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Résumé de l'article

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Abstract

This paper draws from a critical ethnographic case study of the Roses in Concrete Community School (RiC) in East Oakland, California to explore their approach to repurposing a traditional school into a community responsive learning institution by operationalizing a critical humanist vision of education in a marginalized, urban community. The educator activists who founded RiC envisioned a school that would not only meet the needs of students and families, but act as an intervention and a catalyst for healing and transformation. Historiographic methods are used to examine how the founders conceived and implemented the design of RiC and to demonstrate how they drew upon the history of social movements in the Bay Area to design a school that they believed could meet the needs of poor and working-class Black and Brown children, and in doing so contributed to a longer, intergenerational struggle for justice.

Introduction

This paper documents the efforts of community activists and educators in Oakland, CA to create a school that affirmed the humanity of Black and Brown children and prepared them to be critical agents of transformation and healing in their communities and the world. The Roses in Concrete Community School (RiC)[1] was conceived as a counter-hegemonic project. It opened in 2015 with a mission to serve poor and working-class children of color in East Oakland; historically one of the most marginalized and impoverished communities in the Bay Area. Beyond serving this historically under-served community, the founders sought to prove that schools could be transformed into centers of health and wellbeing for marginalized and impoverished communities. The founders aimed to accomplish this by creating a school that would affirm the identities, cultures, experiences, hopes and dreams of its children and their families.

The school's name was inspired by a metaphor made popular by Hip-Hop legend, actor, cultural critic, and son of a "Panther," Tupac Shakur (1999) entitled *The Rose that Grew from Concrete.* The short poem provided a vision of tenacity and triumph that the founders appreciated:

Did you hear about the rose that grew from a crack
in the concrete
Proving nature's laws wrong it learned 2 walk without having feet
Funny it seems but by keeping its dreams
it learned 2 breathe fresh air
Long live the rose that grew from concrete
when no one else even cared!

The image of a rose growing in concrete captured the beauty and potential these educators saw in the children they would serve and embodied the resilience they hoped to nurture in their students. The founders conceived of the school as more than just an educational institution. They intended for the school to be a community project, one that drew upon the wisdom and strength gained from the social movements of the past. Their goal was to remove barriers to learning and successfully serve the Black and Latinx students of East Oakland, that many of the public schools struggled to serve, by creating a school that was truly responsive to their needs. These educator activists wanted to ensure that RiC would become a community responsive and culturally sustaining/revitalizing institution (McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017) that would promote the holistic wellbeing of its predominantly Black and Latinx students and families (*Roses in Concrete Community School Local Accountability Plan and Annual Update (LCAP)*, 2018). Finally, they also hoped that the school would play a role in revitalizing East Oakland, and even spark a broader movement for change in educational systems throughout the United States and the world.

This article analyzes the efforts of these community activists and educators as they pursued these ambitious goals during the first few years of the school's operation. Founded as a charter school to provide flexibility in hiring and freedom from the bureaucratic limitations of district policies, the school was organized around a deep commitment to social justice, and it included

[1] I use the full name of the Roses in Concrete Community School and abbreviated versions of its name—*Roses in Concrete*, *Roses*, and *RiC*—interchangeably throughout this article.

features that the education activists believed would make it possible for their school to succeed in critical ways that so many other schools in Oakland had not.

For the sake of this special issue on humanizing education, the project of RiC provides a useful case study from which to explore the limitations and possibilities for doing so in the context of a marginalized, urban community. Throughout the paper I define a humanizing education as an intentional effort to counter the forces of dehumanization by affirming the culture, identity, and personhood of students. In the context of the oppressive conditions facing Black and Latinx children in Oakland, a humanizing education necessarily must include an effort to address social, emotional, and physiological needs as well.

The central question guiding this analysis is: How did the founders conceive of creating a school that would affirm the humanity of its students, overcome the barriers that hindered their development and ability to thrive, and prepare them for an uncertain future where they were likely to encounter overt hostility and numerous barriers and obstacles? I begin by examining how the founders of RiC drew upon the history of activism in Oakland, specifically the legacy of the Black Panther Party, to create a school that would not only be an intervention in the miseducation of Black and Brown children in Oakland but also an act of love. From there, I analyze and critique their efforts to create a school that included (1) a focus on the holistic wellbeing of students and families, including social and emotional support for children, (2) Spanish-English dual language immersion, and (3) an Ethnic Studies and arts-based curriculum. Finally, I discuss the implications of this project for similar efforts in other spaces and communities.

For an issue of *Critical Education* dedicated to centering critical efforts to humanize education, the work of the founders to build RiC represents a concrete attempt to operationalize the role of education in affirming the humanity of the oppressed. In writing this paper, I drew inspiration from the Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire who argued that there is no such thing as a neutral education: "Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes 'the practice of freedom'" (Freire, 1970, p. 14). RiC was a school that was created as a means of institutionalizing critical humanist practices and pedagogy. This paper explores how the founders of RiC drew upon the history of social movements in the Bay Area and lessons from their past to design a school that they believed could meet the holistic needs of working-class and poor Black and Brown children, and act as a catalyst in the revitalization and transformation of Oakland.

