

The Pedagogy and Education of the Black Panther Party: Confronting the
Reproduction of Social and Cultural Inequality

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The Black Panther Party (BPP) firmly believed that schools were implicated in the reproduction of social and cultural inequality in American society. This tenet was central to the Black Panther Party and appeared as the fifth point of the party's 10-point program:

We want decent education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present-day society. We believe in an educational system that will give to our people a knowledge of the self. If you do not have knowledge of yourself and your position in the society and in the world, then you will have little chance to know anything else (Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation, 2008, p.75).

Moreover, those affiliated with the Black Panther Party believed that children's backgrounds and experience outside of school were highly predictive of their educational attainment and employment opportunities later in life. The purpose of the creation of the Intercommunal Youth Institute (IYI) in 1971, which would change its name to the Oakland Community School (OCS) in 1974, is explained in *The Black Panther Party: Service to the People Programs*, the book edited by former Panther David Hilliard and published by The Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation (2008):

The institute was initiated in direct response to the public school system, which has systematically produced individuals totally incapable of thinking in an analytical way. The failure of the public school system to educate Black and poor youth has caused generation after generation of our people to be inadequately prepared to participate and survive in our highly technological society. In order to begin to break this seemingly endless cycle of oppression, the Black Panther Party established the Youth Institute (p.5; Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009, p.170).

With such knowledge and purpose, BPP educators at the Oakland Community School (OCS) sought to not only satisfy "the dire need for *quality* education" of Black and poor youth, but to serve their youth in ways not usually associated with the traditional role of American schools in

order to challenge the reproduction of social and cultural inequality that they saw occurring (i.e. providing breakfast, lunch, and dinner to all their students, healthcare, etc.) (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009, p.163). How did the Black Panther Party seek to challenge the reproduction of social and cultural inequality impacting particularly Black and poor youth? How did the Black Panther Party's premier educational institution, the Oakland Community School, seek to address the reproduction of social and cultural inequality through its resources, pedagogy, and education?

Briefly Defining Social and Cultural Reproduction

Social reproduction is the process by which different social classes in society are maintained and reproduced to their former respective positions. Social reproduction is a concept describing the pattern of how the children of poor families often become poor themselves once they become adults; this frequently being aligned with other patterns of social stratification, most notably race in the United States. However, social reproduction is rarely an overwhelming phenomenon and classes are never completely reproduced in their entirety from generation to generation; as there are poor kids who end up rich and rich kids that end up poor. Nonetheless, social theorists are fascinated with how the children of rich parents often end up in the same upper strata as their rich parents, the same pattern occurring with middle-class, working-class, and poor kids. Theorists have called this social phenomenon social reproduction.

Cultural production is the original creation of a set of practices, norms, ideas, and/or beliefs created by a group of people. Cultural reproduction is when and how a set of practices, norms, ideas, and/or beliefs is passed from one group of people to another. Cultural reproduction is distinctive from cultural production because cultural production indicates that the culture being

created is original. Thus when hip-hop music and culture was first created by the first artists in the Bronx, this was cultural production. Although hip-hop music and culture continues to produce new artists, these artists are participating in cultural reproduction as hip-hop music and culture is maintaining its essential qualities as it is passed from person to person, generation to generation. Unfortunately in the case of hip-hop music and culture, much of the culture has been commodified and come to be closely controlled and monitored by big business; as a result the cultural reproduction of hip-hop is being modified and filtered to fit the monetary goals of those disseminating hip-hop as popular music and culture.

The BPP was one organization which sought to disrupt the social and cultural reproduction perpetuating inequality in the United States; although the BPP sought to operate in solidarity with all vulnerable and oppressed peoples, the BPP was specifically focused upon addressing the brutal inequality facing African Americans.

The Black Panther Party Addressing Social and Cultural Reproduction: Educating the “Whole”

Child

While schools have traditionally been analyzed for their academic and social effectiveness on the basis of what is done within the school itself, the Oakland Community School (OCS) cannot be looked at in the same way. Founded by members of the Black Panther Party (BPP), originally serving the function of educating BPP children away from public institutions which were stigmatizing BPP children, the OCS became the “flagship Black Panther Party community program” representing the educational interests of the BPP (Huggins, 2010, p.37).

Although the OCS had many services offered to its children at the school itself, which will be covered in detail later in this thesis, it would be remiss to ignore the many different programs which the BPP was operating in an effort to alleviate factors contributing to the social and cultural reproduction perpetuating inequality affecting children outside of the school. Members of the OCS staff, particularly the female administrators, were actively working in these other BPP programs in addition to their school responsibilities:

Each administrator was a BPP member at the time she became a school leader, organizing and educating communities, feeding and teaching children in before- and after-school programs, selling BPP newspapers, administering health care, organizing for prisoners' rights, and engaging in voter registration and in local political campaigns. OCS women organized their communities by working with fellow BPP members, actively engaged in coalition politics. (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009, p.163).

As Huggins and Leblanc-Ernest (2009) point out, specifically female administrators at the BPP saw their work at the OCS directly connected with their work for the BPP outside of school, "In terms of their resistance and organizing tradition, the educational activism of the women staff of the OCS during the 1970s was revolutionary. OCS administrators were able to apply lessons from their experience as BPP members to their teaching and community outreach" (p.163).

Decades before Geoffrey Canada would gain fame for his bold experiment in Harlem with the Harlem Children's Zone, the BPP was already aggressively seeking to confront factors they saw influencing children and their families through survival programs outside of the school in the communities that they were representing. The BPP fully intended for their actions in the community to positively affect children and their learning experiences in school.

Ultimately the Black Panther Party's efforts to disrupt the social inequalities facing Black and poor youth can best be described in their words as an effort to educate "the whole child" (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009, p.174). For the BPP this meant working both outside and inside of the Oakland Community School to challenge as many of the social, economic, and

cultural factors impacting the potential rise of Black and poor youth as possible. It meant reinventing pedagogy, re-determining the purpose of education, and creating programs outside of the school when necessary to address social, economic, and cultural factors negatively affecting and impacting the potential of Black and poor youth. It meant operating the neighboring non-profit Oakland Community Learning Center (OCLC) within the Oakland Community School during evenings and weekends (E. Huggins, personal communication, May 27, 2012). As the Oakland Community School grew and attained more resources, the OCS began to gain the capabilities to address many of the needs it had already been addressing outside of the school, as food and health care, within the school itself.

CHAPTER 2: CONFRONTING THE REPRODUCTION OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL INEQUALITY OUTSIDE OF THE OAKLAND COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Even before the Intercommunal Youth Institute (IYI) became the Oakland Community School (OCS), and before the Intercommunal Youth Institute was established, the Black Panther Party (BPP) was operating community-based survival programs. The Oakland Community School was only one of nearly two dozen survival programs which would be instated by the BPP in order to “meet the needs of the people” (Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation, 2008, p.xii; Alkebulan, 2007, p.28). The programs below were some of the most ambitious and/or successful of these efforts by the BPP to address the reproduction of social and cultural inequality affecting the communities that they were serving, and thus the children in these communities as well.

Intercommunal News Service: The Black Panther

Although not a program granting immediate tangible sustenance to the community, the “Intercommunal News Service” was the first BPP survival program and began publishing *The Black Panther* weekly beginning on April 25, 1967. According to the work released by The Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation (2008) and edited by former Panther David Hilliard, *The Black Panther* was a newspaper that provided:

. . . news and information about the work of the Black Panther Party chapters throughout the country; news and news analysis of the Black and other oppressed communities in the United States, Africa, and around the world; theoretical writings of party ideologists; and general news features on all matters relative to the liberation of humankind from oppression of any kind (p.47)

The Black Panther not only provided news about the BPP specifically, but sought to counter the reproduction of false-consciousness created by the dissemination of news and information not

fairly representing the non-dominant and non-privileged communities in the United States and the world (Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation, 2008, p.47-53). Moreover, according to the Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation (2008), *The Black Panther* hoped to increase “understanding of the nature and condition of our society” and increase “understanding of the reader of their oneness with the oppressed of the world and strengthen[s] the reader’s resolve to intensify his or her efforts toward freedom” (p.49-50). The Intercommunal News Service, through *The Black Panther*, desired to create an awareness which would inspire African Americans and other oppressed peoples to stop accepting their unequal position in society and to take action to move toward enlightened social, mental, and economic self-determination. It should also be noted that *The Black Panther* also became a space where children attending BPP educational programs and schools could express themselves alongside the educators who were serving them. Ultimately the Intercommunal News Service’s *The Black Panther* could be considered one of the BPP’s most ambitious educational efforts.

Health Care Programs of the Black Panther Party

While health care was addressed directly within the Oakland Community School, outside of the school the BPP also established programs concerned with the well-being of all those not traditionally served or neglected by America’s health care system. This effort was not random, as providing “medical attention and care” through research and “free of charge” health facilities was Point Six of the BPP’s Ten-Point Program (Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation, 2008, p.21). Some of the most prominent and aspiring of these programs was the People’s Free Medical Research Health Clinics, the Sickle-Cell Anemia Research Foundation, and the People’s Free Ambulance Service.

While it is difficult to ascertain how successful the clinics were at achieving their ambitions and goals without further research, the People's Free Medical Research Health Clinics were founded for the purpose of providing "comprehensive health care for the community" (Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation, 2008, p.21; Alkebulan, 2007, p.41). This comprehensive health care was to include doctors who could treat "common physical ailments" and refer to specialists, laboratory testing which could be administered in "conjunction with local hospitals," and significantly a complete "Child Health Care Program" (Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation, 2008, p.21). According to the Huey P. Newton Foundation (2008) the Child Health Care Program was to offer, "immunization; screening for sickle-cell anemia, and tuberculosis; referrals; and complete physical examinations as well as treatment of illnesses" (p.21-22). In addition to these offerings, the Child Health Care Program emphasized how one of its central goals was following-up and giving ongoing attention to those children who needed such maintenance (Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation, 2008, p.22).

According to former Panther and Virginia State University History Assistant Professor Dr. Paul Alkebulan (2007), discussed in his work *Survival pending revolution: The history of the Black Panther Party*, there were BPP free medical clinics operating in, "Kansas City, Seattle, Los Angeles, Berkeley, New Haven, Portland, Chicago, Rockford (Illinois), Boston, Philadelphia, and multiple sites in New York" (p.35). According to Alkebulan (2007), the Staten Island BPP free medical clinic was able to offer quite a bit of the services it hoped to provide:

The BPP Staten Island health cadre recruited 'revolutionary doctors' who provided house calls to needy community people. They treated anemia, worms, malnutrition, weapon injuries, hearing and vision, and gum diseases. The Staten Island office also gave free physical exams and draft counseling to young men (p.35).

Beyond Staten Island, medical programs were also operating in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Harlem, and Queens, and "medical cadre" from these locales were able to gather on a weekly basis to

“sustain joint activities and share medical technology” (p.35-36). Alkebulan’s (2007) research found that the two most successful of the BPP medical programs operated in Boston and Chicago. Alkebulan (2007) elaborates on the Chicago free health clinic:

The Spurgeon “Jake” Winters Clinic in Chicago was named after a Panther killed by police in November 1969. Panthers worked with medical professionals who provided expertise in the areas of gynecology, obstetrics, pediatrics, optometry, and dentistry. Volunteers and medical students canvassed the community to facilitate the provision of services and information. The BPP claimed the clinic served more than two thousand people during the first two months of its existence (p.36).

Operating with very similar capabilities to the free health clinic in Chicago, the Boston People’s Free Health Clinic opened in May of 1970. The Boston People’s Free Health Clinic was able to distinguish itself with its ability to train nurse assistants, lab technicians, and medical secretaries (Alkebulan, 2007, p.36). In communication with former Oakland Community School Director and BPP member Ericka Huggins (personal communication, May 27, 2012), I was also able to discover that the BPP operated what they referred to as a “Free Health Clinic Consortium.” In the Bay Area twelve community clinics collaborated and worked together in offering services; four of these clinics are still active (E. Huggins, personal communication, May 27, 2012).

In addition to offering broad medical treatment, particularly for children, the People’s Free Medical Research Health Clinics served an important role in working with the Sickle-Cell Anemia Research Foundation to inform, “. . . people about sickle-cell anemia and maintain[s] a national advisory committee of doctors to research this crippling disease” (Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation, 2008, p.24). The BPP took the research of Sickle-Cell Anemia very seriously and targeted Sickle-Cell Anemia as one prominent disease which was receiving a lack of attention by the medical research community, “While the government has spent large amounts of funds and a great deal of time researching such fatal diseases as leukemia and cancer, it has shown little interest in sickle-cell anemia until the last two or three years” (The Huey P. Newton Foundation,

2008, p.26). According to the Huey P. Newton Foundation (2008) the BPP clinics, in conjunction with the Sickle-Cell Anemia Research Foundation, were able to test nearly half a million people in a period of three years (p.24). Alkebulan (2007) increases this number and claims in his work that BPP clinics were able to test and counsel more than one million black patients. During its operation the foundation ran a national headquarters in Oakland, CA which was able to publish and disseminate educational materials about Sickle-Cell Anemia materials on a large scale (Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation, 2008, p.24-26). Alkebulan (2007) informs us that Dr. Tolbert Small was the national chairman of the BPP Sickle Cell Anemia Project.

