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An Intergenerational Conversation Between Dr. Marvin Lynn and Chris Riser: Social Activism and the Black Male Educator

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Recently, the editor of Northwest Journal of Teacher Education had the opportunity to sit down with Dr. Marvin Lynn, Dean of the College of Education at Portland State University, and Chris Riser, a middle school teacher and social justice activist. Dr. Lynn is a renowned researcher and scholar on race and education, with a specific focus on Critical Race Theory and culturally responsive practices in education. Chris Riser is a passionate educator in his sixth year of teaching who uses an anti-racist lens to engage with the diverse students in his classroom; he is a graduate from the Portland Teachers Program. These two leaders came together for a cross-generational conversation about their experiences as Black male educators, how they engage in social justice educational practices, and to provide advice for teachers of color entering the profession.

Keywords: Black male educator, Anti-racist education, social justice

Background

Dr. Marvin Lynn grew up in the 1970s and 80s in Chicago. He taught elementary school in the mid-90s and has worked as a professor and leader in higher education for the last two decades. He is Dean and Professor in the College of Education at Portland State University.

Chris Riser is an anti-racist educator in his sixth-year with Portland Public Schools, where he teaches middle school Social Studies. He regularly engages with the school system at the pedagogical, planning, and policy levels to advocate for young people, and to advance their own sense of agency.

Introduction

Maika Yeigh, Editor (MY): I appreciate you both coming together to have this conversation. I was hoping we could start with each of you talking a little bit about how you came to education.

Chris Riser (CR): Broadly, education was always a big deal in my family. There was a library in my living room, the television was the size of a laptop, and there were lots of books. There was always an emphasis on learning wherever I was. My father lived in Detroit and whenever he talked with me on the phone, if it wasn't about faith, it was about vocabulary: He would tell me that every word you learn is a door that opens. Poppa T, my mother's father, who was out here with us, always had an emphasis on knowledge. He typed up this packet of math shortcuts and how-to's on his typewriter and gave it to me. At the time I was like, "Dude, what are you doing? I don't need this." But as I got older and reflected on the voices like his that were speaking into my life, I thought that all these people kept hitting on the idea of building knowledge and learning, and that's how you go places, that's how you do what you do. They said those things to me, and I was always learning.

But I was kicked out of high school my freshman year for not attending. I would go to school, walk off campus, find some friends and hang out with them. And then come back, catch the bus home, catch the voicemail, hit delete and on to the next day. The school found out and they kicked me out. My sophomore year I did the same thing. So my mom said, "Well, you need to work." So, I did and when I was not working I was reading. I looked at those books in the living room to find what I wanted to know. I got really into hip hop, and that was really where I started writing because I wanted to be a rapper. I would sit and read the dictionary, and I would read the rhyming dictionary. When I found that I thought, *THIS IS IT!* and if I came across any word that I didn't know, I would go look it up so I knew what the word meant and so I could use it. So there has always been this component that to get what you need, what you want to know—you can find it out.

On my journey, I had a family—I did things backwards. I had two beautiful girls while I was working at Powell's [Books] for seven years and taking classes one at a time. I went to check with an advisor at PCC [Portland Community College] to make sure I was doing the one-page Associate of Arts credit worksheet right. And I knew I wasn't going to get much from the advisor because you get just a random person. I took my ticket and asked them to look over my materials and make sure my math was right and that all of the classes fit into the categories they were supposed to fit into. The woman asked, "Well, what do you want to do?" I told her that I liked to talk and was thinking about going to a four-year college and studying communications. She asked me, "Have you ever thought about teaching?" She was about the 100th person to ask that in the past month, including my wife and close family members. She slid me Deborah Cochran's card for the Portland Teachers Program, and she said, "You need to call this woman and talk to her because I think education might be a good path for you. And this is a full tuition scholarship for people of color who want to teach." I thought, *Okay, maybe I should listen to what I'm hearing.*

