

# PBCOHE

Pennsylvania Black Conference on Higher Education

## JOURNAL



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# Pennsylvania Black Conference On Higher Education

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## Mission Statement

The mission of the Pennsylvania Black Conference on Higher Education, Inc. (PBCOHE) is to provide programs and services, which help ensure that the post-secondary educational needs and aspirations of African Americans in particular are met, and to work in concert with members of other under-represented groups in the Commonwealth.

*The Pennsylvanian Black Conference of Higher Journal was designed to support the mission of the PBCOHE.*

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# Pennsylvania Black Conference On Higher Education

## Pennsylvania Black Conference on Higher Education Journal Guidelines for Submission

The Pennsylvania Black Conference on Higher Education Journal (PBCOHE) is published once every two years. PBCOHEJ publishes scholarly papers, research reports, critical essays, documents and reviews focusing on issues related to factors affecting African Americans and other racial and ethnic populations.

The PBCOHE Journal: (1) provides a forum for critical discussions on relevant issues related to Blacks in higher education (these issues may include discussions of educational, social, economic and legislative topics); (2) serves as a vehicle for exchange of scholarly works of Black faculty and administrators; (3) disseminates knowledge about critical practice, research and education which affects the Black community.

Each paper is accepted with the understanding that it is to be published exclusively with PBCOHE Journal. Material published in the PBCOHE Journal may not be reprinted or published without permission of the PBCOHE Journal. Please address all inquiries to one of the co-editors:

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### **Manuscript Submission:**

The journal uses a blind-review procedure. This means that all submitted manuscripts must be prepared for a blind review. Omit or mask references to specific institutions, states, or any other form of identifying information within the manuscript until your manuscript is accepted for publication and submitted in the final version. The section below describes the steps in submitting a manuscript.

Submit via email attachment to [sstringe@lockhaven.edu](mailto:sstringe@lockhaven.edu). The editors make final decisions regarding publication. Generally, authors can expect a decision regarding a manuscript 6 to 8 weeks after notification that their manuscript has been received. Following are guidelines for developing and submitting a manuscript. Manuscripts that do not conform to these guidelines will be returned to the author without review.

### **The Submission Cover Letter**

Manuscript submission must be accompanied by a cover letter designating the type of manuscript. Manuscript types include research papers using qualitative design, quantitative design, and innovative methods as well as book reviews or position paper. The cover letter also must include a statement establishing that ethical procedures were employed and that all relevant human subjects' considerations were observed. In addition, the cover letter must include the full contact information of all authors. The contact information must include the following information for the corresponding author: name, academic credentials, institutional affiliation or place of employment, postal mailing address, email address, and phone number. Please include the names and email addresses for all co-authors.

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## Manuscript Requirements

1. Research manuscripts should be a minimum 16 pages and a maximum 25 pages total, including all references, tables, etc. Manuscripts must include a 125-150 word abstract. All manuscripts are to be double-spaced including references and extensive quotes. Allow 1" margins on all sides.
2. Manuscript should be submitted in Microsoft Word, or as RTF files. For resubmissions only, combine the cover letter and manuscript into one complete file, which is prepared for blind review. Please do not use "track changes" feature. Files must be submitted in a 12-point Times Roman Font.
3. Use the Publication Manual for the American Psychological Association (latest edition) for style and manuscript format, including style for all figures, tables, and references. Figures that are not camera-ready will be returned to the author and may cause a delay in publication. Authors bear responsibility for the accuracy of tables and figures.
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5. Do not submit previously published or in press material or a manuscript that is under consideration for publication in another periodical.
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7. Submit all manuscripts via email attachment, please include your cover letter in the body of the email, and make sure a copy of the manuscript is prepared for a blind review. Send your manuscript to [sstringe@lockhaven.edu](mailto:sstringe@lockhaven.edu). All tables and figures must be included and properly formatted within the electronic file (otherwise, they will not be accepted separately).

**Submissions are accepted on a continuous schedule unless otherwise noted.**

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## Editor's Comments

Greetings PBCOHE Members and Friends,

After a few setbacks, I am happy to bring you the Spring 2022 edition of the Pennsylvania Black Conference on Higher Education. Many thanks to our dedicated authors and reviewers. The Journal was established under the PBCOHE umbrella to provide professional publishing opportunities for Pennsylvania's higher education faculty and staff and to thereby support their bids for promotion.

During my tenure with the Journal, the publication has helped to strengthen the promotion packages of no less than a dozen contributors. With much pride and admiration, I offer most notably, my co-editor Shavonne Shorter, who recently was hired by the University of Mary Washington as Associate Provost for Equity and Inclusion and Chief Diversity Officer.

We wish Dr. Shorter well in her new position and expect that she will continue the pursuit of excellence that she has so graciously shared with the PBCOHE JOURNAL.

As co-editor, I, too, have benefited from contributing my expertise to the journal's production. However, the Journal cannot be published without your help. I encourage you to use your relationships with young and seasoned higher education professionals to encourage them to submit their academic work. We accept research papers, white papers, and commentaries that are directly related to PBCOHE's mission. While many professionals find it challenging to generate a research agenda during the academic year, be informed that we also accept book reviews of works that will advance the cause. Consider adding something that is worthy of academic review to your summer reading list.

Please know that the Journal is a labor of love for you. We want to see you published. Your professional accomplishments are a win for us all. The Journal is currently published every other year; however, editors will accept submissions, when received. Each article is blind-reviewed by three reviewers, rated for content and quality, and accepted or rejected (usually for some rewriting,) as appropriate. Please be patient with us as we experience some growing pains and move to fully online. We will continue accepting submission all the while.

Have a great summer.

Respectfully submitted,  
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## The Intersectional Perspective of Low SES Minority Community College Students

Lilcelia Williams

### Abstract

Minority community college students are boldly refusing to be defined by visual presentation, myths, and stereotypes. The challenges experienced by persons with multiple and converging social identities along with the failure of academic personnel to acknowledge the value of their lived experiences and personal perspectives can lead to high attrition rates and low graduation rates in the post-secondary arena. Additionally, pedagogical practices and curriculums that are void of cultural inclusivity for low socioeconomic status minority students in postsecondary institutions have evolved from the principles of intellectual deficit attributed to minority students. Hence, a qualitative case study employing a theoretical lens of intersectionality was conducted to identify the most commonly utilized ancillary services and support resources that enabled this population of students to persist and achieve graduation. The study's findings highlighted the ability of minority students to exhibit resilience in the face of adversity to successfully achieve their academic goals.

### Introduction

A methodology grounded in the social justice theory of intersectionality was utilized to secure a better understanding of the lived experiences and personal perspectives of low socioeconomic (SES) minority community college. The qualitative case study design provided a platform for students to reset the narratives regarding high rates of attrition in the post-secondary environment. This methodological approach and design offered a validated avenue to debunk the myths presented by the deficit model and to support the principles of community cultural wealth as it relates to low SES minority community college students. The study was conducted at a community college accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. Annually the pre-selected community college offers more than 40,000 students the opportunity to enroll in both credit and non-credit programs. The community college is located in southwestern Pennsylvania with 64% of the student population enrolled full time, 55% of the students are women, the remaining 45% are men and 27% of students identify as an ethnic and/or racial minority. The target audience of the study was composed of persons who self-identified as a low SES African American or Hispanic American student with an anticipated graduation date within the current academic year or was a recent graduate within the last five years from the pre-selected community college. Individual semi-structured interviews and a focus group was utilized to collect qualitative data from a multigenerational cohort composed of current students and recent graduates. Additionally, a retrospective analysis of the most recent Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) data was performed to harvest a comprehensive understanding of the educational experience of a previous and comparable cohort of students.