In addition to the medical services offered, the BPP also began the People's Free Ambulance Service to offer, “. . . free, rapid transportation for sick or injured people without time-consuming checks into the patients' financial status or means” (Huey P. Newton Foundation, 2008, p.27). It is not evident how extensive the ambulance service was across the country, but according to the Huey P. Newton Foundation (2008) one prominent city to offer successful services was Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The city was able to offer ambulance service due to a grant received from the National Episcopal Church's General Convention Special Program (p.28).

Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program and the Liberation Schools

Perhaps the best known, widely considered the first Black Panther Party survival program (when the Intercommunal News Service is not considered), was the Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program (Huey P. Newton Foundation, 2008, p.30). The first Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program began on January 20, 1969 at the St. Augustine's Episcopal Church in Oakland, CA with the support and encouragement of Father Earl Neal. By November of 1969

the coordinator for the Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program claimed that twenty thousand children were being served by twenty-two chapters and branches across the United States (Alkebulan, 2007, p.32). Not only is this number of children served supported as fully plausible through analysis by scholars like Alkebulan (2007), but at the time the success of the program was commented on by a top governmental official, “The Panthers are feeding more kids than we are” (Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation, 2008, p.30). The Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program aimed to alleviate the hunger that they saw affecting the ability of children to function and learn. Paul Crayton, Lieutenant of Religion of the Milwaukee Panthers, at the time elaborated, “. . . the main purpose of the (Breakfast) program is to feed kids in the community that are hungry. Many times kids go to school hungry and they can’t function like they want to” (Witt, 2007, p.73). Years later the Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation (2008) illuminates further goals of the program:

The program will raise (sic) consciousness in the form of people participating in a program that they put together themselves to serve themselves and their children. People will come to understand a concept of getting businesspeople in the community to give something back to the community and do so in a way that the businesspeople can understand. The consciousness of the children will be raised in that they will see someone outside of the structure of their own family working in their interest and motivated by love and concern (p.34).

While primarily motivated to support and raise the consciousness of Black and poor youth, as well as “educate the community about the contradictions in a capitalist society between rich and poor,” Alkebulan (2007) reveals that the Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program had additional purpose. According to Alkebulan (2007), among other initial survival programs, the Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program was created as a tool to raise consciousness and discipline among the membership as the BPP grew. Thus the Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program was also utilized as a positive national community empowerment initiative to motivate

Panther members from steering away from participating in activities that could further strengthen social and cultural reproduction maintaining Black and poor people in an unequal position in American society:

This program also helps more people relate to the party. They see that the party is not a bunch of avaricious fools. We have kicked out the people who robbed those banks and robbed those taverns and liquor stores for 200 and 300 and 80 dollars. . . . They will relate to the fact that the Party is really trying to serve them (Alkebulan, 2007, p.31)

While the children ate, the BPP also took the opportunity to “talk to children about community concerns,” and raise political consciousness in youth which would come to be both applauded and criticized. In his work “Minds Stayed on Freedom: Politics, Pedagogy, and the African American Freedom Struggle” Daniel Perlstein (2002) brings to light the words of former Panther Akua Njeri who operated a Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program in Chicago:

Black children went to school “and learned nothing,” Njeri argued, “not because they’re stupid, not because they’re ignorant. . . . We would say, ‘You came from a rich culture. You came from a place where you were kings and queens. You are brilliant children. But this government is fearful of you realizing who you are. This government has placed you in an educational situation that constantly tells you you’re stupid and you can’t learn and stifles you at every turn” (p.263).

Importantly, it can be seen that another objective of the Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Programs was bolstering the self-esteem of children in light of an education system which the BPP saw as clearly underfunding and undervaluing the education of particularly Black youth; analysis of the success and failures of school districts like Oakland during this time period can be seen to support the BPP’s conclusions (Huggins and LeBlanc, 2009). Words coming from Panthers like Akua Njeri above would be taken into serious consideration by the FBI who would come to their own conclusion regarding the BPP’s Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program. According to the San Francisco Field Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, as delineated in the final report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to

Intelligence Activities (also referred to as the Church Report), the “Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program” was one of the most dangerous programs of the Black Panther Party (Williamson, 2005, p.145; The Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation, 2008, p.30). The San Francisco Field Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, as illuminated by former Stanford University Assistant Professor Dr. Joy Ann Williamson (2005), “. . . identified the Panther Free Breakfast Program – which was closely related to the Liberation Schools – as a prime target because of its ‘potentially successful effort . . . to teach children to hate police and spread ‘anti-white propaganda’” (p.145). The FBI’s efforts to paint the Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program as a program of hate did not end with rhetoric. In San Diego, California the FBI would successfully disrupt a Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program operating under the support of Father Frank Curran by calling his superiors and impersonating parishioners upset with his activities (Alkebulan, 2007, p.32). On another occasion, the FBI would attempt to spoil food during a raid at an office in New York (Alkebulan, 2007, p.33).

As the Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Programs spread successfully across the country, in spite of the FBI’s disruptions, the BPP sought to expand the educational and political consciousness component into what the BPP referred to as the Liberation Schools, “Party liberation schools resulted from the good relations that began with the free breakfasts. Panthers began to encourage children to return for other activities” (Alkebulan, 2007, p.33). The Liberation Schools followed closely after the Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Programs and the first began as early as June 1969 in Berkeley, Oakland, and San Francisco, California (Alkebulan, 2007, p.33; Williamson, 2005, p.143). Thus the first BPP Liberation Schools frequently established themselves in churches already participating in hosting the BPP’s “free breakfast programs, community recreational centers, and BPP offices” (Jones and Gayles, 2008,

p.101). The BPP Liberation Schools would go on to spread across the United States with varying success (Alkebulan, 2007, p.33-34). According to Jones and Gayles (2008) the Liberation Schools enrolled, “. . . a broad cross-section of Black children from the nation’s urban communities who ranged from 2 to 15 years old. Many of the BPP affiliates regularly attracted more than 50 youngsters to their respective schools” (p.101). While scholars as Jones and Gayles (2008) emphasize the enrollment of Black children, Huggins (personal communication, May 27, 2012) points out that Latino/a and White children were present in many programs as well.

Initially the weekly curriculum followed very closely to that which occurred at the San Francisco liberation school which came to serve twenty-five children daily, “Monday, history day; Tuesday, culture day; Wednesday, field trips; Thursdays, revolutionary films; and Friday, current events. Songs and games were utilized to convey the Panther message. Children learned how to recite and explain the ten-point platform” (Alkebulan, 2007, p.33). While the daily curricular focuses would vary by location and school, the primary purpose of the Liberation Schools remained essentially the same across schools:

The curriculum at most liberation schools consisted of basic academic skills and current events gleaned from newspapers and party literature. Community volunteers and Panthers staffed the schools . . . Professional academic instruction, however, was not the primary goal of the liberation schools from 1969 to 1971. Instruction in Panther ideology and African American history were the most important items in the curriculum. This was not only because the Panthers lacked the expertise to do anything else but also because the academic potential of the liberation schools was not yet recognized by the leadership. The oversight was corrected in two years (Alkebulan, 2007, p.34).

As Alkebulan (2007) brings to light, the Liberation Schools were founded as institutions designed less for assisting students in their daily school instruction, but for enlightening students about their position in the world. This also meant fostering what was referred to as “interconnectedness” with those in their community as well as the world, “. . . Panthers used the

phrase 'Big Family' in the classroom, as a tool to teach the students about their interconnectedness with other oppressed people across the globe . . ." (Williamson, 2005, p.143). Williamson (2005) makes sure to note that although this was fostered in the BPP Liberation Schools that, ". . . the Liberation Schools remained primarily Black in attendance" (p.143). Some of the innovative pedagogical methodologies which would come to be commonplace at the acclaimed Oakland Community School were also emerging at the Liberation Schools:

. . . according to Val Douglas, an assistant teacher in the Berkeley school, students could self-direct some of their learning by choosing local or world events of interest for class study. Douglas remembered that a mother of one of the children was impressed by the fact that "their work shows that they can relate to what is happening to them and to other poor people in the world." (Williamson, 2005, p.144).

Ultimately one reason for the eventual decline of the Liberation Schools would be the concentration on a political agenda which made the schools a target of the FBI. The schools had an increasingly difficult time accomplishing their directives, some of the most ambitious efforts by the BPP to educate against the social and cultural reproduction of Black and poor youth, with incessant disruptions by the FBI. As brought to light by Williamson (2005), the Liberation Schools would only face escalating issues with the FBI as the BPP enhanced the educational and political consciousness component challenging the American status quo. However, it is important to note that although scholars like Williamson (2005) maintain a strong positive correlation between FBI disruption and the content taught in Liberation Schools, Alkebulan (2007) complicates this claim. Alkebulan (2007) brings to light how it must be acknowledged how significant unrelated attacks on the BPP and its members were in negatively influencing the operation of all survival programs (p.45). In his chapter "The Black Panther Party: State Repression and Political Prisoners" included in Dr. Charles E. Jones' *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, Dr. Winston A. Grady-Willis (1998) illuminates how both violent and non-violent

attacks by authorities at the local, state, and federal level would affect BPP community building as BPP members were killed, injured, and arrested:

State political repression directed against the Black Panther Party severely circumscribed the organization's effectiveness. Revolving arrests and detention distracted Panther activists from community organizing, and repeatedly raising bail depleted Party funds. The most devastating, lasting impact of state political repression, short of death itself, has been the ongoing incarceration of members of the BPP . . . (Grady-Willis, 1998, p.363).

Grady-Willis (1998) notes that although the Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Program was a specific target by J. Edgar Hoover who was bothered by the success of the program, referring to it as a "real long range threat to American society," that it was also considerably undermined as the FBI, ". . . directed most of its efforts at destabilizing the program by targeting its supporters" (p.374). Thus, according to Dr. Dr. Winston A. Grady-Willis (1998), it was not as necessary to directly interrupt the activities of the Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Programs or the Liberation Schools because ongoing attacks on members and the organization itself, significantly and indirectly, weakened the BPP's community building efforts.

While Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Programs and Liberation Schools near the BPP's Oakland headquarters generally received more positive response and praise for their pedagogy and educational content, much of which would be improved and utilized at the acclaimed Oakland Community School, this was not the case across the country. Huggins (personal communication, May 27, 2012) points out how generally the farther the program or school was from BPP headquarters in Oakland, CA, the more likely the program or school would be to utilizing what Williamson (2005) describes in her work as, ". . . overtly hostile rhetoric unacceptable in a public school" (p.145). While more distant programs and schools continued to receive praise for their efforts at feeding children, and approval from those who agreed with the

blunt teaching of children about the “inhuman capitalist society in America,” there were parents who did protest elements of these programs and schools:

The HCIS found that in cities like Kansas City, Des Moines, and Seattle, parents protested the use of posters, songs, and chants meant to teach the children that “police officers are ‘pigs’ who should be ‘offed’ because they mistreat black citizens and help to preserve an inhuman capitalist society in America (Williamson, 2005, p.145).

It should be noted that the analysis of the HCIS, the House Committee on Internal Security, should be taken with caution as this committee did not seek to explore the schools for the purpose of applauding or encouraging their efforts. Ultimately, the successes and failures of the Liberation Schools would be analyzed by the BPP, and experience honed from operating these schools would lay the foundation for what would become the most successful and widely acclaimed school of the BPP, the Oakland Community School (OCS).

