Racialized Formations of Learning In and Across Context
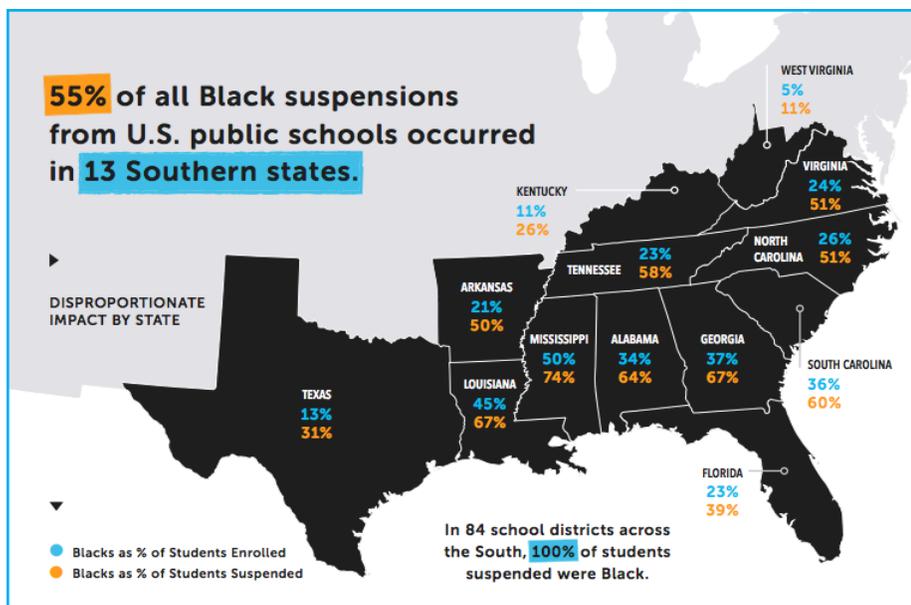
The Family Leadership Design Collaborative

Written by Ezekiel Dixon-Román

It has become increasingly understood that education is a social process that is ubiquitous to being human[1-4]. Learning goes beyond the place of schooling and occurs through the practices in and across contexts. Further learning is formed and shaped by racializations - that is, structural relations of "difference" - producing inequities in pedagogical conditions and inequalities in educational opportunities. Alex Weheliye[5] defines racialization as the sociopolitical process of differentiating and hierarchizing bodies, designating their humanity and possibilities. In order to enable educational justice for everyone social policy has to address the sociopolitical system of hierarchizing and differentiating relations. This brief will provide a way of understanding what racializations are, discuss some of the important research literature on the impact of racializations in education, and highlight the potential of comprehensive education policy.

BLACK STUDENT SUSPENSION RATES IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH

55% of all Black suspensions from U.S. public schools occurred in **13 Southern states.**

DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT BY STATE

WEST VIRGINIA
5%
11%

KENTUCKY
11%
26%

VIRGINIA
24%
51%

NORTH CAROLINA
26%
51%

TENNESSEE
23%
58%

ARKANSAS
21%
50%

MISSISSIPPI
50%
74%

ALABAMA
34%
64%

GEORGIA
37%
67%

SOUTH CAROLINA
36%
60%

TEXAS
13%
31%

LOUISIANA
45%
67%

FLORIDA
23%
39%

● Blacks as % of Students Enrolled
● Blacks as % of Students Suspended

In 84 school districts across the South, **100%** of students suspended were Black.
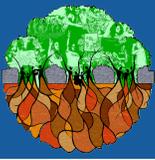
KEY CONCEPTS

Race is a social construct that permeates the actions and interactions of everyday life.

Racialization is a sociopolitical process of differentiation and hierarchization that produces the structural relations of race, gender, class, sexuality, and dis/ability among others

Education is a social process of being human.

Black students are disproportionately suspended, expelled, and penalized in the United States. This racialization of students permeates structural, systemic, and ideological facets of daily interaction and impacts physical and mental wellbeing and possibility.

Infographic produced by the University of Pennsylvania, Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education[6], based on a report by Smith & Harper[7].

RACE & RACIALIZATION

Race is byproduct invention of a social system, process, and ideology of racism[8-15]. This is an ideology that permeates the actions and interactions of everyday life. Zeus Leonardo[10] argues there is no outside of race. Even in the purported "blindness" and seeming absence of racism in language or daily life, its markings rear up in mysterious and often misrecognized ways. In fact, for Weheliye[5], racialization is not to be reduced to race or racism; instead, as a sociopolitical process of differentiation and hierarchization that produces the structural relations of race, gender, class, sexuality, and dis/ability among other structural relations of "difference."

Racializations are not just in language, discourse, and ideology but also shape the neurobiological structure of the body. To not account for the importance of how racializations become part of bodily structures overlooks and misses the vibrant and consequential materiality of differentiating power relations[16]. Michael Hames-García states, "The biological body is not inert matter in the face of racial ideologies" [17, p. 326].

Racialized events and situations do interact with the body, as empirically demonstrated. For instance, stereotype threat is the immediate situational effect of being exposed or primed by a negative group stereotype and the produced anxiety of self-fulfilling that negative stereotype or being evaluated or judged by it[18]. These processes suppress performance on standardized educational tests and explemplify how racializations impact educational opportunities through bodily registers[18]. Additionally, social epidemiology research indicates that racism and perceived discrimination become embodied and materialized in racial health disparities [19-21]. Included in these racial health disparities are learning disabilities, developmental delays, mental health, exposure to lead, and the onset of asthma, each empirically found to impact human learning and development. Power relations do not just exist in sociopolitical relations but are very much part of the corporeal matter of the body, forming and shaping how we preconsciously act and interact in the world as well as our material well-being.