The multigenerational cohort of eighteen research study participants included fifteen

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individuals who identified as African Americans and the remaining individuals identified as Hispanic Americans with a median participant age of 36. The disciplines of allied health, business, and trades were the most represented academic majors among the participants. Recent graduates comprised 83% and the remaining 17% were current students. The demographic composition of the research study participants reflected the demographic composition of the catchment area served by the community college.

## Background

Historically underrepresented and marginalized populations residing within the United States have encountered numerous challenges trying to secure equal and equitable access to the liberties freely enjoyed by their non-minority counterparts. To date the liberty to enjoy equal and equitable access to quality education continues to be an aspiration of members of the Black and Brown communities. *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), *Mendez v. Westminster* (1946), and *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) are examples of monumental legal proceedings argued before the high courts of the United States. These are illustrations of the longstanding crusade led by minorities to secure equal and equitable access to quality education. Despite these efforts and those of the Civil Rights Movement, the educational disparities that exist within minority populations continue to be consistently documented at every level of education including post-secondary environments (Quintana & Mahgoub, 2016).

The precedent ruling in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) "prohibited states from segregating public-school students on the basis of race" (347 U.S. 483). The legal obstacles that were preventing minorities from having equal and equitable access to education were removed by the United States Supreme Court's verdict in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, but additional barriers quickly emerged in the academic arena. The intellectual aptitude of low SES minority post-secondary students has been consistently questioned by educators since, Tinto (1975) initially presented the deficit model and its defining principles. The deficit model contends that low SES minority students fail to persist and achieve graduation from post-secondary institutions of higher learning as a result of their innate deficiencies related to familial context, individual traits, and the quality of their K-12 education. Furthermore, the deficit model is a theoretical framework rooted in the concept of "individual deficit" which are cited as the main determinants of minority student success in the post-secondary environment (Tinto, 1975; Sherman & Tinto, 1975). Embracing the idea that low SES minority community college students are a monolithic population, which is void of personal perspectives and unique experiences, provides a platform for erroneous assumptions to be made without acknowledging the intersectional perspective of low SES minority community college students. Yosso (2005) offered the theory of community cultural wealth to debunk the principles of the deficit model, as well as the myths and stereotypes attributed to post-secondary minority students. The social justice theory of intersectionality was utilized as the theoretical lens to examine the multiple converging and oftentimes oppressive social identities of minority post-secondary students.

## Social Identities

It would be fair to deduce that the overt discrimination experienced by minorities prior to the late 1950's was based on race and/or ethnicity, while the forms of discrimination currently experienced by minorities is a product of their multiple and converging social identities. Social identities are a categorical list of personal attributes or characteristics associated with race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status or class, immigration status, religion and (dis)ability which acknowledges an individual's membership to a specific population (Bowleg, 2012; Carter & Marony, 2018). It is not uncommon for individuals to identify with or be defined by multiple and converging social identities which oftentimes results in discrimination and/or oppression. For example, the research study participants self-identified as a racial or ethnic minority



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from a low socioeconomic status. Also, thirteen of the aforementioned participants self-identified as female. Thus, highlighting the multiple social identities of race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status and gender being possessed by 72% of the research study participants. Therefore, the findings of this research study evolved from the intersectional perspective and lived experiences of the participants.

## Social Determinants of Health

The intersectional perspective of low SES minority community college students acknowledges how a person or population's collection of social identities can impact their lived experiences, as well as how external factors can converge with social identities to further compound their lived experiences and personal perspectives. The external factors are commonly referred to as the social determinants of health. The social determinants of health are defined as conditions which influence the outcome of a person's social and economic opportunities that specifically aligns with and "depicts the relationship among socioeconomic and political context, social position, conditions of daily life, the health-care system, and health and well-being" (as cited in LaVeist & Pierre, 2014, p.11). Oftentimes, the social determinants of health are ingrained elements associated with culture, generational patterns, and lifestyles. Plainly stated, the social determinants of health are the circumstances in which an individual is born, lives, learns, and has a significant influence on their quality of life (Braveman & Gottlieb, 2014). Education, healthcare, neighborhood, social and community context and economic stability are the five most commonly recognized categories as it relates to the social determinants of health. Thus, illustrating the importance of how having equal and equitable access to quality opportunities, services, and resources can positively impact the quality of life for an individual or a population.

## Data Collection and Analysis

The groundwork of this qualitative case study was guided by three research questions which were utilized during the semi-structured interview process to engage in rich, descriptive discussions with the study participants. The use of judiciously constructed research questions could potentially lead to findings that would aid in the elimination of the educational disparities which exist between historically underrepresented and marginalized populations and their non-minority counterparts. Hence, the following research questions were used.

1. What barriers (i.e. socio-economic, racial, experiential, etc.) did participants identify, if any, to graduating from a community college?
2. What (if any) ancillary services or support resources at the college level did students use to help minimize or eliminate any barriers to graduation?
3. How did these services and resources impact the participants' ability to graduate from college?

Three distinct methods were utilized for the data collection process. Data was collected from seventeen semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and a retrospective analysis of CCSSE data collected tri-annually between the years of 2011 and 2016. The semi-structured interview process allowed each respondent to be asked the same questions with an opportunity to provide additional information through the use of open-ended questions and organic conversation. The data gathered from the focus group conversation and the probing questions of the one-to-one interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded for themes to identify the common characteristics, services and tools used by study participants to improve their academic experience. It is imperative to note, the process of coding is an integral part of the data analysis process because it provides a validated means of assigning labels to "allocate units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during the study" (Basil, 2003, p.144). Furthermore, coding is a repetitive process that occurs continuously throughout the duration of the research study aligning with the inductive reasoning element of qualitative research.

Similarly, the data collected from previous students who completed the CCSSE surveys was also analyzed to identify common characteristics, services and tools used to improve the academic experience of each predetermined population. This data set was then triangulated with the

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data gathered from the semi-structured interviews and focus group. In social research environments the active process of triangulation emphasizes the use of multiple, at least two, sources of collecting and comparing data which provides an opportunity for the researcher to confirm that accurate data has been collected and complete analysis has occurred by using the two initial data sets to construct a third data set highlighting the commonalities (Flick, 2004; Breitmayer, Ayres & Knafl, 1993). Furthermore, member checking was performed at key intervals along with weekly peer debriefing sessions to increase confidence and trustworthiness in the data presented by the researcher, which is perceived as a demonstration of convergent validity.