I called her and she grilled me on the phone, *hard*: "Why do you want to teach? Who do you look up to?" Again, I thought, *Wow. Who is this person?* Ms. Cochran told me to come in and fill out an application. Eventually, I got in. It was an amazing experience. Because I knew from the time I was 26 that I was going to be a teacher, I had in the back of my mind, with every class I took, questions like, *How does this fit into teaching? How is this teacher teaching? Will I be able to use this in the history classroom?* It was an incredible experience because I was just so hungry to make everything work for what I was trying to do. I just really took advantage of all those classes. It took me seven years from the start to the finish to get through the Portland Teachers Program. I graduated in 2013—with three girls, now!—and started teaching.

Marvin Lynn (ML): I grew up poor, working class in a heavily segregated neighborhood in Chicago where there was a lot of concentrated poverty. When I look back on it, my Stepfather worked in the factory and served as a foreman. So, he was a bona fide union guy. He was very engaged in that community. I understood the power of the union for advancing equality for workers' rights. I had a real clear sense of that as a young person. As a matter of fact, I walked the picket line with him when they would strike. I remember listening to conversations about why the workers at the steel plant would need to strike, and what his role would be in organizing it. I remember listening to him talk about strategies for organizing other workers and then negotiating with the leadership on the terms of a new contract. As a child, I had a real sense of social justice and organizing and why that was important.

My mother, on the other hand, was home. She told a lot of fascinating stories about what it meant to be Black in the South during the 1940s and 50s. She was attending school in Northern Mississippi when *Brown vs. Board of Education* [*see Resources at end*] became the law of the land. She remembered what it was like to suddenly have her school closed and be shipped off to another school. She was one of those kids—and there were many kids like this—whose parents were sharecroppers and were forced to pick cotton and they could not go to school because the family needed the income which was minimal. You would pick a whole bag of cotton and maybe get a dollar, and it wasn't much, but it was a dollar well-earned and needed. She remembered that and she missed a lot of school because of that.

While I got a good education about racism in the South and unionizing, neither of my parents had much formal education. What I *did* get as a child was encouragement from my mother and from her relatives, my grandmother in particular, who again, didn't have a lot formal education but was known to be a very smart person. She and I connected. Like Chris, early on, people asked me whether or not I would be a teacher. Even growing up in poverty and in this segregated neighborhood, people had a dream and a vision for what I would become. I remember Jesse Jackson's phrase, *I am somebody*. Jackson comes out of Chicago. People were always telling me as a kid that I would be *somebody* when I grew up. I was raised to believe that I was going to do something important with my life—even in those impoverished and, at times, extremely difficult circumstances. I liked working with other kids, tutoring, teaching. As a result, I was encouraged to become a teacher. I essentially started making plans by the time I was eight or nine years old that I would become a teacher.

When I applied to college, I knew that I would major in education. My initial interest was in music education. I was fortunate to receive the Golden Apple Scholars Program award [*see Resources at end*]. As an 18-year old "scholar" I was provided with significant financial support, mentoring and professional development including paid summer enrichment. I was expected, of course, to teach in the Chicago Public Schools for at least five years in order to realize the full benefits of the program. I was one of fifteen, young people from the City of Chicago who were selected to receive this award. It was the first year the program came into existence and it was designed to encourage particularly young African-American and Latinx kids, many of whom were first-generation college students to go to college to become teachers. They connected us to a whole group of award winning teachers who had won Golden Apple Awards because they were outstanding teachers. Suddenly I was part of this great community of educators who were all really well-established and well-recognized for their excellence in the education field. There was a great deal of media coverage both nationally and locally. There was an article published in the *New York Times* where I was quoted (1989, January 26--*see Resources at end*). I was also interviewed by CNN. The program was unique because it focused