RACIALIZATION PROCESSES & IMPACTS

Racialization in Schools

The forces of racialization also occur in schooling practices such as discipline and interactions with school teachers and administration. A recent report found that in the K-12 public school districts in 13 Southern states black students were disproportionately suspended or expelled at higher rates[7]. They also found that in 84 school districts in the South, black students made up 100% of those students suspended. These are unconscionable rates that reflect the school administrations' and teachers' disposition toward black students[7]. Providing several different examples, Gloria Ladson-Billings[22] has discussed how Black male behaviors in the classroom are feared and not tolerated whereas their White or Asian American counterparts' behaviors are much more tolerated. Others have also found that school administration are differently responsive to black parents engagement with the school, regardless of class[23]. Additionally, parental meetings or conferences with school teachers have been found to, on average, have a negative effect on achievement growth for black males[24].

Racialization in Structural Spaces & Resources

Racializations also include the structural arrangement of space and resources in space. As an example, in addition to Black families being disproportionately overrepresented in neighborhoods of urban poverty, the impact of urban neighborhood poverty on contextual mobility has been more deleterious for Black families than for white families. For Black adults, 72% of those who reside in poor urban neighborhoods were raised by parents who resided in poor urban neighborhoods[25]. This was only 40% for their white adult counterparts.

Contextual mobility matters for education. For example, being raised in a high-poverty neighborhood in one generation has a substantial negative effect on child cognitive ability in the next generation[11]. Additionally, research indicates that school desegregation trends halted in the early 1970s maintaining racial and class segregated schools[27-28]. In fact, reterritorialized boundaries of recent redistricting have not just been on racial lines but also have produced curricular differences as a result of resegregating processes and policies[28].

Thus, hierarchizing and differentiating sociopolitical forces permeate every fabric of social life impacting the well-being, learning and development in and across space and time.
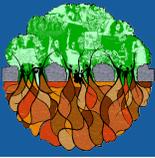
CONSIDERATIONS FOR SOCIAL POLICY & PRACTICE

To address the concerns of racialized formations of learning in and across context, policymakers need to consider social policies that take on a public health approach to education. Education, like racialization, is a social process that is ubiquitous in the everyday acts and interactions of being human. Policy approaches, then, are needed that go beyond schooling and directly challenge and mitigate the hierarchizing and differentiating sociopolitical relations in society. This would necessarily include a more comprehensive approach to education that includes spaces and practices such as libraries, museums, childcare centers, health education and clinics, afterschool programs, parenting practice workshops, prenatal services, mental health services, group counseling, among many others[1]. These social policies not only need to address inequities in structural arrangement and ecological conditions but also do the social and cultural work of radically shifting ideologies of difference. This would have to include community and social interventions with teachers, school administration, and community practitioners (e.g., social workers and public health practitioners) as well as regular institutional audits on sensitivity toward difference. Ultimately, in order to enable greater educational equity and justice, empathetic social policies of comprehensive education will have to account for the racializing formations of learning in and across context.

A #BlackLivesMatter protest in Las Vegas. (Photo: snakegirlproductions/Flickr). Retrieved from Pacific Standard[29].

AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH & PRACTICE

Future research in this area will need to focus less on identity and positionality and more on processes such as the situational measures of racializing relations. New materialist and affect theories will need to be taken up more directly to better examine and theoretically understand the biosocial processes of marginalization. This will need to include both measures of biomarkers and sociotechnical forces in order to account for the increasing ways in which the ubiquity of data and algorithmic thought are shaping the body and everyday life[30].

FOR MORE INFORMATION

FOR MORE RESOURCES:

→ Center for the Study of Race in Education

→ Black Lives Matter: The Schott Foundation 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males

→ Oxford Academic: Youtube Series on Racialization with Dr. Carlos Hoyt

ALSO SEE FLDC RESEARCH BRIEFS:

→ Centering Ancestral Knowledges: Leadership in Learning Environments

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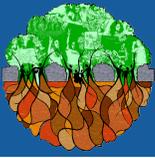
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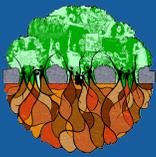
THE FAMILY LEADERSHIP DESIGN COLLABORATIVE

The Family Leadership Design Collaborative (FLDC) is a national network of over 40 scholars, practitioners, and family and community leaders who seek to center racial equity in family engagement by catalyzing an expansive national research agenda and developing "next" (beyond current "best") practices, measures and tools. We envision family and community wellbeing and educational justice as core aims in this work that begins from non-dominant family and community ecologies, creates ongoing transformative possibilities, and builds solidarities towards collective action for racial equity, from early childhood to secondary education.

We mobilize inter-disciplinary and experiential forms of expertise and see families and communities – particularly those marginalized by race, class, language, or immigrant status – as learning experts, co-designers, collaborators, and fellow leaders in the work. For more information, visit our website at www.familydesigncollab.org or email us at uwfldc@gmail.com

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To Cite: