

## EDUCATION AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY: THE FAILED PROMISE

One unwritten but commonly accepted view of the benefits of education in the United States is that it provides access to mobility and that such access is based on equality of educational opportunity. Bolstered by this view, ambitious students and their equally hopeful parents embrace the necessary pursuit of no less than a college degree and join educational policymakers who share, as Mickelson and Smith (1992) point out,

one of the assumptions that has long been a part of the putative dominant ideology: a "good education" is the meal ticket. It will unlock the door to economic opportunity and thus enable disadvantaged groups or individuals to improve their lot dramatically. (p. 329)

In short, with the appropriate degree, any individual can expect to achieve her/his career goal and its attendant socioeconomic rewards. While this assumption dates back to progressive educators and their ideas on school reform proposed in the early part of the twentieth century, the landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which outlawed school segregation and called for equality of educational opportunity, had perhaps the most profound impact on its becoming firmly ingrained within the dominant ideology. Legislation was established and federal policies conceived which were to compensate for past inequities and assure that schooling, or equal educational opportunity, would remain a reliable and accessible channel to job opportunities and social equality.

Forty years later, disparities in our educational system which contradict the promise offered by the *Brown* decision and the disheartening statistics on levels of achievement of disadvantaged youth have generated necessary discussions regarding the meaning and appropriateness of the concept of equal educational opportunity. In taking a look back at his report released in 1966 and subsequent research findings on Black and White educational differences in American public schools, Coleman (1990) claims that the term equal educational opportunity is a misleading notion because of the confusion which "centers around one issue: the question of whether such equality implies equality of input school resources or equality of results of schooling" (p. 63). A proper understanding of the term as used by the Court, he surmises, puts greater emphasis on "education leading to equality of adult opportunity [rather than on] equal educational opportunity" (p. 64). In this case, the word "opportunity" refers to a situation later in life rather than an actual educational process. While Coleman draws attention to the differential impact of environments outside of the school, he does not fail to point to the school's task of reducing inequality. Further, he asserts that the term equality is misleading since it focuses on education as an end rather than as part of a process in which other factors also may play a role.

By contrast, Mickelson and Smith (1992) suggest the need to distinguish between the terms equality, equality of opportunity, and equality of educational opportunity (p. 360). Although equality of life conditions is impossible, equality of opportunity may help to bridge the gap between democratic theory, which preaches equality, and economic practice, which often renders social equality unattainable. Mickelson and Smith further make a distinction between equality of opportunity and equality of outcome, suggesting that equality of opportunity, which, based on a number of social factors, is realized in varying degrees (and sometimes not at all) is made possible because of equality of educational opportunity. Using the "life as a game metaphor" to illustrate that point, they write:

If life is a game, the playing field must be level; if life is a race, the starting line must be in the same place for everyone. For the playing field to be level, many believe education is crucial, giving individuals the wherewithal to compete in the allegedly meritocratic system. Thus, equality of opportunity hinges on equality of educational opportunity. (p. 360)

The urgency of this problem has been pointed out by several educational and social theorists who suggest that instead of achieving this goal, we are instead moving backwards into a state where racism is viewed as permanent (Bell, 1992), where we exist as two nations, beset by separation, hostility, and inequality between Blacks and Whites (Hacker, 1992), and as Kozol (1991) charges, where we maintain an educational system replete with "savage inequalities" that produce an unlevel playing field and an overwhelmingly unequal contest whose consequences have a "terrible finality" (p. 180); such inequalities in schooling, he goes on to note, can never be overcome, as opposed to a tainted sports event that can be replayed. Kozol explains:

We are children only once; and after those few years are gone, there is no second chance to make amends. . . . Those who are denied cannot be "made whole" by a later act of government. Those who get the unfair edge cannot be later stripped of what they've won. Skills, once attained—no matter how unfairly—take on a compelling aura. Effectiveness seems irrefutable, no matter how acquired. . . . The only argument is justice. But justice, poorly argued, is no match for the acquired ingenuity of the successful. The fruits of inequality, in this respect, are self-confirming. (p. 180)

Despite these different interpretations, all of the arguments conclude that "what does appear achievable and attentive to results is the idea of effective public schooling that leads in the direction of equal adult opportunities" (Coleman, 1990, p. 64).

