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*Ghosts of Brown v. Board of Education 1954 . . . Still Fighting for Human
Status & Social Justice:*

DEVELOPMENTAL AND INTERSECTIONAL INSIGHTS ABOUT DIVERSE CHILDREN'S IDENTITY

Given the valued invitation to share my scholarship with you today, I will begin my remarks with significant appreciation to the University of Florida Levin College of Law Center on Children and Family and the Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies. I am especially appreciative of the long-term collegiality provided by Nancy Dowd whose advocacy of all children is recognized and highly valued and especially now. It is critical to acknowledge that these are difficult times for our nation, but are enormously eventful for young children denied a fair start. Following introductory comments, I will provide illustrations of conceptual challenges and ignored opportunities for maximizing young children's and youth development, and then frame concluding remarks.

These are difficult times for our nation which are expected to continue given changing demographics and the fact that too many young children are not provided a fair start. On the one hand—acknowledged or not—everyone represents a vulnerability status (i.e., possess both risks and protective factors). However—as a nation—and irrespective of vulnerability status, all children embody the sources of our own economic and social viability; thus, their less than fair treatment has consequences. And at the same time, it is imperative to state more specifically that if we cannot support *all children* simply because it is the right thing to do, then we need to weigh in because we are afraid to do anything less. Today's young children will be of age to make decisions about our own quality of life as we experience the inevitability of old age—so if we cannot maximize their development because it is right, we should do it because we are fearful. When we invest in them, we are really investing in ourselves. Our joint presence here today to collaborate and pool conceptual resources to make all children resilient and supported is both humane as well as the economically and socially smart thing to do.

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With that introduction, in the remarks to be shared today, my intent is to offer the conceptual shortcomings which hinder scholarly contributions important to contemporary policies and practices. Reference will be to traditions intended to aid the guaranteed supports represented in the Constitution and salient to all of America's diverse citizenry. In framing the dilemma of representation—or not—as experienced by diverse populations, the following quote by Albert Einstein is apropos and clearly represents an identity relevant conundrum: “Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing it is stupid.”¹ That is our dilemma. Relative to the current national situation regarding diversity and the quote, the dilemma is that the Constitution makes references and allowances for its nation's citizens; however, behaviorally and relative to inclusivity, we have failed to overcome the belief that particular individuals are not members of the human family. Beliefs about the superiority of non-minorities persist as well as unacknowledged and organized efforts to guarantee privileges for some while increasing risk conditions for others.

Privileging particular voices without formal discussion of the fact has permitted and abetted active deceptions. Following the 2016 elections and eight years of leadership by a man of color, the observed problem and practiced everyday reality of egocentric beliefs, communicated misconceptions, and patterned outright lying have become the norm; it represents the milieu of child focused social science, implemented practices, and the content of policy.

Salient is that young children's development means they are constantly taking in information including structured and organized *miscommunications* about others (e.g., minorities and immigrants). It is important to equate the contemporary situation with the dilemma precipitated by the interpretations and reliance on early social science studies concerning children's perceptions of color and people.² The inference made was that because black and white children showed a preference for all things “light/white” and a demonstrated proclivity to devalue all things dark, the interpreters of the Clarks' efforts assumed black self-hatred. The inferred remedy was that black children needed to be in the presence of white children in order to avoid self-hatred. No one understood that black youngsters were responding to their American context as black children (i.e., not adults), taking in information about the world, and answering “appropriately” to questions posed. Critically, also ignored was that it was children's normal processing of the world (given developmental status) which prevented them from internalizing the affective impact of language used about black people. As we replicated those studies, we determined for black and for white children—because of this organized, persistent, and systemic misrepresentation of diverse people—in fact, youngsters' comments

1. *Quote by Albert Einstein*, GOODREADS, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/8136665-everybody-is-a-genius-but-if-you-judge-a-fish>.

