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Teacher Resiliency Training Case Study

Charleston County, South Carolina



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*Greater Understanding of the Complexities of
Public Education in South Carolina*

Case Study

Introduction

The InterMediate Planning (IMP) journey toward greater understanding of the complexities of public education in South Carolina began with myself, Founder and Managing Director Ashley Krejci-Shaw, while studying for my master's degree in sustainable development. Field research conducted in 2013-2014 led me to identify hurdles laid across the learning tracks of hundreds of thousands of children in our state's public school system. I decided to formulate a research question to learn more about education in SC and, more so, to pinpoint causes for difficulties leading to alternative school options for African American students. The obvious problems I saw in SC's school system confounded me: excessive school removal, misbehavior, minimal academic gains, mass student frustration and, worse, widespread apathy among students and teachers about their future prospects in the educational system. I met dozens of young African American students during my field research who had been funneled into alternative programs and away from their home schools that, coincidentally, were all Title I. There were young people I met with stories that made it nearly impossible to discern whether they had failed in school, or if their school had failed them; in all cases, the stories were curious and, given their prevalence, made them all worth investigating.

So what is it? I asked at the time. This status quo of mass dissatisfaction, fatigue and lack of empowerment in the school system? In addition to academic journals, I navigated well-respected philanthropic publications

only to find disjointed explanations - all of which ended in an ism. I was a burgeoning qualitative researcher on fire for an etiological understanding of how young people I met felt completely lethargic about their educational prospects. Why? Because, despite

being a relatively well performing African American student from a two-parent, middle-class household who was on the verge of earning an advanced degree, their discontent often resonated with me. I soon realized that most African American students are connected through a common thread of discontent regardless of where we fall on the socioeconomic or performance spectrum. For some of us, challenging school experiences can draw our curiosities or frustrations and vibrate at our feet, threatening to throw off our balance. For others, challenging experiences can crack the earth underneath our feet causing a separation so wide that it consequently breaks our school connection - that being a belief that school is our golden ticket to a better future.

My initial conclusions as to why many of us make it, and many of us do not, were all irritatingly incomplete and fractured. My sustainable development training was in high gear at the time and fractured causalities like poverty, social injustice, and lack of parental involvement were all valid as singular variables but otherwise failed as a coherent, complete explanation. I wanted the answer. In time, my scholarly attempt gained traction to deliver cogent reasons that could be understood by the outside world (as in outside of the African American experience) as to why African American youth are at the center of public education's crisis. I completed my field research with a satisfactory bookend to the phenomenon I studied for a year and a half. However, I did so knowing that there was more to uncover and I continued on with a new professional commitment in South Carolina.

In 2015, I founded IMP with the intent of helping build a community of knowledgeable, skill-based sustainable-minded interventionists in South Carolina's leading organizations, many of which have vested interests in educational-focused philanthropy. In the company's first year, IMP was at the helm of providing consulting



strategies for fiscally endowed local nonprofits and, as my new business grew, so did my awareness that company success was bittersweet. Every new consulting experience opened IMP to learning more about the philanthropic landscape in the tri-county. Organizations and corporations alike in the educational space expressed a very general understanding of the problems and grievances of African American students and their families. Therefore, this case study provides a summary of IMP's research and subsequent understanding of the challenging relationship between Western scholarship and the African American experience.

By 2017, IMP's nonprofit consulting had accumulated invaluable experiences, partnerships and data that in many ways seemed like a continuation of my field research from 2014. I was certain that I now knew how IMP could be most effective in addressing the educational deficits in Charleston County. That certainty brought about a new vision for IMP's Sustainable Education Initiative, led by a training we initially titled *Teacher Resiliency Training (TRT)* - a training with the objective to narrow deficits in Title I teaching communities. The training would take well-intentioned, determined teachers seeking specialization and provide them pedagogical insights on how to overcome challenges they face in Title I school communities. As with all IMP interventions, our teacher training is based on sustainable development theory and practice, which is highly interdisciplinary. The interdisciplinary basis of IMP consulting allows us to make accurate determinations about problems that exist in a school that relate to school culture (e.g., management, leadership, team dynamics) as well as considering the consequences of overarching systemic problems. IMP determined that the most viable stakeholder group in Title I schools most primed for an intervention like ours was teachers. From this stance, TRT was created to accurately re-frame Title I challenges honestly and comprehensively for teaching professionals to increase the likelihood of them specializing in their craft, and in turn providing equal benefits for them and their students.