CHAPTER THREE: THE ROOTS OF THE OAKLAND COMMUNITY SCHOOL (OCS)

The Beginnings

While prominent scholars of the BPP, as Paul Alkebulan (2007) and Joy Ann Williamson (2005), mark the birth of the school which would become the Oakland Community School in 1971 with the establishment of the Intercommunal Youth Institute, Ericka Huggins reveals more details (Jones & Gayles, 2008). As current professor of women's studies and sociology, professional public speaker, former Black Panther member, former member of the Alameda County Board of Education and former Director of the Oakland Community School, Ericka Huggins reveals with Angela D. LeBlanc-Ernest (2009) that the OCS had earlier roots. While many prominent BPP scholars conclude through their research that the Oakland Community School was founded as the Intercommunal Youth Institute in January of 1971, Ericka Huggins sets the original predecessor as a "home school" referred to as the "Children's House" founded in 1970. According to Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest (2009), the creation of the school was a result of a decision by then chairman Bobby Seale and Party chief of staff David Hilliard to remove Party members' children from public schools (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009, p.168). Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest (2009) quote David Hilliard who notes the reason for withdrawing Party members' children, ". . . the FBI and teachers harassed the children because of the parents' BPP membership" (p.168). Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest (2009) elaborate, "The outcome was twofold: to provide a safe place for BPP members' children during a time when BPP offices and homes were subject to raids, shoot-outs, firebombings, and FBI COINTELPRO surveillance, and to serve as an informal home-based community school" (p.168). Initially the school served as a more informal school "similar to southern black church schools," but with a

decision to add more structure the Intercommunal Youth Institute was born (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009, p.168). Scholars Charles E. Jones and Jonathan Gayles (2008) note that the “intercommunal” portion of the institute’s name had origins in the BPP’s “ideological shift to intercommunalism” (p.102). Jones and Gayles (2008) argue that the creation of the Intercommunal Youth Institute was significantly influenced by an initiative to create an “alternative educational institution” by Newton when he was released from prison in August 1970. Former Director Ericka Huggins (personal communication, April 18, 2012) in interview elaborates on Huey P. Newton’s role in the establishment of what would become the Oakland Community School (OCS), “. . . the trajectory of what we came to call Oakland Community School, started with an idea of Huey’s. He bought the building . . . He put the non-profit incorporation in place that supported the school financially, and at the fundraising and promotional level, his ideology in general about humanity was the underpinning of the school’s pedagogy.” Huggins (personal communication, April 18, 2012) notes that while Huey P. Newton’s ideology crucially influenced the pedagogy of the school, that Newton did not participate in writing the curriculum or creating the structure of the school. Huggins (personal communication, April 18, 2012) further illuminates Newton’s role, “He was equivalent to what is the board of trustees. He visited the school to hang out with the kids, and play with them, and bring things to the school. In the early earliest days he helped to pick the staff.” Huggins (personal communication, April 18, 2012) herself would be asked by Newton to serve as Director following the departure of the previous Director to the East Coast.

(Samuel L. Napier) Intercommunal Youth Institute

When the Intercommunal Youth Institute (IYI) officially established itself in January of 1971, Brenda Bay began as its first director (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009; Jones and Gayles, 2008, p.102). With an academic background in education and personal background of having been a BPP member in New York, Brenda Bay would serve as the leader of the IYI until 1973 (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009, p.168). Gloria Smith, a University of California, Berkeley student, would also serve as an “architect” of the early IYI curriculum (Jones and Gayles, 2008, p.103). During this time period the enrollment of the school would expand from an initial twenty eight students to fifty in the 1973-1974 school year. The name of the school would also change its name during the 1972-1973 academic year to the “Samuel L. Napier Intercommunal Youth Institute” as a result of the death of Samuel L. Napier to “intrafactional organizational conflict” (Jones and Gayles, 2008, p.103). Most of the students at the IYI would be the children of BPP members and would range in age from 2.5 to 12 years old (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009, p.168). Huggins elaborates on the BPP reasoning for taking children so young, “We start at the age of 2 ½ because we do believe a child doesn’t have to be 5 in order to form concepts. So, they learn a lot of things at an early age” (Jones and Gayles, 2008, p.102-103). At this time the IYI only received funding through the BPP.

Many of the characteristics of the IYI in these initial years were unconventional. Since most of the students were the children of BPP members, it was not uncommon that IYI students would live in small collectives with instructors twenty-four hours per day as parents “organized and maintained BPP community programs” (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009, p.168). Although there was a small number of students and modest number of staff, the ratio of instructional staff to students was an intimate 1:10; this ratio allowed for a level of “individualized attention” which was lacking from many public schools at the time (Huggins and

LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009, p.168). The IYI did not organize its students through traditional grade levels, but instead grouped students based upon their academic performance.

While the IYI would share a goal with the Liberation Schools of making its students politically and socially aware, the IYI slowly began to deviate from the more controversial and blunt methodology of the Liberation Schools to a curriculum which would emphasize “educate to liberate” (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009, p.169). Moreover, the IYI began to move away from the BPP Liberation Schools and offer “greater emphasis on traditional subject matter and developing academic skills” (Jones and Gayles, 2008, p.103). While not straying from their initial goal of teaching students about “their slave past and ‘their role in the present-day society,” the IYI began to evolve a powerful liberating pedagogical purpose which would become the foundation of the school as it became the OCS. Unlike traditional public schools, the IYI sought to incorporate a curriculum which emphasized community work (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009, p.168). Although the school would teach the standard basic skills and areas of knowledge including mathematics, science, history and English, as well as adding political education, physical education, people’s art, and music in 1973, the students would learn through unconventional teaching strategies (Jones and Gayles, 2008, p.103). Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest (2009) explain, “As an example, the students learned writing skills by writing poetry and letters to incarcerated BPP members, by attending trials of BPP members and other political prisoners, by distributing food at BPP-sponsored food giveaways, and by selling BPP newspapers” (p.169). Perhaps then Director Brenda Bay explains the IYI’s purpose best during this time period, “[to] expose the children to a great deal of information and direct experience with the world so they can receive a more realistic view of the world” (p.169). The IYI did not see developing students’ traditional academics as mutually exclusive from teaching students the

value of standing against injustice in the world; contextualizing skills against a backdrop of the broader world around the students was seen as very important. Beyond just teaching about the injustices occurring against African-descended people in the United States, the IYI would also expand its focus to educate children about the farmworkers movement and the holocaust of Native Americans, as well as educate children about the injustices occurring in Vietnam and South Africa. The administration of the IYI would select the motto “The world is a child’s classroom” as the “key organizing principle” of the school (Jones and Gayles, 2008, p.103). Thus the pedagogy of the IYI can be seen as battling the cultural reproduction occurring, then and now, in public schools which traditionally has normalized the injustice occurring in students’ lives as outside the realm of a school’s educational and personal control. Not only did students learn about injustices occurring in their world as BPP members were being put on trial, but students were quite literally brought to the courtroom to participate in the process of overcoming the injustices that they were learning about. The IYI was teaching students from an early age how to identify and stand against injustice; teaching students that literacy was not only for reading school materials, but for becoming responsible citizens in an unjust society. While it could be argued that this was a biased political indoctrination more subtle than the more overt methodology occurring in Liberation Schools, this view of the IYI would require viewing what was occurring to BPP members as just and right.

As the school began to grow and garner more monetary support and attention through exposure from both Bobby Seale and Elaine Brown’s political campaigns in 1972-1973, respectively for Oakland mayor and city councilwoman, the school would gain the resources to move to a more visible and larger location in East Oakland (Brown, 1992). The new school site was a converted church complex which would include eight classrooms, an art room, curriculum

center, 350-seat auditorium, and a large cafeteria with a fully equipped kitchen (Jones and Gayles, 2008, p.103). The larger space would allow the IYI to increase their enrollment from forty-two to one hundred ten students; during this time the IYI began taking on a much larger number of students whose parents were not BPP members (Jones and Gayles, 2008, p.103-104). Moreover, this new change in location also allowed the BPP to open the Oakland Community Learning Center (OCLC) on the same grounds, which would begin offering “adult education programming, a free medical clinic, legal aid services, employment counseling, a monthly film series, teen programs, and community forums” (Jones and Gayles, 2008, p.104). Soon after this move in physical location, in 1974 the administrators would change the name of the Intercommunal Youth Institute to the Oakland Community School as a result of misunderstandings of the word “intercommunal” (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009, p.170). As Ericka Huggins explains, “We wanted to be appealing to people. People were not going to understand the Intercommunal Youth Institute. It sounded exclusive” (Jones and Gayles, 2008, p.104)

CHAPTER FOUR: OAKLAND COMMUNITY SCHOOL (OCS)

In 1973, during this crucial period of growth and expansion of the Intercommunal Youth Institute to what would become the Oakland Community School, Ericka Huggins would take over as the OCS director. Following her key roles in BPP organizing and dedication to the community, as well as her background majoring in education at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, Newton and the BPP's central committee thought Huggins a very appropriate fit (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009, p.171). Another key leader at the OCS would be Donna Howell, brought on for her experience and organizational abilities (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009, p.171). Elaine Brown would also be a crucial figure at the OCS as she would utilize her influence as BPP Chairman to do everything in her power to ensure the school's success (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009, p.171; Brown, 1992). Scholars like Williamson (2005) describe a radical shift taking place during these transition years as she argues the OCS sought to "legitimize" itself away from its "Panther roots," "[Ericka Huggins and Elaine Brown] . . . played a large role in legitimizing the school as it dissociated itself with its Panther roots and became more mainstream in its curriculum and less overt in its pedagogy" (p.146). However, Ericka Huggins herself does not indicate that there was a dramatic shift, but rather a new leadership of dedicated and passionate women educators who would seek to steer the school toward excellence (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009, p.172-173). As Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest (2009) explain, "OCS administrators had varying backgrounds; but their commitment to education, community, and children united them" (p.171).

Despite this expansion, the OCS would intentionally remain tuition-free as it had been since its beginnings. Huggins and LeBlanc (2009) elaborate:

The school was appealing also because it was free. Because the administrators knew poor families could not afford to pay for the school's services, the OCS was tuition-free and funded by private donations, grants from local foundations, city and county resources, and the California Department of Education. All BPP cadres, including the general membership, the military wing, party leadership and school leadership, raised significant financial support for the school. The school's parent-teacher organization planned house parties and other social events, including two radio-thons and numerous community dances and concerts. In addition, community supporters in professional positions often informed the school's administrators or staff about potential funding sources. In turn, the Educational Opportunities Corporation (EOC), the school's nonprofit sponsor, wrote grants and applied for funds (p.170-171).

Significant to note regarding the funding of the OCS was the linkage between the school and the community, even beyond the parents. School administrators were able to market the school's revolutionary educational intent and academic results with great success.

It is difficult to separate the pedagogy and educational offerings of the Oakland Community School as they were integrally linked. The OCS sought to embody the pedagogy it was transmitting to students in the structure, offerings, and setting of the school itself. Began with the Intercommunal Youth Institute, the OCS would continue to seek to utilize community involvement and social justice activism as the means to teach academic subject matter. In seeking to educate "the whole child," the OCS addressed social inequality affecting students in ways which still have not found their way into public schools today. The OCS administration and staff are not shy in admitting, although not using the terminology, that confronting the reproduction of social and cultural inequality, affecting particularly Black and poor youth, was key to their purpose as an educational institution. They were able to accomplish this goal quite successfully while administering a high quality education in the traditional academic areas.

Addressing the Reproduction of Social and Cultural Inequality at the OCS

Central Pedagogy

In order to combat what the Oakland Community School saw as a dogmatic and unfulfilling education promoting the maintenance of capitalist relations, as well as gendered and raced relationships, offered by traditional public schools, the OCS sought to utilize a pedagogy which put critical thinking, self-questioning, and analysis at the forefront of learning. In the June 30, 1975 issue of the *Black Panther* this pedagogy is succinctly explained, “In contrast to public school instruction, which consists mainly of memorization and drilling, the school encourages the children to express themselves freely, to explore, and to question the assumptions of what they are learning, as children are naturally inclined to do” (Hoffman, 1975). At the beginning of both the 1976 and 1978 OCS *Instructor Handbooks* there are two initial quotes and a “Preface” poem which centers the approach the BPP took as it taught children at the OCS; soon after these initial pages are the OCS *Instructor Handbooks*’ “Approach to Learning” (Newton, n.d.a; Newton, n.d.b).

Both quotes at the onset of the OCS *Instructors Handbooks* come from Huey P. Newton; the first is as follows, “What is it that cannot be taught or learned. It is a realization (sic)” (Newton, n.d.a). The OCS envisioned itself as a school inspiring consciousness, rather than as an institution dictating or assigning opinions regarding the world. Quintessential to this pedagogical idea regarding the role of teaching and learning with children was the further recognition that knowledge and understanding have a unique relationship to each other. The second quote by Huey P. Newton at the beginning of the OCS *Instructor’s Handbooks* is as follows, “One can have knowledge without understanding. But there is no understanding without knowledge” (Newton, n.d.a). The OCS sought to kindle an independent awareness of the world for students as a result of lesson plans which included multiple narratives, presenting as many viewpoints and as much information as available, in order to inspire students to come to

a more complete understanding of whatever is being explored, for themselves (Newton, n.d.a). For the OCS knowledge did not equal understanding; for the OCS a student could know that America and Japan fought during World War II, but the OCS did not believe that this knowledge meant that a student would understand the conflict between Japan and the United States (Newton, n.d.a). The OCS aimed to bring about realizations rather than teach attitudes or judgments. Thus the OCS did not teach whether Japan or the United States were right or wrong, but rather sought to provide students with resources from diverse sources and to let them decide what the war between the United States and Japan was all about (Newton, n.d.a).

This approach by the OCS came as a surprise to those who assumed that the OCS would serve as a tool or outlet for the Black Panther Party to spread its own perspectives and worldviews. In an article published by Jet Magazine on February 5, 1976 Elaine Brown goes into more detail when questioned about the intentions of the OCS, “We try to teach the children, in essence, how to think as opposed to what to think. So therefore we don’t try to impose Panther thinking, or anybody else’s, on the board or in the classroom” (Lucas, 1976).