2. See K.B. Clark, *Effect of Prejudice and Discrimination on Personality Development* (Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth, 1950).

represented the outcome of their “information taking in process.”³ What always astounded me, and remains an indelibly recalled experience, is the framed character of their responses. When you ask young children about preferences, attitudes, and beliefs about people or color, they gaze at you—an all knowing “big person”—as if you are deranged for posing the question. It was our failure to understand the basic humanity and linked attributes of the developmental status of youngsters of color which represented the problem and conceptual shortcoming. Children’s responses actually denoted the negative imbued content regarding American racial traditions to which all are exposed from micro- and macro-system level messages about “difference” resulting in the “color conundrum” referenced by Gunnar Myrdal and others.⁴ The untold social science relevant dilemma was that young children repeated institutionalized biases and stereotypes to which they were exposed but did not internalize the *affect*. We were able to demonstrate empirically that young children share information to which they are exposed when you pose the question to them. Thus, black children maintain their positive values about the self while also demonstrating proficiency in sharing accrued “knowledge about the world.”⁵

This fact is highly salient, from a developmental perspective, given that the noted information garnering process in early childhood is part of our “normal” DNA linked human development process. Development moves from an early state of cognitive egocentrism (i.e., appropriate narcissism). If you ask children a variety of questions about their objective reality, they will tell you what they “know;” at the same time, information accrued about the self-system from family and community is also present. Children’s “normal egocentrism” functions wedge-like and, thus, serves as protection against the potential to experience dissonance or uncertainty when ideas or values seem in conflict. So the task for early childcare providers is to make sure that all youngsters feel emotionally “awesome” while simultaneously absorbing information about the world and how it operates.

Informational content garnered from the outside (i.e., anti-black values about people of color) occurs while also feeling awesome about the self given

3. *Study: White and Black Children Biased Toward Lighter Skin*, CNN (May 14, 2010, 4:24 PM), <http://www.cnn.com/2010/US/05/13/doll.study/index.html>.

4. See GUNNAR MYRDAL, *AN AMERICAN DILEMMA: THE NEGRO PROBLEM AND MODERN DEMOCRACY* (1944).

5. Margaret B. Spencer, *Cultural Cognition and Social Cognition as Identity Factors in Black Children’s Personal-Social Growth*, in *BEGINNINGS: THE SOCIAL AND AFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT OF BLACK CHILDREN* 215–30 (Margaret B. Spencer et al. eds., 1985); Margaret B. Spencer, *Black Children’s Race Awareness, Racial Attitudes and Self-Concept: A Reinterpretation*, 25 *J. CHILD PSYCHOL. & PSYCHIATRY* 433 (1984); Margaret B. Spencer & Frances D. Horowitz, *Effects of Systematic Social and Token Reinforcement on the Modification of Racial and Color Concept Attitudes in Black and White Preschool Children*, 9 *DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOL.* 246 (1973); Margaret B. Spencer et al., *Doll Studies*, in *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF RACE AND RACISM* 67–70 (Patrick L. Mason ed., Cengage 2d ed. 2013) (2008).

family and community socialization experiences. Particularly during the preschool years, dissonance is minimized due to young children's appropriate cognitive egocentrism. But during first or second grade when literacy and math content skills are the heightened focus, egocentrism is reduced given maturation and experience-based cognitive differentiation. Critical to acknowledge is that the "wedge-like" cognitive egocentrism is no longer available for protecting the ego.

Moving into sophisticated and less egocentric ways of thinking about self and the outside world; students must process and make sense of dissonant information. Potentially unsettling feelings precipitate stress requiring immediate reactions and coping and, thus, adaptive or maladaptive responses. When children have difficulty making sense about knowledge obtained about the world including inferred messages "about the self," some feel dissonance which precipitates psychic uncomfortableness. Important to acknowledge is that the "inference making" processes were not possible during the early preschool period; we should consider that normal cognitive egocentrism of early childhood may function as protective. During middle childhood, awareness of disparaging comments concerning own group membership may require significant coping. Needing greater insights into how children of color cope with potential dissonance and the implications of same for school achievement and persistency is critical.

It is important to acknowledge that for adults and the frequently observed self-centered ways of thinking, we refer to the particular emotional status as extreme self-absorption of egotism. Perhaps more appropriate is a designation of pathological narcissism—which is a different level of "self-outside world" distortion because it is volitional and significantly and negatively impacts others' lives. For youngsters, egocentrism is developmentally appropriate; for older individuals, the self-centeredness represents another "social agenda" with untoward implications for others. This conference event should reinforce and consider the importance of designing and implementing socio-cultural supports suitable for children's developmental stage of development. By providing appropriate supports and critical feedback, children will not learn to rely on identities that result in adult narcissism, such as perceptions of superiority and beliefs of earned privilege. We hazard that the latter socialization strategy is more likely to lead to practiced equity and beliefs of shared humanity as adult shared and practiced values.