Methods

This article draws from a larger critical ethnographic case study that was conducted over several years (2014-2020). A variety of qualitative research methods were utilized to obtain data on the operation of the school including: semi-structured 3-part interviews with key stakeholders (teachers, parents and administrators) (Seidman, 2013), classroom and school observations from numerous visits to the school, and a review of key documents (e.g. charter application, mission statement, minutes from faculty meetings, meetings with parents, etc.), including the plans and strategies used to design the school. Additionally, historiographic methods were used to examine how the founders conceived and implemented the design of RiC, and inform the analysis presented in this study. Fieldwork was carried out as a critical advocate and ally of the school, as well as

through traditional participant-observation techniques. Together, the data collected made it possible for me to present the context for the analysis presented in this paper and serves as the basis for my attempt to engage in a holistic analysis of the school. The access I obtained to the school and its personnel provided me with firsthand observations of the day-to-day operations of RiC, as well as opportunities to hear from teachers, students, parents, and others connected to the school community about experiences, perceptions, and challenges encountered by the school.

Literature Review

Although schools are largely perceived as a public good (Kaul et al., 1999), and institutions that make upward mobility possible for working class and poor communities, more often than not, schools in the U.S. tend to reproduce social inequality (MacLeod, 2009; Chetty et al., 2014). This phenomenon is not unique to the U.S. Generations of scholars throughout the world have made numerous compelling cases, supported with both empirical evidence and theoretically grounded analyses, for viewing schools as institutions of injustice that reinforce the status quo in service of racial capitalism and/or colonial interests (Althusser, 1971; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Freire, 1970; hooks, 2003; Howard, 2019; Milne, 2017; Noguera, 2003; Paris and Alim, 2017; Woodson, 1933). Importantly, these critical perspectives frame schools as mechanism of social and cultural reproduction and situate the struggles for educational justice alongside struggles for humanity by oppressed peoples.

One of the most well-known critiques of schooling for reproduction was put forth by Brazilian education philosopher and critical pedagogue Paulo Freire, who described the day-to-day and in-class practices that contribute to these patterns as the "banking method" of education (Freire, 1970); a name for education that promotes domestication and domination. In his seminal book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire not only articulates how and why the banking method is unjust, he also offers a path that educators can pursue to forward liberatory education–education that can promote social transformation, critical consciousness, and justice. Freire's (1970) guidance for an education that can transform communities and the world calls for the restoration of the humanity of oppressed peoples (p. 45) and a praxis of solidarity (p. 176). His work has resonated with and been utilized by oppressed and underserved communities throughout the world, and as a result, there is great diversity in what liberatory and humanizing education looks like across nations and communities. In this section, I provide an outline of what this work has looked like in Oakland, California.

Education and the Struggle for Racial Justice in Oakland

In the 1960s, the Black Panther Party for Self Defense was created in Oakland for the explicit purpose of combating police brutality (Bloom & Martin, 2013). While their willingness to arm themselves captured the attention of the media and broader public, the Panthers did much more as their sense of mission and their commitment to organizing expanded. While their newspaper and self-defense work have received considerable attention (Davenport, 2009; Strain, 2005), their efforts to address the educational needs of the community are less well known (Peck, 2001). Based on their recognition that education is the key to self-determination, the Panthers created an independently operated liberation school and the first free breakfast program for children in the nation (Heynen, 2009).

The efforts of the Panthers were met with systematic attacks by the police, infiltration and espionage by intelligence organizations such as the FBI, and the imprisonment and assassination of several Panther leaders. This brought an end to their independent education work but other activists took on the task of trying to address the educational needs of Black children in Oakland. In the early 1970s, radical activists (the Symbionese Liberation Army) not aligned with the Panthers, gunned down Marcus Foster, the first Black superintendent of Oakland Public Schools. Some activists viewed Foster as an enemy of the people, and the debate that ensued over his murder clearly illustrated the lack of community consensus on how best to serve Oakland's children (Spencer, 2009; Spencer, 2012). This dispute would continue for decades to come. In the late 1990s, the district became embroiled in controversy over a decision by the Oakland School Board to recognize Ebonics (also referred to as African American Vernacular English, or Black vernacular English), as a way to ensure that the learning needs of Black students were met (Baugh, 2000; Perry & Delpit, 1998). In the late 1990s, Oakland Community Organizations (OCO), a coalition of community groups and churches, led a concerted effort to demand change and greater accountability from the Oakland School Board. Their efforts resulted in the creation of several smaller schools which the architects claimed would be more responsive to the needs of students (Gold et al., 2002).

For years, Oakland public schools have been plagued by a range of challenges including revolving door leadership, budget deficits, school closures, strikes by teachers, and threats by the state of California to take the district over. Despite these challenges, activists in Oakland have continued to engage in efforts to create schools that can respond to the needs of the children and the community. The education activists who came together to create Roses in Concrete Community School were aware of this history and the narrative of failure that was used to characterize Oakland schools and students. Despite obstacles that they knew were quite formidable (i.e. poverty, racism, and political indifference), they believed they could do what prior movements had failed to accomplish—create an institution that could succeed in educating poor and working-class children of color. Their actions were guided by the belief that the narrative of failure did not paint an accurate picture of their community. They believed that despite the pernicious effects of poverty, despite the indifference of local politicians, and despite the failures of others in the past, they could create a school where the children of Oakland could thrive despite the tremendous obstacles, like roses that grew from concrete.