Effective public schooling within increasingly diverse schools remains a challenge. Whether one considers racial or cultural African American group differences in dropout rates, expulsion or suspension rates, attainment or achievement levels, quality of instruction received, access to educational resources, or based on other pertinent measures, the data provide one inescapable conclusion: An overwhelming number of African American students have underachieved and continue to be underserved.

Beyond our national borders, similar patterns in student underachievement among ethnic minorities are found. McCarthy and Crichlow (1993) allude to this phenomenon and its global implications in their overview of debates on racial inequality, racial identity, and curriculum reform in the educational field in the United States by noting that "parallels to the great struggles over race, identity, and representation that are taking place in the American education system now also exist in other metropolitan countries such as England, Australia, and Canada, as well as in post-colonial societies in the Third World" (pp. xv-xvi). In studies carried out in Canada, Europe, and Asia, there is evidence that "school failure is more frequent among the youth of castelike minorities: minority groups that are politically, economically, and culturally subordinate to a dominant majority group" (R. L. Collins, 1993, pp. 195-196; Neisser, 1986; Ogbu, 1978, as cited in R. L. Collins, 1993).

In America, changes in educational and social policies were initiated as a result of both the *Brown* decision and the 1964 Civil Rights Act. For example, measurable gains were made in increasing the number of African Americans who obtain high school and college degrees. Since then, additional legislation and programs such as Head Start, Chapter I, Upward Bound, and other compensatory measures have done much to provide greater access to innovative schooling and materials. While this legislation and the resulting initiatives literally opened doors and expanded access to education, they nevertheless failed to remove some barriers which continue to impede the

progress of African Americans and economically disadvantaged students. Consequently, educational inequality persists, as evidenced in statistics which reflect widening achievement gaps between Black and Latino students and their White counterparts as well as a decline in the number of Black students completing higher education. Thus, many whose future aspirations were predicated on the conviction that positive end results can be realized through a "good education" find themselves instead "stopped short"—often before they graduate from high school—within an educational system which leaves them standing outside on the inside, hampered by barriers within an institution that frustrates rather than promotes their advancement even as it denies them "invitations to the American Feast" (Rist, 1978, p. 262).

To a greater degree, then, instead of being empowered to develop their potential, those from racially marginalized groups remain locked within a system that has failed to meet their needs effectively, and has, in too many cases, relegated them to a status characterized on a national level as "at risk." As Tienda & Grusky (1990) note:

At the start of the 1990's, the issues of educational achievement and inequality of educational opportunity remain . . . even more conspicuous [than in the mid-1960's] because of the changed skill demands of the work force and because of mounting evidence that educational inequities have increased for some groups. . . . Moreover, there are signs of widening differentials in educational outcomes between private and public schools located in inner cities and those located in affluent suburbs, and between those whose student body is largely minority and those whose student body is largely majority. (ix)

While these "outsiders on the inside" are, on the one hand, very much the subject of discussion and proposed reforms intended to reverse these trends, they remain far too often faceless entities of a monolithic "other," for whom past

inequities have presumably been rectified by logical measures and educational enterprises. Indeed, even as these measures and enterprises are based on a commitment to universal education, they are plagued with ambiguity about how to achieve it. Because emphasis has been placed largely on environmental and familial influences which negatively affect academic achievement, with less rigorous attention given to identity construction in disadvantaged students, the schooling experience of adolescents in this group often renders them invisible, much like Ralph Ellison's basement dweller, who explains that he and others like him, whom people refuse to see as individuals, "appear like bodiless heads . . . surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass" (*Invisible Man*, 1952, p. 3). He goes on: "When they approach me, they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed everything and anything except me" (p. 3).