The contemporary dilemma is that the Constitution makes references to and allowances for its nation's citizens; however, confronted still are significant problems because the humanity for citizens of color is not recognized. Given the timing of this event, we acknowledge the 50 years since the assassination of Dr. King and note, as well, the nearly 60 years post-*Brown v. Board of Education*.⁶ Dr. King's message suggests that no matter one's disciplinary

6. *Brown v. Bd. of Educ.*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

identity, there remain significant and associated economic, racism-linked, and social justice issues requiring remedy. *Brown* also illustrates that progress requires examining basic underlying philosophical issues evident as we use public dollars in the conduct of identity-relevant scholarly efforts. Unpacking the identity process as linked to policy and practice represents stable and patterned ways of coping with or responding to everyday decision making and behavioral orientations. This explains the persistency of practices. Why so little change in 50 or 60 years? I believe it is because we establish everyday habits in responding to challenges which function as coping strategies that become internalized as an under-acknowledged inequality cemented identity.

How we intellectually orient ourselves to problem-solving race linked themes while failing to interrogate its etiology precipitates troubling behavioral orientations. It results in shortsighted interpretations of research findings and institutional shortcomings intended to provide insights and supports vis-à-vis all of the nation's citizens. As a traditionally trained developmental psychologist, nonetheless, I "own" the fact that we have participated in the conceptually limiting "traditions" described. Too frequently traditional research has not focused on understanding the humanity of all children, but instead has represented inappropriate assumptions about who is superior and who is the assumed inferior other. Thus, post-*Brown* and Dr. King's assassination, our nation's children remain in dire circumstances.

The presence of an invisible "elephant in the room" requires attention if authentic change is to be accomplished moving deeper into 21st century. The title of my remarks suggest differences both in the basic definition of "humanity" practiced and "humane conditions" 1) used by social scientists, policymakers, and interpretations of the law; 2) provided as variations in perspectives regarding whether there is an everyday presence of structural racism functioning; and 3) conceptualized as significant sources of risk and challenge requiring assistance for some and—proximally at the same time—remain absent for others. The noted situation is generally unacknowledged and thus, remains, residually, as "ghost-like conditions" in the shadow of *Brown v. Board* decision. *Brown* heralded the ending of state-determined racial segregation in the nation's public schools. However, unfortunately, positive and hopeful residual impacts of the opinion remain absent from lives of 21st century minorities and the poor who daily experience persistent indicators of social inequality and opportunity access differences. As stated by legal scholar Derrick Bell during the Harvard Law School symposium commemorating the 25th anniversary of the opinion, "Brown will not be forgotten. It has triggered a revolution in civil rights law and in the political leverage available in and out of court."⁷

Significant consequences of the Supreme Court's opinion remain

7. Derrick A. Bell, Jr., *Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest-Convergence Dilemma*, 93 HARV. L. REV. 518, 518 (1980).

unaddressed. Functioning as a ghost of *Brown*, the nation remains haunted by the implicit and problematic assumptions underlying the 1954 decision. They linger as an ever-present “elephant in the room,” thus, enduring in many social science traditions and professional practices. For one, there’s an underlying inferiority/superiority view concerning identities and basic worth of blacks and whites. And second, the law functions as if an authentic colorblind society. Not only is the latter a fallacy, moreover, there remains an underlying and practiced philosophical stance that not only does skin color matter in America but, in fact, basic human development process assumptions about whites as applied to white children *are not* applied and considered about children in communities of color. And that is why the interpretation of Mamie and Kenneth Clark’s work was emboldening. The empirical results accessed, incorporated, and forwarded were not inferred by the Court as information provided about young children. Rather they were framed and interpreted, more likely than not and unconsciously, as adult cognitions, thoughts, and self-processes. *Brown* was formulated from a viewpoint which indicated that without white presence in their lives, black children’s basic human development orientation was determinative of self-hatred. Given the implied assumptions about black psychological functioning noted, the perspective served as the programming training content for teacher education pedagogy. Post-*Brown*, the tradition continues into the 21st century as social science prepared training materials. The objective intent is that tax dollars sourced teacher salaries support the learning of all children but, in reality, a different situation exists.