exclusively on education. The founders of the program, Martin and Patricia Koldyke, were wealthy Chicago area philanthropists and venture capitalists. So, people paid attention to them. As a result, we received a great deal of positive attention. As an undergraduate student, I attended DePaul University. There, I had distinction as a “scholar” and I also had these relationships I could rely on for additional support when and where needed. I was also connected to other young folks of color who had interests that were similar to mine. The Golden Apple Scholars program was intentional about including males in the program. Of the 15 students selected to receive the award, four of us were male (three African American and one Filipino). Men of color constituted more than a quarter of the population of those selected to participate in this inaugural cohort. While that may seem like a small number, it was significant because the presence of male teachers of color in our schools was so much lower than that. Nationally, less than 5 percent of teachers are men of color. So, this was significant. That definitely sealed the deal for me. If I was considering something else at that point, it wasn't going to happen because I had this community behind me along with wonderful financial support.

CR: The path was paved.

ML: Absolutely! I went to DePaul, in Chicago, because my mother could not stand me leaving the state at that point [laughter], so I started working in classrooms in high poverty schools while obtaining my teacher licensure. It's interesting because I also applied to and got admitted to grad school as I was completing college. I ended up in New York at Teachers College, getting a Master's Degree. I did not realize that I was at a very elite institution—Columbia University. Well known scholar, Bill Ayers, was one of people led enrichment activities with me and other scholars in the summer. He recommended I consider Teachers College since he hadn't gotten a degree there. While at Teachers College, I taught elementary school full-time.

Additional Expectations: A Blessing and a Curse

MY: I was just having a conversation with the only Black male candidate we have in our secondary program this year—we only have one—about recruiting more teachers of color. The commonality you two speak about in relation to recruitment is so important, and one of the commonalities between your two stories. Thinking about how teachers should reflect the students in their classrooms and then also having the pressure, the onus of the responsibility of African-American kids in the classroom. And thinking about recruitment but also that tension of having the onus of the success of Black students placed on the shoulders of Black male teachers. As a white female teacher, I have never felt that the success of white female students depends on me. But I think that is true for African-Americans generally, and Black males specifically. Is that true for you? And how have you navigated that? As we think about recruiting more teachers of color, how do we help them navigate that?

ML: You know, I'm a little bit different. I actually embrace the idea that as a teacher I could provide specialized support for kids because I might be able to better understand where their life experience. I remember when I was learning to become a teacher at DePaul—and they were very good at getting us into lots of different types of schools for field experiences—and I remember visiting poverty-stricken schools, and wealthy suburban schools. And I remember

being in one school setting and coming into contact with poor Black boys and remembering, “Wow, that was me.”

CR: Yeah.

ML: And connecting with those kids and thinking that I really wanted to be able to serve that population because I felt like I could offer a special contribution in that regard. I don't know if this happens to you, Chris, but it becomes a blessing and a curse. It was a blessing because I was there to help. But then sometimes other teachers took issue with it. I was able to manage what were considered very difficult students quite well and those kids were learning. I wasn't in the profession that long. But when I came into the profession, I kind of knew what I was doing because of this community that I was affiliated with in college. I was well prepared. And so when I got into the classroom, I hit the ground running and was having a lot of success, particularly with Black male students but it was not necessarily appreciated by administrators, and other teachers were threatened by it. And it was not what I had hoped; I thought people would be glad to have somebody who could do this.

CR: Well, my experience has been a little bit different. This is only my sixth year teaching. But there is more of an inward pull, an inward responsibility, an inward identification I have with these students that comes out of my experience and my identity that I think we share. When you got into that space where you saw those kids and you saw yourself, something that compelled you--that wasn't external. It was intrinsic and saying, “This is what I've got to do. These are the kids. I've got to be here.” And, I would say I feel much of that same sense of a real strong desire to create space for those kids. Especially those who I see getting pushed to the margins, in whatever way. You know today, the transgender kids, the kids who are ELD and they have other identified special needs, just seeing how they are so pushed to the edges by the system. I just feel this responsibility knowing that I was that kid who felt, “This is clearly not a space for me, this place was not set up for me, this was not set up for me to explore what I want to explore or to learn what I want to learn, this place is not about what I'm about. So I'm not going,” I want to go back and be that adult that I wish I had seen in my own experience.

