Foreword

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The current state of education in our country is more representative of deplorable decay than a disruption of inequality and injustice. The National Assessment Governing Board and National Center for Education Statistics released results from NAEP contended that educational progress is stagnant and interventions are static (McFarland, Hussar, De Brey, Snyder, Wang, Wilkinson-Flicker & Bullock Mann, 2017). Seemingly, injustice, from the prism of educational matters, has traveled faster and farther than justice. Furthermore, injustice appears to rapidly move in a multi directional manner impacting the embroider canvas of students, teachers, and families both a figurative and literal representation of a torn educational tapestry. Students experience the acute pain of academic malpractice levied by the powerful who have the ability to influence a broader and bolder approach to education yet abdicate their affluence in ways for which only the most elite benefit juxtaposed to effectualizing change that is to the advantage of all.

In the American instructional workforce, we face the persistent problem of teacher shortages (Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond, 2016). Experiencing a teacher shortage is a symptomatic microcosm of the real word. Nevertheless, the wide-range concern is fostering support which facilitates the sustainable preparation, recruitment and retention of teachers (Ingersoll &Smith, 2003). The decay of education also infiltrates mindsets, where the actions and attitudes of injustice are pervasive. Toxicities penetrate education that threatens to undermine the progression of progress. There comes a time when a critique is too inept to disrupt chaos. As such I recommend following the frame of Freire. In his work *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation*, Freire (1985) offered harsh critique of education and suggested a viable pathway forward is to allow education, as we know it, to undergo its own excavation. He asserted that once "Education had its own Easter" we could radically revive it in manner that works for the greater good. In order to aspire to do the aforementioned there needs to be a blueprint for building up a new education system.

Approximately six months prior to the assassination and untimely death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr he gave a deeply motivating and moving address entitled "What Is Your Life's Blueprint?" In delivering his talk, King urged the assembled listeners to be the architects that created plans for a "proper, solid, and sound blueprint." I contend that the need for this blueprint is ever more critical today and most will readily agree that an empowering plan is needed in troubling times. This brings me to the focus of the work encapsulated in this publication. In our Hillard/Sizemore Special Issue in the *Urban Education Research and Policy Annuals,* the authors answered and brought attention to an array of elucidative topics that have arisen in the field of education regarding the success of students in general, and the success of African American populations. The prophetic commentary and empirical investigations endeavor to take readers on an esoteric journey regarding practices and understandings that challenge the complexities of serving African American learners. The work of the authors is not merely sweeping responses but specific ideas to build the continuity of our informed and enlightened perspective.

In the following article titled, *Shifting Our Focus: Collaborating with Urban Schools to Support African American Students*, Wilkerson, Chapman, Bennett, and Carroll offer a comprehensive examination of University of Central Florida's (UCF) commitment to equity and excellent through the College of Community Innovation and Education's teacher preparation program. In an effort to revitalize and address the shortage of teachers who are culturally responsive to the challenges facing African American students in urban communities, the article

highlights the adaptation and replication of national best practices in the UCF teacher preparation program. To aid in the reform, a multidisciplinary approach was used to gather valuable data through focus groups and interviews to engage with community stakeholders, school district, personnel, and African American students in K-12 schooling environments.

In the discussion of black learners, one controversial issue has been cultural competencies in the teaching profession (Blacks: Education Issues, n.d.). On the one hand, academics contend that culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) is an equitable practice that "includes" a learner's culture to improve learning. On the other hand, some theorist argue that "practicing" culturally affirming pedagogical approaches is a priority for consistent positive performance among racially diverse populations (Gay, 2010). Nevertheless, in the article *Towards Black Gaze Theory: How Black Female Teachers Make Black Students Visible* the authors maintains that we must replace dehumanizing research that focuses solely on disparities in order to reposition Black leaners from a white gaze, to a consciousness, black gaze. In the view of the authors Black Gaze Theory- to perceive Black Student behavior as a cultural asset that is understood and valued by academics. The authors' work calls into question white meritocracy. Moreover the writers thoughtfully form a blueprint which fosters sociopolitical consciousness.

As such, if we are to build a radically reimagined education then our blueprint cannot complacently look at the education of Black learners in a one dimensional manner. Student and systems are important intersecting themes in education which need our attention. In the article *Black Girls and Womyn Matter: Using Black Feminist Thought to Examine Violence and Erasure Against Black Girls and Womyn in Education* the writers challenged conventional meaning regarding the collegiate experiences and threats experienced by Black women. Of particular relevance to the topic is the attempt to engage in shifting critical discourses in academic literature while constructing equity-based strategies for the promotion and advancement of undergraduate Black women. Given this promising and compelling logic, the authors built a blueprint for eradicating injustice, subjugation, and oppressive acts experienced by Black women in post-secondary settings.

In the last article, Garo and Lawson offer a relevant, yet under-discussed analysis of trauma in their piece titled, *My Story, My Way: Conceptualization of Narrative Therapy with Trauma-Exposed Black Male Youth.* When discussing the impact of trauma, and the infinite forms in which it can occur to an individual and present itself as symptoms of larger personal and societal issues, the article utilizes the narrative of Black male youth to explicate this issue to a larger audience. Highlighting youth voice, particularly for Black male youth who are often overlooked in regards to trauma, is a critical component to addressing and reforming practices and approaches in education. This approach not only highlights the needs of students, but it involves incorporating the youths' ability to share out via non-traditional, yet vitally important communication methods.

For the readers of the articles in this special issue, there is more stimulating information to read that presents the conditions necessary to demonstrate a suitable, realistic reverberation of reassessing the relationship between students, teachers and families given the critical agenda to advance the education of African American learners. What we, the authors featured in this publication, put forth is a progressive blueprint for which we hope will launch a critical exchange. At the conclusion of your reading, we desire that you serve as the educational architect, to build a solid future for Black Students.

Sincerely-Amanda

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