At the end of the 1976 OCS *Instructor Handbook’s* “Approach to Learning” is a sentence which explains why the OCS sought to inspire realizations, “We know that if a child does not know how she or he arrived at an ‘answer’ then the child does not understand the concept that is being learned” (Newton, n.d.b). For the OCS it did not make sense to impose opinions and understandings on children because they did not believe children could fully understand that which they did not come to think of for themselves.

The pedagogical purpose that the OCS set for itself as an educational institution is perhaps best elucidated by the poem “On Children” by Khalil Gibran presented at the onset of the OCS *Instructors Handbooks*:

. . . Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's
longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they
belong not to you.
You may give them your love but not
your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not
their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of
Tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even
in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them, but seek
not to make them like you.
For life goes not backward nor tarries
with yesterday.
You are the bows from which your children
As living arrows are sent forth . . .

While the poem speaks for itself, and it should be clear what the OCS meant to do by associating itself with this work by Khalil Gibran, it is worthwhile to pinpoint what in particular the OCS could mean to be saying by positioning this poem at the beginning of its *Instructor Handbooks*. In this poem Khalil Gibran describes parents as vessels which carry their children into the world of adulthood. Important for understanding the pedagogy of the OCS through this poem, are the lines which describe how parents do not have the power to give their children thoughts, but only the power to love and propel their children as best as they can, into the world. The OCS did not think that its job was to force students to accept as truth the worldview of their teachers or the OCS as an educational institution; moreover, the OCS did not think that it was possible to pass on “your thoughts” to children. The OCS viewed itself as an educational institution whose purpose was not to dictate the world, but to open the world with all its complexities for the children to examine, see, feel, and understand for themselves.

Structure

At the most basic level of structure the OCS sought to disrupt the cultural reproduction of the traditional school environment. Rather than group children together by grade and age, the OCS chose to group children together in “levels of instruction” (Newton, n.d.a). Such is explained in the *OCS Instructor Handbook* for 1978, “The 12 levels of instruction are grouped as follows: Levels 1-3: Primary Skills / Levels 4-9: Intermediates / Levels 10-12: Secondary / The children are placed into groups. The groups of children are designated by letter name” (Newton, n.d.a). The OCS sought to get rid of groupings which it did not see as helpful to students; instead the OCS sought to create groupings which better reflected the needs and progress of their students (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009, p.172). Thus the principle way a child was placed in their “level of instruction” was the result of an analysis of their results on the “Oakland Community School Developmental or Skills Accomplishment Tests” and “Period Evaluations” (Newton, n.d.a). Further in the *OCS Instructor Handbook* these evaluations are explained:

Evaluations are reports of children’s accomplishments based on the performance objectives of the Curriculum . . . There are four evaluation periods in the school year. These occur every 8 weeks and are called Period Evaluations. They are compilations of weekly evaluations. The weekly evaluations must include the skills or concepts taught, the child’s accomplishments in the skills or concepts, absences, homework missed and comments. An instructor’s personal evaluation of a child’s behavior (“good child” versus “bad child”) or an instructor’s opinion about the child are not to be included in evaluations. Evaluations must be objective analyses based on actual performance in a subject area. (Newton, n.d.a)

Significant to note about the OCS evaluations was their focus on maintaining “objective analyses” of student performance. Although traditional schools are expected to maintain similar standards, it is noteworthy that the OCS made it such a special point to draw upon the importance of not allowing teachers’ own personal views regarding students to affect how they judged a child’s progress.

Moreover the *OCS Instructor Handbook* elaborates, “It is expected that instructors will develop teams of children within the subject area of each class based on the children’s skills. The teams are work groups [sic] and are an application of one of the basic tenets of the OCS philosophy: ‘Each One, Teach One’” (Newton, n.d.a). This breakdown of students into teams, where each child helped the other to learn, was an embodiment of the OCS’ belief in community. In the May 4th issue of the *Black Panther* the philosophy of “Each One Teach One” at the OCS is elucidated, “. . . knowledge is nothing to keep secret. The students have the responsibility to see that everyone comprehends -- "Each One Teach One" -- a collective learning responsibility (*Black Panther*, 1974a, p.4). The OCS made it a point to teach their students that it was each of their responsibilities to make sure that everyone understood the material and that knowledge was for everyone to benefit. The OCS sought to combat individual competitiveness which it saw contributing to the reproduction of social and cultural inequality. Smuggled out of the California Penal Colony men's institution on July 12, 1969 and printed in the *Black Panther*, Huey P. Newton theorizing on “the people” is informative when looking at the “Each One Teach One” philosophy of the OCS:

Ideas move from one person to another by the association of brother and sisters who recognize that a most evil system of capitalism has set us against each other, although our real enemy is the exploiter who profits from our poverty. When we realize such an idea, then we come to love and appreciate our brothers and sisters who we may have seen as enemies, and those exploiters who we may have seen as friends are revealed for what they truly are to all oppressed people. The people are the idea. (*Black Panther*, 1975b)

The BPP believed that poverty was a result of capitalism’s brutal competitive nature, and aimed for all of its programs, especially the OCS, to combat capitalism’s individualism through a structure which sought to re-humanize and revitalize connections between people. Essentially, for the BPP at the OCS, teaching children in the classroom to care and share knowledge with

each other was a way of combatting the social and cultural reproduction which it saw creating social classes through capitalistic struggle.

It is important to acknowledge that the OCS was very conscious of how creating this communal caring environment was threatened by tests, like the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS), which it saw as having the potential to create the social division that they were trying to combat, “ESEA/EDY children are to receive individualized and small group instruction through tutoring (1-to-1) and learning centers in the subject area. However, they are not to be isolated from their classmates in any way” (Newton, n.d.a). The OCS attempted to take every precaution as they administered the CTBS test in order to qualify for “Title I – ESEA/EDY” funding.

Important to the structure of the OCS was their take on “discipline.” Familiar with how “traditional schools” approached discipline, and recognizing the disproportionately negative consequences this often had for maintaining Black and poor youth in a lower social strata, the OCS developed a system of discipline of their own. Their disciplinary strategies were foremost based upon their understanding of the purpose of discipline:

Discipline in this sense is not a matter of control of the class; it is a matter of directing inevitable human energies into productive, socially meaningful channels. By ‘directing’ we mean offering the child enough options in the form of rewarding activities to insure that he or she can exercise some choice and voluntarily become involved in any aspect of the educational experience. (Newton, n.d.a)

The OCS did not believe in classroom management so much as classroom productivity; if the class was becoming unruly, this was the result of the teacher not adequately offering her/his students enough interesting activities or knowledge, a teacher imposing on student concentration, and/or a teacher putting too much “precedence” on “arbitrary adult planning”:

We realize that people learn best when allowed to focus attention on things of interest to them in their environment. An important basic principle is that concentration cannot be

imposed from outside the organism. Concentration is a natural consequence of voluntary interest, but without interest there can be no concentration. In the traditional school, learning is approached through memorization and repetition of information. It allows the child little freedom of movement, speech or choice in the manner and method of his/her education . . . Again and again throughout the traditional school experience, children have their rhythm of work broken by the instructor who must adhere to rigid almost robotic schedules and planning. In time, children learn to protect themselves from this shock of interruption; they learn not to concentrate. (Newton, n.d.a)

Thus it can be seen that the OCS had its own ideology regarding why children lose focus and they sought to act on own theorizing regarding children with their own structure which sought to “provide discipline with freedom to allow for flexibility and creativity without abandon” (Newton, n.d.a). While the OCS believed that children needed a “disciplined” and “structured” learning environment, they balanced this discipline with their own ideology regarding each child’s “individuality” and “rhythm of learning” (Newton, n.d.a). However, when the occasion did come when a student was disrupting the class despite grand efforts at supporting their interests, and this began affecting the collective good, the OCS saw “self-mastery” was the issue. First established at the Samuel L. Napier Intercommunal Youth Institute, and further developed at the OCS, the *Black Panther* elaborates on the OCS attitude toward discipline, “Unlike traditional public schools where ‘discipline’ means a set of rules, punishments and rewards that are imposed by teachers and authority figures, the Institute emphasizes internal discipline” (Hoffman, 1975). Every day the OCS reserved time for student to meditate; key to their meditation were exercises taught to help students develop a mastery of self. When meeting with former Director Ericka Huggins, she was proud to tell me the story of how effective these efforts were; when a student appeared unbalanced teachers would provide time for students to go to an unoccupied space and perform the Hatha Yoga posture, the “tree pose” (E. Huggins, personal communication, January, 12, 2012). She said almost without fail performing this Hatha Yoga stance would allow the student to rebalance and return to learning.

However, students at the OCS were not simply guided toward greater discipline by adults, but also by their peers; seen as an integral part of cultivating self-discipline among students was the Youth Committee Justice Board. The 1976 OCS *Instructor Handbook* briefly details the purpose of the Justice Board, “A student body that handles the children’s relations with each other and their understanding of school rules” (Newton, n.d.a). The OCS sought to give students more opportunity to realize justice through their own self-discovery of what justice looks like for themselves. Thus, as much as possible, the OCS operated with an ideology which sought to prepare students for a future where they could re-direct and discipline themselves.

Addressing Health Care and Wellness of OCS Students

The OCS took the health and wellness of its students very seriously and extensive efforts were made to make sure that students did not have to worry about anything but their education at the OCS (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009). Maintaining good health and wellness of students was seen as integral to the OCS in confronting the social and cultural reproduction of inequality it saw affecting specifically Black and poor youth. Imani, a previous OCS student, offers a personal and demonstrative anecdote illustrating the priority of student health care and wellness at the OCS:

One day I came to school and showed the schools (sic) nurse my toenail that had suddenly fallen off . . . this was not the first time. I painted my toes to cover up the missing nails. I didn’t know what it was, so I asked . . . I was taken to Oakland Children’s Hospital; they ran tests. It was discovered that I had a mild form of malnutrition. The doctor prescribed vitamins and the school gave my mom diet ideas. After this OCS gave all of the children vitamin supplements once a day. (Huggins, 2010, p.69)

While the OCS could have easily shrugged off or chosen not to worry about a student losing their nails, the OCS took Imani’s condition very seriously and took her to Oakland Children’s

Hospital. Not only did the OCS take Imani to the hospital, but the OCS closely followed Imani's treatment; upon discovery that the cause of her losing nails was mild malnutrition, the OCS took it upon itself to further support the nutrition of its students by offering daily vitamin supplements to all of its students. Instead of condemning Imani's mother, the OCS worked with her to develop alternative "diet ideas" (Huggins, 2010, p.69). In response to a majority of students coming from poor and working-class backgrounds, the OCS was eventually able to offer all of its students daily free breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Moreover, the food served at the OCS would be held to high nutritional standards, "These warm and nutritious meals were an antidote to the processed and modified food sold in 'corner stores' and public school cafeterias" (Huggins, 2010, p.70). When interviewed by Huggins (2010), a former mother of an OCS child recounts how the health of her children was taken care of by the OCS and the Black Panther Party, "I received Medi-Cal. This didn't cover the costs of regular visits to quality dentists and eye doctors. I prayed that my children did not get sick. When they did get sick, the OCS staff made a way for each child to be cared for through Children's Hospital or through the group of community clinics the BPP put up" (p.70). Addressing the full health of students also meant addressing the emotional needs of children and their families; thus the OCS found ways to offer the services of family therapists, child psychologists, and counselors for free or at reduced rates whenever the needs arose (Huggins, 2010, p.70). The OCS did not separate health care and well-being from the education of the children; the school saw the physical and emotional health of the children as an inseparable priority for which it was fully responsible.

Interrupting and Investigating: Re-Humanizing the Youth through the Truth

The primary method by which the OCS sought to confront the social and cultural reproduction it saw maintaining inequality was through a dynamic ideology of humanization and compassion. At the OCS this meant that “no duty was beyond any person” as the school sought to care for the “whole” child (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009, p.172). Although it was, and continues to be commonplace, that particularly public schools do not delve into teaching toward what former Director of the OCS, Ericka Huggins (personal communication, April, 18, 2012), refers to as a “social intelligence,” this was very much the concern of the OCS:

. . . so when black children in public schools were calling one another “African booty snatchers” or something crazy like that we interrupted the conversation. Very rarely we heard students repeat the de-humanizing language used to describe the Vietnamese people: “gook,” “chink” or “slant-eye,” when we heard it, we interrupted it. And if students or staff made fun of others’ languages and dialects, we interrupted it.