ML: That's right. In my own experience, it is a little bit of both. It was, “Wow. There are some gaps here and maybe I can help fill them.” But I also had teachers, particularly in that all-Black school on the south side of Chicago—it was all Black teachers for the most part—who were so committed to my success and they kept telling me, “You're going to be somebody.” They kept telling me that, they kept feeding that to me, and taking responsibility for my learning, and working with my mom who did not always understand how to help me. Part of my desire was to try to be like them and give back in the way they did, pay it forward. That was part of my impetus.

CR: I was thinking about this question over the past couple of weeks, and I do sometimes feel that it is a burden. Last Friday was not my best day, for example [laughter]. But where my frustration came from was that I felt like I was pouring all of myself into this work with the students, and then the students themselves were not reciprocating. Right? And then I felt like I was running out of resources to continue to fill up their tank. And so that's where I'm feeling difficulty. I'm not sure why it is. I think part of it is that I am only six years in and I know this is

a long game. And you know, I have the energy to put in. But I could see wondering about how much longer I could sustain the level of energy that I do put into what I'm doing. I place a high level of responsibility upon myself for the work that I do, and what I do with my one precious life. I also bring a high level of physical energy, and a lot of emotional energy. There's also a taxation that comes from just being a person of color in a system designed to exclude you. And in being moderately successful—but, like last Friday, I struggle, too—in working with people whom others do not as easily identify with and who are also excluded, colleagues who are seeking greater success, they bring stories. I take those on as well. I want to solve so many problems, but it's a challenge because I'm dealing with my own stuff, and taking on problems for other folks as well out of concern for those Black and Brown kids, you know? And that's where I'm feeling it. I understand these are kids, and they're not going to reciprocate every day, and they're not going to reciprocate every day *right now*. But it's the adult piece where I feel like I'm constantly doing the educational piece because I am a teacher of color doing my own continuing education. That can be exhausting.

MY: To build on that and thinking about the Portland area: There are so many schools here that have so few kids of color. I hear from our graduates who are teachers of color how difficult it can be to work in these schools. I wonder if there is an added layer when there's fewer kids of color at the school for a teacher of color where they may be sought out. Chris, your school is predominantly kids of color ...

CR: Right. Yeah, it is only around one third white. I don't know if that would be different for a teacher of color who works with a population with so few kids of color. I don't know; I wouldn't be surprised if that might be the case. I'm certain that it would be more difficult for a teacher of color to operate effectively in that kind of space because they're already isolated in themselves as a teacher of color among their peers. But then also to be in a setting where you're not around your people. I would imagine that would be pretty hard to navigate.

ML: I think it doesn't matter what setting you are in, if you're the only one or if you're one of the few, you become called upon to do a lot of extra work. The literature does point to the fact that as you just described--it's exhausting. All the work that you have to do with your colleagues, all the work that you have to do to help other students that are not even your students becomes part of a real challenge. I would regularly have two or three kids from somewhere else sitting in the back in their classroom. And they were quiet because I was teaching. But you know, they didn't always get what they needed to get because I had 28 other kids that I was teaching. And then I had another three or four sprung on me because they were out of control somewhere else, and I felt bad because there was no discussion between me and those teachers about what these kids needed academically. I didn't have time. And when I would try to have those conversations, those teachers didn't always want to listen. That was a big point of frustration for me. Maika, I do think the pressure that Black male teachers have on them to be the one who's going to be able to educate all Black males in the building is a difficult challenge. And unfair. We shouldn't put all of the onus on Black people to do all the work to save all the other Black people. That's everybody's job. I think that there's a shifting of responsibility to Black male teachers that, unfortunately, exhausts us in process.