In educational systems struggling to deal with African American underachievement by providing classes and materials to compensate for the presumed negative impact of a low socioeconomic status, emphasis is often so heavily focused on racial frames of reference which designate students as unequal and locate them outside the mainstream culture that any concern with tending to the student's sense of an academic identity is obscured or, in some cases, not considered. Thus, for these students who are "outsiders on the inside," the construction of an academic identity disappears under the heavy overlay of racial identity. This requires them to maintain a stance in their academic environment which recalls W. E. B. Du Bois' description of "second sight" and "double-consciousness" (*The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903) in the perspective of each African American in the American social system,

a world which only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks

on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness . . . two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings. (p. 3)

These words expressing the perspective of outsiders-within and their relationship to the dominant culture continue to resonate in contemporary discussions of "the institutionalized rejection of difference" (Lorde, 1984, p. 115), in accounts of the oppression of women of color (P. H. Collins, 1990), and in axioms on the boundaries defined by the margins and the center as they pertain to Black intellectual life (hooks, 1994) but are perhaps even more pointedly relevant when understood in light of ethnic minorities' experience of schooling, discussed earlier, not only in America but also in the broader global context.

Thus, in important ways, schools serve as microcosms of the societies in which they exist. And however clichéd the assertion, research across a variety of disciplines and theoretical perspectives suggests that embedded within the Western tradition of schooling exists a process for shaping a distribution of images of identity (Wexler, 1992, p. 8). According to Wexler, the social process involves a kind of "tracking" system in schools which, while allowing some crossovers and consisting of individuals who defy placement, still uses single behaviors, words, or other kinds of signs as representations of the self. Moreover, the organization is also described as an economy "because it sets up standards or values and social instruments to achieve them, moving and shaping identities and the interactional resources used in their accomplishment" (Wexler, 1992, p. 9).

Nor is the process egalitarian. Indeed, Wexler's study of identity construction in three high school settings suggests that differentiations embedded in class, race, and gender distinctions existed. These differentiations, in turn, create demarcations rather than inclusive positions for adolescent identity construction. Further, Wexler found that in each of the schools these "types of selves" were set by the central image of the school and the organizational

devices used to achieve that image. Functioning as social class emblems, they represented significant components of life for the social segment within which the school was located. Thus, "within each class image that sets the values implemented by organizational structures . . . there is an internal stratification, a binary division between those students who will become—according to social class and organizational emblem—winners and those who will become losers" (Wexler, 1992, p. 10). The hierarchical system which results establishes internal polarization even while, paradoxically, the "image" of the school population may be seen as homogeneous, that is, with similar abilities or deficiencies. "Becoming somebody, then, is an organizationally patterned process of production that uses cultural resources deeply ingrained in more pervasive societal structures of inequality and difference" (Wexler, 1992, p. 7).

A major question posed by Wexler's study and the others already discussed is whether or not the school's curriculum can be redesigned to eliminate ideological biases and include the conceptual tools that poor African American students need to succeed in society. Such an "ideologically pluralistic" curriculum would have to acknowledge the social structural flaws in society that maintain inequalities due to race, class, and gender while helping poor, ethnic minority children develop skills they need to overcome and correct these flaws (R. L. Collins, 1993). In recent years, proponents of educational reform in the schooling of African American and/or disadvantaged students have emphasized the importance of multicultural approaches in achieving such a pluralistic curriculum. McCarthy (1993) notes that these approaches have been situated in three policy-related discourses:

1. Cultural understanding, the idea—central to many ethnic studies and human relations programs—that students and teachers should be more sensitive to ethnic differences in the classroom
2. Cultural competence, the insistence in bilingual and bicultural education programs that students and



teachers should be able to demonstrate competence in the language and culture of groups outside their own cultural heritage

3. Cultural emancipation, the somewhat more possibilitarian and social reconstructionist thesis that the incorporation or inclusion of African American culture in the school curriculum has the potential to positively influence African American academic achievement and consequently life chances beyond the school. (Sleeter & Grant, 1988; Rushton, 1981 as cited in McCarthy, 1993a, p. 292).

In analyzing the core assumptions and desired outcomes associated with each of these approaches, McCarthy (1993b) concludes that each in its way fails to take into account several important factors related to schools and schooling:

These multicultural approaches to curriculum reform really do not offer viable explanations or "solutions" to the problem of racial inequality in schooling. School reform and reform in race relations within these frameworks depend almost exclusively on the reversal of values, attitudes, and the human nature of social actors understood as "individuals." [Absent from this analysis], however, is a recognition that schools are sites of power or contestation in which differential interests, resources and capacities determine the maneuverability of competing racial groups and the possibility and pace of change. In significant ways, too, proponents of multiculturalism fail to take into account the differential structure of opportunities that help to define African American relations to dominant white groups and social institutions in the United States. (p. 243)

McCarthy ends by warning that by failing to acknowledge the limitations imposed by these structural inequalities, proponents of various multicultural approaches ultimately

place the responsibility for change in race relations on classroom teachers who are least in a position to transform them.