The work undertaken by these education activists is similar to recent efforts undertaken in cities such as Baltimore, Newark, Detroit, Cleveland and many others. In such places, the structural challenges created by racial capitalism and the marginalization of working-class and poor communities of color are formidable. The education activists who created RiC were aware that the problems facing communities of color were by no means unique to Oakland. For this reason, they believed that the work they were doing could potentially have national ramifications. They hoped that if they were successful, the project would serve as an example of what could be achieved. They undertook their work knowing that others would be watching and potentially learning from their experience.

For the sake of this paper, the creation of RiC must be viewed as part of a larger and longer struggle for self-determination by communities of color in white settler colonial societies that have sought to practice and implement a form of self-determination in education through community responsive (Tintiangco-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021), culturally sustaining/revitalizing

(McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017) practices. Such efforts are essential to any effort to humanize schooling for historically oppressed peoples (Noguera, 2020). In order to address needs that are systematically undermined and thwarted under white settler colonial schooling, education must aim to be holistic, culturally affirming, and oriented toward critical wellness (Howard, 2019) or healing-centered engagement (Ginwright, 2018).

Applying the Lessons of History: A Rose Emerges from the Concrete in Oakland

The educators and activists who came together to create the Roses in Concrete Community School saw their work as more than educational. For them, schooling was an act of political resistance, one that was building on the legacy of the Panthers and other examples of organized resistance. The founders of RiC were part of this activist tradition, and beyond drawing inspiration from that legacy they sought to use the strategies they had learned from earlier movements to address the challenges facing the families they would serve.

Primary among these was the threat posed by gentrification. From 1940 – 1970 the Black population in Oakland swelled to 47% (DeBolt, 2021). However, by 2020 Oakland's Black population declined by 25%. Black residents comprise just 22% of the city today. In the Oakland school district, the number of Black youth under 18 decreased by 29%, while the number of Asian youth also declined by 13%, and the white and Latinx youth populations grew by 16% and nearly 12% respectively. The rising cost of housing in the East Bay (Berkeley and Oakland) and San Francisco has been identified as the primary cause of the decline. Working class families are under extreme pressure as prices soar due to the growth and influence of major technology corporations in the Silicon Valley. However, Black families have also been fleeing from the Oakland Public Schools in droves as a result of the negative experiences their children face, which many regard as a both a form of mistreatment and miseducation.

The founders of RiC drew on strategies similar to those used by the Black Panthers to confront these challenges as they began planning for the school. To further their goal of self-determination, the Panthers developed a series of "survival programs" that were intended to serve the community, foster institutional growth, and raise political consciousness (Newton, 1996). Similarly, the founders of RiC sought to equip their school with programs and resources that would not only help the families they would serve to survive but would also make it possible to resist gentrification and displacement.

Armed with a critical analysis of race and class oppression, the founders of RiC, like the Panthers, believed that "exploited and oppressed people deserved an education that provided them with the tools to critically examine the capitalist structure, understand their reality as Black in America, and then plot a course for change" (Williamson, 2005, p. 138). The founders of RiC regarded education as a critical part of resistance to oppression in the United States. For the founders, colonization had led to the destruction of culture, language, history, and humanity. To counter this legacy, they sought to create a school that would affirm the humanity of the students they intended to serve. Ultimately, they hoped to create a generation of students who would be prepared to improve conditions in the communities from which they came. Like the Panthers, they explicitly saw education as a political enterprise, one that was essential for long-term liberation (Williamson, 2005, p. 140).

The founders of RiC, like the Black Panthers, sought to establish relational accountability between school and the communities they served. As they developed their plans for the school, they envisioned a community in control of the school to ensure that it would be truly responsive to community needs. They began developing a curriculum that would make the history and culture of students central to all forms of learning, and they made clear their intention to encourage the development of an education that would promote social action (RiC charter petition, 2014; Williamson, 2005). The school they would create would serve children in kindergarten through the eighth grade. It would provide nutritious meals, offer social services such as case management, clothing, housing assistance and other forms of help to needy students and families, and it would extend the hours of operation so that working families would be assured that their children were in a safe and nurturing place until they could be picked up.

The most successful Panther school, the Oakland Community School (OCS), was founded in 1971 and remained open until 1982 (Bloom & Martin, 2013, p. 192; Williamson, 2005, p. 146). Its mission was to prove that Black children could achieve excellence through an education that affirmed their culture. The founders of RiC wanted to follow this example by providing students with a critical pedagogy that would challenge them and showed them how but not what to think (Duncan-Andrade and Morrell, 2008). They planned to use students' lived experiences as a springboard for learning about the world.

The new school would operate year-round and operationalize a holistic view of education. This meant providing access to medical and dental services, school supplies, and if need be, three meals each day. Like the Panther education program, RiC exposed students to a wide variety of cultural history and global perspectives and took students on a variety of field trips so that they could learn in the world and not just the classroom. They wanted students to be able to apply what they learned in the world as social change-agents (Drummond, 2016; Williamson, 2005).