CR: And actually, now that you say that, I realized that for the last two years I haven't been on the Equity Team [laughter], and that was an intentional choice. Because I did not want to be the one Core teacher of color in the building who was also talking to people about how they needed to shift their practices around race. You know? And I love that work and I enjoy doing it. I didn't stop for any real specific reason. I couldn't point to an event or an incident. I just thought, "You know, next year I'm going to say no to leading Equity stuff. I'm going to take a break and give other people the opportunity to do that work." You know, I guess I should really take a moment to think about how this is pretty taxing, this whole experience, you know? But the way I rationalize it is because I have that desire, this hunger, to meet these kids where they are. That's where the struggle is for me, to say I have a limit of what I can do to bring others a certain perspective. All teachers, but especially white teachers have to do the self-work to develop a different perspective—a critical perspective—that is apart from the dominant perspective. Great educators, like Bryan Chu, Andy Kulak, Jayme Causey, and Donald Rose here in Portland, can point you in that direction, but you've got to step up and do the rest. No one can really do that for anyone.

ML: When I was teaching elementary school 25 years ago, I didn't realize that. When I was teaching I was 23 or 24 years old and I didn't realize my own limitations, that I was not going to be able to change other teacher's behavior. Chris, the fact that you are able to recognize that is so wonderful. Because I didn't. I thought that if I shared something brilliant that I would help change teacher's thinking and practice.

CR: Marvin, this is an interesting thing that may have been a shift from the time that you spent in the classroom to where things are now: It's *the thing* to want to be good at equity, right? Now it's what you have to do. So, I get people coming to me and asking. But there's not necessarily a shift there because, what is it really? It's hard work [laughter]. Right? And it's not just doing one thing different and everything is going to work out. It's difficult to remember how complex this work is. No, you gotta read. What are you reading this summer? You've got to reflect about yourself. You know when that kid calls you racist? Don't just deny it. You need to sit back and think, "What did I do that could have been perceived as racist? Do I actually believe that about others? Why? If not, where'd it come from?" It's work. And so I get the niceness of people asking what I think. But then there isn't necessarily evidence of follow through. Right? Because it is constant work, not something with a quick fix. It's like people are coming and they want to ask. But I don't know if they really want the answer.

Black Male Leaders: In the Classroom & In Administration

MY: I've heard some of our graduates of color talk about feeling like they are sucked into administration. I think of how unfortunate it is to pull a Black male teacher out of a classroom, but yet how potentially powerful it is to have a Black male as an administrator and taking that lead. Our graduates also report that the administrative positions often lean toward a discipline position, where they end up being the Dean of Students versus the person that teachers look to for curriculum. What are your thoughts on that?

CR: I've seen successful Black male teachers, connected to the community, get pulled to become Student Management Specialists [SMS], a quasi-administrative position that is

discipline focused. I've also see it have negative health effects on people of color in that position.

ML: Because all you're dealing with negativity. It puts us in a position of just doing discipline, and that is not good.

MY: It also seems to send the message to kids that if you're a successful Black male in this school, you're the disciplinarian versus the person who is working to lead instruction. I think it sends a really dangerous message that reinforces negative stereotypes.

ML: I think we have to be really careful about what we do.

CR: This year at my school I feel like we do a pretty good job of sharing that load. But we're still in a white supremacist system. We're still in a racist system. But it feels like there's more solidarity. There are definitely some white allies in this building who do the work and they're leading that equity work and leading those discussions in a really great way. So, it feels better in this moment. But it still has these highly concentrated points of taxation on the teachers of color in the building. And yet, I was also thinking about what do we do with those talented teachers of color? There's a teacher of color who can see things outside of their classroom? So often they get taken up into leadership positions. You know the curve for mastery in teaching is ten years at least, right? I can only imagine that's happening everywhere. And administration sounds great to so many educators who feel undervalued in the classroom. You get a pay raise among other things. And I know we need more leaders of color. But right now, we don't have any *teachers* of color. We should address that first, and not from the state level down, but from the community level up.