Our most valuable lesson in this work so far is that principals and teachers are two stakeholder groups who walk an arduous pedagogical terrain. They carry the weight of a torch that is widely believed bright enough to illuminate the pathways of all students in pursuit of their academic success. Yet, the brighter a light, the longer its shadow. We aim to enlighten readers to the nature of Title I problems and offer solutions available to any schools looking for meaningful change.

Proudly, we share our company's journey to underscore this important message: *Title I schools can vastly improve and demonstrate remarkable progress in student outlook, learning outcomes, and teacher effectiveness on a consistent basis.* Our company case study makes every effort to simplify the individual, institutional, and cultural complexities that continue to elude our current public school architects laboring for Title I school progress.

**Ashley KrejCí-Shaw, Managing Director
InterMediate Planning**

Defining Title 1

The South Carolina Department of Education describes Title I as: Part A of Public Law 107-110 is to enable schools to provide opportunities for children served to acquire the knowledge and skills contained in the challenging state content standards and to meet the challenging state performance standards developed for all children. However, "Title I" is commonly described as schools that serve a majority of children who are enrolled in a free and reduced lunch program.



Common Title I Destabilizers in Charleston County

Reviewed

Historical Educational Destabilizers

Student learning is subject to many various kinds of disturbances ranging from administrative changes, climate related natural disasters, and fiscal policy. Historically, desegregation is one example of a disruptive policy change having caused racial, pedagogical and logistical clashes most evident in the southern US. The United States Supreme Court decision that overturned Plessy v. Ferguson, which declared state sanctioned school segregation as “unconstitutional” was heralded a landmark victory for the African American Civil Rights Movement.

Unfortunately, desegregation was implemented poorly, having dire consequences for African American students as well as their teaching professionals. Desegregation led to immense inequity for African American learners who found themselves in white-managed schools enduring hostility toward their presence.

Desegregation spurred inequity in our public school system that has compounded to produce the numerous disparities felt by many Title I students today. When the Brown versus Board of Education decision mandated states to desegregate at all deliberate speed, the vague timeline provided reluctant white southern families the time to accumulate resources toward the creation of their own schools (e.g., separate “academies”) to circumnavigate forced integration. African American youth and teaching professionals paid the highest price as a result of desegregation. On one hand, African American students were subjected to abuses from white students and teachers. On the other hand, African

American educators and staff members were largely displaced because white schools were not obligated to hire them as a part of the federal mandate. Consequently, African American students lost scores of supportive role models who could teach them without

condition or bias. Today, the ratio of African American administrators and teachers to African American students remains disproportionate in Title I schools, most visibly in Charleston County.

Destabilizers Today

In recent years, IMP has identified common administrative decision-making in Charleston County at both district and school levels that has subjected school communities to volatility. These decisions antagonize historical, racial and political divides and surface in three ways. Volatility in Title I schools most commonly emerges in the form of high principal turnover, frequent program swapping, and hiring of unprepared educators.

First, frequent leadership transitions bring forth new principals with different philosophies, experiences, and managerial styles - all three of which can cause volatility. Teachers adapt more easily to new principals than students, as students can internalize departures of principals (and teachers) in far more personal ways. In Charleston County principal turnover can occur, in extreme cases, annually and consecutively over a number of academic school years. The departures can be abrupt, limiting the time a school community has to adjust to the news of an incoming leadership. This common occurrence also strains a future principal’s attempt to build trust with a school community, which becomes conditioned to frequent transitions and can view the incoming principal with indifference.