## Findings

The intersectional perspective of low SES minority community college students was reiterated by the findings of this study. The study analysis resulted in five eminent and distinct findings. The findings provided evidence highlighting the commonalities in shared perspectives and lived experiences of minority students while validating the polyethnic attributes of this population of students. The first finding supported the resourcefulness and persistence of study participants despite the presence of multi-faceted barriers. The importance of external forms of support from family, friends, and community is unparalleled, as well as having equal and equitable access to school resources, technology, and mental health services are the second and third findings, respectively. The final two findings demonstrated that informal mentoring relationships were the most utilized support resource by research study participants and that mentoring relationships provided a sustainable latent impact which manifested in the form of social and human capital. The research study participants collectively identified numerous factors that served as barriers to their ability to successfully persist in the postsecondary academic environment. The barriers to persistence were divided into four categories. The list of barriers listed in Table 1 can be summarized by three major themes.

**Table 1**  
*Participant Identified Barriers to Graduation*

Socio-economic	Racial	Experiential	Language
Homelessness	Microaggressions	Death	English second language
Grant/Loan Depletions	Having to prove oneself due to race and/or ethnicity	Generational Patterns of Poverty and Addiction	Lack of interpreters
Low paying employment/financial stability	Minimization of lived experiences	The absence of and/or lack of consistent academic advising	
Costs of books, technology, transportation, meals, childcare	Lack of diverse faculty, staff, and advisors	Health concerns	
Lack of social and human capital	Lack of diversity in student body	Domestic violence	
Financial obligations to family			
Poverty			

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Personal hierarchy of needs, the impact of implicit bias and external obligations represent the three themes which align with the socio-economic, racial, experiential and language barriers collectively identified by the research study participants. The aforementioned themes are offered in direct response to the first research question. Table 2 lists each theme along with a detailed explanation of each theme. Although each research study participant identified as a racial or ethnic low SES minority, the extensive list of barriers and themes confirms that the experience of these students was not monolithic. Thus, reiterating the importance of acknowledging the intersectional perspective of minority students in the post-secondary educational environment.

Table 2  
*Research Question #1 Themes*

Theme	Meaning
Personal Hierarchy of Needs	Human beings have a primitive set of basic needs which need to be satisfied to promote and/or enhance the quality of life. The primitive set of basic needs include such items as but not limited to food, water, financial means, personal safety, shelter, love/support, a sense of belonging and the desire to succeed and/or achieve specific goals.
Impact of Implicit Bias	The repetitive experience or encountering of microaggressions whether overt or covert in delivery. Persistent unsolicited forms of oppression and discrimination has the potential to result in undue emotional and/or mental stress. Stress can result in less-than-optimal academic performance, a lack of self-confidence and create a feeling that the faculty/staff are unapproachable.
External Obligations	Represent factors outside of the academic setting which require a significant amount of the student's time to be diverted to other commitments such as but limited to work, personal issues, and family responsibilities.

The second research question inquired if there were any ancillary services or support resources at the college level that the study participants used to help minimize or eliminate any barriers to graduation. Twenty-two unique ancillary services and support resources were identified by the study participants. Analysis indicated that ancillary services and support resources used to help minimize and eliminate potential barriers accounted for 32% and 68%, respectively. The wide range of ancillary services and support resources utilized by study participants in various combinations, and at various times further supports the intersectional perspective of minority community college students. Similar to the findings for the first research question, multiple themes quickly emerged from the responses offered by the study participants. These themes are illustrated in Table 3.

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Table 3  
*Research Question #2 Themes*

Theme	Meaning
Academic Services/Resources	School sanctioned and administered programs established to provide academic and/or financial support to specific student populations such as TRIO, HPOG and Job Corps which receives funding from Federal Agencies.
Non-Academic Services/Resources	School sponsored programs established to provide non-academic services and/or resources to specific student populations such as Women on a Mission and Men of Merit. These and similar programs provide peer support, career planning and community engagement opportunities to participants.
Informal Resources	Encompassed in the informal resources are mentoring and sponsoring relationships with college faculty and staff members. These nurturing relationships organically evolved between students and the aforementioned persons from an array of origins. The manifestations of relationships were advising suggestions, encouragement, and the introduction to resources unfamiliar to the students.

It is important to note, despite the fact that numerous ancillary services were identified 56% of the participants were unaware that any ancillary services were available or offered by the college. Programs that offered a means of financial assistance such as TRIO and HPOG, were more frequently utilized by the study participants, representing 22% and 11% respectively of the ancillary services listed.

The final research question was posed to solicit information relating to if and how the identified ancillary services and support resources impacted the study participants' ability to graduate from community college. The diverse and multi-generational cohort of study participants confidently offered a collective consensus noting that all of the identified ancillary services and support resources which had a positive impact on their ability to graduate from the pre-selected community college. Additionally, the impact of the ancillary services and support resources were organized by the longevity of its impact on the study participants' personal journey and collegiate career. The emerging themes of impact were categorized as Provisional, Sustainable, and Incidental. Table 4 lists each theme, accompanied by definition.

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Table 4  
*Research Question #3 Themes*

Theme	Meaning
Provisional Impact	References the gravity associated with the services and/or resources identified by the research study participants when responding to the second research question. The services and/or resources that align with this theme provided short term support to participants, such as occasional tutoring or incidental meetings with a professor and tangible supplies such as printing resources.
Sustainable Impact	References the gravity associated with the services and/or resources identified by the research study participants when responding to the second research question. The services and/or resources that align with this theme provided long lasting support to participants. Examples include but are not limited to personal mentoring relationships and a faculty or staff member serving as a student's sponsor for professional, as well as personal development.
Incidental Impact	References the gravity associated with the services and/or resources identified by the research study participants when responding to the second research question. The services and/or resources that align with this theme provided unintended support to participants on an individual base. Peer support derived from relationships with classmates or acquaintances that met during class or in common areas across the college campus.

The aforementioned themes of provisional, sustainable, and incidental impact demonstrate the gravity associated with the impact derived from the ancillary services and/or support resources identified by the study participants. This section presented the study's findings for each research question in a concise manner. During the data collection phase, study participants offered concrete examples to support, as well as highlight the unique vantage point of their lived experiences and personal perspectives.

## Interpretations

The explicit examples offered by the study participants reiterate the importance of acknowledging their intersectional perspectives, as well as the importance of assigning value

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to the lived experiences of low SES minority community college students. Throughout the semi-structured interview process participants repeatedly described how it felt to be invisible in plain sight in the post-secondary academic setting. For example, participant eighteen stated that her professors were “not willing to answer my questions, I felt invisible.” While study participant fifteen shared that being “the only Black person in class reminds you of who you are.” Despite these participants being physically present and actively engaged in the academic process, the culture and climate of the classroom failed to acknowledge their existence.

Furthermore, the study participants expressed a specific desire for a culture and climate which valued their lived experiences along with their personal perspectives. For example, participant thirteen who identified as an African American single mother, working two jobs stated how she wanted “instructors that cared.” Participant fourteen cited how she “lacked the support most other people had.” While participant six who identified as a Mexican American with Spanish as his primary language shared how “I chose to write about border security and my paper was not appreciated.” The direct quotes from the research study participants emphasizes how identifying with multiple and converging social identities can impact a person’s lived experiences and personal perspective. Additionally, the concrete examples serve as an essential element of the study’s foundation as it relates to the five eminent and distinct findings.

