

A Narrative of One Teacher's Journey Toward Conscientization

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Introduction

In this paper I look to the past to find clarity and direction: I recount the events following a personal tragedy that led to professional and personal awakening and critical consciousness. Although I work to see this awakening and journey objectively, my narrative is nevertheless subjective, for I tell of my awakening, coming to critical consciousness, and conscientization (*conscientização*; Freire 1970). I have chosen to tell this story because it may help others in their efforts to free themselves toward becoming fully human and because it ultimately reveals the power of education—including self-education—to transform racists and bigots if only they will think, reflect, and remain open to all kinds of Others. In keeping with the causes of transformation, I use Freire's (1970) liberation pedagogy—specifically his concepts of conscientization, critical consciousness, praxis, and epistemological curiosity—to frame my story. Within this Freirean (1970) frame, I combine Noddings' (1984) ethics of care and Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 1998, 2003; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) to demonstrate how I worked through my own racism and bigotry toward becoming more fully human. As I worked through the process of conscientization, towards the process of becoming fully human, towards ridding myself of deeply engrained racism and bigotry, I embraced as role models such civil rights activists as Septima Clark¹ and Bayard Rustin.²

I begin by defining and explaining Freire's (1970) concepts conscientization, critical consciousness, praxis, and epistemological curiosity positioning them within his liberation pedagogy. I then explain Noddings' (1984) ethic of care and outline Critical Race Theory's tenets (Crenshaw, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 1998, 2003; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Next, I show my context and the “knowledge,” attitudes, and beliefs with which I entered classroom teaching and that I continued to espouse until I forced myself to create a vision and goals for realizing that vision and subsequently to work toward positive self-

transformation following an event that shattered my life. Third, I recount the story of my liberation—my awakening and my process from magical to critical consciousness in my journey toward conscientization—using Freire’s, Noddings’, and Critical Race Theories to illuminate the meaning and value of my liberation process. Finally, I posit the use of service learning in teacher education and reeducation will positively affect the achievement gap and help to eliminate the Black/white, them/us dichotomy in education.

Theorists Influencing My Path to Liberation

Paulo Freire

Freire’s (1970) conscientization is the agency that leads to liberation of individuals and groups and the process by which individuals and communities develop a critical understanding of their social reality through praxis—reflection plus action (Freire, 1970, 1973, 1984). Freire (1970) contends one develops that critical understanding by working through three levels of consciousness: magical consciousness, naïve consciousness, and critical consciousness. One’s magical consciousness takes life at face value without questioning or identifying systematic themes in the world (Freire, 1970, 1973). Although through naïve consciousness one identifies a social reality where one’s place in society is marginalized, making one’s life more difficult than those in the dominant group’s, one does not yet identify a systematic pattern or deliberateness for the inequalities among races, genders, classes, etc. (Freire, 1970). Through critical consciousness one identifies systematic issues by actively engaging in praxis—reflection plus action—so to understand one’s social reality (Freire, 1970, 1973, 1998).

Since a teacher teaches who she or he is, self-interrogation is vital to developing metacognitive and meta-emotional strategies that move teachers through the levels of consciousness thereby developing their awareness of self and the relationship to their theory, practice, and methodology (Noddings, 2004, 2012; Stets & Burke, 2000). Awareness and the interdependence among who one was, who one is, and who one is to become awaken one to critical consciousness (Freire, 1970). Because all aspects of one’s awareness of reality are alive within and ever changing (Freire, 1970), one is attuned to feelings, emotions, thoughts, and experiences and therefore makes deliberate choices that together transform one’s dichotomized thought processes into liberated, humanized ones (Freire, 1970, 2004). For Freire (1970, 1998, 2004) the process of conscientization is the ongoing journey through these three levels of consciousness with epistemological curiosity fueling the journey and praxis navigating the way. Epistemological curiosity is the desire to obtain new knowledge that in turn stimulates thought and reflection (Freire, 1970, 1973). A person who has epistemological curiosity

challenges why one knows what one knows, questions why systems exist as they do and how those systems affect their reality (Freire, 1970).