The Roses in Concrete Community School opened its doors in 2014 as the product of a small movement led by experienced educators in the Bay Area, many of whom live and work in Oakland. Angered by the failure of so many public schools to meet the needs of Black and Latinx children, the founders of RiC decided that it was time to build a new institution from the ground up. Guided by the hopes and dreams of the community, and the efforts of critical educators who identified with and loved the children of Oakland, the educator activists who created RiC sought to create a school that could be a beacon of hope. Well aware of the political history of the Bay Area and Oakland, and the efforts of activists who preceded them, they sought to create a school that would affirm the culture of their students and address their social needs. In many ways, RiC was an extension of the progressive activism in the Bay Area and a form of resistance to the forces that continue to marginalize and oppress Black, Indigenous, and Latinx communities, as well as other communities of color.

On Saturday, December 15, 2012, at 1:49pm PST, an email, titled "Build Our Own School Agenda for Dec 29th ··· RESPONSE REQUESTED," was sent to 27 people, including myself. The email was an invitation to participate in the design of a new school. The email asked recipients to respond with their intent to participate and to indicate which "breakout group" they would like to be a part of the school culture norms/practices, curriculum, or pedagogy group. The email included a draft of the school's vision statement, and two tasks were assigned. First, recipients were asked to provide feedback on the vision statement or suggestions to modify it, and second, considering

the ideological framework of the school, recipients were asked to develop descriptions of the students that the project would produce. Through the call to action the founders initiated the process of constructing a school that they believed would be responsive to the social, cultural, and educational needs of East Oakland's future.

Nearly two years later, in October of 2014, when the petition to establish Roses in Concrete Community School (RiC) as an authorized charter school in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) approved by the School Board, elements of the original vision statement included in that initial email would remain as features of the school's official mission statement:

> The Roses in Concrete Community School will be a K-8 school in East Oakland founded on the belief that schools should emphasize knowledge of self, character, and intellectual growth to prepare students to fundamentally impact the global society while learning to live, learn, work and thrive in their own communities. Our principal goal is to develop youth committed to lives characterized by self-discipline, integrity, love and hope in the pursuit of justice and equity for all communities. We encourage our students, who are broadly invested in academic, artistic, athletic, and extracurricular pursuits, to demonstrate the spirit of the Warrior-Scholar. As Warrior-Scholars, our students will cultivate the courage to stand as warriors on the side of justice while having the scholarly faculties to decipher where justice resides in a complex society. (RiC charter petition, 2014)

The RiC mission articulated the beliefs of the founders and the long-term goals of the school. In the charter petition, the founders explained that the name Roses in Concrete, inspired by the writings of Tupac Shakur, the son of former Black Panther Afeni Shakur, is a celebration of the tenacity they hoped to cultivate in their students. The will of the rose to grow in the inhospitable and toxic environment of the concrete was an apt metaphor for the work they planned to undertake. In their founding documents they described the nation of being at risk of losing an entire generation of young people in urban centers "who feel trapped in 'the concrete'—a vicious cycle of poverty, violence, hopelessness and despair" (RiC charter petition, 2014, p. 23). Rather than saving the "deserving few," the founders argued that a solution was needed to help the majority overcome the toxic conditions that burden them. They argued that "the point of education is not to *escape* poverty. The point of education is to *end* poverty" (Fieldnote, February 8, 2014).

Culturally Sustaining/Revitalizing and Healing-Centered Education

The founders of RiC believed that they could counter the debilitating effects of poverty and racism through intentional engagement with those they would serve. In their charter petition, they argued that by giving "students and families love, security, nourishment, care and education, we can create a model of success and revitalization that reverses decades of disinvestment" (RiC Charter Petition, 2014, p. 23). Deliberately drawing attention to the ongoing divestment in urban areas, the founders acknowledged that RiC would be an educational intervention in the longue durée (Braudel and Matthews, 1980; Braudel, 2009); an answer to the conditions that have historically oppressed people, and a response to the strategy of colonial domination that had been used to control communities of color in settler colonial societies (Wood, 2019). They argued that the education they would provide would foster transformation by reversing the impact of systematic neglect and exclusion.

It is important to note that the founders did not believe that the transformation they hoped to bring about would happen through an education that would "save" the "best and brightest." This is a common criticism of charter schools which often deliberately select students that are easier to serve while systematically excluding those with greater needs (Frankenberg et al., 2010; Lubienski and Weitzel, 2008). Instead, they saw their school as a means of expanding opportunities for those who had been least well-served, and as a way of "breaking up the concrete so that entire rose gardens can blossom in our highest need neighborhoods" (RiC charter petition, 2014, p. 23). Through a focus on revitalization and restoration of well-being for individuals and the larger East Oakland community, the transformational education model proposed by RiC founders possess the characteristics of culturally sustaining education (Paris & Alim, 2017; McCarty & Lee, 2014). As described by Paris and Alim (2017), "the purpose of state-sanctioned schooling has been to forward the largely assimilationist and often violent white imperial project, with students and families being asked to lose or deny their languages, literacies, cultures, and histories in order to achieve in school" (p. 1). In response, culturally sustaining forms of engagement "seek to perpetuate and foster–to sustain–linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (Paris and Alim, 2014, p. 88). They understood that in order for culturally sustaining education to be relevant to the needs of children in the East Oakland it would have to be holistic, and it would necessarily involve a focus on healing at the individual and collective level and thus support social transformation (Freire, 1970). These very characteristics also suggest that RiC was a *humanizing* project, one that is "strengths based, advances a collective view of healing, and re-centers culture as a central feature in well-being" (Ginwright, 2018).