When inequalities presented themselves through teasing, name-calling, and through the opinions held by students, teachers, parents, and staff, the OCS sought to “interrupt” and instigate “investigation” (E. Huggins, personal communication, April, 18, 2012). For Huggins (personal communication, April, 18, 2012) “interrupting” did not mean punishing or condemning, but instead it meant creating an active dialogue which sought to re-humanize. During interview, Huggins (personal communication, April 18, 2012) tells the story of how the OCS handled when a child at Oakland Community School woke up one day with “alopecia”:

If people judged another’s ability, we had a conversation to educate that child, those children. There was a child at Oakland Community School who was bald due to “alopecia.” We explained to them James has “alopecia,” this is how the disease expresses. Do not tease him about it, please comfort him. The children were kind and compassionate. If you don’t teach it, how will people learn? . . .

Rather than let James experience the initial shock and xenophobia initiated by his alopecia, the OCS immediately stepped in. As Huggins explains, the entire school was notified about James’

condition, but not in a way which objectified or alienated James. The truth was told about James' condition, and the children were taught how they should react; with kindness, "compassion," and comforting, not teasing. Reacting to the onset of James' alopecia at the OCS became a powerful lesson in how to humanly and empathetically react to the strange and unfortunate illness of another (E. Huggins, personal communication, April, 18, 2012).

While not using the term "culturally competent" at the time, Huggins (personal communication, April, 18, 2012) explains in more detail how the OCS taught children how to approach others and how the OCS went about creating a "culturally competent" environment which combatted the social and cultural reproduction of inequality:

. . . we didn't use the term cultural competency then. It means that I may not know everything about your culture, but I want to know. I don't want to ask you questions based in stereotypes, I want to do my own homework, I want to respect you as a human being first, and then as an Asian man. I don't want to approach you with stereotypical curiosity. I am curious because I am a human being on planet Earth and so are you. As an example, I know where Asia is on the global map, so I do my homework about all of the many cultures of the continent Asia and beyond that, I become your student as you tell me about your culture of origin. I hope that you will feel the same about learning about Ericka Huggins and her culture. This way our conversation is reciprocal. We learn what it means to be Asian or African. We learn what it means to be European.

At the OCS children were taught that it was inappropriate to initiate communication with another through objectifying or stereotypical notions and ideas. The OCS encouraged children to ask and learn about that which they found strange or unfamiliar about another person, and to think of the other person "as a human being first" (E. Huggins, personal communication, April, 18, 2012). Children were challenged to observe and then pursue research to narrow down and eliminate their assumptions. While Huggins could observe that I was an "Asian man," she did not let what she knew about Asian men pre-determine how she was going to react to me, but instead sought to ask me what it meant to respect me from my own personal cultural perspective. According to Huggins (personal communication, April, 18, 2012), children at the OCS were

taught that there was no such thing as “pure” people or culture, thus knowing one Asian man does not mean that you know all Asian men, and therefore children were taught to realize the importance in fully “investigating” another before making judgments based upon previous knowledge, assumptions, and/or biases. Huggins (personal communication, April, 18, 2012) made it a point to mention how in “real time” how this might look:

. . . in real time, if a child, student asked a question about culture and we did not have the answer, we didn’t pretend we did. If we had a partial answer, we would give the partial answer and we always would tell the child that we would investigate that. We would do our research. If a child said something demeaning or insensitive, we would ask them, did you investigate that? If not, they were asked to do their research. There was constant learning going on.

At the OCS the pursuit and the realization of truth was taken very seriously. More important than being the knower, was being the one who seeks to know and learn the unknown. According to Huggins (personal communication, April, 18, 2012) saying demeaning things about others brought forth a learning opportunity where children could continue to grow as human beings.

At the OCS not only were children continually challenged to grow in how they looked at and approached others, as Huggins (personal communication, April 18, 2012) elaborates, but also staff, teachers, and parents who were held to an even higher standard than that set forth for the children:

. . . race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, citizenship status, all of these social constructions were addressed in classrooms and in staff meetings at Oakland Community School. When we talked to parents and there was a problem, with a child and/or their family, that was rooted in old ways of thinking and behaving, we would speak to parents directly. Everyone was reminded that we don’t tease about someone’s ability, we don’t judge a child, adult or groups of people, because of their race, ethnicity, language, gender, sexual orientation or class, we didn’t allow it.

According to Huggins (personal communication, April, 18, 2012), at the OCS there was no person who was not subject to daily self-analysis, especially adults. Adults and their reactions and interactions with children were seen as integrally linked to the growth of every child. As

Huggins recounts, she was not afraid to respectfully bring parents or families in who she saw or heard were holding views which could be detrimental to the growth of OCS children as caring, open-minded human beings. This pre-disposition to being self-questioning was a standard which Huggins (personal communication, April, 18, 2012) explains was an integral pre-condition for her choice of teachers at the OCS, “. . . I hired teachers who were willing to tell the truth about themselves and the world we live in, who were unafraid of working with the vestiges of oppression within themselves, so that they weren’t furthering an old paradigm in the classroom.” Moreover, Huggins (personal communication, April, 18, 2012) recounts how there were weekly “staff meetings” where teachers and staff members actively engaged in dialogue about their own personal beliefs, reactions toward children, and how to address the inequalities which they saw occurring at the OCS. The OCS approach to addressing social and cultural reproduction was less about coming to a complete and conclusive agreement about how to treat others based upon their unique backgrounds, but about a “maintenance” which saw to continually ensure that every human being at the OCS was being respected for who they were (E. Huggins, personal communication, April, 18, 2012). As different situations arose there were constant struggles, but Huggins (personal communication, April, 18, 2012) explains that the OCS approach was to face these struggles as best as possible, with an open mind, an open heart, and an eye for justice.

Curriculum

In its most elemental form, the goal of the OCS, as is elaborated in the *Black Panther*, was to become an educational institution teaching children, “. . . basic skills necessary to survive in a technological society and to teach children to think in an analytical fashion in order to develop creative solutions to the problems we are faced with” (*Black Panther*, 1973). Important

to the OCS' educational purpose was providing an education for students coming to live in an increasingly "technological" world, this far before personal computers, and to offer students all means and "basic skills" necessary to analyze and solve problems in their world. While the educational offerings of the OCS were not particularly special when looking at other "progressive" schools at the time, what was chosen as the learning material, and how it was taught and linked to their liberating pedagogical purpose, did make the OCS special. To cite one example of this in the curriculum, which will be elaborated later, is how students were taught in the music curriculum to understand the growing and changing of cultures "by invention," "by borrowing," and "by outright exploitation." This of course was not a traditional lesson taught to students in public school music courses (Newton, n.d.a). Moreover, building on the Samuel L. Napier Intercommunal Youth Institute, the precursor to the OCS, the OCS continued to unconventionally impart knowledge to students by teaching traditional subject areas through a curriculum emphasizing the importance of community, student environment, social justice consciousness, and "direct experience" (Perlstein, 2002). The OCS took the aspect of "direct experience" very seriously not only in the classroom, but as they sought to provide "environmental studies" which provided frequent field trips into the world to explore that which they were studying (Newton, n.d.a). Thus the OCS sought to challenge the social and cultural reproduction maintaining Black and poor people in their place with a curriculum which not only provided students the basic knowledge and means to survive in and realize their position in an unequal society, but a curriculum which could instigate a worldview necessary to combat the social and cultural reproduction of inequality.

By 1976 and 1978, which is evident by looking at the *Instructors Handbooks*, the OCS was providing its students basic skills through the following courses: language arts, mathematics,

science, social science, performing arts, visual arts, physical education, Spanish, and environmental studies (Newton, n.d.a; Newton, n.d.b).

At the OCS the primary components of the children's language arts curriculum focused on, but was not limited to: phonics, parts of speech, syntax, handwriting, library and reference skills, language mechanics, vocabulary, spelling, reading and comprehension, literature, prose, poetry, and speech (Newton, n.d.a). Central to this language arts education was identifying for the OCS children what language is, what language is being taught, and for what reasons:

Language is a form of human communication used to express feelings and ideas through a system of vocal sounds and (corresponding) written symbols. The language used in the political, educational, cultural and social institutions of this country, and the one spoken and understood by the majority of the people, is Standard English – the most widely used form of Modern American English. In this country, the ability to read and write Standard English is essential for the comprehension of all other areas of learning. (Newton, n.d.a)

Unconventional for a more traditional language arts education, and very much a part of confronting the maintenance of the normalization of dominant Modern American English through the cultural reproduction taking place in schools not identifying dominant and non-dominant languages, the OCS made sure to inform its students that they were learning the dominant language. As elaborated in the OCS *Instructor Handbook*, students were informed that they were learning the dominant Modern American English for the purpose of being able to successfully and skillfully communicate and navigate the dominant society. As pointed out by Perlstein (2002) in his analysis of the April 13, 1974 article "Language Arts with Novelty" in the *Black Panther*, "By 1974, the Panthers criticized not only the repressiveness of public schooling but also its failure 'to adequately teach English or grammar.' At OCS, in contrast, students 'recite[d] consonant blends' and studied word endings, diacritical marks, and alphabetization" (p.90). However, while teaching the Modern American English was emphasized, for the OCS learning this dominant form of English did not mean that they could not meet students at their

level of “practical experience” with English (Perlstein, 2002). As Perlstein (2002) points out from his research, “Students built their vocabularies through ‘words we use around town’ and ‘at home’” (p.89).

However, basic language arts skills was not the extent of the OCS language arts curriculum as the OCS also intricately linked its curriculum with community and social justice, particularly through poetry, prose, and writing letters. In an article printed on May 4th, 1974 in the *Black Panther*, the language arts curriculum of the higher level Group 7 is briefly explained, “Creative writing, grammar, reading and vocabulary comprise Group 7's Language Arts program. In creative writing, the students draw upon their own experiences to produce, in prose or poetry, meaningful expressions of their lives as Black youth” (*Black Panther*, 1974a). The OCS related the importance of poetry and prose in helping particularly Black youth relate to their position in the world. In the *Black Panther* published on June 15th, 1974, poetry written by OCS students is printed; the poetry of the OCS students can be seen to reveal the linkage of the language arts curriculum to the social justice and community directed interests at the OCS (*Black Panther*, 1974b). The following is a poem named “THE WORLD IS A JUNKYARD” written “collectively” by OCS learning groups 6 and 7:

THE WORLD IS A JUNKYARD

The world is a junkyard --
And the Presidents won't do
nothin' about it.

We need more houses for
people.
The stores need to put the
prices down.
People are poor and have no
bread,
And we need to stop being so
prejudiced.

The police should stop arresting
people...

People should unite to change
People should unite to change the
big problem. (*Black Panther*, 1974b)

While there are poems written by individual students published in the same copy of the *Black Panther*, this poem can be seen to personify the importance for the OCS of teaching community and social justice. The students quite literally, as a community of themselves, can be seen to have written this poem about the struggles and troubles affecting the community in which they are living. Although the children are likely to have had a firm direction and guidance in their writing, it is clear that these are the words of the children. The OCS youth in learning groups 6 and 7 have been taught that there is a power structure, the President and police, which is not helping them; moreover, they have been taught that if the people come together, in the abstract collective case, they can make a difference to change their oppressive conditions. While the concepts of the power structure, with the President and police, and the “people” as a collective positive entity, are still very over-simplified (as should be expected with the age of the children), it is clear that the OCS youth were gradually learning to understand these concepts in their world through their collective observation of things occurring around them in their world, “The stores need to put the / prices down” (*Black Panther*, 1974b).

As can be seen with the direction of the above poem in the language arts curriculum, “political education” was intricately linked to the language arts curriculum. As far as can be seen with the materials available, it appears that “Political Education” was always an element of the language arts and social sciences curriculums, but for different periods appeared as its own class (Newton, n.d.a; Newton, n.d.b). It appears that in the 1973-1974 school year, which we can see from an article published in the May 4th, 1974 issue of the *Black Panther*, that “Political

Education” was taught in independent classes offered simultaneously to both learning groups 6 and 7 (*Black Panther*, 1974a). The nature of these “Political Education” classes is explained in the article:

Together these two groups make investigations of historical and contemporary human events. The students are presented facts and an analytical framework, a method of thinking. They then draw their own conclusions. Their ideas and feelings about phenomena in their environment are manifest in their writings to political prisoners and their practices of following political trials and petitioning against absurdities, such as the local murder of Tyrone Guyton. (*Black Panther*, 1974a).

While similar political education classes were offered earlier in the Liberation Schools and Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Programs, the “Political Education” classes offered to learning groups 6 and 7 in the 1973-1974 school year can be seen to have been following the OCS pedagogy of allowing children to reach conclusions for themselves. If the *Black Panther* article is reflective of the reality of what was occurring in the “Political Education” classes, then it can be seen that students were being taught to analyze events occurring around them and then to take action depending upon their own conclusions. It appears that once students came to understand the injustice occurring through their analysis of events happening around them, particularly “political trials,” students were encouraged to express how they felt through writing letters to political prisoners and were encouraged to stand against injustice through petitioning and other action. The OCS saw this “Political Education” as particularly important in helping OCS youth to develop important humanizing values to combat social and cultural reproduction affecting their own lives, “Political education classes also enable the youth to internalize certain values: criticism and self-criticism, self-discipline, self-reliance, responsibility and cooperation. The students utilize these principles as they engage in their daily work and interpersonal relationships” (*Black Panther*, 1974a). For the OCS, teaching basic skills was only as important

as how prepared their youth were to use these basic skills to take action against self-perceived injustice occurring in the world around them.