The second destabilizer is high program turnover, which also includes the frequent swapping or modifying of “frameworks” or “models” implemented by school administration. The swapping can be done without adequate teacher preparation or buy-in; both of which are paramount considering such change typically involves teachers and has direct effects on students. When this



happens, teachers are put in a position to “test out” a new approach or implement a new practice. Also, the frequency of program swapping, which involves local nonprofits and Title I after-school programs can lead to problems when students do not respond as expected or needed for adequate program implementation. In some cases, this occurs when a nonprofit neglects to gauge student interest beforehand. In other cases, organizations can also neglect (or may not be required) to establish rapport with prospective student participants leading up to their program delivery. There can be naive assumptions that a student population will embrace a particular program because, as one line of thinking apparently goes, affordability/availability could keep Title I students from participating outside of school.

The third destabilizer is the hiring (or retaining) of teachers in Title I schools who are largely unaware of how race, gender and class (RGC) can affect attempts to build meaningful relationships with their students. Over three years, IMP found that teacher/student conflict is associated with RGC and influences how each stakeholder group perceives one another, particularly during class time. That is why unchanged, unexamined teacher training in colleges today is detrimental for the future quality of Title I schools and ultimately, sets teachers up for failure upon their entry into socioeconomically diverse schools. When teachers sign on to teach in Title I schools, or are retained without an adequate training continuum, their chances of having a positive impact in their students personal and academic lives decreases. More so, teachers enter into another academic teaching cycle that is more likely to exhaust them - either increasing the chance of them

IMP addressed the question of how change happens, or can happen, in Title I schools in Charleston County by explaining an important change theory to teachers: all change is transformational. Or, said another way: all change is personal (first). Individual change advances change in our external environment, and the focus must be on unlearning. IMP asked: how is your own miseducation getting in the way of your student’s learning? Resources and strategies were provided to help teachers identify their own misunderstanding of what locks the wheels of change.

Training Design Misses the Mark

Title I principals in Charleston County do seek trainings that incorporate RGC concepts to improve teacher understanding of how these factors influence their classroom dynamics. Yet, many of these learning opportunities (aka professional development or PDs) are short-term, lightweight, and isolated. Most trainings address “racial equity,” “cultural competency,” and “social justice,” but their efficacy to develop teachers beyond mere awareness are unknown; documented learnings are not routinely published.

IMP found in prior evaluations for local nonprofits that teacher preparedness is more important than teacher experience: just because a teacher is retained by a Title I school and possibly over numerous academic years, it does not also mean that they have improved or grown in their capability to better serve their student population. IMP recently interviewed an experienced Title I teacher and asked her to reflect on the first part of her teaching career. When asked about how her inexperience affected her first year students, she expressed considerable regret. She stated that she still apologizes to her former students when she crosses their paths in the community. She is confident that her learning curve was not as lengthy as some other teachers - yet, she is adamant that her students were unfairly subjected to lack of preparation for them and their needs.





Inherent Inequality and Externalities

The first hurdle IMP addressed in its training design was how to help teachers better understand how practices developed in the country's early state building has complicated the livelihood, culture, and identity of non-white student learners over time. These practices or norms are referred to as externalities that influence whether quality student/teacher relationships develop in the classroom when race and economic binaries are apparent to both groups. An externality, an economic term.

The term is used in this case study as a way of characterizing how societal forces can lead to positive and negative outcomes for members of society without the direct involvement of the particular group having experienced a loss or gain. The economic nature of this term corresponds to the origins of conflict between white and black Americans in South Carolina - as one with the legacy of being enslaved (the exploited) and the other with a legacy of being an enslaver (the exploiter).

Some readers may question: *What does this have to do with Title I education? As it relates to the so-called "achievement gap," the answer is: everything.* The public school system in the USA emerged out of forces like colonialism and institutional slavery, which contribute to equity deficits (externalities) experienced by generations thereafter. If we apply the case study working definition of an externality, then we can more easily understand how these forces have created favorable residual side effects for white America and dire consequences for black America. There are sure to be some case study readers who think or ask themselves, why does this matter now? Isn't a free public educational system an equalizer for all youth in any society? It matters because the answer is, it can be. The evidence for this is the millions of successful college educated African Americans in the US who have overcome obstacles of every imaginable device in most every apparatus of US society. However, the generational successes of overcoming institutional racism through an educational system shaped by European settlers, in their own pedagogical understanding, still makes it unilaterally beneficial to students who are connected to European lineage. In this vein, such a one-lane educational highway of "success" can be an exercise that leads to formal "achievement" - but is debatable as an earnest road to intellectual freedom for African descendants.