Warrior-Scholars

The RiC mission states that the ultimate goal of the school is to develop youth committed to lives characterized by self-discipline, integrity, love and hope in the pursuit of justice and equity for all communities (RiC Charter Petition, 2014, p. 1). The mission statement also introduces the concept of the Warrior-Scholars. The concept embodies the school's goals for its students which go far beyond humanizing the learning environment or improving learning outcomes. A Warrior-Scholar was envisioned as a student who would be armed with the knowledge, discipline, and cultural awareness to counter the forces of oppression to which so many others succumb. The founders envisioned that Warrior-Scholars would be produced through the ideological and pedagogical framework of the school. The Warrior-Scholar is also the clearest connection between RiC and the legacy of prior radical movements in Oakland, particularly the Black Panther Party.

The Roses charter petition describes the Warrior-Scholar as "a concept borrowed from a 15th century Japanese text, which articulates the Warrior-Scholar as the 'highest form of humanity' because such a person has cultivated the courage to stand on the side of justice while having the intellectual faculties to decipher where justice resides in a complex society" (RiC Charter Petition, 2014, p. 23). Interviews with three founders of RiC enabled me to learn more about why they saw the concept of the Warrior-Scholar was central to their work. Discussing the concept, one of the school's founders mentioned that warriorhood is a birthright and an important part of the cultures of many people, but it is often stigmatized:

> It's bred out of us in school. We're taught that it's bad. KIPP's motto is about 'work hard and be nice.' If you are simply a warrior, then you'll be morphed into a soldier, and soldiers follow orders. They don't question, they don't think, they just execute.

> …the warrior is able to distinguish the kinds of directives that are harmful for the community and they can resist those directives and go their own way. At the same time, they can acknowledge directives that are a part of a collective good that they need to follow. That's where the scholar comes in. If you are not a scholar, then you cannot fully execute the principles of the warrior because you never trained yourself to think for yourself. That's something we don't do in schools. We don't teach young people to think for themselves. So many schools are antithetical to education because schools are involved in the process of institutionalizing somebody to become a soldier, and that's anti-democratic. Education is about creating Warrior-Scholars. The core principle is self- determination, and that is the essence of the Warrior-Scholar. It's the essence of some of the best movements that I've studied and admired in the U.S. and in western society. (Interview, February 28, 2014)

The founders envisioned the Warrior-Scholar as an individual who would see themselves as responsible to their community. Another founder described the school's goals as being to create an educational experience that would lead to the development of critical change agents. For this founder, to be a Warrior-Scholar means "developing and utilizing the tools to be successful under this current system, the dominant narrative and paradigm—how we traditionally measure academic success and achievement—and simultaneously developing and utilizing the tools to question, challenge and subvert that system" (Interview, February 23, 2014). Admittedly a difficult task, they went on to state that "It will require a sort of warrior spirit. It's a potentially precarious position because it requires the same kind of pedagogy to do that. To help students be successful according to the oppressive structures while simultaneously preparing them and encouraging them to challenge and eventually supplant those structures and replace them with new structures" (Interview, February 23, 2014).

The founders understood that while they wanted their students to be critical thinkers and agents of change, the school and their students would be judged on traditional/conventional measures such as test scores. For this reason, even as they sought to create a school with a clear counter-hegemonic curricular and pedagogical foundation, they also sought to provide their students with the academic skills that would make it possible for them to meet the traditional academic standards they would be judged upon.

The third founder interviewed stated that the school's intention is:

> To foster the development of Warrior-Scholars who are going to go out into the world, gather resources and knowledge, and bring it back to their communities so that their communities can thrive. There are programs where they are able to get students to be educated and go away to college. You get an education, a better job, a better life for yourself, but you don't come back. That's not a sustainable model. We make people scholars, but unless they know that they are warriors and that they are in a battle, they are not going to sacrifice and be willing to take the necessary steps to help others in similar situations. (Interview, February 11, 2014)

The founders describe the Warrior-Scholars as critical thinking, community-oriented change agents for justice. It is important to note that the community-minded nature of the Warrior-Scholar contrasts with the individualistic measures of success promoted in most U.S. schools.

Many schools today have vision or mission statements that focus on preparing students for college and careers. However, few schools promise to train students to be activists for justice in their community and the world that are capable of deciphering "where justice resides in a complex society" (RiC charter petition, 2014). Moreover, many poor and working-class students of color are taught that individual success will require them to leave their community to pursue their goals. Many schools send implicit and at times explicit messages to their students that if they want to succeed, they must reject the culture, lifestyle and ties of the communities where they were raised. As one founding team member stated during a planning meeting when the school was still in its design stage commented, "Remember, that the point is not to escape the hood. The point is to transform the hood" (Fieldnote, February 8, 2014).