### *Evidence of research study participants’ persistence despite multi-faceted barriers.*

The findings indicated that participants were determined to identify effective means to navigate and overcome the collective list of identified barriers. For example, participant number twelve stated how she “wanted to break the generational curse of poverty” and how the “fear of living in poverty made me resilient and determined.” Likewise, participant number one shared how “I married a man for money in exchange for his green card.” She acknowledged that her actions were “not legal but I don’t care because he has kept his promise making sure that my kids don’t live in the projects in poverty, and we have what we need.”

### *The importance of external forms of support from family, friends, and community.*

The lived experiences of these study participants illustrated their persistence, as well as their internal motivation to succeed but it is important to highlight that several of the participants found various forms of support from family, friends, community members and knowledgeable others. For example, research participant number eight noted how her “first times at C\*A\* were not good and I had to do a medical withdrawal because I did not have a good support” but after sharing her initial experiences with a friend she recounted how her third time enrolling as a student was a success. The participant offered details of how her friend introduced her to HPOG and how the wrap around services of the HPOG program “allowed her to focus on schoolwork and her job which reduced stress” because the program “helped with tuition, books, childcare co-pays and offered utility and rent assistance.” The support provided by this participant’s friend changed the trajectory of her collegiate experience, as well as her career. This participant graduated from the HPOG program and is currently employed full-time as a medical insurance specialist.

### *The importance of equal and equitable access to school resources, technology, and mental health services.*

Another significant finding indicated that equal and equitable access to school resources, technology, and mental health services are imperative for student success in the post-sec-

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ondary environment was critical to the success of low SES minority community college students. For example, research study participant number seventeen freely acknowledged that English was not her primary language and that there were many programs offered by the community college that she wanted to participate in but could not, due to her lack of fluency in the English language. She stated that "I tried to participate in TRIO but couldn't do it because of the language barrier." Likewise, research study participant number fifteen shared her inability to purchase the necessary materials and technology requirements for class. She stated, "My credit card is maxed, I'm waiting on emergency funding from the school, and I am already behind in class because I don't have what I need." The importance of students having equal and equitable access to mental health services was illustrated by participant number twelve when she shared how she was a single mother of two and how she felt "overwhelmed with life and how depression would set in." It is unfair to assume that all community college students are embarking on the post-secondary academic journey with knowledge of or access to school resources, the necessary technology, and materials to be engaged students or access to mental health services to offer support as life ebbs and flows.

### *Informal mentoring relationships were the most utilized support resource by research study participants*

Research study participants noted informal mentoring relationships as the most utilized resource during their academic pursuit with a lasting positive impact which expanded beyond graduation for most students. The mentoring relationships that 67% of the study participants engaged in with faculty and staff members was not organized or overseen by the community college. The mentoring relationships resulted from organic interactions between a member and a faculty or staff member. Irrespective of how the mentoring relationships evolved, the study participants offered concrete examples demonstrating the gravity of these relationships. Study participant number three cited how his mentor introduced him to resources and services to help address his lack of financial resources and his unstable housing circumstances. Similarly, participant number four shared how his mentor helped him with the transfer process to a four-year university and to secure scholarships to assist with tuition. These are just a few examples of how consistent interactions with a knowledgeable other such as a mentor can vastly improve the post-secondary journey of low SES minority students.

### *Mentoring relationships provided a sustainable latent impact which manifested in the form of social and human capital.*

The immeasurable value and inveterate impact of mentoring relationships was realized as sources of social and human capital by study participants. These findings support the principles of the community cultural wealth model. Irrespective of the principles of inherent intellectual deficit attributed to minority students by the deficit model and the presumed absence of social and human capital, the findings illustrated that the participants possessed a wealth of community cultural capital (Tinto, 1975). In direct contrast to the deficit theory principles, Yosso (2005) posits that "community cultural wealth is an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (p.77). Similar to the failure of post-secondary administrators and educators to acknowledge and honor the value of the lived experiences of their minority students, is the failure to acknowledge the wealth contained within the cultural community of minority populations. Community cultural

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wealth is composed of aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). Each one of these forms of capital increases the wealth and capacity of historically marginalized populations to not only be persistent but also be resilient.

## Recommendations

The study findings have illustrated the participants ability to be resourceful, persistent and to successfully achieve graduation despite numerous barriers, the lack of equal and equitable access to beneficial resources and the failure of post-secondary institutions of higher learning to honor the value of their students' lived experiences and to acknowledge the presence, as well as the impact of the intersectional perspective held by various members of the student body. To improve the educational experience of low SES minority community college students it is imperative that administrators, leaders, faculty, and staff members are actively engaged in the following recommendations.

The first recommendation is to identify the common characteristics of non-traditional, single-parents, and English Second Language postsecondary low SES minority community college students to identify if any barriers exist that could negatively impact the persistence and graduation rates for these students. The next recommendation is to examine if a digital divide exists in the post-secondary academic environment and if so, the extent to which the digital divide impacts the educational experience and academic outcomes of low SES minority community college students. It is imperative to ensure that each and every student has equal and equitable access to the necessary resources to be successful in the postsecondary environment.

It would also be advantageous for administration to employ a lens of intersectionality while performing a thorough review of the college's current policies, resources, and programs to help minimize or eliminate as many structural barriers as possible for students with multiple and converging social identities. Likewise, instituting a mandatory campus-wide diversity, equity and inclusion training series for faculty and staff. The training series should incorporate numerous experiential learning opportunities which would provide prime opportunities to identify effective means to address the problems and disparities identified by the findings of the study. Another recommendation to improve the educational experience of postsecondary students with competing obligations would be to offer frequently used services and resources after normal business hours several times a week or during the weekend. This small modification would allow more students to benefit from services and resources such as tutoring, academic advising and programs designed to enhance personal and professional development. The final recommendations include the creation and administration of a formal mentoring program for all enrolled students and to resume the administration of the CCSSE survey. The CCSSE survey should incorporate additional questions to specifically assess the impact of ancillary services and support resources. Implementing the collective recommendations and incorporating the suggestions for future research could expand the body of knowledge as it relates to postsecondary students with intersectional perspectives.

## Conclusion

A qualitative case study employing a theoretical lens of intersectionality was performed to identify the common characteristics of low SES minority community college students who were able to persist and successfully achieve graduation. Three research questions guided the inquiry



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with a multigenerational cohort of low SES minority students that self-identified as either African or Hispanic American. The study's findings provided evidence to refute the principles presented in the deficit theory while reiterating the principles of community cultural wealth (Tinto, 1975; Yosso, 2005). The participants demonstrated not only resourcefulness and persistence but also the ability to navigate multiple and converging social identities.

The cumulative findings illustrated the intersectional perspective of low SES minority post-secondary students which oftentimes went unnoticed. Furthermore, the failure to mitigate the structural barriers frequently encountered by persons with multiple and converging social identities, as well as the failure to honor the value of their lived experiences demonstrated the invisibility of an entire population of students. The research study participants refuse to be adjudicated by visual presentation, preconceived notions, myths, and stereotypes.