Closely aligned with the language arts and political education curricula at the OCS was the social science curriculum. Social science is defined in the 1978 OCS *Instructor Handbook*,

Social Science as defined here is the systematic study of the events, institutions and functioning of human society. It encompasses the study of the people in the societies and ethnic groupings which make up the world, the land they inhabit, the major political systems they employ to exchange goods and accumulate wealth and resources. (Newton, n.d.b)

Thoroughly adhering to the fifth point of the Black Panther Party's 10-point program, the social science curriculum predominantly made its purpose to give OCS students the opportunity to come to a better understanding of themselves through an open and complete dialogue about the world around them (Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation, 2008, p.75). The succinct purpose of the social science curriculum is stated in the 1978 OCS *Instructor Handbook*, "If one sufficiently excites the minds of our children about the world in which we live, they may themselves later take up further study, in relationship to other people and places" (Newton, n.d.b). For the OCS, the most important feature of the instruction of the social science curriculum was to make sure that there was a conversation which did not put one belief, idea, or people above another as investigations regarding humanity were made:

It is our view that the study of Social Science will provide the link that gives our students and an understanding of the social environment. We do not and will not (sic) pre-arrangement is "best": when studying beliefs and influences, we will discuss Buddhism, Christianity, the Moslem Faith and many others. When studying economic arrangements (sic), we will study feudalism, socialism/communism and others. We will study the history of the chattel slavery of blacks as well as the slave-like exploitation of Spanish speaking peoples and Asians in the U.S.; the migration of Native Americans. We will discuss Harriet Tubman and Julius Caesar; Ethiopia and the British Empire; China before and after 1949 and France before and after 1789 . . . (Newton, n.d.b)

Providing students with knowledge of “true history” meant not privileging any people, or their history or culture, over another (Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation, 2008, p.75). Thus, instead of teaching only what has traditionally not been offered in public schools, the OCS chose to teach “Ethiopia and the British Empire” (Newton, n.d.a.). The OCS sought to offer as complete a historical narrative as possible, such that the children could come to their own realizations with the respective evidence and facts presented before them. Moreover, in order to provide the most complete narrative, the OCS chose not to water down what happened during slavery or what actually occurred during interactions with the Native Americans. As Huggins (personal communication, April, 18, 2012) illuminates, “. . . when we taught about the Native American Holocaust or American Chattel Slavery, we told the children the truth. I don’t know any school, anywhere today, that does that because people are frightened of scarring children.” Huggins (personal communication, April 18, 2012) further explains, “. . . we raise children who don’t have the truth, and then they refute it when they get older because they have never heard it before.” For Huggins (personal communication, April, 18, 2012) and the OCS, it was more important to profess what actually happened than to allow children to come to skewed opinions due to watered down history; skewed opinions which the OCS believed could affect how children saw and treated others in the future.

By 1976 the OCS was offering Spanish language to their students. Contrary to traditional schools teaching Spanish, the OCS took a unique and humanizing stance regarding why they taught Spanish to their students:

People are formed by and from their language. Language is a part of each human being: the language is altered according to experiences, feelings, environment (sic). People frequently react to an alien language by purposefully distorting it. To voluntarily study another people’s language is to show respect for cultural differences. It is a desire to communicate, an unselfish act, an act of friendship. (Newton, n.d.a)

Countering the cultural reproduction of the dominant American narrative rejecting the importance of learning more than English, specifically Spanish, the OCS taught children that learning the primary language of another people was an important move towards understanding and humanizing another people and their culture. This could also be seen as a move by the OCS towards eliminating the linguistic bias facilitating the social reproduction of poverty and discrimination against non-English speaking people, particularly Spanish speaking peoples in the United States. In line with this humanizing purpose, the OCS unconventionally emphasized the ability to speak and understand spoken Spanish over reading and writing, “The primary goal is to have the children converse in Spanish with the instructor and amongst themselves. The next goal is to read and write Spanish” (Newton, n.d.a).

Mathematics and science were no exception to the Oakland Community School’s educational purposes. The primary components of the children’s mathematics curriculum focused on, but was not limited to: measurement, problem-solving, number theory, geometry, logical thinking, and addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division with whole numbers, fractions, decimals, and percents (Newton, n.d.a). The primary components of the science curriculum included understanding the human body, physical science, life science, the scientific method, Earth science, astronomy, meteorology, climatology, chemistry, biology, biochemistry, and physics (Newton, n.d.a). Similar to the language arts curriculum there was an emphasis on aligning the children’s personal and direct experience with the world to their mathematics and science education, “They learned mathematics by going to the store and getting change,” and “. . . if we want to know what makes trees grow, then we won’t go to a book about trees or have a science demonstration and just talk about trees. We might have the children go outside to see a tree or trees of various sizes or trees in various stages of development. We would see what

makes them grow . . .” (Perlstein, 2002, p.89). Just as every other discipline at the OCS was linked to social justice, mathematics was no different:

The youth also understand that in mathematics, "method" is very important. "Quickie" solutions without detailed methods are not encouraged. Their mathematic problems are somewhat analogous to their struggle for survival: It is known that more and better things will allow us a better quality of life; some answers are quite apparent, yet it is the long process that culminates in humankind's liberation. These problem-solving methods also show how mathematics and political education are integrated. (*Black Panther*, 1974a)

The OCS closely linked their mathematics study, particularly the study of mathematical problem solving, as one more tool that students could learn to work toward achieving “humankind’s liberation” (*Black Panther*, 1974a).

Just as every other subject area, physical education was taken seriously as a means to develop students personally and socially as responsible human beings. The OCS often employed “games, sports, and physical conditioning” in order to develop, “. . . the concepts of team unity and cooperation along with discipline . . .” (Newton, n.d.a). One primary activity taken very seriously in cultivating “the truth that ‘the mind and the body are one’” was martial arts. Teaching martial arts was also another opportunity that the OCS took to teach the “internal discipline” it saw as one means to confronting the social and cultural reproduction of inequality affecting Black and poor youth (*Black Panther*, 1975).

While arts were actively integrated into other subject areas, both performing arts and visual arts were independently taught to OCS students as their own respectable subject areas. The OCS taught drama, dance, and music as part of their performing arts curriculum and explained their purpose for instruction, “Drama, Dance and Music are representative of humanity’s constant search for that highest form of expression; that which will give us all a better understanding of ourselves and our purpose for living” (Newton, n.d.a). As professed in the 1978 OCS *Instructor Handbook*, performing arts was not important just for performing arts’

sake, but important because the OCS believed performing arts provided a significant means by which children could come to a better understanding of themselves and others. No more so than did the OCS believe this to be true than with music:

Historically music has played the role of “preserver”. (sic) Many historical events of importance have been preserved through music that often told a story or gave out information in the form of a song. Throughout the ages music has played an important role in the area of communication, often being used to send messages which crossed over cultural barriers and created cross-cultural relationships. Cultures throughout the world have used music to transmit their knowledge from one generation to the next. (Newton, n.d.b)

The purpose of teaching visual arts closely aligned with the purpose of performing arts as the OCS taught drawing, painting, sculpturing, handicrafts, and graphic arts (Newton, n.d.a). In terms of developing the children as individuals, the OCS believed, “Free and skillful use of materials facilitates creative expression and communication which in turn promotes confidence and awareness in art as in all areas of study” (Newton, n.d.a). While traditionally the arts have been undervalued in public schools, the OCS saw the arts as a powerful means to empower and educate children about the wider world in an interesting and engaging manner.

School Environment

The school environment of the OCS was not overlooked as the OCS pursued the development of a model educational institution (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009, p.175). Cleanliness was not taken lightly at the OCS as all students, as well as the adult teachers and staff members, were expected and taught to care for the school building as if it were their own (Huggins, 2010). A former staff member reflects upon the success that they had, “The school was spotless. Care of the classroom environment was expected of each teacher and student . . . The school building was a beautiful and safe place in the community” (Huggins, 2010). The

safety and well-being of the children was also carefully considered with the location of the OCS in a “. . . community long neglected by local and national politicians” (Huggins, 2010, p.65). A father of former OCS students describes his feelings regarding the environment offered at the OCS, “The protected, but not sheltered, environment of OCS gave my children a chance at success, not just moneymaking” (Huggins, 2010, p.66). Huggins (2010) relates how important it was to the OCS to maintain a school which was a “welcoming environment” for both students and their parents. However, the OCS was careful not to create a space for students and parents which compromised the OCS goal of strengthening the bond of students to the community. Through her own interviews with former parents Huggins (2010) was able to affirm the success of the OCS in this mission as, “Mo and other parent respondents indicate[d] that the school taught their children to be engaged in the world, to understand, not fear it” (p.67).

Community Support and Involvement

Active engagement and work with the community was central to the educational purpose of the OCS as it sought to cultivate “global” and socially aware students with an eye for acting upon injustice. Not only did teachers and staff members, many active Black Panther Party members themselves, model how to address inequality and injustice in the community for their students through their own work, but teachers frequently took their students to observe and participate. The OCS also made it a point to invite human rights heroes and heroines to visit the children (Huggins, 2010, p.93). Confronting the reproduction of social and cultural inequality was a mission which was not only embodied in the school environment, pedagogy, and curriculum at the OCS itself, but an undertaking which was taken to the world; thus the motto

“the world is a child’s classroom” became more than a metaphor, but a literal reality for students at the OCS (Jones and Gayles, 2008).

The OCS was largely able to accomplish this goal due to the BPP’s purposeful use of the school as also the space for the Oakland Community Learning Center (OCLC). As Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest (2009) explain, “Such proximity allowed OCS students to reinforce their connections to the community by participating in the programs after school. It was also a way for the BPP women to infuse their revolutionary activism into the academic education” (p.179). The OCLC being housed at the school enabled the OCS the opportunity and capability of being able to incorporate its community-based ideology in a way which would have certainly been more difficult if the OCLC was not housed at the OCS. The OCLC was a BPP community center which sponsored, among other programs, “. . . [an] adult education program, a teen program, a free film series, self-defense classes, community legal aid, and a community forum for political discussion and action” (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009, p.179). One of the most successful engagements of OCS youth came with the establishment of the Seniors Against a Fearful Environment (S.A.F.E) program at the OCLC in 1972. OCS youth assisted community elders with “. . . needed transportation, advocacy, and protection as they traveled to and from banks, medical appointments, and shopping areas” (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009, p.179). A number of OCS youth came to closely identify with the program as they were being raised by grandparents and elders themselves (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009). In her Master’s Thesis Huggins (2010) recalls, amongst other “donation[s] of time and resources to the communities nearest the school,” one particular “Radiothon fundraiser” which was hosted at the OCS through a local radio station; all the proceeds from the fundraiser went to Sickle Cell Anemia research (p.94). A parent interviewed by Huggins (2010) remembers the event, “I realized then that my

children will not have the kind of half-life I had as a child. There is hope, I thought. This school gives children hope for the future” (p.95). Perhaps one of the most powerful legacies of the OCS, as it sought to confront the reproduction of social and cultural inequality, can be seen with how the OCS was able to restore agency and “hope for the future” in parents and students.

Not only did the Oakland Community School seek to provide for and link itself to the surrounding community through the service offered by its teachers, parents, staff, and students, but the community also welcomed the school; prominent human rights activists would choose to volunteer and would inspire parents, teachers, staff, and children. A broader linkage of the OCS to the wider world can be seen through the notable guests who chose to volunteer their time with children at the school. During the duration of the time the OCS was operating, the OCS was visited by such prominent figures as Maya Angelou, Cesar Chavez, James Baldwin, Rosa Parks, and Richard Pryor. One former OCS student interviewed by Huggins (2010) recalls that after Cesar Chavez visited the OCS that they decided not to eat grapes to act in solidarity with Chavez and the farm workers (p.94). As Huggins (2010), and other former faculty interviewed by Huggins recall, seeing influential human rights activists inspired the children to want to fight against the reproduction of social and cultural inequality themselves. Huggins (2010) recounts of Rosa Park’s visit to the OCS, “Rosa’s visit inspired the children, the faculty, staff and parents. After her visit the older children discussed ways in which they too could serve the people of the world. They were inspired and motivated to nurture that courage she modeled, in themselves” (p.94). Support from the broader community also came from everyday people, as a former teacher interviewed by Huggins (2010) recalls a time when a white female special education teacher from the Oakland Unified School District walked into the school one day, unannounced, to freely offer her knowledge on how to better educate children with dyslexia; as a result five

students “reading and language comprehension” changed (p.96). This former OCS teacher further elaborates, “This woman didn’t just come and talk, she also gave us materials. There were all these unsung heroes and heroines who walked in the door and said, you know I could help with this; I have books . . . I heard about the school and I want to do something” (p.96). The OCS sought to nurture a relationship between the OCS and community which could demonstrate the liberating power of education allied with a social justice agenda.