### Marginality

These discussions of "structural inequalities" parallel those of Freire (1970), hooks (1990), Edgerton (1993), and Ferguson (1992), who suggest that the relationship between margin and center is one of power and position, that is, when one speaks of marginality, one must also determine the positions of individuals in the relationship with respect to "the place from which power is exercised" (Ferguson, 1992). As Ferguson notes:

In our society dominant discourse tries never to speak its own name. Its authority is based on absence. The absence is not just that of the various groups classified as "other," although members of these groups are routinely denied power. It is also the lack of any overt acknowledgement of the specificity of the dominant culture, which is simply assumed to be the all-encompassing norm. This is the basis of its power. (p. 11)

Lorde (1984) characterized this "all-encompassing" norm as "mythical," adding that it effectively consigned to the periphery those who were *not* "white, thin, male, young, Christian, heterosexual and financially secure" (p. 116). And, in so doing, this mythical norm delineates the parameters of deviance, perpetuates the interests of those it serves, and even becomes internalized by those it oppresses (Ferguson, 1992).

In their work, Freire (1970) and hooks (1990) examine the roles of margin and center in the perpetuation of oppressive social structures. Freire suggests that marginalized or oppressed individuals are the only ones who both understand and possess the strength to eradicate oppression. He contends that this strength occurs because, in order to survive, oppressed peoples must internalize the

consciousness of the oppressor even as they simultaneously struggle to retain themselves. In other words, "the conflict lies in the choice between being wholly themselves or being divided" (as cited in Edgerton, 1993, p. 32).

Hooks (1990) views the margin as both a position and a site of resistance which "oppressed, exploited, and colonized people" must understand as a place from which to launch a "counter-hegemonic discourse situated not only in 'habits of being' but also in the way one lives" (p. 149). From this site, she contends, individuals draw the "nourishment" needed to resist both the oppression and the would-be liberator who attempts to "speak about the 'other' . . . talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. . . . [Tell your story] back to you in a way that it has become [his/her] own. . . . I am still author, authority, . . . still colonizer, the speaking subject and you are now at the center of my talk" (p. 153). From a margin which contests power even as it is oppressed by it, the Others can "make a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as a site of radical openness and possibility" (p. 153).

In a recent discussion, Edgerton (1993) has advanced two perspectives or layers from which to examine marginality: social marginality and individual marginality. She suggests that the socially marginalized are those who live outside the dominant culture (center). Thus, although they encompass more than one category, socially marginalized groups within American society are, in part, "racially identified, economically deprived, and feminist or feminine" (p. 56). Individual marginality involves how individuals define themselves in relation to those they define as "others," and the area (frontier) between this individual "self" and this "other" is where individual marginality lies (p. 56).

Beyond both the individual and social layers of marginality is an interactive space, where these layers enfold one another and, in so doing, reveal the porous nature of the boundaries between the different forms of marginality. Although not a synthesis of either the social, individual

or even larger social and community and individual layers, it represents a kind of "deconstruction," a neutral ground, if you will, where stable claims of identity for either self or other, margin or center, can be undermined (Edgerton, 1993, p. 57). Edgerton's notion of the interactive nature of marginality underscores the need for those within both margin and center to understand their interrelated nature and "the infusion of each in the other" (1993, p. 57). Ferguson echoes this conclusion when he notes that "margin and center can draw their meanings only from each other. Neither can exist alone" (p. 11).

The pervasive societal structures of marginality and difference, then, produce the outsider/insider position occupied by some disadvantaged adolescents within schools, even as they contribute to the perception of these students as "others" whose cultural deprivation or cultural difference, depending on the theory, places them "at risk" for failure in schools. Nor is this reconstruction random or unintentional. Rather, as Apple (1993) argues, it represents a redefinition of equality and access whose antecedents can be traced to "nothing less than the recurrent conflict between property rights and person rights that has been the central tension in the economy" (p. 26). Through this process, the failure experienced by some students, once attributed to severely deficient educational policies and practices, can now be explained through "the biological and economic marketplace" (Apple, 1993, p. 27). That is, while oppression and disadvantage exist, they do not explain the absence of achievement in disadvantaged students. Rather, competitive school environments based on "free market" themes such as self-interest, individualism, minimal governmental interference, and family values offer a more effective counterbalance to the problems of the "inner city." Through the creation of what Apple (1993) terms, a "populist ideology," the goal of expanding equality of opportunity has been redefined in ways which place excellence and achievement in curious juxtaposition depending upon to which individuals and in what communities and schools they are applied.