We consider the early childhood period—beginning at birth—as one representing series of critical interactions with socializing parental agents. For example, there is feedback and patterned interactions between a baby/early toddlerhood children and adults. The interactions aid early cognition and affect relevant learning (e.g., the existence of an independent and outside world). The highly relevant social cognition contributing feedback opportunities assist with diminishing “normal egocentrism.” Similarly when youngsters attend school, understanding that having books depicting primarily the cultural traditions of white children and keeping invisible the daily escapades of poor and/or brown children matter. For the latter, reading these books and learning from them potentially contributes dissonance.

A responsive strategy by teachers might include a critique of the book and its author. Although expected as a routine response to “gender biases,” however, I would hazard its less frequent use vis-à-vis race/ethnicity insensitivity. One might easily imagine a teacher’s response to gender bias in an early reader: “Oh! The person writing this book should have known better. Of course, we know that girls can be scientists. Girls can be doctors, and boys can be homemakers and nurses, etc.” Less likely would be rejoinders or reactive coping strategies to problematic imagery of black and brown people.

We have daily life-course experiences which precipitate a need for “in the moment” adaptive or mal-adaptive coping responses both to unique and

standard situations. Reactive coping, given a stressful situation requiring a response, is linked with identity formation or the standard, stable responses to the many decisions required on a daily basis.⁸ The fact may explain why the apparent resistance to new or alternative insights which encourage informed societal changes. There is a need to acknowledge the less than ideal significance of humanity assuming research, policy, and practice relevant to children of color; it is an observation still apparent virtually 65 years post-*Brown* and a “ground swell” of publications which include children of color. The unfinished civil rights “business” begun by Dr. King and civil rights’ activism is that socially structured conditions—regarding American racism—have spawned a deeply entrenched set of conditions of inequality evident, as well, in policy relevant science production and multi-level contexts of impactful and unacknowledged high risk.

Intersectionality perspectives are highly salient to social discourse and efforts for authentic social change. Individuals sharing context may have parallel characterized risks traditionally associated with human vulnerability. For others, risks are synergistically experienced. When we recommend, design, and push forward—as ameliorative prospects—specific supports, efficacy is significantly diminished if intended protective factors merely function as simple decontextualized aids. Programming efforts (regarding potential impact) require levels of efficacy sufficient for neutralizing the trauma level of risks actually perceived and experienced by individuals themselves. Specifically, a recommended ameliorative for a youngster’s transgression may not be experienced in the same way as another burdened by intergenerationally transmitted stable conditions of trauma. America’s systemic responses to the dispensing of educational opportunity and adjudicating wrongdoing are not blind but are structured to let through rays of opportunity and forgiveness for whites and those in possession of a “backpack of privilege.” This is different from the punitive character of “justice” distributed to those lacking such supports as poignantly described in *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander.⁹ The situation means that the context of development and learning are different among cohorts of young people and has consequential implications.¹⁰

If vulnerability is defined as a balance or imbalance between conditions of protective factors and supports vs. risks and challenges, then, by definition, being a person of color in these United States contributes to a status of high vulnerability. We visualize the dilemma as the “see-saw” equipment found in a

8. See Margaret B. Spencer, *Phenomenology and Ecological Systems Theory: Development of Diverse Groups*, in 1 HANDBOOK OF CHILD PSYCHOLOGY: THEORETICAL MODELS OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT 829–93 (William Damon & Richard M. Lerner eds., Wiley Publishers 6th ed. 2006).

9. MICHELLE ALEXANDER, *THE NEW JIM CROW: MASS INCARCERATION IN THE AGE OF COLORBLINDNESS* (2010).

10. See generally Peggy McIntosh, *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*, https://psychology.umbc.edu/files/2016/10/White-Privilege_McIntosh-1989.pdf.

child's playground. For individuals of color, long term recipients of high risk due to poverty and/or immigrant status, there is a stable state of high vulnerability (i.e., many more risks and challenges than protective factors and supports). Even acknowledging biology determined finiteness, at base, aids our unavoidable vulnerability designation and gradations of same; its character is linked to identity status. For certain individuals, vulnerability is made synonymous with risk and which invariably functions to further stigmatize. Critical to make clear, vulnerability and risk are not synonymous. Vulnerability is the balance or imbalance between risks versus protective factors; importantly, available and accessible supports must be adequate for neutralizing the impacts of risk and challenge. Systems purporting to dispense supports and opportunities must be "up to the task" of neutralizing travails and stage specific challenges. Accordingly, from a research and policy stance, the designation of supports for decreasing high vulnerability status must consider and possess potential impactful efficacy from the recipient's perspective. Thus, the theoretical stance and conceptual orientation identified and incorporated matter.