Origins of Acrimonious Educational Relationship

To understand the chronic challenges known to exist for teachers and students in Title I schools, it is necessary to examine the treatment of knowledge in our history in contrast with the treatment and experience of Africans and their descendants. Only in our very recent history has African Americans' pursuit of learning been a truly free, independent action solely for their own self-actualization.

The US educational system is steeped in a pedagogical framework that originates from schools of thought based on the trials and tribulation of European expansion (e.g. manifest destiny, social enlightenment and technological advancements). As the New World developed through European exploration and acquisition of land, people, and knowledge, known as the Age of Discovery, it was the Age of Devastation for mostly West Africans. During this period slavery was intellectualized as a necessary evil by colonizing classes - sanctimoniously, at the same time that written works emerge about civility, rights, liberty, individuality and freedom. Knowledge is dispersed selectively and the Bible is propagandized to enforce dangerous psychology upon subjugated classes for their continued psychological subjugation.

Emancipation brought new learning opportunities that the newly freed took full advantage of, but the meaning of learning, as an endeavor for oneself, remained an elusive concept to the then newly freed. In the south, learning opportunities were limited to specific topics of education provided by well-intentioned Northerners (at times in partnership with white Southerners) that developed trade schools or programs. The kind of programs available to African Americans during the Reconstruction Era included topics such as sewing, teaching, ministry and agriculture. Many of the newly freed were highly skilled laborers, yet the prospect of procuring fair "employment" were limited, as many African Americans earned income working on their former plantations. For African Americans who sought advanced academic opportunities, northern institutions were an option - if one managed to gain acceptance. As African Americans arose to the challenge of gaining traction in a world of new opportunity, their movement slowed and came to a screeching halt at the turn of the century. The rise of African Americans in the political arena particularly,



initiated a groundswell of resentment in the south that led to the Jim Crow Era. With it came the rise of domestic terror embodied in groups like the Ku Klux Klan who extinguished the actions of African Americans laboring, for the first time, for their own prosperity. By the 1900s, African Americans endured brutal, punitive responses to their collective exercise of free thought and action.

Privilege, Power, and Knowledge

IMP found the discourses that draw the most contention in the educational arena are those that encourage examination of how white Americans are at a greater benefit upon entering the public educational system today. Why is it contentious to openly discuss how it has come to be, based on US history, that white students are born into a societal proprietorship that contributes more favorably to their school experiences/outcomes? This is especially so if we can accept that slavery and legalized second class citizenship has imposed unfavorable generational consequences for all African Americans in schools and other institutions.

The other critical question that must be asked, if narrowing deficits in our Title I schools is priority, is this: **Knowing that white students are connected without abbreviation or omission in the fabric of US society, why is it that schools with majority African American enrollment have yet to develop curriculum and approaches that are more culturally centered to them?** Why is it that more Title I schools administrations are not addressing externalities from shared ancestral histories? Finally, is it possible that Title I schools serving the majority of African American children are unaware of the relevance these histories have in creating a dominant pedagogical frame? Given what we know to be factually true about these historical realities, we ask readers: how can teachers help our educational system overcome epistemological limitations that complicate learning for African American youth?

Below is a summary itemizing five ways in which externalities (historical consequences) affect both Title I teachers and students in local learning centers:

- The educational and generational experiences of African American students lacks priority in teacher training programs and schools nationally and is evident in Charleston;
- Culturally specific learning style, need, and knowledge construction are subsidiary to historically hegemonic pedagogical construction;

- Institutions of higher learning continue to issue advanced degrees in education without amend to degree programs predicated on pedagogical bias;
- Biracial teaching and learning is possible but the teacher/student partnership is delicate and subject to volatility.