Thus, the subjects of discrimination are no longer those groups who have been historically categorized as oppressed. Instead, they have become ordinary American citizens who embody the virtues of the Protestant Ethic, which have become a part of the country's idealized past. The "others" are the undeserving persons, who, getting something for nothing, threaten these values even as they facilitate more governmental control (Hunter, 1987, as cited in Apple, 1993). This "hegemonic accord of dominant economic and political elites, . . . white working class and middle-class groups concerned with security, the family and traditional knowledge and values in conjunction with economic conservatives has partly succeeded in altering the way in which the social goal of equality is constructed" (Hunter, 1987, p. 37, as cited in Apple, 1993, p. 34).

Most troubling in this construction is the persistent connection of social problems such as drug use, teen pregnancy, welfare abuse, and unemployment with African Americans and Latinos along with a simultaneous depiction of Asian Americans as a homogeneous, "model minority" whose achievement through hard work and family cohesiveness more closely embodies the core "American values" many whites believe their ancestors followed (Sleeter, 1993). Within this construct, the marginality experienced by students of color within schools can be reconceptualized within an "at risk" paradigm in which the main causes of their difficulties (parental attitudes, gang influence, and "deficient" language skills) are located in their homes and communities, justifying the creation of supplementary programs aimed at providing the necessary academic and vocational skills (Sleeter, 1993). Thus, in these discussions the "other" is defined by "insiders" who appropriate the voices and, with that appropriation, as Pritibha Parma reminds us, the political power as well (Parma, p. 152, as cited in hooks, 1990). Missing from this construct, however is a definition of achievement or equality which stresses "accessibility to high status knowledge or equality or competitive opportunity" (Gordon, 1983, as cited in Sleeter, 1993, p. 158).

Against this backdrop, adolescents like those described in Wexler's study (1992) attempt to "become somebody," real, presentable selves, anchored and verified by friends as worthwhile (p. 7). Since the meanings of margin and center derive from each other and are constructed by those within and outside of them, in examining the failed promise of education in our own study, the critical questions became, why failed? and for whom? Clearly, the assimilationist model of education did *not* fail the majority of immigrants from Europe during the first half of the twentieth century. In a discussion of outsiders who have moved into the American educational system and transformed it, Fass (1989) contends that the presence of European immigrants, Blacks, women, and Catholics profoundly influenced schooling. Fass plays down the impact of race but does not account completely for the difference in the experience of European immigrants who more easily assimilated than their African American counterparts. Indeed, as McCarthy reminds us in quoting Ellwood P. Cubberley, a proponent of "social efficiency" in the inculcation of dominant Anglo-Saxon values among new immigrants, the major task of schools was to insure that the national manners, customs and observances of various immigrant groups would be replaced by "those things in [the] national life which were held to be of abiding truth" (Cubberley as cited in McCarthy, 1993, pp. 226-227). And, in general, this is what occurred. Indeed, as each succeeding group appeared, the groups before it established levels of primacy which they used to establish their own "gatekeeping" systems of oppression (e.g., the discrimination visited on Irish Catholics by Protestant German immigrants). What the assimilationist model did not accomplish was the integration of Native Americans, Latinos, and African Americans, nor have subsequent multicultural models done so, as McCarthy (1993) and others (R. L. Collins, 1993; Banks, 1988; Berlowitz, 1984) illustrate.

