



## Statement of Research Philosophy Tonya Walls

*As an early scholar and doctoral student nearing the end of her studies, my research interests* are emerging. They have been shaped by my experiences as an anti-racist educator committed to social justice, and teaching in community, PK-12 and higher education contexts. Critical inquiry, participatory action research, and counter narrative storytelling are at the core of how I approach the study of education, leadership, and multicultural pedagogies. I am especially interested in studying the relationship(s) between race, gender, class, educational policy, and leadership as situated in the lived experiences of historically marginalized peoples. Specifically, my research pertains to preparing educators to serve students, families, and communities that are diverse in ethnicity, race, culture, gender, gender identification, socioeconomic class, ability, sexuality, language, religion, and various other social identity factors. My current dissertation study will explore the ways in which Black female school leaders committed to racial justice, construct and enact their leadership identities within teaching and learning spaces that are undergoing school reform efforts like high stakes testing and no tolerance policy, and, that engage a school cultural climate that fails to effectively affirm, validate, and support their standpoints. I am approaching this research with the premise that we in education must create ways to explore how schools can invest in supporting the development of leaders who maintain social justice dispositions, and who potentially employ the culturally-responsive, liberating and loving pedagogies required to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. As I continue to develop my scholarship, I have an interest in pursuing lines of inquiry in teacher education, critical literacy, social justice leadership, grassroots community organizing, critical pedagogy, critical race theory, and critical multicultural education. I believe future inquiries in these areas will allow me to engage in collaborative inquiry and knowledge building as aligned with my desire to positively influence teacher/school leader preparation and PK-12 public education towards a goal of equity and racial justice.

*As a post-graduate teacher educator at Touro University Nevada,* I have focused my works on social justice leadership and praxis, including examining ways to marry the research in multicultural education, critical race theory, and educational leadership (Walls, 2016, in progress), as well as explore social justice dispositions and practices across the teacher education continuum (Walls, Cornejo, Pachowski, Park, and Reid, 2016, under review). Administrative intern field experiences, leadership problem-posing, culturally responsive mentorship and coaching, and action research are all innovative practices being explored in educational leadership development, and have received wide endorsement. Yet, little is known about these strategies, the programs that employ them, and the performance of their graduates as connected with social justice leadership development. In my emerging research praxis, I have begun to study these components of social justice leadership development and programming, and have written for publication one, co-

authored article currently under consideration for presentation and peer-review at the 2016 Critical Inquiry in Education Conference, and another sole-authored article to be submitted to JSCORE's call for manuscripts. The first study explores the perceptions of five social justice oriented scholars serving in higher education and engaged in grassroots community organizing as part of an effort to found a grassroots teacher led collaborative committed to racial justice, and aiming to provide liberatory spaces for PK-16+ teachers to engage in critical, social-justice oriented professional development. The second investigation comprises a critical auto-ethnographic case study of faculty methods, and examines their impact on the critical consciousness and cultural proficiency of administrative interns. This study was presented as a poster presentation at the 2016 National Conference on Race Education (NCORE) in spring 2016, and will also be presented for peer-feedback at the annual National Association of Multicultural Education conference in November 2016. It comprises a critical review of one masters in school leadership program and has potential contributions to the field of teacher education, educational leadership, social justice leadership development, and culturally responsive pedagogical practices. It may also reveal that additional, comparative studies are needed in order to determine what benefits this educator preparation and development model provides over and above traditional teacher and educational leadership preparation. These studies inform not only the development of teacher education programs, but the field of teacher preparation, educational leadership, and social justice leadership development at large. Forthcoming manuscripts will focus on critical inquiry and participatory research designs in the creation of third-space for liberatory (Freire, 1970) teacher development programs, grassroots community activism, social justice curriculum, and the experiences of educational leaders leading for social justice.

*As a scholar activist committed to developing research inquiries focused on social justice*, I have an organic connection to pursuing my interest in this area. In my current position as an assistant professor at Touro University Nevada (TUN), I am also leading a long-term mixed methods participatory action research study of teachers' and leaders' of color social justice beliefs and practices. This study fills a void in the literature in educational leadership, social justice leadership, and teacher of color preparation and retention, and will also assist my college in tracking our candidates and better understanding how our program can aid them in persevering in the profession. I secured an internal student mentored grant in the amount of \$1,500.00 to pursue this line of inquiry and am awaiting a decision on a seed grant funding request for \$33,573.68 to continue the work with the expectation of applying for additional funds at the state and federal levels. Social justice in teacher preparation and development is a growing area of research and it is important to me to explore this topic in a way that maintains the true spirit of critical multicultural and social justice education.

*Education is inherently political. My research agenda reflects this context* and I have recently become engaged in community and state level service and accountability issues, including serving on a legislative work group to write regulation language for an initiative requiring teachers to take an additional multicultural education course for license renewal. As a compliment to this work, I am also working cross-institutionally with peers from Nevada State College, The College of Southern Nevada, and The University of Nevada Las Vegas to create a state endorsement in teacher leadership focused on Cultural Competence Development. This work is being supported by an elected Assemblywoman, and entails collaborative research on similar initiatives already in practice across the nation. I also serve on a workgroup to assist with creating the action plan for

the newly instituted federal ESSA requirements. My work as a research assistant as part of a state grant-funded project undertaken by a faculty-student research team at the University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV) allows me to put the work I engage on the ESSA work group into action in the field. The UNLV grant has been funded for \$335,000 (Smith, Clark, Beck, Marrun, Flores, & Hernandez Johnson, 2016), and includes research to study high school students' perceptions of the teaching profession, as well as to support students of color in becoming teachers. This project not only addresses a statewide teacher preparation issue, but also appeals to my desire to bring equity to teacher preparation.