Noddings

Philosopher of education Nel Noddings (1993, 2002, 2004) proposes educators live by and teach using an ethic of care. Imploring contemporary educators to leap from the educational conundrum of standards-based grading and common-core standards to embrace care and love, Noddings (1993, 2002, 2004) challenges educators to bring care to the forefront of education: de-compartmentalize, generate an environment conducive to all students' learning, and strive for human care, concern, and connection (the three Cs philosopher of education, Jane Roland Martin [1994] advances). Caring requires one to listen respectfully to others, (Tirozzi & Uro 1997), to be attuned to one's perceptions and feelings, to reflect (Freire, 1973; Noddings, 1994; Tatum, 1994), to engage in conversation which includes listening attentively (Freire, 1973; Noddings, 1994, Tatum, 1994), and to serve the community competently (Freire, 1973; Noddings, 1994, Tatum, 1994).

Initially, this serving as an act of caring stimulates teachers' and service workers' good feelings about themselves, their actions, and those whom they serve. Over time these good feelings often lessen as the caregiver begins to need particular reactions from recipients to continue feeling good about his or her service (Noddings, 2012). If the service recipient does not provide the expected reaction, the caregiver's good feelings diminish as deeply embedded, negative feelings arise, gain strength, and increase in power (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1995, 2012). For example, when something occurs to break the trust between the caring educator and the cared-about, cared-for student, as it does in the classroom scenario I recount in a moment, the educator no longer cares for the student, and the student becomes inhibited in his or her learning (Noddings, 2012). Their individual reactions together lead to an environment in which the student feels threatened and becomes unable to take risks necessary to his or her continued learning (Noddings, 2012). Noddings calls this environment unsafe (2012).

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CTR) emerged from the 1970's critical legal studies movement, and is an analytical lens used to develop a critical consciousness concerning the inequities of institutional and systemic power along racial lines (Crenshaw, 1995). Racism's permanence, counter-narratives, interest convergence, and critiques of liberalism comprise CRT's tenets (Crenshaw, 1995). Permanent and ever-present in our culture, racism as systemic practice and policy normalizes racism (Crenshaw, 1995). Historically, the law has encoded and created a norm passed down from generation to generation through families, schools,

and communities creating institutional and structural racism so well masked it seems to have disappeared (Crenshaw, 1995). Just as the dominant, white male scripts the social and legal language, practice, and policy to which one adheres today, white hegemony generates the narratives perpetuating many theoretical ideologies that promote the thinking that racism is wavering, diminished, or gone (Crenshaw, 1995). Robert Gordon (1990) explains “the most effective kind of domination takes place when both the dominant and dominated classes believe that the existing order, with perhaps some marginal changes, is satisfactory, or at least represents the most that anyone could expect, because things pretty much have to be the way they are” (p. 413). The dominant culture touts progress by pointing to legal equality, school integration, and overt violence in decline, somehow failing to recognize disparities in educational and employment opportunities, disproportional poverty levels, and racial profiling in arrests and sentencing (Bell, 2004). Cultural deficit theorists contend one is not failing to recognize these disparities and disproportionalities but that such negative social symptoms as poverty, low levels of education, unemployment, and criminal activity emerge from race and cultural values (Bell, 2004). In contrast, Gloria Ladson-Billings (Ladson-Billings, 1999, 2003; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) calls educators to recognize racism—not in such big happenings as lynchings or such contemporary, symbolic lynchings as Michael Brown’s, Travon Martin’s or Rodney King’s—in the thousand, daily, racist cuts one witnesses and, as a result, in which one participates, and to fight, not to win, but to join the daily struggle.

Critical Race Theorists challenge everyone to create and listen to narratives that counter the dominant culture’s insistence racism no longer exists when indeed one sees it flourishing in many, daily, racist acts, words, and attitudes (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Listening to, “owning,” and creating narratives countering the dominant one help pave the way to questioning the historical scripts of meritocracy, colorblindness, and assimilation, to dismantling white hegemony, and to turning the page so a new narrative can emerge along with changes in laws, policies, and practices (Crenshaw, 1995; Freire, 1970). Interest convergence is in apparent opposition to the tenet of counternarratives since for change to occur, the proposed changes must converge with the general interests of whites (Bell, 1995). Historically, one has certainly seen interest convergence at work in *Brown v. Board’s* symbolic desegregation (Bell, 2004) and seen such African Americans as Booker T. Washington recognize at least some truth in this tenet and use it to advance African Americans’ educations or at least vocational educations (Bell, 2004).