Research on the education of ethnic minority children in northwest European countries, where there has been an influx of migrant workers, also reveals an overall situa-

tion wherein consequences for the ethnic minority students in the formal educational system of a given country produce developments and statistics showing gaps in the levels of achievements of the minority groups and the indigenous population. Yet, for members of many ethnic minorities, poverty resulting from historical discrimination reduces resources to apply toward school materials and special academic programs and contributes sources of stress that interfere with school learning tasks (Tomlinson, 1989). This situation is, of course, further complicated by problems related to racial and/or cultural differences. With the recognition that culture influences knowledge acquisition, cultural differences between home and school have become increasingly identified as barriers to learning (R. L. Collins, 1993). Also, majority teachers' responses to cultural differences can include prejudices, lowered expectations, and forms of discriminatory treatment that contribute to minority student underachievement (Hamalian & Bhatnagar, 1984; R. L. Collins, 1993).

Researchers recognize that ethnic-cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic factors, as well as the added complication of language difference, are important variables in evaluating the academic performance of these pupils, but studies undertaken in Britain (Tomlinson, 1989), Germany (Boos-Nünning & Hohmann, 1989), and the Netherlands (Eldering, 1989) repeatedly call for increased attention to school organization and effectiveness and deplore theory and practice which only recently has regarded school, as "an area that is independent from and not influenced by social factors" (Boos-Nünning & Hohmann, 1989). Thus, in the example of Germany, studies have revealed that "the conditions the migrant pupils have to cope with (such as xenophobia, the migrant families' poor living conditions, insecurity in future planning because of restrictive political measures or intentions) are seen as accompanying factors that have little effect on the 'essential pedagogical work'" (Boos-Nünning & Hohmann, 1989, p. 54).

According to Tomlinson (1989), one of the most important patterns emerging from research on the educational

achievement of ethnic minority students in Europe refers to the importance of school effects. Research is showing, in fact, that some school processes can disadvantage ethnic minority pupils who do not necessarily enter schools with educational disadvantages, but who fall behind because of the way schools interact with them (Tomlinson, 1989). This view is supported by studies in several countries pointing to misconceptions and prejudices which have had a deterrent if not morbidly negative impact on school reform. These problems include, among other things, the outdated belief still present among some educators that different races have different intellectual capacities (Tomlinson, 1989); the stereotyping of families based on research which linked importance of home and family background in ethnic minority school performance (Tomlinson, 1989); miscalculation of students' intellectual ability or academic potential because of the level of proficiency in the majority language (Menk, 1986); the view that migrant parents [are] disinterested in their children's education at school (Boos-Nünning, 1989). These misconceptions result in a serious "mismatch of expectations between what minority parents expect of education and what schools and teachers think they can offer the children" (Tomlinson, 1989, p. 27).

In a recent work, Taubman (1993) examines alternative approaches to antibias education in which the focus shifts from institutions to individuals, that is, how individual actors within the social context of school construct the meaning of identity. Similarly, for us, identity construction centered on questions related to the meaning of scholarship for disadvantaged, college-bound Black adolescents. Specifically, we wanted to know if and how they made use of their schooling experiences, as well as what they brought from their "home culture," to formulate individual academic (scholar) identities which enabled them to achieve. The scholar identity is similar to Taubman's notion of the "autobiographical register" in which center and margin together serve as sites for constructing an "identity in motion which can be used to illuminate the



dynamics of oppression and investigate one's own being as well as the relationships one has with others" (p. 28).

For participants in Project EXCEL, such an identity could permit navigation between the center and margins without loss of an individual's "communal identity" derived from and given meaning through the group. While we recognize that there are multiple "selves" from which and through which individuals construct meaning in a variety of contexts, we chose to confine our research to how participants constructed academic identities, as well as the role of the social context of schooling and the interactions within it which influenced those constructions. Of particular interest were the strategies employed by adolescents to create identities within their own "definitions" of schools and school purposes. Since the students challenged aspects of the mythical norm, that is, the majority were African Americans, some were women, many were disadvantaged, and one was White/female/disabled, we were interested in whether they viewed themselves as "marginalized others" and, how that view, if held, influenced or did not influence their construction of academic identities. We believe such examinations are critical to understanding the relationship between representation and identity formation in school settings as well as how curriculum impacts such representations. As Castenell & Pinar (1993) suggest in the introduction to their edited work *Understanding Curriculum as Racial Text: Representations of Identity and Difference in Education*, "representation becomes important not only because it reflects identity at a particular historical conjuncture; it is important because it also creates that identity" (p. 29).

In chapter 2, we discuss the construction of achievement identities by two African American students—a male and a female—in Project EXCEL.