- Historical consensus building
- Theoretical knowledge building
- Stakeholder community building
- Practical classroom skill building

The intervention focused on addressing the nature of problematic relationships, classroom management practices and student relationship building across socioeconomic lines. IMP incorporated training lessons to help teachers self-audit their belief systems to connect more sincerely with students. More often than not, teachers in Title I schools experience difficulty transcending values and experiences they perceive as vastly different between themselves and their students.

Below is a summary of training solutions identified by IMP as critically important for teacher improvement in classroom practice and relationship building:

- learn about teaching legacy in state context;
- learn method(s) for understanding individual and generational experiences;
- learn how to build upon existing teacher skills for a cross-cultural teaching style;
- learn practitioner methods that can avert student crisis/improve classroom team building; and
- learn how to self-identify limiting behavior, thoughts and assumptions that hinder authentic professional growth and in-school relationships.



Conceptual Training Highlight:

- Institutional Legacy
- Stakeholder Common Ground
- Change Agency
- Unequal Personal Stakes

Institutional Legacy

IMP characterized learning as a relationship that must be built upon trust and understanding between two parties. Teachers were educated on the historical relationship between the state of South Carolina and African American youth at the turn of the Twentieth Century. IMP sought to challenge teacher thinking by exploring their misgivings or in some cases, addressing mischaracterizations about the origin of “Title I” school deficits. IMP informed teachers about the rise of the SC state prison system, social welfare programs and public education. The purpose was to help teachers come to their own conclusions about the causality of common socioeconomic and learning deficits in Title I schools among students and their families. More so, IMP sought to help them understand the ramifications for them, professionally, and for their students educationally. This particular module also intro-

duced to teachers the notion of competing narratives that crop up alongside public education, such as federal government versus state government, black versus white, and oppressor versus subjugated. The oppositional narratives were explored as a means of cultivating teacher-led discussion on how to combat oppositional relationships in their daily professional lives: teacher versus student (in the classroom), teacher versus institution (learning outcomes), and African Americans versus SC (legal- based deficits). The narrow manner in which “failure” in Title I schools is characterized was also presented to teachers. One school source explained that when Title I students ‘fail’ to demonstrate gains, public discourse centers on student ability, not teacher ability. The purpose of bringing teachers into this awareness about biased reporting practices was to illustrate how inequality lingers today, often in undetectable ways.

Stakeholder Common Ground

IMP sought to connect teachers with their students on the basis of a stakeholder connection, advancing the notion that they have more similarities than differences as they exist within the milieu of public education. As one example, both have overlapping vulnerabilities in the public school system, yet are perceived as having little in common because of their demographic related differences. IMP explained the problem with this thinking as it becomes a barrier of “us” and “them” along lines of shallow criteria. Although demographics are relevant when considering why trust building is a constant challenge, IMP encouraged teachers to focus on the vulnerabilities they share based on *stakeholder designation*. As one example, IMP asked teachers to think critically about expectations placed on them and their students in relation to academic achievement: *are you both given all you need to succeed in the classroom?* To an outsider, it may appear so. IMP also asked: *How does it feel when your [student] scores do not reflect your effort or desire for gains? What kind of criticism or emotional response ensues when your objective is not achieved?* One erroneous belief among educational outsiders is that teachers and students can achieve any desired learning outcomes if they find a way to develop more grit. This term is often tossed around in the educational arena to characterize a person’s intrinsic motivation, endurance or - wrongly - to measure their desire for personal or academic success.



