

INTERLUDE: SANCTUARY

As my feet dangled from the tan-colored pew, growing up in the Black church tradition meant Sunday mornings were reserved for feeling the warm contours of female and male voices echoing throughout its sacred walls. Proudly I gazed as Paw-Paw's glistening chocolate skin revealed perfect white teeth coupled with a carefree attitude standing front and center singing in unison Down by the Riverside, a familiar and charismatic gospel hymn.

I watched as Mahalia's spirit embraced the sanctuary, somehow keeping watch and comforting us.

This is what I longed for in the sanctuary.

A sanctuary detached from Ms Davis and her colleagues' classrooms, where my boys had total freedom.

A location Dr Hoffman offered during my first visit to Brighter Day.

Dr Hoffman sanctioned the importance of providing this space because, as a former researcher, he knew the importance of allowing people to feel safe and secure. A prior background knowledge beneficial to my endeavors.

A space was necessary for investigative freedom of diverse forms of Blackness. I wanted Carter, Malik, Darius, and Thomas to tell their stories against the backdrop of myths, presuppositions, and stereotypes laced in popular culture, confining them to the last place. The quiet sanctuary yielded uninterrupted space where liberated voices could display emotions at high decibels bouncing off historical walls reverberating every day and lived experiences in schooling. Storytelling unmasking undocumented institutional and structural inequalities faced daily. Longing to observe and understand racism's ordinariness impacting their access often neglected. William Tate, a Black scholar, warned us how racism's everyday occurrences go well beyond academic performance, causing psychological damage. Debris, I should anticipate as Carter, Darius, Malik, and Thomas begin bearing their souls. Thus, the sanctuary must be a haven uncovering race explicitly. Unwrapping diversity and inclusion out of a color-blindness box, avoiding irresponsible and dangerous narratives.

The current realities of racism are real, but I also wanted my boys to reflect on the past. Essential in understanding how my boys situate their present self-identity while simultaneously showcasing the who, what, where, and how that contributed to identity development. Cullingford's scholarship enabled me to structure conversations leveraging recollection as both a fact-finding mission and reimagining what schooling should entail. The sanctuary cradled Black boys and situated recollection in three categories (Montandon & Osiek, 1998). First, I wanted Carter, Malik, Darius, and Thomas to break down school experiences regarding the knowledge, values, ideals, and culture transmitted to them daily. An exploration that would lead to classroom instruction conversations impacting the way they imagined professional careers, lives, and future selves. Lastly, I wanted my boys to think freely about the intricate parts of schooling, which contributed to their sense of self in math and science.

Allowing my boys to lay down their burdens in the sanctuary offered a deep dive into their internal flames. Leaning on the work of Vignoles, Schwartz, and Luyckx (2011), I understood the sophistication of one's identity. One's character is a potpourri mixture of chosen or forced upon allegiance, personality, deep-held beliefs, relationships with significant others, race, class, gender, sexuality, geographical space, and collective notions of blackness. To understand the messiness of racism, recollection, identity, math and science teaching and learning, the sanctuary was mandatory to whisk Black boys away into their private enclave. Some may think my line of questioning is too much. Still, the problem in educational ethnography is that we have done far too little, for far too long, and haven't genuinely wrestled with the messiness and complexity engulfing the totality of Black boys' educational experiences. To truly engage in this process, my boys needed time to trust, think, and reflect. Being transparent and vulnerable required a great deal of agency to jump in the deep end of the Olympic size pool.

Being a social constructivist drives the framing of our talks. Having sheltered and private conversations in the sanctuary unpacked heavy luggage revealing schooling, policy, teachers, parents, students, and Redwood as an incredible amount to carry. And on top of that, trying to develop a sense of self in the math and science world proved daunting. To maximize conversations, I used a phenomenological interviewing strategy grounded in four principles. The first aim was to understand human experience based on various times throughout their childhood. I wanted to know how they experienced math and science, starting in kindergarten until their current station in life. Secondly, I wanted to get as close as possible to understanding their lived experiences. Thirdly, I wanted them to construct the past by going back in time and

stepping out of their current position in life to both reconstruct and reflect. Lastly, I wanted Carter, Malik, Darius, and Thomas to understand what each spoken experience truly meant to them and how they juxtaposed past and current events, behavior, and course of action.

