sense of their actions and distinguish childish behavior from malevolence, malefeasance and malintent. Citing five “real reasons why children drop out”, a former school teacher, counselor and administrator explains that “schools are toxic to student learning, students, parents and staff” Schargel (2013). When coupled with already complicated home-community associations, students disengage from the schools and teachers who fail them and make different choices.

3.3 The school system, as an autonomous agent and closed ecosystem
School systems lack mechanisms that mitigate students’ personal ecology. The distinction between high performers and low performers lies outside of the school’s ecology. This notion compromises the potential strength of a student-teacher dyad built on trust and mutual respect. It’s vacuum isn’t tight enough to insulate students from their everyday realities, challenges, and temptations. It’s archaic model is built upon assumptions of social norms (nuclear household, educated caring parents, and capital stability). It fails to take seriously a burgeoning student body plagued by poverty, post traumatic stress disorder, prison culture, absentee and permissive parents, untreated illness, and homelessness. Furthermore it assumes that networks do not exist.

4. Evidence of Empowerment Pedagogy: Clues from our work
Protective factors for the development of scholar identity in school settings do exist. Teachers and other authorities in the school context have skills useful for identifying funds of knowledge within the lives of children. These funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992) and various capitals (Achinstein et al., 2014) allow children to buffet deficits that must be overcome in order to survive. Teachers and other authorities in the child’s life are generally able to distinguish behavioural elements in youth that are marks of leadership. More importantly however is the idea that teachers and other authorities in learning environments have their own experiences that can be the source of rich, co-generative dialogues (Lavan & Beers, 2005) about complex problems. In some ways, these co-generative dialogues are a mechanism for transgenerational survival and reconciliation. We describe examples of
such resilience across the full range of stakeholder development—youth and adults—in community and school-based research settings. Engagement in critical thinking about world-significant issues leads to ownership of both the problems and the solutions. In the first example, we provide curricular details from a community-based Black male mentoring program. In the second example, we describe how resilience is cultivated in the context of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) teaching and learning.

4.1 Men & Boys learning together and building human capital

Homicide, incarceration rates, poor education, and underemployment among African American males remain disproportionately high compared to other racial groups within the United States (Lauritsen & Heimer, 2006; 2007; Grantham & Ford, 1998; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Holzer, 2006; Holzman, 2006). An enhanced understanding of ethnic-based mentoring that captures the process of nurturing self-efficacy, positive self-image, and resilience among them is useful to social scientists, therapeutic practitioners, educators, and policy makers who work to improve the status of the African American male population. The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to understand the transformational process from social and academic dysfunction to social and academic success among African American male students through the shared experiences of those who have participated in a community-based mentoring program. Community mentors were police officers and program alumni (spanning the 12-year existence of the program). The objectives were to identify the vital elements and components of successful mentoring interventions and to label factors that were determined to be important to mediating success among African American adolescent males. Among the petit-tour questions interrogated in the study were participants’ perception of their own transformation as a result of their involvement in the program. Below are key insights from one study informant (P1):

Prior to joining the Program... we [me and my African American male peers] didn’t follow a lot of rules they [school authorities] set for us... a lot of kids, including myself, ...made our own path and there wasn’t a lot of...accountability and there wasn’t a lot of respect towards the authority figures.

First off, I try to make sure I’m accountable to God, to myself, to my family, my wife, my children, to my peer group, as a law officer... accountable to the community... I just became more focused, and more serious, and realized that I was representing, not just myself, but representing African American males (AAM). Representing the program. What Officer B instilled in myself was a sense of accountability.

Prior to the Program, I really didn’t see myself being...[sic] I really didn’t see myself as having the ability to be successful. I didn’t know anybody that was successful. I knew people that... I didn’t know anybody who had a career. Some people I knew had jobs. I didn’t really... I knew a lot of broken families. I didn’t really understand the fact that a lot of our successes and our failures we hold in our own hands.

There were residual benefits for the mentors parallel to the intended benefit for the youth. There was a systemic approach to teaching and learning that started with problem solving. Problem solving with relevant examples from the African-American community was used to build awareness of AAM status in the context of a bigger picture for the students. Ownership of the ideas needed to generate new questions and potential solutions led to richness and high quality interactions for adult and youth participants. This richness in communication, recreation exchange, fellowship and responsibility sustained individual’s commitment to the program. Even for the adult mentors, many of whom were in complex family
situations (i.e., divorced, single-parents) their experience with the youth of the program gave them opportunities to see themselves as contributing meaningfully to the lives of children.