CHAPTER FIVE: HOW SUCCESSFUL WAS THE OAKLAND COMMUNITY SCHOOL?

While it is difficult to measure how successful an institution can be in addressing the reproduction of social and cultural inequality, especially in the case of the OCS due to direct efforts by opposing forces at the time and since to disrupt collection of data and distort positive interpretations of the school's legacy, there are ways to evaluate the school's success.

At the most basic level, the OCS can be seen to have combatted the social and cultural reproduction confronting students who passed through its doors to the degree that for the most part OCS students did not end up following many of the dire academic statistics associated with Black and poor children of the time. While Huggins is sure to point out that the OCS at the time did not use testing data for any other purpose than to qualify for state funding and prepare students for testing at future public schools that they would attend, available OCS student "California Test of Basic Skills" (CTBS) test results can be evaluated and compared to the OUSD for November of 1977 (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009, p.176-177). While there is the limitation acknowledged by Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest (2009) that OCS children were not organized by age in traditional grades, but instead by "ability levels," OCS test results can be seen to approximately indicate that students were out-performing their Oakland public school peers (p.176). Just looking at "level 2" student test results, with thirteen students ranging in age from 8.8 to 11.5 years of age, which would place these students in the fifth and sixth grades in public school, it can be seen that level 2 students on average scored twenty-eight percentage points higher in math and thirty-two point nine percentage points higher in reading than their Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) peers (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009, p.176-177). However, as Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest (2009) point out must be taken into consideration,

there were still OCS students who would excel over their peers, and there were still those OCS students that were struggling; the same as OUSD schools. This is reflective in the range of these thirteen students CTBS testing scores from “5th to 82nd percentile in total reading and from the 8th to 93rd percentile in total math” (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009, p.177). A similar degree of numerical testing success over their OUSD peers was also reflected in other levels at the OCS, as in “level A”; in November of 1977 the OCS had sixteen students in level A, the equivalent to pre-school, ranging in age from 4.8 to 5.5 years of age (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009, p.176). Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest (2009) are sure to note that there was one exception to this age range in level A with one eight-year-old student (p.176). Evaluating this data Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest (2009) found that, “This group of sixteen students tested on average at the 70th percentile in reading and the 71st percentile for math,” and similar to the wide range of level 2, “Also, in level A, a five-year-old student tested in the 95th prereading percentile, and one scored in both the 33rd prereading percentile and the 18th total math percentile” (p.176).

The success of the OCS in educating its students would not go unnoticed as the OCS went on to garner significant support, praise, and recognitions from beyond the immediately affected staff, teachers, students, parents, and community. At the Western regional meeting of Black Engineers and Scientists an OCS exhibit would win distinction for its display (Jones and Gayles, 2008, p.111). Under the direction of “jazz master Charles Moffett,” the Intercommunal Youth Band would win first place in the North American Zone Far West Region competition (Jones and Gayles, 2008, p.111). Moreover, as Williamson (2005) elaborates, “The school drew recognition from Black community members, lawmakers, and an assemblyman . . .” and as Jones and Gayles (2008) illuminate, “The Alameda County Board of Supervisors lauded the fully accredited Oakland Community School as a model educational institution” (p.146; p.100).

Praise for the OCS would reach its pinnacle with an official commendation for its efforts by Governor Edmund “Jerry” Brown and the California state legislature in 1977:

On August 18, 1977, 10 years after the BPP’s infamous protest of the Mulford Act on the floor of the General Assembly in Sacramento on May 2, 1967, party members were formally invited to a capitol steps ceremony to receive a commendation for its school. State legislators passed a resolution applauding the OCS for its exemplary service to children in Oakland: “Resolved, that the highest commendations be extended to the Oakland Community School for its outstanding record of dedicated and highly effective service in educating children of the community of East Oakland. (Jones and Gayles, 2008, p.111; Williamson, 2005, p.146).

Although official praise for the OCS does much to illustrate how effective the school was in challenging the maintenance of particularly Black and poor youth in their social positions, much more can be said about how the OCS addressed the reproduction of social and cultural inequality based upon exploring the narratives of former OCS students themselves.

Although only a starting point due to the small sample, a preliminary longitudinal evaluation, performed by Huggins (2010) for her Master’s Thesis, indicates that former OCS students have been quite successful in defying the social and cultural reproduction which would have predicted most of these students’ failure. For her Master’s Thesis, Huggins (2010) located and interviewed thirteen former OCS students utilizing a “convenience sample to recruit participants” through “email and postal letters” (p.53). Huggins (2010) explains her sampling of students:

Thirteen former OCS students were interviewed between late 2007 and December 2009. They ranged in age from 4-11 years at the time of their attendance at OCS. They now span the range of 35-45 years old. The students interviewed reflect the diversity of students who attended OCS in the 1960’s and 70’s. For instance, 95% of the thirteen students are African-American; 2% Latina/Latino; 1% European-American; 2% mixed race (Euro-African, Asian-African, and Latino-European). Four students are male and nine are female. These student participants attended the OCS between the years 1973 and 1981 (OCS Staff meeting notes, Fall 1979). The students in this study were raised by parents and guardians in working class and poor families. (p.53)

While it could be argued that Huggins' (2010) use of convenience sampling could have easily been manipulated to skew the data in a positive direction, there is no reason or indication that such took place. Moreover, although it is without a doubt that a larger sample would add more credibility to the results, there is much value in looking at this small sample which may still representatively defy public school longitudinal data for students of similar background. Further, given the success of students in this small sample, it will be highly recommended that additional study of a larger number of former OCS students be pursued; but this will be considered in the following chapter. Of the thirteen former OCS students located and interviewed by Huggins (2010), at the time of interview all had earned their high school diploma, two had gone on to complete their associate degree, ten had graduated with an undergraduate degree, four had completed their master's degree, and one of the students had attained their doctorate (p.60). Remarkable about this small sample is how many of the former OCS students went into professions seeking to address social and cultural inequality. Of the thirteen former students, nine of the students at the time of interview were engaged in seeking to address social and cultural reproduction: special education teacher, middle school teacher, high school teacher, elementary school teacher and doctoral student, businesswoman and mentor for youth, marketing manager and school volunteer, personal banker and volunteer supporting the arts, museum curator, and university professor and youth mentor (Huggins, 2010). Two of the former OCS students from above also "passionately expressed interest planning and opening schools that foster the principle of individual and collective worth" (Huggins, 2010).

Of course one of the most telling legacies of the OCS can be seen by looking at the immediate experiences of students following their graduation from the OCS. While confident in the sense of purpose and academic preparation they instilled in their students, Huggins recalls

worrying, “. . . whether the four- to eight-year-olds who had not been exposed to public school would be ready to face future challenges” (Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, 2009, p.181). Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest (2009) recount the experience of one former OCS student who attended the OCS “during the public school equivalent of grades four through six”:

After attending OCS she enrolled in both Albany Middle and High Schools, small Bay Area schools in a school district known for lower class size and attentive staff. Her OCS education had taught her how critical her voice was in effecting change. Therefore, she questioned her history teacher about using an outdated text with two simplistic chapters on African Americans and Native Americans. When confronted by the principal, Watkins chose suspension instead of compromise. Ultimately, the teacher apologized and asked Watkins to coordinate the school’s first Black History celebration, during which she used poetry, songs, and stories learned at the OCS. Erica had taken revolutionary action for her own and her peers’ education. (p.181)

While not attending the OCS for the duration of her entire primary school education, Watkins still in her time at the OCS gained the awareness and confidence to confront her history teacher who presented her and her peers with an inappropriate and incomplete history of African Americans and Native Americans. Instead of staying silent, Watkins took initiative and was able to change the conditions of her education. While not dramatically challenging or changing her school as an educational institution, her actions highlight the sense of justice and agency which the OCS was able to instill in its students. It should also be noted that Watkins was also prepared, with her knowledge and training, to successfully organize a Black History celebration at her school. Although the research has currently not been done to know how common this type of action was among former OCS students, this brief anecdote is telling of the education the OCS provided its students. Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest (2009) provide an additional informative anecdote from another former OCS student who transferred to an OUSD public school in the equivalent of fifth grade:

Although he learned calculus and algebra at OCS, in OUSD he was in classes with students learning addition and subtraction and with students “who could barely spell.”

One of the main things Killoran learned to do in public school was use profanity and fight. Killoran, of bicultural heritage, African American and Irish, recalled that at OCS he was not singled out because of his ethnic background. In contrast, this was the basis of some of his fights in public school. Nevertheless, Killoran always remembers the deeper lessons from OCS that taught him to see himself as part of a broader community, caring for others, what he calls “communal thinking.” He further explains: “I don’t just take care of me, I take care of my community; anybody who happens to be around me.” (p.181)

If Killoran’s experience can be generalized, which is of course not possible to know without further research exploring the experience of former OCS students, then this brief anecdote shows how the OCS was on the most basic academic level able to provide its students a lasting academic jumpstart. Beyond academics, Killoran’s positive racial experience at the OCS appears to have been in great contrast to his hostile experiences in the surrounding public schools he attended. Moreover, Killoran seems to have successfully absorbed the OCS communal worldview as he moved forward in his education and life; a powerful testament to how influential the OCS was in instilling the importance of community in its students.

CHAPTER SIX: WHAT WE CAN LEARN

*“Educate to Liberate”: Applicable Lessons for Contemporary Educators Seeking to Address the
Reproduction of Social and Cultural Inequality*

In 1848 Horace Mann released his annual report to the Massachusetts School Board where he professed the following, “Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men--the balance-wheel of the social machinery” (Cremin, 1957). While carrying the gender bias inherent in many written texts of the time referring only to “men” rather than all humankind, in this report Horace Mann imagined an education which did more than prepare youth for their position within the “social machinery,” but imagined an education which would become the “great equalizer”; functioning “to obliterate factitious distinctions in society” (Cremin, 1957). Essentially, Horace Mann envisioned education as the primary means to address the reproduction of social and cultural inequality in American society (Cremin, 1957). Of course, as Horace Mann was expressing this opinion regarding education, America had already institutionalized and was in the midst of intensifying one of the most heinous and brutal social institutions created to de-humanize and subjugate a people in the history of Western society with its violent and horrific enslavement of African-descended peoples. More than a century has passed since Horace Mann articulated his vision regarding the purpose of education, and although there have been notable steps forward, this vision has yet to come to fruition.

When the Black Panther Party arrived at the tail end of the civil rights movement, the BPP came to the realization that any authentic effort to educate youth to defy social and cultural reproduction was going to require a re-definition of the purpose and context of education. The

BPP saw the then system of education as one more means by which the reproduction of social and cultural inequality was being maintained. In an effort to begin providing particularly Black and poor youth the means to defy their positioning in American society, the BPP instituted social programs, many of an educational nature, as well as its own schools, to combat this maintenance of social and cultural inequality. The most bold and successful of these efforts, which I investigated and evaluated above, was the Oakland Community School. After much analysis, I have provided what I have determined to be the most important lessons which can be taken from particularly the Oakland Community School.

The Importance of Addressing Health and Wellness for Children Before, During and After School

For the Oakland Community School offering a quality and liberating pedagogy and education was useless if their students were not able to concentrate and learn due to bad health and wellness. When an OCS student began losing her toenails and did not know why, the OCS did not take the condition lightly; after they were not able to ascertain why the student was suffering from the condition utilizing their resources, they immediately took her to a nearby hospital. In the process the OCS not only discovered and addressed the underlying malnutrition causing the malady for this child, but they took this condition as a lesson for all students as they began offering vitamin supplements to all the children at the school. Moreover, the OCS did not stop at addressing malnutrition during the time that they had the children during the day, but the OCS worked with the parent of the student to see that her diet was healthier at home. Following in the footsteps of the OCS, schools could greatly benefit from not only putting Band-Aids on scraped knees, but by offering authentic free health care for all students and taking any and all

ailments affecting children seriously. Schools could profit from working with parents to make sure that health and wellness is not only addressed during school hours, but before and after hours when children are not at school. Taking this step will require following in the footsteps of the OCS and valuing the construction of healthy non-judgmental, non-paternalistic relationships with parents and guardians.

While many schools today offer meals during the day, it is still uncommon that these meals are made with the same love as the OCS which provided its students a delicious and nutritious breakfast, lunch, and dinner in a time where such was nearly unheard of. I can testify to my own experience of having worked at a contemporary charter school in Oakland which offered its children three meals. However, these meals were often the size of snacks, and although healthy, were almost always pre-packaged and unappetizing to such a degree that many of the children either avoided eating or chose the unhealthy cheap alternative most available.

