

A VOLUME IN  
CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON ACCESS, EQUITY, AND ACHIEVEMENT

# The Impact of Classroom Practices

*Teacher Educators' Reflections  
on Culturally Relevant Teachers*



*edited by*

Antonio L. Ellis

Nathaniel Bryan | Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz

Ivory Toldson | Christopher Emdin

*Foreword by* William Tate

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Chance W. Lewis, *Series Editor*

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*This book is dedicated to Mr. Linard H. McCloud,  
who is the longest employed teacher at Burke High School in Charleston,  
South Carolina. We celebrate his 40 years of effective teaching at the same school.  
To honor his commitment to education, we share our reflections  
on effective teaching through critical storytelling.*

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# FOREWORD

**William F. Tate IV**

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I love biographical stories. Throughout my professional career, I have enjoyed reading résumés, CVs, bio statements, and other documents that provide insight into the lives of my colleagues and associates. I aspire to understand better the relationship between their accomplishments and the various forms of sponsored mobility in their lives. How did the individuals learn to navigate their situation? Who helped them move to the next phase in their lives?

My fascination with stories about life-course started early. *Biography* the American documentary television series was a staple during my youth. As a child, I loved the reruns of the show *This is Your Life*. The origin of the show dates to 1940s radio. The television show experienced fits of starts and stops on the airways from the 1950s to earlier 2000s. One of my favorite episodes highlighted the life of Muhammad Ali. Most of the episodes followed a formula. And the Ali episode was no different. The star of the hour arrives at the television set thinking he is headed to an important engagement unrelated to the story of his life. Shocked when he arrives at the set, Mr. Ali professes his love for the show and can't believe his life will be shared for all to see.

As you might imagine, the Muhammad Ali episode evolved with a series of guests arriving to share their part in his life. His wife, parents, children, professional trainer, amateur and professional boxing opponents, friends,

fellow Olympians, and youth sports leaders paraded onto the set to offer perspective and tales. There were two major takeaways from this episode. The first take away entailed Muhammad Ali's desperate attempt to interject his views. He wanted us to hear how he interpreted the story. Time and the show's protocol prohibited his contribution. A second take away involved one of the guests. She provided tremendous insight into the boxer's life. And of all the guests, she is the one person that offered a perspective on the champion from both his youth and his adult life. Mrs. Carter, his third-grade teacher, bridged the seasons of his life. She described his temperament as a child. And Mrs. Carter offered a view into the logic underpinning her instruction to the 8-year old version of arguably the greatest boxer of all time. Specifically, she discouraged him from street fighting. She told him that fighting would not take him far. Ali's look of respect and admiration for his former teacher was apparent. Mrs. Carter continued by discussing her career transition to head the YWCA. She sent for her former student to make a speech at a YWCA event and he had obliged. Mrs. Carter added that the boxer wrote a check for \$10,000 on the spot to help the kids in the YWCA program. It is here that the multigenerational effects of the student-teacher relationship emerge. The teacher who sponsored a young Ali's mobility reaches out to him to give back to his community. And he responded. Mrs. Carter's words illustrate the importance of this multigenerational transaction.

This volume provides the field a retrospective view of a group of "Mrs. Carters" who impacted the lives of educators and scholars. Unlike the protocol of *This is Your Life*, the authors narrate the story and shape our understanding of how teachers influenced their life-course, worldviews, and approaches to education. We hear their voices reflecting on childhood and the adolescent years, enabling us to grow in our understanding of the multigenerational nature of the student-teacher relationship. Specifically, we learn more about how a group of intellectuals interpret past engagement with impactful educators and the influence of these interactions on their practices, thinking, and scholarly outlook.

Years ago, I argued that my schoolboy experiences in urban schools with great teachers represented important lessons for the field. However, custom and tradition prohibited these experiences from inclusion in the literature. Specifically, the paradigmatic boundaries of my field of study aligned with the documentary series, *This is Your Life*. It was acceptable to interview others about my experiences and to synthesize their views as a form of evidence. However, crossing the standing protocol of excluding my story and my interpretation of events posed a threat to the validity and trustworthiness of the information. I countered with the need to examine the lives of rare birds in the academy. In the case of this book, I invite the readers

to examine each chapter and to glean lessons from the experiences of my colleagues. They have navigated the scholarly road to the highest levels of graduate education attainment. This is their life.