Change Agency

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Transformational Change Agency for Teachers

The Legacy of Miseducation in SC

Distorted knowledge
Rise of institutional bodies SC
Prison-to-school pipeline

Teacher Resiliency Training

Classroom management framework Research method
Self-auditing
Cross-cultural teams

Adaptive Needs Based Training Series

Problem-solving
Change theory
Narrative work
Team exploration
Skill building

Unequal Personal Stakes

A second critical concept, *stakeholder differential*, stimulated new thoughts about the consequences of Title I schools operating as they have for decades. As mentioned, teachers and students have overlapping pressure placed on them relating to classroom performance, as in teaching and learning outcomes. The concept of a *stakeholder differential* was one way of helping teachers contemplate, far more deeply, the consequential differences between them and their students. Yes, as mentioned, in the school system they have overlapping similarities as stakeholders - but there is a critical split (e.g., differential) when one of these groups decides to exit their school for either professional or personal reasons. For students, their exit skyrockets their vulnerability, and not merely because they won't graduate high school, which is often cited as the consequence of dropping out. IMP contends that when a student stops going to school, their limited options usher them into informal economic activity regulated by street codes and violence so severe that it can lead to fatalities. Ask any Title I teacher who has taught at a school for two years or more and most anyone can share a story about a student lost to "the streets" or "the system." On the other hand, when teachers exit their respective Title I school, they do so as a skilled member of the workforce with viable employment options to sustain their livelihoods. In sum, Charleston area youth in Title I schools are so often labeled "at risk" upon entry - yet it is a premature departure that increases their peril, making them truly at-risk; not graduating high school is one of the least consequential outcomes they can face. This critical concept presented to teachers sought to underscore the vital importance of their re-training and the expansion of educational programs for teacher specialization.



Teacher Findings

(The outcomes reported here are based on the trainer’s analytical memos (qualitative reflections post-session), and teacher evaluations administered at the end of each training as well as feedback provided during live sessions.)

“It’s just the way it’s always done”

A teacher’s motivation to grow personally and/or initiate change in Title I schools is dependent on their belief as to whether change is possible in their work environment. One teacher volunteered that she was aware that her school was “backward” in how they addressed administrative concerns and student behavior. On the spot, she quickly thought of alternative methods she believed might be more beneficial for her students than the policies currently in place. When asked why she had not taken steps to incorporate her ideas into existing policies, she replied “because that’s just the way we always do it. Everybody knows it’s not working, but we do it anyway.”

“There’s trust issues”

If a teacher or their manager is considered distrustful or unapproachable it can thwart a teacher and student from taking steps toward making positive change. Distrust of authority or management leads to teacher cliques or pessimistic grouping among students. One teacher described how she entered her first Title I school with great enthusiasm, but was soon privy to mass staff cynicism about their school’s operations.





“This is a safe training space”

Many of the teachers admitted to feeling apprehensive about IMP’s training when it was first proposed to them. They were unconvinced that racialized topics and personal experiences could be shared openly in a biracial training environment without conflict arising. Nonetheless, teachers reported a high level of “comfort” to “share openly” and were surprised that there were no “problems” or “judgments” made about experiences teachers shared voluntarily. Evaluation comments also applauded IMP training facilitation, which allowed for independent thoughts, stories and conversation to flow openly with a flexible structure. Teachers felt that it not only allowed them to learn from the training content, but also from one another.

“We may be a part of the problem”

Also, teachers admitted that they “may be part of the problem” when it comes to their lack of preparedness and motivation to initiate meaningful change at their schools. Teachers came to this realization when they were asked to share what is currently within their power as opposed to what is not in their power. As the group explored their “sphere of influence” as a body of professionals, they agreed that “more” initiative could be taken on their behalf to better direct their trainings and connect with parents. Additionally, teachers were overwhelmingly surprised at their lack of knowledge about state history and how much this has affected education for African American students.

“I feel so guilty at times”

In module three, a teacher confided to the group that she often felt immense guilt when her students’ learning outcomes are unmet, but more so when it leads to “social promotion” to the next grade level. IMP asked trainees to think critically about how social promotion has come to be normalized and whether there were any benefits or only consequences to this practice. Teachers shared thought-provoking realizations about its value and how it compromises their professional integrity.