Paulo Freire was exiled from Brazil, not because of his commitment and success in teaching literacy but because he helped marginalized people awaken to their oppression. As Gordon (1990) explains, the system of oppression works because people believe things are the way they are. This belief held by both the dominant and the dominated legitimizes historical scripts such as meritocracy, color-blindness, and assimilation (Crenshaw, 1995). Meritocracy or the “bootstrap mentality” is the belief that with hard work, determination, and grit, any person can achieve the American Dream. Color-blindness, the notion one does not see color and therefore treats all people equally, is a common theme in white, middle-class, female teachers’ discourse and is dangerous because advancing color-blindness means advancing normality: no individuals exist; everyone is the same; treat everyone the same. Thus, one is not to take one’s home, racial or cultural background, and mental and physical abilities into account; one is to treat others equally rather than equitably. To assimilate, one peels away one’s culture, discards one’s cultural capital as worthless, takes on the dominant culture’s values, and works to accumulate that dominant culture’s cultural capital. Since one function of U.S. schools has been to teach and perpetuate the dominant cultures’ values and cultural capital, U.S. public school educators—whether with or without full knowledge—strive to help non-whites and females to assimilate to the culture and values of the white, male U.S.

Context

Although my first teaching job was in a school of 80% white students and 20% African-American students, the typical ratio in lower-track classes was the reverse: 20% white and 80% African American. As a young, new teacher, I was assigned many of these lower-track classes. At the time, I was labeled “good with those kids” because my pass-to-fail ratio was the highest among my colleagues. I was proud of helping students of color though, in fact, I was simply keeping them in their place, maintaining a pleasant *status quo* from my position not of slave owner but of foreman.

Much of what I learned as a white, middle-class teacher echoed, reflected, and supported what I had learned growing up. As a result of my parents’ and community members’ teachings, racism and bigotry deeply rooted themselves in me as knowledge and truth. I learned most African-American students are disadvantaged because their families do not support them; most do not have the resources to succeed; most are too lazy to improve their situations; and most abuse the system. Reared to believe one should “pull oneself up by one’s bootstraps,” that a person who worked hard could achieve the American Dream, I could only have distaste for those too lazy to support themselves and their children. I learned that although African-American males are especially

angry and dangerous, many female African Americans are also angry. I should be careful. I learned my goal as the white teacher was to save my African-American students, rescue them—just like in the movies. This knowledge and these truths permeated my practice and dictated whom I believed could learn as a result of my teaching. As stated earlier Freire (1970) claims our upbringing defines who we are in an ongoing ebb and flow of experiences and reflections. As a child I neither knew my parents' beliefs and teachings were racist nor questioned these beliefs and teachings; therefore, the beliefs my parents taught me became deeply rooted and integral to who I am. With 80% of my students African American, I, a state-certified educator, operated on the level of magical consciousness (Freire, 1970). Without questioning, I simply accepted those beliefs and teachings passed onto me even though I had students showing me daily that my "truths" may well have been lies or at least dangerous distortions of reality.

Similar to the way my parents and educators taught me to fear African Americans, my African-American students' families and community had taught them to fear whites—even white teachers. Thus, when white teacher and African-American student came together in the classroom, each with the knowledge of the Other their parents and community members had taught them, the classroom could become a hostile place. While giving a lecture, the white middle-class teacher notices an African-American student in the back using an electronic device, not having the proper materials, or perhaps combing his or her hair. When the teacher calls the student's name, instructs the student to get on task, and directs the student on how to proceed, she expects the student to comply. While a teacher may indeed care about all her students, in some cases, when a student does not respond in the expected way, trust breaks and the teacher stops reaching out and caring about that student.

The African-American student perceives the situation differently. Because historically an African American showing signs of aggression would likely be suspended, arrested, or shot, African Americans have reared their children to fear white authority—to freeze, not move, not speak, and not run. The student asked to get on task may freeze from fear. Unaware of the student's survival tactic, the teacher interprets the student's noncompliance as disrespectful and defiant resulting in her anger and fear. Besides, many white, middle-class teachers know what I knew for the majority of my life: all people should strive to assimilate. However one looks at the interaction, the student's noncompliance reinforces and stimulates the educator's already present, deeply rooted prejudices, bigotry, and fear (Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995;

Tatum 1992, 1994; Woodson, 1933; Yosso, 2005). As a result, care and learning cease; the classroom becomes a dangerous place for the student (Noddings, 2012). How was I to save these students? As long as I disciplined them, was not I saving them? Such questions spun within me until a tragic blow forced me to question the beliefs and values I learned during my girlhood, forced me to face the pain of my deeply buried, always-ignored racism.