ML: When I think about my own history ... as you were talking it made me think that maybe jumping into the academy was my way of escaping the principal position. Just skip that!
[laughter]

Learning (and Leading) Through Activism

In 2017-2018, Chris' school studied the Black Lives Matter movement. In the winter and on the one-year anniversary of the Portland police killing of Quanice Hayes, a 17-year-old Black male, students walked out of the middle school in a march of protest and solidarity. The district threatened to discipline Chris; students, parents, and the larger community worked in protest against the school district and in support of Chris. In the next section, Marvin talks with Chris about that experience.

MY: Chris, I wanted to ask you about your experiences last year. You work with your school community to help empower kids, help them take charge of their learning and their community and be passionate. I also heard you talk about feeling exhausted at times. So how do you sustain that passion? And Marvin, you've been a social justice warrior for your career. What advice can you give to Chris about his experience last year?

CR: One thing I definitely took away was a really disappointing experience of working with administrators with fear and that everybody becomes a “risk”. I really experienced that in a way that I had never before imagined. Folks that people recognized as bringing something to the community become expendable when other people's interests are at stake, and how easily and how quickly that could happen. That was kind of a powerful experience. It was both one of the highlights of my life and also, in the aftermath, one of the worst moments that I've ever had to experience. What I witnessed in that moment, what I saw was more than 400 kids assert their own agency and power and overwhelm adults with their sense of mission. They knew what they were doing in this visceral way. And once the adults fell in line with what the kids were already doing, I've never seen that much passion, that much energy, that much excitement in the students.

I think they learned something that day about themselves and so many other things. I just know that for so many of those kids it was a transformative moment when that walkout actually occurred. We talk about student voice. And after last year, I'm thinking: Wait. What about student agency? What are we talking about? Because you can say whatever you want, and I don't have to listen. But when we start talking about *student agency*. Now, we're talking about what you want to do, what you need to do, what you feel you need to do, and action. Doing something. And what I saw was student agency, front and center. And it got me thinking that *student voice* is not the conversation we need to be having. That's actually cutting off the discourse. And that's actually limiting these kids in a really subtle way. Student action and getting these kids ready to act in order to face down all of these complex problems like racism, police violence, white supremacy, terrorism, nuclear proliferation, climate change: We can't just talk about it. We've got to do *something*, right? That's what I learned from that experience, that it's so much bigger. And these kids are really ready to do something, but it has to be meaningful to them. And when something is meaningful to them, you better watch out because they're going to do it. They're going to do what they feel is important. There's so many things I think I'm going to be reflecting on from that experience for the rest of my life; it was transforming.

ML: You activated their agency, and in doing so helped them understand their fundamental role as participants in a democratic society. This is what education ultimately is about, what it's supposed to be about. I think it's been subverted in a number of ways and I do think that the democracy conversation right now is hard because what we're seeing at multiple levels of the government. Particularly at the federal level. But what you're doing is advancing democracy. And when you get kids engaged in taking action to solve real problems that impact them in their community—that lesson that you taught them is so valuable. I think about the impact that this has probably had on their lives right now, and the impact it will have on their lives for the next five, 10 or 20 years. We're going to see students taking up all kinds of responsibility for leading change efforts in the community because they had this experience. And not just the act of the walk out itself, but with how they responded and came together in the wake of what happened to you, right? The *kids* were organizing and the *kids* were making it clear that this was not acceptable, that they weren't going to have it, and they got parents and the community involved. They are now a force to be reckoned with in ways that was not the case before. And thank God because our democracy needs it.