There are also people who—a priori—are low vulnerability because they have many more protective factors and supports than risks and challenges. At every stage in the life course, there are always developmental tasks to be met. In the first half dozen years of life, the associated risk and development relevant task may be moving past one's "normal egocentricity." Significantly relevant to how instructors teach, learning experiences may be interpreted differently. One youngster may make a mistake and a teacher thinks the child needs more support; another teacher may respond to the same situation: "Why aren't you paying attention?" It is the framing of the message and the impact of the information exchanged which precipitates either added risk or challenge or is interpreted as communicating extra support and ego-supporting privilege. Decisions made relative to the design and dispensing of supports make sense when consistent with children's level of challenge confronted—when matched, resiliency is possible.

Resiliency implies positive outcomes achieved under challenging conditions. Some things can be managed but others are structural thus resisting easy change. Nevertheless, supports can be designed which are adequate to offset long-term structured inequality. In parallel, women have made real progress over the last 30 years, but the question becomes particularly for whites: Is that progress converted into privilege or is it translated into opportunities to understand and assist other people who have similarly experienced high risk, stress, and challenge? And for men as well, helping men cope with the changes in their status vis-à-vis the successes accrued by women require attention. Although the issues and beliefs of privilege and superiority have been noted professionally, the themes are equally poignant personally.

For myself, as a woman having enjoyed decades of marriage to a gentleman with whom I have co-reared a son—relative to each of these men—I enjoy a positive relationship. Nevertheless, male superiority assumptions still present

major trepidations. Why? By 24-months, boys have already identified as male and, through socialization, begun the process of internalized privileging beliefs concerning, for example, the dominance of male status, superiority of activities and interests, beliefs of deserved privileges, and acceptance of male authority identifications. There may also be an evolving awareness and expectation that the beliefs of superiority may be hard to meet. Becoming aware of the challenges to significant role enactment may promulgate significant perceived risks and internalized related stress (i.e., living up to unrealistic standards). Accordingly, more often than not for males, there may be consequences for irreverence to “gender role expectations” and inadequate supports counteracting the impact of violations. The consistent and critical shared is that everyone confronts challenges and risks but there are also protective factors which vary. The point is that in early development, protective factors should be reinforced, conveyed, and experienced in reasonable ways guaranteed to function as intended.

It is critical to acknowledge that in furthering professional careers, we pose questions, design research, and interpret research findings which virtually guarantee gap findings and demonstrated .001 significance, thus, documenting an effect between individuals occupying quite different levels of human vulnerability. It is a “common sense” expectation that if one is comparing middle-income, white, suburban children with lower-income, low resource, minority youngsters—given the socially structured and persistent condition of inequality described by Gunnar Myrdal as the *American Dilemma*—of course, significant findings are expected. Long and short-term variations in most health status, academic, justice, and economic viability differences are expected given structured inequality. Moreover, when gap outcomes are not observed and resiliency is evident, very seldom are protective factors and supports explored and acknowledged for informing best practices. Given inappropriate comparisons and research designs—gap findings are inevitable at a .001 significance level (i.e., “worthy” of yet another stereotype affirming publication). One is ordinarily proud of the dozens of publications which contribute to tenure and promotion but, in fact, should one feel good about such obvious “achievements? I have questions.

From a practical wisdom and morality stance, there are multiple concerns. Needing analysis and interrogation is the reason for misusing young children in this way. The pattern indicates preoccupations about “the self,” professional advancement needs, and cultural shortsightedness as researchers rather than accrued insights and authentic curiosity about the human development of the nation’s diverse child population. For example, do we already know the answer to the questions posed because the design itself is inappropriate? We suggest that the foundational way of thinking and philosophical stance undergirding programs of research matter profusely. The history of phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST), as a responsive philosophical and theoretical strategy, represented a specific task. The goal was to propose, provide data demonstrations, and apply—as programming illustrations and

clinical observations—an inclusive systems theory. Its intent was its utility for understanding life course human development of diverse individuals. Given individuals' needs to cope with varied, traditional, and atypical experiences as each navigates ecological places and psychological spaces, the formulation of PVEST serves a purpose.¹¹ It affords an identity-focused, cultural and ecological conceptual opportunity.