Tragedy Precipitates the Journey Toward Conscientization

On April 23, 2009 my husband of 15 years committed suicide. In an instant my world froze, and I entered the realm of shock, disbelief, devastation, and vulnerability. This tragedy obliterated my belief system in a single moment leaving me no foundation, no answers, no joy—just questions, anger, confusion, uncertainties, and pain. Why did he do it? I searched for purpose and meaning in a time when everything I had known had changed leaving me frightened and uncertain. Sleep was impossible; questions, pain, and anger consumed me. I had two, school-aged children fully vested in their community who needed the support and structure of our old life and a strong, healthy parent guiding them to make sense of the world. They could not afford to lose another parent. I required health and strength to help my children and me move forward in our lives. I needed to begin my new life's journey by going through the messy, uncomfortable stages of grief until I accepted what had happened.

In the following years, I gradually awoke to the inequalities, inequities, injustices, and white privilege, in particular, that exist; I began to move into naïve consciousness (Freire, 1970). Rather than wanting to run away *from* my life, I now fantasized about running *to* a life of service by leaving the United States to travel in pursuit of peace and justice. In this time of confusion and enlightenment, friends and family encouraged me to seek answers to my questions. My quest for answers led me to a Ph.D. program emphasizing social justice, Critical Race Theory, and peace work: I found hope in academe. Through my doctoral readings and class discussions, I began the spiritual, emotional, and intellectual healing that led to critical reflection, the first part of Freire's (1970) praxis, which in turn pulled me beyond naïve consciousness to critical consciousness (Freire, 1970), spiritual awakening, and a meaningful existence.

Once introduced to Critical Race Theory (CRT), I began critically interrogating myself. Questioning national claims of equality and fairness, I turned for guidance to civil-rights activists known to pursue peace and justice. These activists maintained self-control, stayed calm, and remained steadfast in their beliefs as they withstood hatred often expressed violently through physical and psychological abuse. In

hindsight, I was seeking help for controlling my anger. Thus, pacifist Bayard Rustin particularly appealed to me, for he dedicated himself to healing others to subdue his own anguish. Wanting to return meaning and stability to my life by having a positive influence on others, I resolved to adapt his life of service.

Adapting a life of service resonated with my Catholic upbringing helping me develop a working vision: facilitate others' self-empowerment and opportunities, work side-by-side with others toward liberation, and research social-justice issues to understand the systemic nature of inequity. Goals toward realizing that vision included creating a service-learning course at my high school shifting my position from mathematics teacher to social-justice teacher, pursuing graduate education, and traveling through the Peace Corps. Reading Paulo Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* helped me understand and focus my awakening, claim my voice, name my vision, and direct my growth in critical consciousness. I entered into a covenant with myself to work toward eradicating inequities and injustices in the world in every way I could. I was indeed moving forward in my journey towards conscientization (Freire, 1973).

Conscientization: From Crooked Room to Critical Consciousness

Philosophers have long conceded...that every man has two educators: "that which is given to him, and the other that which he gives himself. Of the two kinds the latter is by far the more desirable. Indeed all that is most worthy in man he must work out and conquer for himself. It is that which constitutes our real and best nourishment. What we are merely taught seldom nourishes the mind like that which we teach ourselves."³ (Woodson, 1933, p. 86)

Although the readings and intellectual conversation associated with my Ph.D. work were addictive and energizing, I read and conversed within a crooked room: a metaphor for a person's process of fitting into a peculiar situation, of leaning heavily to one side or another when perceiving a room has been altered (Harris-Perry, 2011). The service-learning course I designed and developed for my dissertation research became my self-created, crooked room, for I leaned to the side of action—writing the proposal, securing certification and support, writing the curriculum, facilitating the course—while neglecting the other part of Freire's (1970) praxis, reflection.

In connection to this first, service-learning, course project, I began volunteering at food banks, homeless shelters, Habitat for Humanity, and schools where I tutored, but my service work was riddled with incongruences; I served to save the unfortunates—they were to be

indebted to me; I was making a difference—praise goes to me. Initially, as I began participating in service work, I would feel wonderful; serving filled me with peace and fulfillment. For about two years, I would swoop into various places bringing my good will, imposing my help, and feeding my soul with satisfaction and good feelings. But those feelings would lose their intensity and quickly disappear. Two events catapulted me forward in critical consciousness (Freire, 1970) so I began evaluating my thoughts and feelings as I interacted with others and the environment: a clash in a men's homeless shelter and a church-sponsored, one-on-one, neighborhood needs survey.

When I was serving a meal at a local, men's homeless shelter, I was offended one night by the way one of the clients spoke to me. I perceived him to be disrespectful. After all, I had taken the time to volunteer, so he should be grateful to me. I got upset, and we got into a shouting match. After a few minutes, a fellow volunteer came over and told the client to sit down and stop talking to me. I felt validated and on the way home, kept thinking about what a jerk he was. A few months later, looking back on that night, I felt ashamed. I now recognized my arrogance and rudeness. I had no business going to shelters thinking I was better than people who lived there. In that moment, I understood to be a good servant, one must put oneself in others' shoes and participate with those one serves as equals, side by side.

A second lesson advanced me beyond putting myself in others' shoes to being one of the individuals I saw myself helping and to working side by side with those individuals as equals. This lesson occurred during a church community day I attended to clean up yards, repaint houses and fences, and bring joy to older neighbors in this inner-city neighborhood. A fellow parishioner challenged me to do more, to come down to the neighborhood, knock on doors, and ask people what they needed from us. Hesitant and full of excuses, I reluctantly agreed after his gentle coaxing. Possibly because I would have to knock on doors and talk to people about what they needed from us, I realized this day that to care about the people in this neighborhood, I had to see myself first as one of them.

Perhaps, I had this two-step epiphany because throughout these years of volunteer work, I renewed my faith and read as much as I could about racism, white privilege, oppression, and humane education. We must ask people what they need and then, as Septima Clark and Paulo Freire (1970) counsel, work side by side with them to meet the needs *they* identify. Perhaps the knocking on doors caused me to remember my earlier readings about Clark who demonstrated true leaders listen first; change and self-empowerment come only when people believe in what they are doing (Charron, 2009, Clark & Brown, 1990).⁴ I finally began to

recognize (Freire, 1970; Gilligan, 1982; Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995), then awaken to (Freire 1970), and finally embrace my inner racism and bigotry moving me further into critical consciousness (Freire, 1970) and doing social-justice work side by side with students and colleagues of color (Charron, 2009; Cipolle, 2010; Freire, 1973).

What has now become an acute awareness of my inner bigot (Schwarz, 2012) helps me open myself to honest interaction with students who often preserve the caring environment of my once-unsafe classroom (Noddings, 1984, 2012). Only through critical consciousness (Freire, 1970) could I interpret events, break down my old value system, and retune my thinking and feelings. Through the work of Paulo Freire (1970), I have learned to hone my awareness of opposing themes, dispel my myths, and live in my present reality: “unveil reality [and] unmask its mythicization, and achieve a full realization of the human task: the permanent transformation of reality in favor of the liberation of people” (Freire, 1970, 1973, 2004). This awareness has led to my developing spiritual, emotional, and intellectual epistemological curiosity and has propelled my teaching practice from banking to problem-posing dialogue resulting in my liberation (Freire, 1970).

Still Learning Liberation

People do not decide to risk their lives and livelihoods because an organizer talks them into it. They choose to do so because something inside of them changes.... Until you free a person mentally, emotionally and spiritually you can't accomplish very much, but as those things happen, oh my Lord, it just gets better. (Charron, 2012, p. 304)

My white colleagues frequently ask such questions as: how do I close the achievement gap in my classroom; how do I create a safe classroom; what reform will work to change our school or district; what will help me change? In my early service work, I, too, sought answers to these questions. My desire to identify problems and fix them became almost obsessive. I was driven to find solutions. CRT has taught me that racism is permanent in society and in me. Accepting and understanding the source of my inner bigotry has helped me move forward and see how to address my colleagues' questions: join the everyday struggle to give one's best; reeducate and quiet one's inner bigot; work side by side with others to eliminate the dichotomies pervading education; and replace these dichotomies with humane thinking (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2000). Although I understood the relationship between teacher and student Freire (1970) advocates—teachers are students; students are teachers; both teach and learn together—it was not until I read Noddings' (1984, 1993, 2004) work that I realized teachers and students