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## CHAPTER 1

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# MR. LINARD H. McCLOUD

## Clarifying Excellence in Teacher Education Practice

Antonio L. Ellis

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For over three decades educational researchers and scholars have largely written about teacher effectiveness using quantitative research methodologies (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Wilson & Hallum, 2006). There is a dearth of literature available that defines teacher effectiveness using the reflective voices of former students (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Siddle Walker, 2001, 2005). Debates regarding the qualities, skills, and dispositions of effective teachers and teaching have raged in teacher education for several decades. Ladson-Billings' (2009) *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* was a pathbreaking work that has become a foundational study that informs the work of culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 2009) and "culturally sustaining" (Paris & Alim, 2017) teaching. In her book *The Dreamkeepers*, Ladson-Billings describes effective teachers who are able to draw from the cultural wealth of Black communities. These Dreamkeepers ensured that their Black students were academically successful and grew both in terms of their

cultural competence and their sociopolitical awareness. In other words, according to Ladson-Billings (2009), these effective teachers possessed both pedagogical and relational dispositions, which leave lifelong impacts on the academic and social lives of their students. As some scholars have noted, what remains missing from the research on culturally-relevant and even culturally-sustaining teachers are “narratives” (read: stories, cuentos, testimonios, etc.) related to how the race of particular K–12 teachers positively impact the lives of their students because they either served as windows or mirrors (Bryan, 2020; Howard, 2001; Irvine & Fenwick, 2011; Milner, 2011). This volume aims to help fill this gap in educational research literature.

The foundation of this volume stems from the classroom experiences provided to me by my high school music teacher. In August of 1995, I entered Burke High School in Charleston, South Carolina; as an urban student who was placed in speech therapy, special education, and lower tracked courses (Ellis & Hartlep, 2017). I lacked motivation towards education and the majority of my teachers did not have high expectations of me. Members of my family averaged an 8th grade education. While growing up, I was encouraged to do enough just to get by academically and in life. From my recollection, all of my family members who raised me did not complete high school. Some dropped out prior to high school. Based on my surroundings and the odds that were against me, my chances for success appeared to be extremely dismal. Many people in society gave up on me, including school teachers, guidance counselors, clergy, and community leaders. Eventually I felt like all hope was lost and never imagined that I would graduate from high school.

Upon entering Burke High School, I decided to seek membership into the marching band. At that time I knew very little about musical instruments. I simply thought that joining the band program would be a fun thing to do. As I reflect on the first band practice of that school year, I recall the music teacher and marching band director, Mr. Linard McCloud’s “pep talk.” Everyone was completely silent as he talked in a very low and firm tone, explaining his expectation of all band members. He was very clear about what he expected from all students. Not only did he express his expectations of band students, he also talked about his expectations for the alumni of the band program. That was the first time I heard the term “alumni.” Later I learned that “alumni” meant students who had graduated.

Mr. McCloud showcased the success of alumni who once were members of the marching band. In some cases, he invited alumni to speak during band practices. In other instances, it was normal for alumni to randomly stop by to visit Mr. McCloud and encourage students. During those times, Mr. McCloud typically introduced them by telling band members when they graduated and what they did post high school graduation. Unbeknownst to my peers and I, being exposed to successful alumni was another method

our music teacher used to model his high expectations of us. I recall meeting marching band alumni from various fields including education, art and entertainment, medical science, carpentry, law, theology, political science, electrical engineering, auto mechanics, just to name a few.

In addition to professional fields, I remember meeting alumni who joined the United States military. Subconsciously constantly being exposed to generations of successful people who once were students inspired me to aim for success so that I could one day return to inspire students. When former students visited, I observed the proud look on Mr. McCloud's face and the spark in his eyes, as if they were his own children. In those moments, I became determined to make him equally as proud after I graduated.

Mr. McCloud made it clear that he expected all his students to achieve at least a 3.0 grade point average. In addition, he made it known that students would not be allowed to participate in the band if they consistently failed academically. In order to ensure that students succeeded, he hosted study groups at the band room an hour before school began, during lunch, and up to 3 hours after school. Due to Mr. McCloud's track record for producing highly successful students, he was highly revered in the community and among families. Therefore, if he recommended that students come to school an hour earlier and stay later for academic assistance, parents complied. In many cases parents and legal guardians were also alumni who viewed the music teacher as a father figure. Broughton (this volume) highlights the importance of educators building relationships with students and their families, just as Mr. McCloud championed.