As educators, advocates, and persons who can personally identify with the perspectives of the participants it is our responsibility to stand in the gap and seize the opportunity to serve as a mentor to historically underrepresented and marginalized members of the student body. It is equally important to advocate for programs and policies which will enhance the educational experience for members of the student body from vulnerable populations. Likewise, as advocates and mentors it is crucial to assist in the efforts to refute the intellectual deficit narratives that have been attributed to minority students, and to acknowledge, as well as reinforce the principles of community cultural wealth. Finally, it is our responsibility to proactively create culturally inclusive and responsive environments to honor the lived experiences of low SES minority community college students while employing curriculums and pedagogical practices that are culturally inclusive and responsive.

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## Debate as Transformative Social Practice in Higher Education: Critique, Explanation, and Action

Robert J. Green

### Abstract

This article incorporates elements from critical discourse analysis, critical race theory, and argumentation theory to provide a transformative approach to argumentation and debate grounded in a process of critique, explanation, and action. The article establishes a need in higher education for transformative approaches to debate and introduces an approach to practical forms of deliberative argumentation suitable for the teaching and learning context. The underlying rationale of the article is that training and argument in debate is a social justice issue. A core recommendation presented by the article is that debate as a transformative practice is ultimately a process of forging relationships in theory and in practice, that training in debate must be grounded in the lived experiences of educators and learners, and that such experiences must be connected to existing elements of social reality in meaningful ways.

### Debate as Transformative Social Practice in Higher Education: Critique, Explanation, and Action

This article uses the theoretical and methodological framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to provide guidance to educators in higher education who desire to incorporate into their teaching practice an approach to debate as transformative social practice. The underlying premise of the article is that access to training in argumentation and debate is a social justice issue that can be addressed by providing access to discursive resources underlying the production and interpretation of rational, reasonable, and rhetorically effective forms of argumentation. Contemporary discourses on the theory and practice of argumentation tend to overlook if not dismiss the transformative potential of debate as a social practice. Such perspectives I argue serve to limit access to a fundamental form of agency: the power to use reasons to make a difference in the world. Access to argumentation and debate is a privilege that is often taken for granted especially by those most skilled in its use, and a transformative model of debate oriented to the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion may very well contribute to the development of well-being in ourselves, our students, and the world. Practical forms of argumentation can be transformative at the extent to which they engage in the process of critique, explanation, and action. CDA is a transdisciplinary approach to understanding how language use is an irreducible element of the structures, events, and practices that make up existing social and political reality (N. Fairclough, 2016). This approach conceptualizes discourse as a form of social practice conditioned by social processes, which implies a dialectical relationship between discursive practices and social structures, (networks) of social practices, and actual events in which texts are produced, interpreted, and consumed (N. Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Debate is often perceived and practiced in hegemonic ways that ultimately reproduce the existing state of affairs: as an inaccessible skilset of arcane rules of and rationalities; as anodyne "exchange of views" ultimately disconnected from lived experience; as forms of verbal, emotional, and physical violence that too often culminates in

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an “exchange of blow.” A critical perspective on debate approaches it as an educational process “in which learning about better reasons and arguments is at the same time learning about better states of affairs and better actions which might achieve them” (N. Fairclough, 2018, p. 18).

The guidance reported in this article is informed by my experience as an educator in argumentation and as a coach in the Frederick Douglass Debate Society, a program in the Pennsylvania System of Higher Education that provides to diverse populations of learners access to high-impact training in argumentation and debate. As a white person with extensive training in argumentation and debate, one of the difficulties I face in reconciling my privilege involves accounting for asymmetries in knowledge, training, and identity forming barriers between myself and learners motivated to seek empowerment through their voice. Thus, central to the approach presented here is the recognition that training in practical argumentation must be grounded in the lived experiences of teachers and learners, and that such experiences must be connected to existing elements of social reality in meaningful ways. In order to make a difference, debate as a transformative practice is ultimately a process of forging relationships in theory and in practice.

The article is organized as follows. First, I provide an overview of contemporary discourses on the theory and practice of argumentation in order to establish a need for a transformative approach in higher education. Second, I present the three building blocks of transformative approaches to debate: critique, explanation, and action. Finally, I conclude with a summary of findings and provide directions for further research.

## The Need for A Transformative Model of Debate in Higher Education

Contemporary discourses on argumentation and debate tend to be dismissive if not skeptical to the concept of debate as a transformative social practice. Zarefsky (2019) notes that people often attribute negative connotations to terms such as arguing, argument, and argumentation, noting that people more often than not “associate argumentation with bickering, quarrelsomeness, or petulance –all undesirable personality traits” (p. 1). Dismissive attitudes towards argumentation are further reinforced in the discourse of corporate diversity consultants, which has achieved a degree of currency and notoriety in popular culture, because argumentation is often associated with entitled white persons unable or unwilling to confront the privilege of taken-for-granted racial entitlements and privileges (e.g., DiAngelo, 2018).

Negative perceptions of argumentation are not entirely unwarranted. For example, when I ask learners in my argumentation class if they can recollect a productive argument, many struggle to remember one, and those that do often frame their experiences from a win-loss perspective. The unfortunate reality is that most people have limited access to training in argumentation and debate, and what they have learned comes from the emulation of practices gleaned from their family, their friends, and from the mass media (Mehltretter Drury, 2020). The result is that argumentation is more often than not equated in theory and practice with competitive, manipulative, exclusionary, ineffective, and inappropriate forms of interacting and ways of relating. Given the unfortunate state of argumentation and debate in contemporary culture, teachers and learners interested in “making a difference” will need to create access to the sort of discursive resources used to produce rational, reasonable, and rhetorically effective arguments with transformative potential. Contemporary discourses are unlikely to provide such access. Unsurprisingly, critics of argumentation often engage in a discursive practice called “performative contradiction” (Habermas, 1990) meaning that their critique of argumentation is enacted through argumentation. Such criticism, at best, merely reflects pessimistic attitudes towards argumentation. At its worst, it implies that training in argumentation and debate belongs only to elite members of society—argumentation is good for me, but not for thee.” It is easy for those fortunate to have access to training in argumentation to take it for granted, and such access is often a product of racial, economic, gender, and geographical forms of privilege. These are only the privileges identified by the author as contributing factors to his own training, there are certainly others.

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In order to address negative perceptions and practices of argumentation and realize its transformative potential, it is important to theorize it as a discursive practice related to actual situations and contexts. This condition also implies that argumentation is not always the most effective or appropriate genre of communication to enact in all circumstances, and that competent argumentation is not possible in all contexts with all participants. An argument is, in its most basic sense, a type of speech act primarily used in knowledge exchanges. Arguments function in dialogical contexts along with other speech acts (e.g., asking questions, making offers, issuing commands, etc.) in order to “give a reason (or more than one) to support a claim that is subject to doubt, and thereby remove that doubt” (Walton, 2006, p. 1). One way that we measure can measure the usefulness, effectiveness, and appropriateness of argumentation involves comparing the purpose of the dialogue in which argumentation emerges with the discursive effect of the argument on participants. So, while particular types of character attacks are relevant and may be more or less appropriate in eristic dialogues over grievances, such arguments are irrelevant and inappropriate in information-giving dialogues where people are sharing their lived experiences.