Creating a Rose Garden: A Theory of Change

In many schools in the United States, educators are expected to be apolitical. Even when they work in marginalized communities beset by a variety of economic and social hardships and that are negatively affected by political issues or policies that have a direct and negative impact on their school, they are expected to be neutral (Freire, 1970; Lopez, 2003; Milner, 2020; Picower, 2021). In contrast, teachers at Roses were encouraged to see their work as political and to embrace the struggle against the forces of oppression. Several scholars have written about the importance of teachers understanding the political nature of their work (Agostinone-Wilson, 2005; Charney et al., 2021; Flannery, 2022; Konkol and Ramirez-Alonzo; Pham and Philip, 2021; Rios, 2019; Weiner and Asselin, 2020). Such a stance drew teachers to RiC, and one of the teachers at Roses lost her prior job because she violated this principle (and myth) of neutrality by teaching her students about the case of political prisoner Mumia Abdul Jamal. By making demands for nurses and counselors in every school, restorative justice practices to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline, and adequate resources for schools serving poor and working class BIPOC students, many teachers have actively rejected a stance of neutrality and positioned themselves as allies of the communities they serve.

Determined to counter this tradition, the founding team of RiC collaborated with the Alameda County Public Health Department to identify the boundaries of Oakland's highest need neighborhoods in order to intentionally target the students they believe would most benefit from the opportunities Roses would provide. The RiC founding team also used the 2010 U.S. Census to obtain data on the specific census tracts in the area of East Oakland where the target population they planned to serve resided (RiC charter petition, 2014). Their charter petition includes a description of East Oakland as a community profoundly affected by social and structural inequalities, multi-generational poverty and corresponding social ills, and provides 10 critical findings from their study of Oakland on their target population related to racial/ethnic diversity, income, unemployment rate, the percentage of children and teens living in poverty, and various factors said to be indicators and predictors of physical and academic wellness.

Beyond the economic and social hardships they sought to address, the founders of RiC also wanted to serve communities that contained the racial/ethnic mix of they envisioned as essential to their mission. The target population they aimed to serve was comprised predominantly of people of color: 47.5% Latinx, 38.1% African American, 7.3% Asian and Pacific Islander. The community also served families with median household incomes of $33,803 or 68% of the city's median income, high unemployment rates (13.2% in East Oakland compared to 10.1% in Oakland and

7.9% in the U.S.), and where single-mother families comprise 41% of all families. Nearly half of East Oakland's teenagers under the age of 18 (41.1%) live below the poverty level, which is three times the national average. They also reference the high rate of homicides, data on the academic achievement gap between East Oakland and the city of Oakland as a whole, and the fact that the students who attend schools that serve the target community perform in the lowest two deciles per state ranking (RiC charter petition, 2014, pp. 20-29). Though designing a school that would deliberately address challenges such as these might be daunting, for the founders of RiC it was consistent with their political sense of purpose, one that completely rejected the notion of neutrality.

The founders of RiC pledged to recruit, hire and train "educators who come from similar socio-economic and racial backgrounds and communities" as the students (RiC charter petition, 2014, p. 42). The founders understood that it would be important to hire people that understood the challenges of growing up in impoverished communities because they would have the insights to respond students in Oakland's highest need neighborhoods. By seeing and working closely with people who could relate and empathize with their lived experiences, it was hoped that the students RiC would serve, the Roses, would be prepared for and compelled to develop careers and return "to vulnerable communities like East Oakland to invest and serve as community leaders" (RiC charter petition, 2014, p. 23).

A Holistic and Humanistic Framework

Beyond their counter-hegemonic focus, the founders of RiC believed that learning for their students would be best supported by connecting Abraham Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" (Maslow, 1958) with five themes of effective practice that they called the 5R's: Resources, Relationships, Relevancy, Rigor, and Responsibility. The vision for classroom and school culture was centered around these themes. They believed that if staff were guided by a framework that blended Maslow's hierarchy of human needs with the 5 Rs, they would be able to address the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) needs of their students. They would accomplish this goal by developing a SEL program that cultivated a growth mindset among students. Carol Dweck (2017) has defined growth mindset as the belief that ability can be developed and improved through practice and dedication. The founders of RiC argued that social-emotional learning would be integrated throughout the curriculum and be a part of all instruction as a key strategy for meeting the school vision and providing for all levels of Maslow's framework.

The founders of RiC believed that this framework–the approach to how the school will respond to the hierarchy of students' needs using the 5 Rs, program strategies for meeting target population needs, and clear articulation of how learning best occurs for the target population–could be used to guide engagement and instruction for students and to some degree their families. The operating theory was that by attending to their most critical needs (food, stress, health, etc.) they would be able to remove the barriers to meaningful engagement and meet the academic needs of their students. Their approach was in effect also a critique of the approach used in many schools which focus narrowly on academic achievement while ignoring critical social and emotional needs or teaching SEL strategies while ignoring the social inequity that shapes the context of students' social and emotional experiences (Camangian and Cariaga, 20220. Although the founders acknowledge that the district had recently taken an important shift toward developing practices that are attentive to the whole child through the full-service school model (Dryfoos, 1994), they

believed that trainings and partnerships they would create at RiC would be even more effective because they would be specifically tailored (culturally and community responsive) to the community and provide the wrap around support services to families and students in need.

In this respect, the strategy used by RiC closely resembled the survival programs of the Panthers. Roses founders viewed the plight of children and families in East Oakland as a byproduct of systemic oppression and to what they described as "disinvestments" in the community. They would counter this by responding to the "urgency of now" through trauma-informed practices, and by treating the safety, stability, security, and health of children as precursors to rigorous and responsible engagement as scholars. One RiC school leader recalled being introduced to the concept of "seven generations" at what they described as one of the most influential professional development experiences they had at the school. The term is derived from Indigenous cultures in the Americas. First Nation scholar Cindy Blackstock (2011), who's work shows that Maslow appropriated Indigenous knowledges and misarticulated what he took through a western and white lens with his "hierarchy of needs," described the seven generations concept as a feature of First Nation ontology. The concept serves as a way of understanding how people engage the world and remain connected to their past. It is rooted in an expanded conception of time and provides a means to connect and contextualize one's actions today to both ancestral experiences (the seven generations prior) and to the impact one's actions will have on future generations (the seven generations to follow).

As they described the healing work of the school, the school leader explained that in the context of RiC, the seven generations principle means that "every time you see a student you have to look at the seven generations of trauma they are carrying on their shoulder" (Interview, March 24, 2018). And so, twenty-nine organizations and individuals associated with local non-profits are listed in the Roses charter petition as strategic partners who would be enlisted to help the school to meet student and family basic needs, including issues such as health/wellness, economic development, safety, early childhood needs, child care and parenting classes, housing and real estate development, legal support for families, dance and arts resources, mindfulness, meditation and yoga resources, restorative justice, and urban teacher recruitment and development.

Intentions Versus Impact; Theory, Practice, and Real Limitations

The radical vision and high expectations articulated by the founders of RiC was rooted in a collective perspective on why a school like RiC is needed in a poor and working-class community of color like East Oakland. Their theory of change was based upon a framework intended to guide staff and teachers at the school as they worked to embrace students as "roses" and cultivate Warrior-Scholars in a "loving, caring, and socially supportive environment" (RiC charter petition, 2014). However, neither the vision, the theory of change or the high expectations spelled out the specific skills and knowledge that would be needed by students so that they could work, thrive, and impact change in the local and global community. The Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) for RiC extend our understanding of the Warrior-Scholars that RiC is designed to produce and the occupational and technological skill-building that the founders see as critical needs for change agents in their community. According to the founders of Roses, graduates of RiC would:

1. Exude characteristics of courage, humility, natural inquiry, kindness, creativity, and resiliency

2. Have a solid grasp on effective uses of technology and multimedia tools to better themselves *and* inspire positive social change.

3. Have an understanding of the critical lenses and tools developed in the 20th century to examine issues of race, power, status, gender, and wealth distribution in the 21st century.

4. Express pride and honor in their ancestral roots and be able to identify historical and contemporary alliances across lines of national and ethnic identities. (RiC charter petition, 2014)

The SLOs for RiC's students reflect an expectation of activism for Warrior-Scholars and the intentions of the school's founders. In my work with schools and districts throughout the country, I have seen typical SLOs for secondary schools address aspects of learning that are related to academic ability, ethics, creativity, and occasionally to service, but the SLOs for many schools are generic, and do not attempt to be culturally or community responsive. Typical SLOs for high schools in the United States that I have seen might include goals such as: a) read, write, speak and listen effectively; b) think critically and independently; c) develop the habits necessary to meet the challenges of the 21st century; and d) correctly identify and effectively use available resources, including technology, to manage, research and synthesize knowledge. Unfortunately, learning outcomes such as these often do little to convey to students or the broader community that their unique circumstances are appreciated and understood by schools, thereby missing out on an opportunity to generate buy-in among students, families, and even teachers.

The founders of RiC envisioned Warrior-Scholar as students who would succeed in the current system and be capable of transforming that very system into one that is more just. To do so, students would need to develop the skills, knowledges, and understandings that would prepare them for much more than just the workforce. In addition to addressing the character building that the founders viewed as essential, Warrior-Scholars would need to develop the wherewithal required to advance growth and inspire positive social change. In addition, the school was successful in cultivating an environment that promoted pride in heritage and culture amongst minoritized and oppressed peoples. This was a strategy for establishing or strengthening cultural connection and viewed as necessary for cultural perpetuity–an important counter approach to the "erasure" inherent in white settler and racial capitalist schooling.

However, the promise of any group or collective to forward transformational goals rests on that community's ability to galvanize its members and sustain the effort over time. As an antihegemonic educational project, RiC attracted educators who believed in the school's purpose and viewed the school's vision as a call to action. True believers in the RiC project, most of the educators who worked there joined the community aware that they would be asked to do what most schools would not ask them, and what most schools are unwilling to do. In this sense, the school hired people that could reasonably be described as Warrior-Scholars themselves–individuals who had succeeded in the school system but who were determined to transform it.