“We need personal coaching”

All trainees answered “yes” when asked whether they would benefit from personalized coaching with IMP. There was also written commentary that advocated for IMP to be mandatory for

first year teachers. One Caucasian teacher offered that a structured mentoring opportunity or “coaching” would have greatly improved her teaching during her first two years at her current school. The now-experienced elementary teacher described how critical her two African American colleagues had become to her during her first and second year. She stated that, “even something as simple as language, the different words our kids used confused me at times. There’s words that mean one thing to me, and mean something entirely different to my students and their families. Luckily, I had Mrs. [removed] and Ms. [removed] to help me. I could go into their rooms and ask, ‘what does this mean?’ But if they hadn’t been there, or I hadn’t been comfortable speaking with them, I would have been confused for a really long time.” The willingness and ethnographic connection of her two colleagues to their student population helped her navigate student perspectives and communication norms more easily; this in turn helped her gain confidence more quickly in her daily classroom interactions. In development practice the two women could be regarded as intermediaries - essentially cultural brokers who generously advised her, without judgement, which improved her student relationships.

Suggestions on a whole community (w/ parents) activity that I can incorporate in my classroom that will get the parents to come in.

-CCSD participant, TRT workshop evaluation (January 2018)

“Professional development trainings don’t address the problems we deal with”

Teachers were asked to explore whether they felt any responsibility to take ownership of their own training needs, and if so, to further explore why it is they, as expressed by multiple teachers, never get the right kind of training opportunities. IMP specifically asked, what is your role in helping new teachers avoid some of the missteps and hardships you experienced when you first started?



Have you considered building your own training for incoming colleagues? Upon hearing the question, the teachers looked around and at each other until one teacher spoke for everyone and said: “not until just now.” Teachers mostly lack the belief that they can initiate real change in their school centers. Principals in Title I schools cite funding as a major challenge they have in attempts to address teacher preparedness and cross-culturalism in their classrooms. Title I funding is often allocated for new hires to expand employee bandwidth because this funding stream can be extremely complicated when used to pay for non-employee costs. For example, program or equipment costs can spur random audits by the SC Department of Education and derail busy schedules of Title I administrators. A second factor that can impede a principal from funding IMP-like trainings is that PDs are regularly reserved for technical training.

“I am school shamed”

Teachers revealed that they receive unfair criticism about where they work and often about the students they serve. Numerous teachers swapped stories that all ended with someone they knew, or in some cases a person they didn’t know, responding one of two ways when learning where they work: First, sympathetically, from a standpoint of concern. For instance, someone may say they have “heard how bad” or “how misbehaved” the students at their school are; the second common response is far more abrasive, accompanied by an odd exclamation or impolite question inquiring about how the teacher has managed to survive there [school]. School shaming upsets teachers who have established meaningful relationships within their school community and consider themselves part of an extended family. The other interpretation teachers have is that their ability to teach is undermined by these reactions. Learning outcomes in Title I schools in Charleston fall overwhelmingly below state standards. There weren’t any teacher testimonies that described anyone making a direct indictment against their teaching ability, yet they identify and resent the implication.

“It’s exhausting finding work/life balance”

IMP used an illustration that invoked a tearful response from a teacher on the subject of teacher motivation and commitment. Her question was, “how do we give all that it takes, but live our lives too?” The short answer is that most teachers, especially in

their first two years at a Title I school, calibrate to a life of radical imbalance; early mornings become earlier and long days become longer. Extended hours become a norm and free time is spent doing independent research, taking proactive steps to build relationships with families or volunteering for school programs during evenings or weekends. The logistical demands of a regular school day alone can absorb reserved energy a teacher might have stored during the work day. The danger, of course, is that endurance can wane and fatigue is certain to set in.

“Compliance is not a student relationship”

The quality of teacher and student relationships vary in Title I schools based on a number of factors. One African American teacher was outspoken about her belief that older African American students can be unfairly judged because they are not compliant like younger children are. In a separate discussion with an African American male teacher, he agreed with the statement, noting that compliance is not a meaningful relationship. Based on his experiences in Charleston County he offered that “young, black students are always going to be better received than older black students.” He explained that younger children are not as aware of their personhood as it relates to race or disparity and other societal factors disproportionately affect them.





Looking Ahead

One common solution proposed is that mass failure in these learning centers can be fixed by hiring teachers according to race and gender.