*Though much of my emerging research focuses on social justice and equity through the engagement of multicultural education pedagogies, I also have content area background knowledge in reading, language arts, and multicultural literacies.* I remain interested in pursuing research in these areas and have a vision for exploring the connections between critical pedagogies and critical literacy development within populations who have traditionally been marginalized in the future. This work might entail engaging both mixed methods and qualitative studies of students' perceptions of literacy, language, reading and learning in a multicultural context. Studies of this nature not only have implications for multicultural literacy, critical literacy, and content-area literacy, but also address methodological issues in studying PK-12 students' perceptions. I also hope to publish studies on motivation and engagement in reading in diverse populations and may pursue research designs in this area as well. These studies will have implications for teaching and learning with diverse populations and inform my own teaching as well.

Research is one of the best tools I have to affect the kinds of change I would like to see in educator preparation and development, as well as in PK-12 education more broadly. My inquiry interest not only satisfy my natural curiosities, but also have implications for practice, policy, research, and my own teaching praxis. I look forward to continuing to develop these lines of inquiry as my scholarship, service, advocacy, and activism continues to evolve.

## Current and Developing Research Inquiries

### *Transforming Leadership through Race:*

In this long-term critical multiple case study, the focus is on educational leadership development for social justice. Graduate students who are seeking administrative licensure, and who are enrolled in a masters level program comprise participants and case studies in this research examination that documents the ways in which critical pedagogy employed with a social justice orientation – critical inquiry, reflection, intergroup dialogue, and field based action – impacts the critical consciousness and social justice orientation of emerging leaders.

This project includes analysis of participants' critical consciousness, racialization and gendering processes and their manifestations through the intersections of work, family, school, and leadership responsibilities, including aspirations for social justice leadership praxis. This research also explores the ways that emerging leaders take up opportunities for school, societal and cultural transformation. For example, school leaders are the second most important factor in PK-12 student success, and social justice leadership has emerged as a viable option to help school leaders address the diversity challenges of today, yet few studies in educational leadership position school leaders and the communities they serve to engage an effective social justice praxis. This research will explore the following questions: What theories, lessons, and practices might educational projects like this reveal? What can we learn from the practices and reflections of these emerging leaders?

### *Sowing the Seeds of Justice: Critical Inquiry, PD, and Grassroots Organizing*

*This research is framed in critical auto-ethnographic inquiry, and participatory action research employing critical professional development (CPD) (Kohli, Picower, Martinez, and Ortiz, 2015). It is designed to provide teachers with a bridge to close the gap between theory and praxis, by equipping educators with tools to engage in problem-posing around the national teacher crisis. The purpose of the research is to provoke reflective analysis on, and answers to three critically themed questions: "Why do so few people want to teach anymore?" "What have we done to teaching to make it so unattractive?" and "What (or who) caused this, and what can we do to fix it?" It aims to engage teachers in critical inquiry, reflection, and dialog (Freire, 1970) in order to problematize the national teacher, and teacher of color shortage. Drawing on critical race theory (CRT) teachers critically examine their gendered and racialized teaching experiences, and reflect on these experiences, including considering how school reform initiatives such as merit based evaluations, high stakes testing (Au, 2010) and no tolerance policies (Skrla et. al, 2001) may impact the recruitment, development, and retention of their effectiveness within the field, and/or whether or not these experiences exacerbate the problem of the national teacher crisis.*

### *Trouble in the Pipeline and the Sistahs' Aint Alright: Interrupting Deficit Frames of Black Girlhood and Womanhood in PK-16+ Education*

Inequality affects Black Girls and Women along the lines of race, ethnicity, gender, culture, sexual identity, economic status, and ability. At its root is a myriad of historical, political, and socioeconomic, factors. One salient pillar of said inequity is the ways in which it is systematized

in structures, routines, and procedures within teaching and learning spaces, making it a natural circumstance rather than isolated unfortunate circumstances. We then normalize these structures, routines, and systems in ways that aggressively silence and marginalize the humanity, well-being, life, and cultural experiences for Black girls and women, and often at the expense of others. “No, the Sistah’s Ain’t Alright!” is a series of multi-layered critical inquiries designed to interrupt that normalization, across intersectional vectors of oppression, by doing three things: 1) documenting the gendered and racialized experiences of girls and women of color within PK-16 education in order to elevate and reveal strategies and practices rooted in their resiliency and cultural wealth and employed to overcome such oppression, 2) provide them with a dynamic third learning space to explore and examine the nature of domination and oppression experienced in classrooms, schools, and other educational teaching and learning spaces in order to build upon their cultural wealth, and 3) to provide a forum for counter-narrative storytelling in order to elevate the voices of those often silenced and marginalized, and rendered absent from the educational discourse. The core of the project revolves around the idea that social location, a term first used by sociologist Bill Gamson (2004), provides analytic potential to address intersectional harm, psychological and emotional violence, and identity in ways the research, schools, and school systems do not.

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