In addition to Mr. McCloud's relationship with his students and their families, he also established strong partnerships with local businesses, which provided internships and paid work-based learning opportunities for students. Those partnerships helped fund band trips to colleges and universities and new uniforms. Local partnerships were vital because several students, including myself, could not afford to pay for these trips without additional financial support. Because Mr. McCloud believed in fostering independence and a strong work ethic in his students. He'd ensure that at least 50% of the trip was paid for, while he created opportunities for students to raise the remaining balance with structured fundraisers such as fruit drives, candy sales, soul food dinners, and bake sales. In retrospect, I understand that he supported his students while also ensuring that we earned everything we received. In order to ensure that students' needs were met, Mr. McCloud was one of the first persons who arrived at school daily and among the last to leave. Out of my 4 years in high school, I do not remember him being absent no more than once or twice. I do not highlight his attendance record to suggest that teachers should not take off as needed. Self-care and mental breaks are important for teachers. However,



I highlight Mr. McCloud's attendance record to show the depth of his commitment to his students.

Mr. McCloud was the first adult in my life who influenced me to aim high academically. He refused to settle for less from any of his students' regardless if they were in special education, general education courses, or the gifted and talented program. His level of expectation remained consistent for all of us. As a result of his demand for excellence, I eventually started rising to his expectation. By the time I became a sophomore, my respect for Mr. McCloud climaxed and I loved being a member of the band. Thereafter, I worked hard academically so that I would not disappoint the band director, who was also my music teacher. Before I knew it, I was a junior and finally a graduating senior. Mr. McCloud ensured that all seniors auditioned for music scholarships at several universities. To my surprise, I received full music scholarships to Benedict College, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, and South Carolina State University. Shortly after receiving the music scholarships, I became the first person from my family to graduate from high school and enter college.

While in college, I often reflected on Mr. McCloud's expectation of alumni. He always said, "We send you to college to graduate." Therefore, in the back of my mind I always told myself, "I better do well in college because I cannot return home to Mr. McCloud without a degree." By that time, I had started to believe in myself as a young adult and engaged in self-empowering activities such as reading extensively, building relationships with progressive people, and pursued memberships into organizations on campus such as Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity and the gospel choir. Eventually, I became interested in furthering my education through graduate school. Upon completing my undergraduate degree in philosophy, I entered graduate school programs at Howard University and The George Washington University, earning three master's degrees consecutively, followed by a doctoral degree in educational leadership and policy studies.

It is because of the culturally responsive and effective teaching that Mr. McCloud delivered in the classroom and beyond, that I went from being a special education student at a Title I school to possessing a doctoral degree. His pedagogical practices directly aligned with Ladson-Billings (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy tenets, which includes academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. I encourage all pre-service and in-service teachers, educational leaders, and policy makers to use Mr. Linard McCloud as a model for educating children. As a current school administrator, I frequently tell stories about Mr. McCloud to my teachers, particularly to improve our family engagement, classroom management, teaching practices, and student-teacher relationships. Similarly, as a university professor who develops future teachers and school administrators,

I consistently present Mr. McCloud as a model of excellence for culturally responsive and relevant teaching.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION PRACTITIONERS**

Each chapter in this volume will share similar stories about teachers whom the authors deem as effective, while concluding with practical recommendations for current and pre-service teachers to employ in their practices. Likewise, I share my practical recommendations for teachers and those who are studying to become teachers based on my experience with Mr. McCloud, whom I consider to be a Dreamkeeper. I recommend teachers employ the following practices that do not require hierarchical permission or district funding, but do require intentional planning, intrinsic motivation, and a strong work ethic:

- Be clear about your expectations and build capacity for students to meet them.
- Be fully present for your students (i.e., physically, emotionally, and mentally).
- Show students various forms of successful outcomes (i.e., alumni and mentors).
- Build relationships with families and partnerships with community stakeholders.
- Be culturally relevant and culturally responsive inside the classroom and beyond.
- Support students while also teaching them self-sufficiency and independence.
- Provide opportunities for your students beyond the classroom setting (i.e., fieldtrips, internships, and workforce development).
- Be consistent.

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