4.2 STEM Education: Supports for resilience and equity

In Spring 2006, exploratory research was conducted as a required component of an ethnographic methods course. An IRB-approved study of university supports for persistence in STEM among science and mathematics undergraduate students examined social and academic structures in place that students felt helped them stay committed to their education. A convenience sample of eight students was interviewed about the structures in place throughout their education that helped them choose to major in a science discipline and then maintain that choice over time. The sample of four females (one White, one Black, one non-American Black, one biracial) and four males (one Black, one Latino, two Asian) were asked what supports existed to help them stay in their science programs. Initially, the all attributed their success to their own efforts and habits of discipline—studying instead of partying and seeking employment in labs on campus. None of them cited resources available to them at the university like tutoring centers or lab mentors. Personal reflections (as the researcher) from student interviews and e-mail correspondence about the study with a leading critical race theorist and STEM educator are recorded below:

Author: Interestingly enough, respondents did not perceive very many supports at all; often attributing their persistence and success to their own individual efforts. I couldn't help but conceptualize this finding as a product of meritocratic schooling, contributions level multicultural education and the culture of science that seems to suggest that having "support" is akin to "help" which is a sign of weakness leading to stereotype threat, especially for minorities and women. Another interesting finding is that the Asian respondents that I interviewed, did not conceptualize peer support/collaboration in the same way.

Expert: That's a brilliant basis for comparison, Asian vs UM ("underrepresented minorities")—definitely goes toward the issues raised in Ogbu's work on voluntary vs involuntary minorities and Fordham's "acting white" hypothesis. However from my POV they do not give sufficient attention to what it means to take on a specifically science/tech professional identity—take a look at Eglash, R. "Race, Sex and Nerds: from Black Geeks to Asian-American Hipsters." Social Text, 20:2, pp. 49-64, Summer 2002...

Author: ... I think that the "invisibility of support" especially by non-Asian minority science students is an important finding because it is an indictment of two groups: ineffective educators who continue to treat science as purely objective (positivists) and well-intentioned educators who frame science solely based on concrete products rather than process.

Expert: ...I suspect one thing that goes on is that many UM kids have a critique of the status quo... and they see science as both its source of power and its ability to cover up the system of exploitation under the guise of objective universalism (just as its claims to democracy cover up its inequality). I don't think kids would have an easy time articulating that critique, and perhaps its only subliminal or intuitive, but I think that's an enormous turn-off. So a science education that is willing to cop to those charges—willing to let older kids know the ways that science has been both handmaiden to exploitation, militarism, etc.; but also willing to let kids know about heroes who used science as opposition to those oppressive moves. I think that among the few science educators willing to admit to that, there is still a fear that if we actually let kids know the truth it will turn them off to science. I'm not saying that's not a well-placed fear. But better to know the truth than live a lie.
What I had not realized in those early reflections is that these students had begun developing a clear scholar identity even if they hadn’t been challenged to think or consider themselves as scholars of color. According to Whiting (2006), indicators of scholar identity among diverse males could be characterized by strong self-concepts and willingness to sacrifice social engagement for academic success. Paradigmatically, the role of mentoring is an important factor in scholar identity development. It was missing from participants’ beliefs about their supports (or at least their attribution of success to the efforts of a role model). Additional review of field notes uncovered high-school and elementary teachers who they felt were helpful in piquing interest in science and mathematics.

A strongly held view of school influence on science participation suggests that teachers make the most significant impact on student performance outcomes relevant to scholar-identity formation like motivation, sustained course-taking patterns, and personal science agency (Aikenhead & Jegede, 1999; Alexakos, 2005; Barton, 2000, 2001; Moore, 2002). Science teachers help shape students’ identity as doers of science (Beeton, 2007; Cooper, 1979). If we accept the hypothesis that doers of science are more than smart—that is that they are operating as scholars—then the strategies that teachers use to help students, especially students of color and poor children, re-imagine themselves as social and natural scientists could potentially transform the STEM pipeline. My identity as a Black science teacher (and learner) in mostly White communities continues to shape the various ways I think about that initial study, my role and responsibility in the classroom and the pedagogies that I employ to train teachers, work with students and develop my research agenda.