I applaud you in the courageous path you have chosen. When you read about educators who take risks and think about all the activists who have taken a risk on behalf of their community and what they sometimes face as a result of taking a risk, stepping outside the box,

for doing something that people around them tell them not to do, whatever that might be; what you're experiencing is part of a set of circumstances that, unfortunately, all of us find ourselves in at some point when we take a risk, when we move something, shift something in a way that makes other people uncomfortable or scared. You're part of this pantheon, as far as I see, of leaders, of social activist educators who've done that. Every one of them will tell you that they've had a point, a moment, in some cases multiple moments, where they were absolutely terrified about what their future would look like because they did those things, taken those risks. They've done things that have really impacted the kids and the community in such a positive way, but other people don't understand and appreciate it.

CR: When they put me on leave and when I saw what those kids were doing it was the last thing that I would've expected to see happen in response. That was remarkable. I mean, it was the kids who organized their parents, and were like, "This has got to be handled." It was really remarkable to see. The other thing that was really interesting was that this was six days before the shooting in Parkland, [Florida]. The walkout occurred six days before that shooting on Valentine's Day. And so when that shooting happened we were in a whole other place. I couldn't even process it because I was in the middle of a current event *right now*. I couldn't even wrap my head around what was going on in Florida. And then we started seeing these walkouts all over the country. And I said to my students, "You guys, this is crazy. You know, you were doing something for a whole different reason. But look at this: You were on the crest of this other kind of wave of young people coming out." I thought that was really interesting because it's not uncommon to look through history and to see that it is Black and Brown folks who are out there on the bleeding edge. And then right behind them comes this wave of change. It was just crazy to actually see that happen and to actually have been a part of the whole experience--to have actually experienced so many aspects of that process that I have read about so many other times.

ML: I look back in history at when these kinds of things happened, when folks are doing the right thing because it's the right thing. What you're doing is raising the critical consciousness of your students and leading them into social action. Which is what we hope will happen if we believe in critical pedagogy, and unfortunately, critical pedagogy isn't always embraced by schools, broadly speaking.

Advice to Teachers of Color Entering the Profession

MY: To end the conversation, I wonder what advice you would offer to new teachers of color entering the profession. What is most important for them?

CR: The advice I offer to teachers of color entering the profession, I received from the Portland Teachers Program. I repeat these things because I have found them to be true by my own experience:

- If you're not on a mission, don't come into education. It will only chew you up and leave you broke.
- Know yourself, and take care of you. Who you are when you "run out of gas" is who will show up in the classroom. Know who that is before you get there, and develop healthy strategies to communicate and cope.

- Stay in the fire. It is often when you are most directly serving the kids that you get the most push back from the system.
- Teaching is isolating. Find your Thread: Those people who understand the work of education the way you do, and who are committed to serving the most marginalized students. Stay in touch with them. They will feed you as you feed them, and together you will go much farther than you could ever go on your own.

ML: As a teacher of color, you occupy a number of incredibly important roles. You may be the only substantive interaction some have with a person of color in a position of authority. In that way, you may have an opportunity to teach powerful lessons about the history, power, and presence of the groups you represent. You should bring this cultural richness to the curriculum. Infuse culture everywhere because we are cultural beings. It's important. You also get to bring your cultural intuition to the policy table and help other educators and school leaders understand the power and the richness of your perspective. Your experiential knowledge also best positions you to be a strong advocate for students with whom you may have cultural and linguistic ties. Like I did, you may find that schools are not always wonderful environments to advance critical or culturally relevant pedagogy. I ask you to persist anyway. You may also find that your effective work with student who others may deem hard-to-teach is not always rewarded or recognized. Persist anyway. Remember, teaching is both an art and a science. As you grow, you will get better and better and you will become more expert at teaching your students and successfully navigating the politics of schools on behalf of the students and families that desperately need you.

Resources:

For more on **Brown vs. Board of Education**: <http://www.uscourts.gov/educational-resources/educational-activities/history-brown-v-board-education-re-enactment>

For more on **Golden Apple Scholars Program**: <https://www.goldenapple.org/golden-apple-scholars>

For more on *The New York Times* article “**Bright Chicago Students Lured to Teaching**”: <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/01/25/us/education-bright-chicago-students-lured-to-teaching.html>