bring their beliefs and learned, emotional responses to the classroom as hidden curricula that influence their exchanges with each other. As classroom teacher, my hidden curricula include my racist upbringing, my early teaching life, and my inner bigot. These curricula have caused me to respond in particular ways to situations involving students of color. I have learned to recognize and quiet responses my upbringing, early teaching experience, and resulting bigotry elicit, continually to question what I believe and why I believe it—Freirean unfinishedness and epistemological curiosity (Freire, 1998, 2004)—to join in the fight against systemic oppression and inequities, and to engage in Freirean dialogue with my students.

According to CRT theory, racism is permanent (Bell, 1995). Therefore one's goal as a white teacher must be to liberate oneself, to recognize, acknowledge, and eventually quiet one's inner bigot, to do the work necessary to become fully human (Freire, 1970). The never-ending process towards self-liberation propels one into the everyday struggle toward humanization. One must release oneself from the quest for solutions to embrace this journey and recognize that making the journey means success.

Endnotes

- ¹ Septima Clark was a visionary and legendary civil-rights activist, mentor, and collective conscience to the civil rights movement. Please see Appendix for a brief overview of her life.
- ² Dehumanizing oppression and humanization fostered Bayard Rustin's belief liberation was not to come from fighting and harming others but from love and respect for life. His faith in humanity guided him in his civil rights leadership. Chastised by society, Bayard Rustin suffered great personal pain as a homosexual man (d'Emilio, 2003) yet through this pain he became aware of his dual consciousness as a member of marginalized groups.
- ³ Woodson does not reference the quotation in his book's original text.
- ⁴ "We felt...[Septima Clark] had the most important quality; the ability to listen to people" (Charron, 2012, p. 250). A transformational leader, Clark listened intently to people in the community, uncovered their wants and needs, and then dedicated herself to educating and training leaders within the community. "As an activist educator and clubwoman, she had devoted much of her attention to school and health issues affecting the [B]lack community while remaining equally

concerned with mentoring young black women and garnering respect for [B]lack womanhood. As an organizer of several HFS-sponsored workshops in 1955 and 1956, she incorporated affordable housing and consumer cooperatives into her agenda. Clark had a broad definition of ‘citizenship education,’ augmented by her involvement at Highlander but firmly rooted in southern [B]lack women’s activist organizational culture” (Charron, 2012, p. 247).

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Appendix

Born in 1897 as one of eight children, Septima Clark, a visionary and legendary civil-rights activist, mentor, and collective conscience to the civil-rights movement, grew up in Charleston, South Carolina. Clark's parents were Peter Porcher Poinsett, a former slave, and Victoria Warren Anderson, a free American reared in Haiti where she was taught to read and write. Clark's parents valued education and demanded all eight children put time in on their lessons. Clark (1990) credits her parents for showing her the value of education and of standing up for her beliefs: "I really feel that [my mother's courageousness] helped me to be able to stand in front of the Klansmen and White Citizens' Councils, of large groups that were hostile" (p. 96).

From 1916–1956 Septima Clark was a schoolteacher in various parts of the Southern U.S. At first, Clark taught on Jones Island at Promise Land School, an impoverished, desolate community. After years of teaching in the segregated South, Clark understood poverty's hardships and the systematic oppression imposed on people of color. After 40 years of teaching, taking night and summer-school classes toward earning advanced degrees, and, as a widow, rearing a son, Septima Clark became the director of education at Highlander. An important leader in the development of Citizenship Schools throughout the South, Septima Clark describes how she would go into a town and meet with people listening to what they felt they needed. She asserted good leaders work with communities to empower themselves to design and develop their own paths toward liberation. In addition to setting up

Citizenship Schools, Septima Clark recruited and trained teachers and developed the curriculum helping to teach thousands of adult Blacks to read and register to vote. Eventually, Clark joined forces with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference working closely with Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. utilizing education peacefully to liberate Southern Blacks, her beliefs and educational practices serve as a model to all teachers today. To me, the most intriguing aspect of Septima Clark's repertoire is her unwavering spirituality. Even under the toughest conditions of pain and suffering, her missionary spirit fueled her strength, courage, and unselfish dedication tirelessly to serve people for over 60 years (Charron, 2009; Clark & Brown, 1990).