5. Conclusion
Empowerment pedagogies must be further developed extending beyond cultural relevance and regionally centric models of teaching and learning. Globally, the challenge of education for the next 100-years’ generations must find ways to stay ahead while stepping back to some of the human principles of engagement for action. Learning to find ways that will allow overlapping generations to intersect and interact without tension will be important to the success of this movement. Empowerment pedagogies are transcedent of school systems. School-community boundaries are permeable (Achinstein et al., 2014) thereby allowing for mutual benefit within the school/society construct. There is an ecological framework that helps students use resources (intellectual, social and emotional) available to them in school to negotiate the complexities of their life in dysfunctional home and school environments. When students contemplate the choices that they must make in dysfunctional spaces, protective factors cultivated in school-community networks that have allowed them to have a voice, to take appropriate responsibility for their learning and to operate as a functional member of a group, ultimately help them to make strong choices with positive consequences. Similarly, communities are more able to develop better understanding of youth and activate adult-like logic and mature leadership mindedness in them (Achinstein et al., 2014; Chickering, 1969/1993; Komives et al., 2006).

5.1 Scholar identity development
One approach to addressing large-scale needs in cities is to reimagine what appropriate teaching looks like and who is necessarily involved. The “codes” implicit in a skills-based approach to education that simply seeks to train students to use the same language, information, objectives and values is limiting. Creating a caste-like experience in schools based on performance, behavior, demographic specifications and socioeconomic status is another aspect of coding used to formally disenfranchise youth. The intellectual risks and cognitive dissonance common in significant and authentic learning experiences are
not rewarded in training-mode education. Haberman (1991) describes well how training-mode education may be considered a “pedagogy of poverty”; blackline masters, militant disciplinary practices and silenced youth participation are designed to create environments that are viewed as peaceful and orderly but are incredibly violent examples of indoctrination and disempowerment for students and teachers. We propose what we call empowerment pedagogy as a means to helping students form **scholar identities** over more pathologic identities that are commonly associated with disenfranchised youth.

This is not a phenomenon defined by race but class, broadening its implications beyond urban demographics to include rural places as well. White children from deeply impoverished homes and communities require exposure to responsible diverse adult role models in social and recreational contexts with linkages to school systems and professional contexts as well. “To better understand student leadership development, an intersection of student development and relational leadership” (Komives et al., 2006, p. 401), the border-crossing that happens between adults and children from different backgrounds and of different statuses as they build a community must also be understood. There is no true healthy relationship without a balance of power. An imbalance of power modifies relationships and perhaps is a barrier to intimacy (trust, respect, concern) and empowerment. In the system we propose, trust, respect and concern are ethical imperatives for children and adults as they mutually exercise their roles as leaders during conversations and activities. Being taught to be a leader versus **being trained to have a job** does three important things on the way to raising lower SES youth’s self-concept on par with that of youth from higher SES families:

- builds a personal empowerment structure (entrepreneur, owner, active participant in their destiny and that of their community… change agents)
- diminishes personal subjugation (employed, renter, passive observer of their own existence and that of their community)
- fosters a sense of ownership in their community and their society

As practitioners, we understand that disempowerment and marginalization are both central to social pathology and form barriers to academic self-concept: education without empowerment and access to opportunity (a context to operationalize their education and benefit from it) is useless.

Students and adults described in this paper developed their own scholar identities by making their own observations, vetting their ideas within peer and adult collaborative structures and presenting their solutions in meaningful ways. In the community-based process, youth were held accountable to standards for strong communication but even the adults were transformed. In the school-based process, research became the precipitating factor in the formation of an identity as a leader and scholar.

**5.2 A Model of the Empowerment Process**

Taking an heuristic approach to empowerment is a vital element in the development of a scholar identity especially for poor and minority children. A philosophy that we must adopt in our efforts to keep these vulnerable populations physically, intellectually and emotionally safe is the notion of human capital that can lead to the establishment of trust networks. Children in complex situations are being asked to resolve conflicts like adults. Adults in strained power contexts (parents in schools, poor people on their jobs, under-/mis-informed “others” in a range of different settings) are often treated like children. Without strong networks, people fail to feel empowered to change anything about their circumstance and trust is never fully established.
Between birth and the “scholar state” there are a series of linear and branched events that a person must navigate. We propose that very nearly at birth, cognition and readiness to learn are encapsulated in childhood by an awareness of “new things and behaviors” observed in home or at school. In other words, childhood learning fits into a container characterized by an awareness of home and school primers for learning. These primers build vocabulary and skills that can influence future learning in profound ways. Learning both what to do and what not to do, we posit that there exists a potential for life-long empowerment (and disempowerment) very early in the development of a child. The organization of other humans in that child’s life contributes to his ability to even form additional networks with peers and others. When ties from the child are strong between family and other networks, mentoring is accepted and leads to additional pathways for success. A model of these processes is described above (See Figure 3.).