Research in CDA theorizes that the packaging of reasons into arguments and of arguments into cases has causal power, that argumentation provides people with reasons for action in personal, technical, and public contexts (N. Fairclough et al., 2002). Additionally, debate can be understood as a discursive practice that draws upon and combines communicative genres (including argumentation), discursive representations of the world from particular perspectives, and of social identities into an order of discourse capable of challenging taken-for-granted conventions and circumstances. Acknowledgment of debate as a discursive practice thus allows distinctions to be made between communicative practices that reinforce needless forms of exploitation and domination—i.e., the use of argumentation to reproduce structures of racism by the white managerial class—from transformative practices with the potential to change the world for the better. The remainder of the article is dedicated to providing one possible answer to the following question: How can teachers and learners in higher education leverage training in argumentation and debate to make a difference? An alternative account of argumentation instantiates cooperative, reflexive, inclusive, and competent forms of reasoning that can be combined with related genres of communication (e.g., narrative, explanation, and conversation) to generate, select, and advocate actions that can change the world for the better. From this perspective, access to the theory and practice of argumentation and debate is a social justice issue.

### **Critique, Explanation, Action: The building blocks of Debate as a Transformative Social Practice**

The approach to debate as a transformative social practice is based on a critical and creative process of reasoning and action developed by N. Fairclough (2018) called dialectical reasoning. This is “a way of reasoning from critique of discourse to what should be done to change existing reality, by way of explanation of relations between discourse and other components of reality” (p. 13). Dialectical reasoning is thus used to link the problematization of an existing state of affairs to the formulation and articulation of actions and strategies with the potential to transform society for the better. Dialectical reasoning further bridges the gap between theory and practice through forms of practical argumentation that advocate for courses of action (N. Fairclough, 1989). Thus, this section is designed to introduce and illustrate the three building blocks of transformative debate as a process of dialectical reasoning: critique, explanation, and action.

### **Critique**

The entry point into transformative argumentation is a normative critique of discourse. Normative critique of discourse is a form of immanent critique of society, which involves the identification and evaluation of problematic discursive representations against critical normative

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frameworks. Critique of discourse is an accessible, useful, and effective entry point into broader forms of analysis because discourses are associated with (networks) of practices, institutions, organizations, and broader fields of social activity relating to the lived experiences of teachers and learners.

Normative critique of discourse provides an accessible, useful, and effective entry point because we all to some extent or another participate in discursive practices of text production, interpretation, and consumption in all areas of social life. Educators and learners gain access to topics through their consumption of discourses related to academic, legal, political, and social, popular culture texts. It is also of considerable value for educators and learners to document their personal relationship with the debate topic in the form of narratives. For example, a debate over the contentious issue of reparations might involve problematizing the presumed "historical" context of the issue by placing it into its contemporary context. An initial entry point may involve reading the 13th amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which permits carceral slavery in the modern era, followed by a viewing of the documentary 13TH. Teachers and learners may then formulate their relationship with carceral slavery, which can range from an abstract relationship—i.e., I personally have zero experience with the prison industrial complex but recognize the enjoy the benefits of it—to stories that document concrete experiences of exploitation. Both perspectives are valuable to the extent that participants link discursive practices to actual lived experiences in a meaningful manner.

Critical norms can be drawn from a variety of places, and it is the task of the educator ideally in consultation with learners to identify and construct normative frameworks tailored to specified learning outcomes. For example, a typical norm commonly used by critical discourse analysts and tailored to specific contexts is the extent to which discursive practices contribute to the development of well-being—e.g., mental well-being, human well-being, environmental well-being, etc. For example, we can argue in general terms that debate is a transformative social practice only if it contributes in some sense to the cultivation of well-being.

Another method of normative critique involves analyzing discursive representations with the aim of revealing contradictions within the existing state of affairs. Contradictions commonly investigated include: contradictions between what is expected to happen and what actually happens; contradictions related to truth, rightness, and sincerity of communication; contradictions between what people claim in theory and what they actually do in practice (Fairclough, 1989/2015). For example, when talking about the issue of slavery, it can be surprising to realize the contradiction between (a) common-sense beliefs about the abolition of slavery by the Emancipation Proclamation, (b) the preservation of slavery in reconstruction era, and amendments to the U.S. Constitution, (c) the reincarnation of slavery in the form of carceral slavery (Rodríguez, 2019). Because normative critique of discourse directs our attention to analysis of broader contextual factors, it leads into an explanation of the relationship between critiqued discourse and other elements of existing social reality.

### Explanation

Once an entry point into analysis has been established through normative critique of discourse, the next step involves an explanation of how problematized representations are dialectically related to elements of existing social reality. Relationships are dialectical in the sense that discourse is shaped by and constitutive of the structures, material practices, ideologies, power dynamics, social identities, social institutions, and other discursive and non-discursive elements making up these broader social processes (Harvey, 1996). Elements of the social process are dialectically related to the extent they internalize one another without being reducible to one or the other. Dialectically grounded explanations provide an antidote to reductionist thinking, and that is a key source of its transformative potential.

For example. A fundamental contradiction within existing social reality related to the

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intersection of racism and neoliberal capitalism is interest convergence, which Bell (1980) defines as “the interest in blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites” (p. 523). Bell’s analysis of *Brown vs Board of Education* is instructive because it situates analysis of legal discourse in relation to its broader socio-political context in ways that seem unrelated. Yet, by putting a landmark ruling in relation to cold war politics, Bell identifies the operation of a contradiction raising questions about common sense perspectives on racial progress. Delgado (2015) more recently applied the interest convergence thesis to the election of Barack Obama, which has been commonly hailed as a key moment in the emergence of a post-racial society led by a colorblind presidency. So while the election of President Obama can be construed as a victory for minority interests, Delgado argues that it is only such because it is a victory for elite White self-interest constituting a necessary development “for globalization to advance, for the United States to impose environmental limits on the developing world, and for corporate capitalism to advance to the next level” (Delgado, 2015, p. 346).

Analysis of interest convergence leads into an explanation that relates hegemonic discourses of “color blindness” and “post-racial society” to interrelated though discrete structures of racism and neoliberal capitalism. Although contemporary discourses tend to establish boundaries that compel a choice to be made between either racism or capitalism as the primary explanation, in reality both racism and capitalism constrain agentive potential to varying degrees of emphasis. We can even go as far as to say that racism internalizes capitalist impulses without being reducible to it, and we can likewise say that capitalism internalizes racism without being reducible to it. Emphasis on one or the other depends on the lived experiences of educators and learners so long as the relational focus is maintained.

It is furthermore important to recognize that structures do not determine discourses, and that discursive representations do not operate free of structural constraints. Although structures such as racism and neoliberal capitalism constrain agentive potential, they do not foreclose the potential for creativity. Discourses are shaped by and constitutive of structures through discursive practices of text production, interpretation, and consumption. Although discursive practices contribute to the reproduction of harmful social practices, changes in the composition of discursive practices can have transformational potential if they can be linked to the development of action.