The process of creating, delivering, and evolving TRT left IMP with some of the following conclusions. First, that teachers in Title I schools have a unique obligation to make every effort to establish rapport with students always as well as with their families whenever possible. Learning outcomes are influenced by the quality of the relationship between teachers and their students - again, if one accepts that learning is a relationship. Trust and bridge building does not come easy, nor will it in the future if more districts and other decision-makers in Charleston neglect to embrace trainings like TRT as a regular professional development (PD) series, particularly for first-year teachers in Title I schools.

When teachers were asked to specify the subject and structure of their PDs in the last year, none of the teachers present could identify a training in any way similar to TRT's learning content nor IMP's approach to sensitive content. Equally unfortunate is that teachers admitted to either having limited or zero knowledge and exposure to African American scholars and history. Their limited understanding and knowledge of African American scholarship was agreed among them as problematic, in that it poses barriers to their full understanding of their students. TRT substantiates the need for specialization and shines a bright light on the disservice of our local decision-makers and learning institutions to prepare teachers adequately for deserving young people.

What kind of teachers succeed in Title I schools without this specialized teacher training?

What is the rubric for successful teaching in Title I schools? It cannot be a matter of simply returning year after year, could it? You might think so considering that student gains are minimal and largely unchanging. If we accept that students are missing the mark, then can we not also accept that teachers are also not meeting certain standards?

One common solution proposed is that mass failure in these learning centers can be fixed by hiring teachers according to race and gender. In Charleston County, African American males are presumed ideal new hires because of the high number of African American students that attend Title I schools and comprise most school's behavioral referrals, suspensions and expulsions. There is no refuting the need for more African American male teachers. There is a plethora of peer-reviewed studies to support that students who have teachers that look like them, especially in their formative years, perform better than students who do not. Yet, so few African American male educators are employed in schools where the majority of their students are African American students. Why? If you ask Title I administrators, they will tell you there are few African American male applicants. However, if the candidate pool is limited and has been for decades, then can we not presume that the problem therein lies with the manner in which African American learners (especially boys) are received, treated and "educated" by the local school system? There is a critical connection for Title I principals to acknowledge between the marginalization of African American boys in their schools and their peripheral professional presence later, as teachers in the school system.



Common Characterizations of “The Problem” in Charleston County

Nearly 6,500 teachers did not return to their teaching positions for the 2016-17 school year. This total is a 21% increase compared to the 5,352 departures reported for the 2015-16 school year.

-A Report on the Fall 2016 Supply and Demand Survey, Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, & Advancement, January 2017

CCSD must address the stark divide between high-performing and low-performing schools due to the low achievement by children of color and poverty that exists at all academic levels of the system. Solutions to address the historically under-achievement by a high percentage of the district's children of color and poverty must involve the wider community.

-Recommendations for Further Action, “Close the Gaps in Performance and Achievement,” Clemson University Division of Inclusion and Equity, August 27, 2018 - Charleston County Principal Purview

I have one teacher who's African American, petite female teacher, she's got full control of that classroom. I've got a Caucasian petite female teacher, she's got control. I thought, 'Is it size? Is it color of your skin... is it that creates that magic?' and it's not. None of that plays a role (sighs) it's all about the relationships they're able to build with the kids, and it's about, when I say do something, I'm going to give your input and allow you to make choices, but only if you're within this realm of what's expected. And I'm going to hold you accountable for what you do. The teachers that do that and do that on a consistent basis, they don't have behavioral issues. With the exception of our few children.

-Anonymous. Interview with North Charleston Title I school principal. September 2015

“Several initiatives have been implemented in CCSD to minimize disruptive behaviors and to properly manage discipline events. One important strategy to improve social and academic behaviors among students and to enhance their learning environments is the use of the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), which utilizes a data-based problem solving model. It is based on prevention, intervention, and supports to help ensure that all you are doing addresses the needs of all students in achieving the profile of the SC Graduate. MTSS incorporates foundations from Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) and Response to Intervention (RtI).”

-A Report of Student Suspensions, Expulsions, and Attendance 2014-2015, Office of Assessment and Evaluation (Report No. 15-414), Charleston County School District, December 2015

~End~

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