PVEST: Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems of Theory¹²

A significant aspect of this developmental theory is that it can be tested. It represents basic and linked aspects of our humanity; it is context-sensitive, culture-acknowledging, and perception driven with a life-course identity focus. As humans we take in and process information bi-directionally. Engaging in inference-making processes, we absorb information, and bi-directionally engage in perceptions about the outside world as “meaning making” processes; it includes inferring how others engage the process described vis-à-vis the self. The system of human processes, then, is phenomenological and dynamic beginning between an infant and parents and increasing with greater complexity over time. More specifically, not only are we ensconced in multiple levels of context but also serve that role for others. Second and critical is that context functions as a psycho-historical moment. In contemporary American life, youngsters are growing up in an era with Washington, D.C. emanating significant discussions about immigration and “cultural differences” as deficits and problems. The fact is significant given that character determining values are cemented during the first ten years of life. The framing of attitudes, beliefs, and preferences are disseminated in multiple presentations of media and may be determinative.

A conscious critiquing of our science and scholarship—given under-acknowledged high vulnerability to status quo research traditions—represents a needed critical process. The suggested interrogation called for is influential for the questions posed, strategies implemented, and interpretations made of findings. The interrogations suggested has implications for formulating research findings potentially contributing to authentic policies and practices conducive to overall youth resilience. As noted, we most frequently implement work that examines the risk factors of young people and children living in communities of high risk and low support (“high vulnerability group”); problematically and simplistically, the consequent dilemma is that we compare them against communities of low risk and high support. I call this latter group our “untested standard vulnerability group” and the invalid comparison. It represents a practiced research design habit in that it is guaranteed to obtain an effect. Important, of course, is that it represents a missed opportunity.

11. SHARON M. RAVITCH & J. MATTHEW RIGGAN, *REASON & RIGOR: HOW CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS GUIDE RESEARCH* (1st ed. 2012).

12. See Margaret B. Spencer et al., *A Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST): A Self-Organization Perspective in Context*, 9 DEV. & PSYCHOPATHOLOGY 817 (1997).

Supports and protective factors are disregarded because we fail to watch for them and, in some cases, they are hard to see absent cultural sensitivity. Untested standard vulnerability individuals appear to indicate low risk (e.g., live in economically privileged communities). However, some are low risk but of “unknown or masked” vulnerability. That is, although living under “low risk” conditions and, thus, experiencing an absence of perceived supports, their “low risk status” accompanies beliefs of low support. Such individuals are described by neighbors as unexpected offenders when investigated for untoward acts reported too frequently as mass shootings. For this “masked vulnerability” group, we fail to recognize, in fact, their high vulnerability status because we note only their privilege. Accordingly, “Columbine-like youngsters” are missed for intervention due to a failure to understand their perceptions of low support (i.e., until after-the-fact). By using the dual axis model of PVEST, these youth are low risk (e.g., white with “significant economic security”); however, as described, at the same time, they perceive and experience low perceived supports (i.e., low risk and low experienced protective factors). Importantly, these youngsters represent “low hanging fruit” for improving lives and decreasing human vulnerability.

Other youth missed as “low hanging fruit” are individuals living in high risk situations but are able to recognize and access significant and meaningful protective factors which function as significant support (i.e., high risk but high support). These “resilient youngsters” suggest a status of low vulnerability because they benefit from support irrespective of their challenging circumstances. Too little is known about their successful “meaning making” even though struggling under high risk circumstances.

PVEST provides opportunities to engage in research—either qualitative or quantitative—for demonstrating each of the four status designations using PVEST.¹³ Each of the four dual axis groups representing PVEST is unique given their combinations of risk presence level as well as protective factor presence. For myself and constituencies of research colleagues, all status designations present as “low hanging fruit” for identifying and implementing culturally relevant interventions—such strategies potentially facilitate improved outcomes over time. Effectiveness requires expunging stereotypes concerning high risk and recognizing variability within categories (i.e., “risk circumstances”). Highly salient about high risk individuals—as a group—is that every life stage has developmental tasks and challenges. Without recognizing the variability in supports perceived and needed even in contexts of high risk, we fail to identify, design, and provide the minimal supports needed for achieving and maintaining good outcomes and resilience. Similarly, for youth representing high risk and low support (i.e., “high vulnerability” status), programming and implementation strategies use PVEST conceptualizing and researching strategies to identify and implement support which moves individuals from high vulnerability into a