Through the use of a three-part interview structure, robust information sprung forth. The three-part interview set-up included separate conversations about the individualized, focused life history, details of experience, and reflection. I wanted to learn precise information about the past and present encompassing people, places, and geographical spaces. Since this was an in-depth probe, time and space were blocked out to reflect on the intellectual and emotional connections such an exploration would yield, often bleeding over the allotted time. One of the phenomenological interviewing requirements is that each interview should be 90-minutes, three days to a week apart. While I wanted to engage Black boys in a conversation that they often don't get a chance to participate in, I had to adjust the interview structure because of schooling and environmental issues that impeded the opportunity to have uninterrupted 90-minute sessions weeks apart. Attendance was not always a priority for my boys, and instead of using that as a crutch to not do the work, I adjusted conversation times to meet their needs and given realities. Transportation issues, safety, and family responsibilities limited my access, so I had to engage them in this process whenever I could, whether it was 5 minutes, 10 minutes, an hour, or the full 90. An adjustment that helped tremendously as each moment spent with them was valuable and precious.

I must acknowledge, sanctuary conversation blended with classroom observations. I never wanted to observe nor have a conversation in isolation without having contexts for both. Using field notes as guides to document how my boys move through the school day and community space and probe meaning so that my interpretation was respectful, accurate, and honored reality.

The phenomenological conversation structure was not limited to my boys but included gatekeepers as well. Just as I had to unpack my experiences, shaping the lens I bring to this work, teachers and administrators must undergo the same process.

While Ms Davis opted out of stepping into the sanctuary's physical space, referencing it as a "cold classroom." At that moment, I realized the sanctuary was not a place, but a way of being, a feeling. I was sad she didn't want to go to the sanctuary, but she had no clue the cold classroom had been transformed into a warm oasis, courtesy of my boys. Dr Martinez no longer worked in the city and provided his sanctuary across town in his restorative justice office. Dr Hoffman had conversations both inside and outside of the sanctuary. While I

enjoyed talking with folks in whatever location served them, the sanctuary principle was a state of mind and not tied to a particular place, so it was appropriate for adults to utilize their comfortable sites allowing them to be vulnerable and transparent. As with the students, hectic schedules and various commitments required an alteration of phenomenological conversation time without compromising the process. The gatekeepers' conversations were more extended as planned, as they had more years on this earth to unpack the myriad of experiences faced in personal and professional lives.

My teacher and administrator conversations matter because their insight, willingness, and daily practice gave physical manifestation to every day and lived experiences schooling enact on Black boys in their quest to become educated and successful in mathematics and science. The fabric of their lived experiences impacts their social relations with Black boys in math and science and whether or not the sanctuary they design empowers, hurts, or hinders my boys' quest for positive self-efficacy. Schooling environments matter, and it is in schools where connections between students, family, and the community aid in forming favorable math and science identities for Black boys.

While conducting this work as an ethnographer, researchers are not the only ones who can engage in this process. This work can challenge teachers and administrators to participate in these in-depth discussions with Black boys to transform education. The interplay between phenomenology inquiry (how Black boys experience(d) life) and ethnography (social forces which dictate how Black boys experience(d) said life) becomes critical in understanding the complexities of K-12 schooling and math and science teaching and learning.

From attending to my boys, teachers, and administrators, and intertwining personal experiences, educators in Redwood, fell into three categories. Educators who genuinely want to teach here; those who wish to use Redwood as a launching pad for employment in a "better, safer community;" or those forced to educate in Redwood due to a demotion. Redwood remains seen as a poor community, primarily Black and Brown folks, generations of academic failure, housing projects, and gang-infested streets. A surface and one-dimensional view championed through societal narratives. When allowed to persist, the damaging rhetoric becomes so powerful that even my boys and educators begin reciting the same verbiage. Verbiage travels from the surface level and takes root in Carter, Malik, Darius, and Thomas's hearts, minds, and souls. I am proving that the language used in school environments is violent and deadly to the Black male psyche and existence. I hoped my presence, the sanctuary, and conversation would reverse or relieve the damage ingested.