5.3 Factoring in Affirmation: Empowerment, Enablement and Entitlement
Building a trust network requires that emergent scholars—youth and adults—be allowed to function with intellectual impunity. Actors are allowed to ask questions and challenge rules as long as they are also held accountable for their communications and actions. This is a necessary, protective factor for group dynamics but also strong self-concept development. Affirmation of positive actions makes room for
additional growth. Affirmations without correction can lead to entitlement within the network—a potential source of power imbalance. As an individualistic outcome, entitlement creates a false sense of empowerment because it exists without general regard for common good. Like entitlement, a potential negative outcome of affirmation is enablement. If an actor lacks opportunities to be independent and exercise autonomy, the network could foster an over-reliance on the group. Although collective self-concepts are important, this too will fall short of full scholar identity development. The ideal result of network formation and affirmation within groups is the development of intellectual leaders—scholars—capable of designing solutions to problems and supporting the growth process for others. On the path to this identity, actors are free to overcome challenges, demonstrate creativity and count on the mutuality of interdependence with others. In light of the various social and societal conflicts that poor and minority communities face related to the current surveillance culture in our nation, programs designed to galvanize various stakeholders, including state systems like the police, need to consider new ways of educating the populace.

5.4 Essential Questions Left Unanswered: Future Directions
What our conversations as practitioners working on behalf of communities of color have uncovered is a growing set of questions that continue to emerge as we contemplate our initial query: **What is [or should be] the real function of schools in the life of poor and minority communities?** Much like churches, schools have a schizophrenic identity in high-need communities. Serving multiple purposes, schools are becoming highly differentiated community spaces in some cases but remain limited in inner-city and minority-serving environments (Achinstein, Curry, Ogawa, & Athanases, 2014). How do multiple organizations work together to hold individual members accountable to the change process? Additional questions have emerged for us that are related to our model of empowerment pedagogy processes (Fig. 3) in high needs environments.

**What is terminal disempowerment?** We relate this unfortunate reality to the lowest levels of Maslov’s Hierarchy of Needs (MHON). Unmet needs cause actors to transition away from strong network affiliation and development into survival mode. In order to survive dysfunction and limited resources, out of necessity the actor becomes self-centered, generally acting alone as an agent of self-preservation. On the other hand, we have been equally challenged by the question, “**What is terminal empowerment?**”? We believe that when MHON is satisfied, personal fulfillment and self-actualization are achieved; an individual actor is an agent of philanthropy and purposeful collaboration. Furthermore, Chickering’s (1969/1993) seven vectors are systematically negotiated—the actor evolves as a leader and is able to act with integrity on behalf of himself and others acknowledging big picture phenomena. Thankfully, terminal does not mean static or permanent. We believe it is possible to re-enter the process and change the outcome, through additional learning and/or through further networking (Fig. 2). Structural holes (Fig. 1) created by gaps in spheres of influence are themselves unifying structures that allow us to see what we have in common with others outside of our circle. Re-entry into the process then is stabilizing.

5.5 Final thoughts and recommendations
Students, teachers and community members are often relegated to subjugated positions under policies of safety and accountability. How have these policies impacted voice, activism and identity formation for these groups? Our recommendation for future research includes exploration of the disempowerment -
empowerment continuum in schooling contexts. We further recommend that schools begin to use resources that teach children to “code switch”, to acknowledge that there is a language of power that does not have to diminish their own voice. Code switching is about “the different spaces we each inhabit and the tensions of trying to navigate between them. In one sense, “code-switching is about dialogue that spans cultures” (Demby, 2013). The culture and language of power is dictated by knowledge, information and collective reasoning. School stakeholders who feel powerless (or rather disempowered) can redefine their experience by choosing to learn how to “unlock the code”. Disunity and poor self concept make room for exploitation—a device inscribed within the code. When actors already feel exploited, additional language and policy patterns and codes can be used to keep them oppressed, especially when these groups are already on the margins (or are used to being marginalized). It is time to give “power to the people” by creating strong tie networks within the community that value autonomy, value creativity and ultimately cultivate scholarship.
References