### Action

The purpose of debate as a transformative social practice is the discovery of courses of action that would presumably transform society for the better. The final building block of debate as a transformative social practice is action. The normative critique of discourse is a necessary problematization of existing social reality, and it is a useful exercise in its own right when discursive representations are explained in relation to other elements of existing social reality. The purpose of the exercise, however, is to produce argumentation oriented to the transformation of society. In this next step, action, the findings of normative critique and explanation are turned into reasons for action through the discursive practice of practical argumentation.

Practical argumentation consists of four premise types (circumstantial, value, goal, and means-goal) that independently converge to affirm or oppose a normative claim for action (I. Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012). The claim is the focal point of the debate, and it serves to divide ground between those tasked to affirm the claim and those tasked to oppose or negate it. Because argumentation is used to deliberate a course of action, the claim is most formally stated as a proposition of policy. This is a normative statement asserting that a specified agent at some point in the future should take a prescribed course of action. Propositions of policy presuppose propositions of fact—factual statements about what is or is not the case—as well as propositions of value— or evaluative statements about the morality, desirability, or effectiveness of a thing—that are respectively developed in the circumstantial and value premises.

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Circumstantial premises provide a representation of the existing state of affairs in order to establish a factual basis for action, ultimately problematizing the contemporary socio-political context in the form of reasons for accepting and implementing the claim. Circumstantial premises define the existing state of affairs in ways that establish the significant harms to well-beings. Such harms will continue to exist despite their negative consequences unless action is taken to overcome existing structures and attitudes that allow such harms to persist. It is vital that arguers explain the relationship between significant harms and their basis in the existing state of affairs, otherwise there would be no need to implement the claim.

Value premises specify the underlying concerns, desires, obligations, and commitments that motivate advocates to action. The need to articulate explicit value premises is based on the fact that value systems can be drawn from a variety of sources that will inevitably come into conflict, and that the decision to prioritize one value over another equally acceptable value may require further justification. A useful tool for the consideration of values is known as a "value wheel," which organizes value "ideal types" according to typical compatibility (Schwartz, 1994). For example, values related to social justice typically complement values related to benevolence and self-direction, they typically contradict values related to power and wealth, and they are typically less compatible with values related to hedonism and the existing social order. Values are powerful motivators of personal and political activity, and in argumentation they often operate implicitly, such as in the way that values inform the definition of reality in circumstantial premises or the selection of goal premises. Thus, tools such as the value wheel may help educators and learners of argumentation to explore their own values, consider opposing values held by others, and do so in ways that provide areas of agreement and disagreement that can be used for understanding as well as for advantage.

Goal premises represent a future state of affairs in which the claim is implemented, and underlying values are realized. The formulation of goal premises encourages teachers and learners to imagine a world where their actions have made a difference for the better. Although this might sound trite or utopian, the opportunity to imagine a different, better version of the future is one worthy of our attention. So long as goal premises are related through circumstantial premises to actually existing elements of social reality, goal premises may turn out to be realistic and doable.

The means-goal premise is a conditional argument stating that if the claim is adopted, then problematic circumstances will be overcome and a desirable future state of affairs where core values are instantiated will be realized. Formulation of a means-goal premises provides another check against the least helpful forms of utopian thinking: if there is no evidence to suggest that a proposed claim is not capable of solving the problem, then it might be better to consider alternatives.

Indeed, the future may depend on building a capacity for bringing about a better world. Circumstances related to unrelenting racism, global climate change, the rise of authoritarian governments, and the redistribution of wealth from the lower classes to a concentrated global elite have instantiated a general sense of malaise in younger generations characterized by Berardi (2011) as a "slow cancellation of the future" (p. 18). The formulation of a goal in relation to circumstances, values, and means is an exercise in imagining the use of power to bring about changes to reality for the better. Power operates in practical argumentation to provide "agents with reasons for action," including reasons to confront the authority of illegitimate institutions as well as the power to create new institutional realities (I. Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012, p. 112). Although we may critically question the legitimacy of social and political institutions as they currently exist, practical forms of argumentation establish an action, and process, and a vision with the potential to reform or radically transform institution realities for the better.



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It has been the purpose of this article to use the theoretical and methodological framework of critical discourse analysis to provide one approach that educators and learners in higher education can take in using argumentation and debate to make a difference. The theoretical and methodological framework of the study is drawn from critical discourse analysis (CDA) in relation to elements drawn from critical race theory and argumentation theory. It is the purpose of CDA to make visible the implicit operation of power through a normative critique of discourse in relation to problematic elements of existing social reality as a basis for overcoming structures, practices, and events detrimental to well-being (N. Fairclough, 2016). Practical argumentation provides one form of strategy that be used to transform critique into meaningful forms of social change through the analysis of circumstances, values, means, and goals.

There are several limitations that ultimately serve as recommendations for future research. This article has primarily focused on putting CDA into conversation with critical race theory and argumentation theory in the context of social practices of debate associated with institutions of higher education. Future research can further develop this framework of critique, explanation, and action to introduce significant learning outcomes (Fink, 2013) that educators can use as a starting point for the incorporation of transformative practices of debate into their own teaching and learning practice. Likewise, this report has not focused on the instructional practice of coaching debate, and future research can apply this framework to revitalizing additional aspects of the coaching vocation. Finally, the focus on critical race theory in this report does not imply the exclusion of discursive perspectives that people may orient to in accordance with their lived experiences. The significance of debate as a transformative practice can be measured by relations forged among elements of social life, which entails the inclusion of persons, perspectives, and realities from all walks of life.

The approach to debate as a transformative social practice is grounded in a process of critique and explanation that ultimately serves to provide reasons for action. Normative critique of discourse provides a useful, accessible, effective entry point to the problematization of existing social reality because it aims to connect the lived experiences to discursive practices of text production, interpretation, and consumption. Explanation moves from critique of discourse to critique of the social, political, and cultural contexts that are shaped by and constitutive of existing social and political reality. Normative critique and explanation together provide reasons for action, the third building block of debate as a transformative social practice. Practical argumentation is a discursive practice bridging the gap between theory and practice because it provides a method leading into the development and advocacy of solutions that can be enacted to address actual problems faced by actual people in the actual world. Debate is most effective when it entails a mixture of relevant communication genres (e.g., argumentation, narrative, etc.), discursive perspectives, and social identities coming together in finding ways to overcome a social wrong that will persist unless action is taken.

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## Commentary: The Role and Responsibility of Educators and Education Leaders to Promote Racial Justice” EPLC Panel Discussion: July 2, 2020

John Craig

### Opening:

Good morning, everyone. As I consider what the role of educators and education leaders is as it pertains to promoting racial justice, I think of the following quote by the late great poet, memoirist, civil rights activist and university professor Maya Angelou, “It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength.” This quote is powerful to me on so many levels. One, as educators, how many times have we said, especially to those who teach in middle and high school, I wish more parents would get involved? From my perspective and experience as an educator and education leader, parents, guardians and/or caregivers are vitally important to the success of children. Which leads me to the heart of my first point: we must build and sustain meaningful relationships with parents and families such that we can educate them about racism and how that plays out in society and the impact it has on their child(ren) in school and beyond.