Structure with Flexibility: Creativity in Structure and Learning Environment

Instead of accepting the cultural norms of traditional schools, the OCS started without any preconceived notions of how a school should be structured or aesthetically appear. As a result the OCS created a school which divided students by “levels of instruction” instead of by traditional grades, and used evaluations instead of an A – F grading system. Moreover, while the OCS believed that children needed structure, they did not structure impose upon what they referred to as the children’s “rhythm of learning” (Newton, n.d.a). The OCS chose to develop a learning environment which would best suit the needs of their children over accepting dominant norms which may or may not work for all children. Contemporary educators can learn from the OCS not by adopting the same exact structure of the OCS, but by learning to be flexible and

creative in seeking to address the needs of their students. The OCS did not begin with all the services, as well as classes, it would eventually offer its students, but rather the OCS was constantly seeking to improve the education and well-being of all its children. The OCS adopted a “by any means necessary” ethos and approach which continued until the school’s unfortunate closure (Huggins, personal communication, April 18, 2012).

Importance of Creating a Warm Welcoming Environment for Parents and Students

While a seemingly minor and un-prioritized feature of particularly schools serving Black and poor youth, the OCS took very seriously both the cleanliness of its facilities and whether the school was a warm welcoming environment for their parents and students. Leaving an open-door to parents encouraged their participation and comfort in developing a close relationship with the OCS. OCS students took pride in their school, which contributed to their greater engagement with all aspects of their experience with the OCS. Contemporary educators could greatly profit from realizing the importance of creating a school environment that is clean, attractive, and actively offering a positive experience to parents and students. Huggins’ (personal communication, April 18, 2012) research testifies to how important this small feature was to the success of the OCS.

Interrupting and Investigating: Addressing the Daily Emergence of Social and Cultural

Inequality

Traditional schools could greatly benefit from addressing daily emergences of social inequality in the manner modeled by the Oakland Community School. In traditional schools, when a serious issue arises concerning race, class, gender, or another form of social inequality, it

is most often addressed by some sort of one-time workshop or training alongside a form of punishment; if the action is deemed worthy of punishment. When an all-girls upstate New York basketball team was caught using the “n-word” in a pre-game chant, following the team’s only African-American player bringing it to the forefront, the teammates of the African American player were all suspended for two days and forced to take “cultural sensitivity training” (Rivas, 2011). At the time of the release of the news article above, only two of the teammates had apologized to their African American teammate.

For the Oakland Community School, confronting the reproduction of social and cultural inequality, whether manifested through racism, male chauvinism, or other forms of oppression or discrimination, was important to address in all spaces and at all times; there was no ignorant action or remark too small. Finger-pointing and blaming was shunned and honest conversations were initiated as the OCS sought to interrupt every emergence of social inequality reaching the ears of OCS teachers or staff members. It is important to note that students were not punished by the OCS, but rather immediately engaged in dialogue with an OCS teacher or staff member; this dialogue incorporated peers, staff, teachers, and even the school if deemed necessary to address the issue at hand. Such issues were never treated as solved, as “maintenance” was seen as necessary to ensure children and adults alike continued to learn from their mistakes.

OCS teachers and staff members had weekly meetings to engage in dialogue about social and cultural inequality and how to address the issues they saw emerging not only among students, but themselves. Whenever an issue arose which a teacher or staff member felt that they were unable to address, or there was a heavy question which surfaced that the teacher or staff member did not think they could appropriately answer, they did not fake an answer, but modeled the method of investigation that they taught their students. Students were constantly encouraged

to challenge their opinions and ideas, to learn about others, in order that they could continue to develop into responsible and empathetic human beings. As a result, former students of the OCS have professed not only how safe that they felt at the OCS relative to the public schools they would later attend, as Killoran (pseudonym) who was interviewed by Huggins (2010), but expressed how this daily social justice framework helped them to grow as they matured into adults in a racialized, gendered, classed, and de-humanizing world. In particular one former OCS student recalled during interview with Huggins (2010):

We knew for a fact that girls were as strong and as smart as boys; that people who are poor are not to blame for their own poverty; European classical music and dance is different, but not better than, African and Asian classical music and dance. Gay people are not weird or “sinful.” All white people are not responsible for the conditions of people of color. Respect for everyone was demanded of us (p.83).

Pedagogy: “How to Think as Opposed to What to Think”

While not an unknown educational pedagogy, teaching children the critical thinking of “how to think” instead of “what to think” continues to be a pedagogy that is unpopular in traditional schools; this was not the case at the OCS. At the OCS teaching particularly Black and poor youth “how to think” was seen as paramount in preparing students to move into the world, defying patterns of social and cultural reproduction, as responsible human beings with an eye for justice. The BPP’s OCS realized that children would come to understand complex realities regarding the world when they were given the opportunity to see a variety of points of view and analyze all the available evidence at hand. In order to humanize the Vietnamese in a time when rhetoric was one-sided, the OCS provided their students pen pals in Vietnam, which according to Huggins (2010), former students recalled on their own during interview (p.81). Schools today could learn from the OCS how valuable utilizing a similar “how to think” pedagogy can be in

preparing all children to constantly question conclusive stereotypical notions regarding others perpetuating the social and cultural reproduction of inequality.

An Authentic Social Justice Oriented Curriculum

While there are schools which describe themselves as social justice oriented institutions, rarely do they seek to incorporate addressing injustice in every subject offered. At the OCS it did not matter if the class was Performing Arts or Language Arts, the OCS found a way to make sure that children were learning and linking every aspect of their education to their world and linking how what they learned could be applied to confronting social and cultural inequality. Learning music was taken as an opportunity to understand cultural appropriation and how to positively and successfully collaborate with others without exploiting or abusing them in the process. Language Arts was learned through the writing of poetry and prose exploring unjust social conditions, as well as through the writing of letters to political prisoners. The OCS curriculum of course sought to embed all the basic skills and learning that the OCS thought would be necessary to cultivate particularly their Black and poor youth into skilled, critical thinking individuals. Individuals capable of not only living in the world and recognizing and acting against injustice, but prepared to defy the statistics and expectations that the world had set for them as Black and poor youth.

Importance of Cultivating Self-Discipline and Dialogue over Punishment

Much of the creation of an environment empowering youth to challenge social and cultural reproduction at the OCS was about teaching youth inner-discipline and about valuing a constant dialogue over any punishment which might stigmatize or frustrate a child. Instead of

punishing children for disrupting the learning, self-esteem, or physical and mental well-being of another or themselves, the OCS utilized Hatha Yoga, meditation, martial arts, and dialogue to address what they saw as the root of undisciplined and hurtful actions or words – an uninteresting learning environment, hurtful actions or words of another, and/or a lack of self-discipline. While the OCS method of correction will definitely require further research to understand its more intricate and detailed workings before it can be broadly applied, such an approach of correction utilized by the OCS should be investigated, and is worthy of investigation, for the purpose of applying to contemporary schools.

Teaching Social Justice through Action Early and Earnestly

While there are schools and educational institutions professing a curriculum or worldview espousing social justice, it is not common that social justice is earnestly taught as early as primary school, and even less common that this is taught through the actual engagement of the children. At the OCS, pedagogy and curriculum bringing social justice to the forefront was not enough, as the OCS believed that children needed to participate themselves, as well as see the adults surrounding them actively modeling how to react to social and cultural inequality. Although schools may incorporate and mandate community service, this service is frequently framed as philanthropy, teaching children that community service is paternalistic, condescending, and sometimes worse – a form of punishment - rather than an act of solidarity and authentic compassion. The OCS also benefited from the BPP's mutual placement of the Oakland Community Learning Center (OCLC). The OCLC closely worked with the community, on the same grounds as the school, to offer services to those in need. As the OCLC was on the same grounds as the OCS, this mutual location enabled students, parents, teachers, and staff of

the OCS to participate in community development on a daily basis when such may not have been possible. Thus this mutual location was not taken as just an “opportunity,” as teachers and staff both actively engaged their students at the OCLC to participate in positive change, as well as actively worked at and with the OCLC themselves. Contemporary educators could learn much from looking at the close relationship the BPP developed between the OCS and OCLC.

Teachers, Staff, and Adults Modeling How to Address Social and Cultural Inequality

Closely aligned with their efforts to engage youth in confronting the reproduction of social and cultural inequality affecting particularly Black and poor communities, the OCS sought to employ and enlist prominent role models addressing social and cultural inequality. Not only did multiple teachers and staff members actively participate in survival programs and community empowerment, including former Director Ericka Huggins herself, but in its lifetime the OCS managed to bring some of the most notable and active leaders of the time confronting the social and cultural reproduction of inequality including: James Baldwin, Cesar Chavez, Rosa Parks, Maya Angelou, and Huey P. Newton himself. Contemporary schools could benefit from a similar active and constant incorporation of adults modeling and teaching how to address social and cultural inequality.

“No Duty was Beyond Any Person . . .”

Perhaps one of the most powerful means by which the OCS was able to successfully maintain an educational institution capable of addressing social and cultural reproduction at so many levels was through an ethos by which all adults, teachers and staff, were held accountable; at the OCS there was no activity too good or beneath another. Whenever a problem or concern

arose, every adult was held accountable to either address it or refer the problem to someone who had the “ability” to handle it. As Huggins (2010) professes in her Master’s Thesis, “No duty was beyond any person –whether they were male or female, administrator or staff, BPP or community teaching staff; party member or volunteer. Whoever had the skill or ability to do it did (sic)” (p.41). In interview Huggins (personal communication, April 18, 2012) professes how important this level of care, humility, and love was to the successful operation of the school.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

Limitations to Consider and Recommendations

A talk about what we can learn from the OCS and the educational and pedagogical efforts of the Black Panther Party is not complete without a thorough conversation about the limitations. Similar to all research exploring institutions, people, and events in the past, studying the efforts of the BPP and the OCS are restricted by how much time has passed and how well documented their actions and efforts were during the time period. Unfortunate for the BPP and the OCS, they were also combatting extensive efforts by the United States government to shutdown, infiltrate, and disrupt all aspects of their operations (Williamson, 2005, p.145; Jones, 1998). Specifically the BPP's earliest educational efforts, the Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Programs and Liberation Schools, faced the full brunt as, ". . . the United States government, in the form of intimidation, rumor, and violence, contributed to the closing of various schools" (Williamson, 2005, p.145). Williamson (2005) elaborates how both severe and successful many of these efforts by the US government were at repressing specifically the BPP's Liberation Schools, "Various agents sought to discredit the Panthers (and intimidate financial contributors) in an effort to undermine support and attendance in the schools. As a result, the Liberation School in Omaha lasted one week; in San Francisco, it lasted one day; and in Richmond, California, the school closed after an hour and a half" (p.145). The development of what would become the Oakland Community School would take into account the response of the US government to particularly the Liberation Schools and the Free Breakfast for Schoolchildren Programs (Grady-Willis, 1998). In spite of the violent and repressive context of the time period, the OCS would learn from past experiences and only increase and intensify the liberatory pedagogy and

education, previously explored, found in all BPP educational programs which would become the celebrated trademark of the OCS. Also not extensively discussed here, this did not mean that the OCS did not experience the consequences of the ensuing challenges of deaths, imprisonments, and injuries of those adults associated with the BPP and OCS, which of course affected the successful operation and documentation of BPP and OCS efforts. Thus, one significant and unfortunate consequence of these repressive efforts is that most of the resources available exploring the education and pedagogy of the BPP and the OCS are only available from BPP sources. The Huey P. Newton Archives housed at Stanford University, as well as former articles released by the *Black Panther*, are some of the only sources available intricately and seriously looking at the OCS and the BPP's educational and pedagogical efforts. In exploring the OCS, much of the authoritative and comprehensive research has since only been accomplished by the former OCS Director Ericka Huggins herself. While academics across the country have shown increased interest in the education and pedagogy of the BPP in the past decade, particularly the OCS, much of their work is surface-level and only utilizing the available archival and paper resources; former BPP members, students, teachers, and staff are rarely consulted in any depth. In interview Ericka Huggins (personal communication, April, 18, 2012) expressed much disappointment at the fact of how available she has made herself, but how little she has been contacted, along with other former students, teachers, and staff, in studies of the OCS and BPP. While it could be, and should be, looked at as a serious weakness that this master's thesis relies so heavily on interviews and resources created by Ericka Huggins, this is not a negative reflection on the work of Ericka Huggins; this is an unfortunate consequence of continued sensationalism and ignorance maintaining an incomplete picture of the BPP and the OCS, such which needs to be seriously remedied as investigations continue.

A more reliable assessment of what should be taken from the OCS will require much more extensive research seeking to expand Ericka Huggins' own efforts to reach out to former students, teachers, staff, and parents. From my research, I think that this would not only be a worthy venture, but this research would be a highly valuable and propitious undertaking; this further and more expansive inquiry into the OCS is becoming more urgent as time passes, as more former teachers, students, staff, and community members pass away, carrying their experiences of the OCS with them.

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