However, teaching at RiC was extremely demanding and caused several teachers to experience a sense of burnout, creating additional strain for the professional community that kept the school afloat. In addition, leadership change occurred frequently at RiC and had a negative

impact on the school's culture and the willingness of even very dedicated teachers to remain committed to the project over time. Teachers and other staff often looked to the school's leaders for support, and when relief efforts were not effective or did not come, several educators who believed in the RiC project decided to leave the school. The departure of teachers required the school to hire new staff, and though the school attracted educators from across the U.S., new teachers require support to become familiar with the school's systems, practices, and expectations, and they also had to form new relationships with students and families.

All of these factors drew attention, energy, and resources away from the primary concerns of the RiC project: students, families, and the community. Interviews with educators who left RiC revealed that they felt the need to prioritize their own well-being. Despite the school's goals and aspirations for student and the community revitalization, the school struggled to extend the practices it used to its employees. Although the school was founded on the understanding that students' basic needs would need to be met in order for them to thrive by centering a critical humanist view of pedagogy and engagement, ensuring that teachers' basic needs were met was often experienced as a secondary concern.

Conclusion: Operationalizing a Critical Vision for a School That Affirms Humanity and Promotes Resistance

In 2018, while in a 5th grade classroom with an Arts and Ethnic Studies teacher as we observed a small black poster with white text that said, "Children carry the wisdom of the ancestors," the teacher explained the culture for learning in their classroom: "Everything about this class is about socially constructing knowledge and information, which is a cornerstone for Ethnic Studies. You have knowledge via your experience, and your perspective on that experience *is* knowledge. And that is a counter-discourse. It is a key element of Ethnic Studies, which is knowledge of self" (Teacher Interview, April 16, 2018). The teacher's statement reflects an understanding of both knowledge construction and the transformative potential of honoring students' right to the word (Casar, 2022). As Freire (1970) argued, "To exist, humanly, is to name the world...to say the true word...is to transform the world... Those who have been denied their primordial right to speak their words must first reclaim this right and prevent the continuation of this dehumanizing aggression (p. 88). In contrast to the disregard for prior knowledge that is common in many schools, RiC would value and attempt to honor the lived experiences and perceptions of students, families, and the wider community.

The RiC teachers I observed and interviewed often argued that what mattered most was to connect with students. One of the school's Lead Teachers explained,

> "My bread and butter is youth culture, and that makes me responsive to youth. I listen to the youth and incorporate what they are interested in. I always start with that, and then I connect to the ancestors. Sometimes, when I start with the ancestors, students will say 'who cares?' So, I learned. Even when I'm teaching hegemony, and I teach it to fifth graders, I start with analyzing Drake or some other artist that is hot, and then we tie it into its historical context. I just feel like, in order for our kids to really embrace this stuff, you've got to meet them where they're at, and then you develop from there." (Interview, June 15, 2018)

This teacher and many others responded to my inquiries about the work of teaching at RiC by demonstrating an understanding of the need for teachers to be curious about their students. On the other hand, it was not uncommon for new and less experienced teachers to struggled to develop close, supportive relationships with their students. While these teachers recognized the inherent giftedness of all young people and hoped to honor those they served, many of them were unsure of where healing and transformation work should begin–exemplifying the dire need for mentorship and systematic capacity building for educators in response to student and community needs.

The educator activists who founded RiC envisioned a school that would not only meet the needs of students and families, but act as an intervention and catalyst for change in the East Oakland community and the field of education. They sought to create a school that affirmed the identity of students and supported their well-being. In many ways they succeeded. Guided by knowledge of previous efforts to radically transform society and resist the forces that devalue the experiences, perceptions, and knowledges of poor and working class communities and people of color, RiC's founders designed a plan to change the world through education. Their plan relied on change agents, Warrior-Scholars, would support Black and Brown solidarity, and would embrace the wounds of the past in order to restore hope and promise for the future. However, their plan to support holistic engagement capable of deconstructing "essentialisms that reduce the multidimensionality of human experience" (Lee & McCarty, 2017, p. 77), required more resources, training and support for teachers, consistency in leadership, and time to cultivate the limitless potential of BIPOC students and communities. Through the RiC movement, we know that those who hope to forward transformation through humanizing education must also apply a critical humanist approach to those who are expected to grow roses in concrete: teachers, leaders, and staff.

Educational transformation takes time, thoughtfulness, and the revision of plans when obstacles arise. Still, the movement to create the Roses in Concrete Community School provides many lessons for those who hope to use education to decrease domination and increase freedom–"to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave us" (Horkheimer, 1972, p. 244). For educators who undertake similar projects, a saying from prominent Africana studies scholar, John Henrik Clarke, may be most helpful: "History is a clock that people use to tell their political and cultural time of day. It is also a compass that people use to find themselves on the map of human geography" (Clarke, 1993, p. 11). Once oriented, educators who hope to cultivate learning spaces that humanize historically oppressed communities must determine a strategy for disrupting hopelessness (Duncan-Andrade, 2009) and engage in generative activism to repurpose traditional schools into community responsive learning centers for critical wellness.

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