From an article published by the American Psychological Association in 2015, Hoyt Jr. (2012) defines racism as “a particular form of prejudice defined by preconceived erroneous beliefs about race and members of racial groups.” According to this definition, we can see how racism is built up around stereotypes, assumptions and prejudiced views. However, racism is not simply a prejudiced viewpoint. Wellman (1993) fleshes out the definition and understanding of racism, showing how it not only includes interpersonal biases, but is present in institutional, historical and structural dynamics, which perpetuate the power and advantages of the dominant group.

Because racism benefits those in power, it is imperative to include the concept of privilege when addressing the reality of racism. Kendall Clark (n.d.) defines privilege as the possession of an advantage a dominant group enjoys over an oppressed group. The word hints at the interplay of privilege and oppression. George Lipsitz (2006) explains how privilege and racism go hand in hand, involving those who benefit from and those who are oppressed by a racist system.

So, I started out by talking about how we need to engage our parents and families in the educational process because my belief is that racism and privilege are learned behaviors which must be eradicated, indeed not even taught at home. Additionally, Racism and prejudice are not interchangeable. The difference must be taught in every home. Allow me to elaborate, According to Sobantu Mzwakali (2015), prejudice refers to a positive or negative evaluation of another person based on their perceived group membership. Racism on the other hand refers to social actions, practices or beliefs or political systems that consider different races to be ranked as inherently superior or inferior to each other. Furthermore, racism is socio-economic, with systemic structures which promote one race’s powers over another. Socio-economic being the operative word, I am certain you will agree that black people do not have the resources to impose such oppressive structures which enforce their superiority. White people on the other hand have, and had imposed them on blacks for over four centuries of slavery and colonialism. Black people can be prejudiced, but not racist. The ability to enforce your discriminations and prejudices in such a way that leads to power structures where you can ensure a race is inferior to you is racism.

Now, why is it important for children to know about privilege, prejudice and racism? I’m glad you asked: White children need to be taught to recognize their privilege. This sounds harsh and you might be saying, “Privilege, I grew up poor! I certainly wasn’t privileged!” My response to you is this: Even in your poorest state, the system which exists in our Commonwealth and our nation is set up to benefit you because of your whiteness. Schools, places of worship,

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politics, health care, etc., have been established to benefit whites. White people will often say, I'm not racist, to which I reply, good. However, you need to recognize your privilege in this society. Thus, my original point is White children need to be taught candidly about race and racism. These conversations should start in the home. However, I am not naïve enough to believe that these conversations about race and racism will happen in the home. But, that does not mean our schools can't do so. Which leads me to my second point:

Educators and education leaders must be courageous to adequately teach about racial justice in our schools and not just during Black history month. Race and racism needs to be part of the core curriculum and not an elective. New teachers, principals, superintendents and everyone who works in the schools need to be screened for a racist past and alliances to racist hate groups like the KKK and other White supremacist organizations. These people have no place in our schools. All teachers who have exhibited a pattern of racist behaviors as evidenced by speech, grading, discipline, inordinate referrals to special education, need to be investigated and relieved of their duties. Principals who do not create an environment in their schools which is welcoming and supportive of all students, need to be investigated, trained and removed from the field if they have been found to exhibit a pattern of racist behavior. Superintendents and school boards who do not actively promote a more diverse teaching and administrative workforce and who do not support a curriculum in which race and racism is part of the core curriculum need to be removed.

This may sound harsh and rigid; however, the irreparable harm that racist educators have inflicted upon Black and other children of color throughout this Commonwealth is worse. We need educators and education leaders who are committed to equity and equality. Please do not think that I am limiting this to just our K-12 schools. This is also applicable to our post-secondary institutions as well. We must root out professors, administrators and staff who are racist. The Pennsylvania Black Conference on Higher Education, Inc., which was founded in 1970 by the late great Hon. K. Leroy Irvis, who was a State Rep. from Allegheny County and an attorney, would later become the nation's first Black speaker of any state house of representatives since reconstruction, founded the organization during the civil rights movement to ensure that the higher educational needs of Blacks and other minorities are met by promoting and demanding access, equity and equality. The organization consists of college and university faculty, administrators, many of whom hold cabinet level positions at their respective institution and a host of students. I served as president of this organization for 3 (two-year terms) and was honored to do so. Mr. Irvis leveraged this newly-formed body of educators to help him write the legislation which is known as the Higher Education Equal Opportunity Program aka ACT 101. ACT 101 is a grant provided to participating post-secondary institutions. This grant is to be used to provide access to and support programming for all economically and academically disadvantaged students from the Commonwealth. The first grants were awarded in 1971. Because of this legislation, many Black students have gained access to college despite their socioeconomic status, yours truly included. Additionally, ACT 101 was also a professional inlet for Black professionals who would other not have been hired to colleges and universities across the Commonwealth. One final word about the importance of the legacy of Mr. Irvis, during his many years in the House of Representatives, he sponsored over 1600 pieces of legislation, some of which are highly notable, such as the creation of the PA Higher Education Assistance Agency, the community colleges in Pennsylvania and the Commonwealth System of Higher Education, to name a few. So, when we're talking about things to be taught in our schools, this should be taught all across the Commonwealth.

My final point about the role of educators and education leaders in the fight for racial justice is this: Hold our elected officials accountable and demand a more equitable funding formula which benefits all of PA's 501 (or 500) districts in PA and not just those in affluent communities. In fact, the current funding formula is racist because it perpetuates a system by which discrimination against those in poor communities do not have access to the same resources as those who are in more affluent communities. This is not only racist but also classist. Dare I say it, it is also very intentional.

We as educators have the power to make change. We got into this profession because we felt a deep commitment to helping people and a love of children and of the profession itself.

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If we truly love our children, all children, then we will love them enough to teach them the truth and not “our truth” but the truth about the system of racism which has existed since this country’s founding. The truth about slavery, Jim Crow, segregation, institutional and corporate racism and police brutality and the legalized lynching in which police have engaged against Black men and women since the founding of this nation. We will stop saying things like, “all police aren’t bad.” No one is saying that all police are bad. We are saying that all police are bad when they do not hold to account the ones which are. Similarly, we will stop saying, “all lives matter,” as a means to deflect from the issue at hand. We will realize that the Black Lives Matter movement is not a movement of hate and the Black Lives Matter movement doesn’t teach nor believe that Black Lives Matter more. The movement is simply but forcefully saying, “all lives can’t matter until Black lives matter.” Finally, we will not put the burden of fighting racial injustice on the backs of Black people alone. White people must fight with us against this injustice and shoulder the burden of eradicating this racism in our schools, in particular, and, in our communities, in general, by not condoning the weaponizing of your whiteness against Black people. We all have seen many instances captured on video of white women, in particular, calling the police on Black men and women who are doing nothing amiss but being.

I got into the field of education because I view it as my calling. I was raised in a home which valued diversity. I can remember my grandmother telling me at a very young age, “John you are not better than anybody; but, you are just as good as everybody else.” These are the types of values which must be taught in our homes and schools. Until we can believe that no one is better than anyone else, then we will continue to experience racial injustice in our schools and in society.

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