13. *Id.*

resiliency category. The emphasis informs research for understanding what incentivizes adaptive coping and positive identity—as supports—thus, fostering resilience. For example, collaborations with two school systems in two contiguous states used monetary incentives with low-income youngsters living in high risk environments for increasing academic engagement. The project required documenting low economic status for all program participants. As opposed to the usual strategy of using primarily a school designation vis-à-vis socioeconomic status, we visited homes with portable copiers to obtain documentation of family economic risk if forms were not returned by students. There were A/B students already doing very well at the start of the study for which the goal was the persistence of high achievement. For the C/D students, the task of the project was the use of incentives (monetary and after school programming) for improving academic achievement, attendance, and overall academic persistence. The instructions for program participation were specific. Students already in the A/B performance category were instructed that their current academic strategies were effective and continued high performance was expected for the receipt of the monetary incentive. On the other hand, C/D performers were instructed that—for receiving a monthly stipend—they needed to attend school, work hard on their grades, and attend after school programming for becoming community health educators. We were able to demonstrate that monetary incentives were effective for students from highly impoverished households. In sum—and not surprising given any definition of “incentives”—the monetary linked programming was incentivizing for significantly impoverished students. Even for poor performers, they achieved a new identity and improved academic orientation. The critical insight is that how one copes with significant risk and challenge matters. Altering the level and character of supports as well as coping options makes a difference for best outcomes. The supports provided should be cultural and context relevant for improving coping expected given developmental tasks to be addressed (e.g., academic engagement).¹⁴

An additional collaboration included the National Organization on Disability, a public school system, and an Ivy League university. Special education students with IEP designations were moved from their local public school and, alternatively, received PVEST informed academic programming and job apprenticeship options at the university. Students no longer needed to confront and cope with negative and stereotypic comments from peers and personnel because they were now attending classes at an Ivy League institution. It changed their sense of self, encouraged intellectual risk taking, and—in addition to academic classes—cohorts applied for and were paid for

14. Margaret B. Spencer et al., *Monetary Incentives in Support of Academic Achievement: Results of a Randomized Field Trial Involving High-Achieving, Low-Resource, Ethnically Diverse Urban Adolescents*, 29 EVALUATION REV. 199 (2005); Gregory Seaton et al., *Moving Beyond the Dichotomy: Meeting the Needs of Urban Students Through Contextually-Relevant Education Practices*, 34 TCHR. EDUC. Q. 163 (2007).

apprenticeship opportunities in work situations across the university campus. They also received training and had modelled the use of PVEST for improving patterned coping with academic and social tasks and challenges (i.e., were “PVESTualized”). Students developed a new academic identity and, as cohorts, significantly improved graduation rates.¹⁵

The message is that there is “low hanging fruit” ripe for intervention. There is need to utilize non-problematizing research methods and theory driven strategies for maximizing youth resiliency. Humans’ need to show efficacy (i.e., effectance motivation) or having opportunities to make a difference is part of our biological makeup. Without supports assisting and affirming the process, too frequently observed are exemplars of maladaptive coping, negative identity, and untoward outcomes.¹⁶

PVEST reminds us that we are all vulnerable. Our humanity is linked with risk and protective factors that lead to context linked stress experiences requiring coping responses. The character of coping responses matter for the character of human development outcomes achieved. Because identity is linked to behavioral persistency over time, reciprocally, the theoretical framing and conceptual orientation used have implications for understanding subsequent levels of vulnerability or resiliency observed.

A main takeaway is the effectiveness of culture and identity linked theory for 1) aiding the design and implementation of empirical research, 2) generating findings authentically helpful for understanding how children cope, and thus 3) determining supportive programming for maximizing youth well-being given statuses of vulnerability. It is critical to note that the Supreme Court’s opinion in *Brown* introduced a landmark change in American life. The opinion ended decades of racial segregation, although it lacked preparation and thoughtful support for authentic and enduring change. Thus, American life examined six decades after *Brown*, suggests an underlying and still inadequately addressed question as to whether fundamental basic human development themes pertain to all of the nation’s diverse citizens, especially children. Additionally addressed should be whether or not, for citizens of color, the failure to recognize the multiple facets of diverse citizens’ humanity matters. I believe today’s remarks today suggests the affirmative.

It may be that critical outcomes in the implementation of the decision remain “ghost-like” because of ongoing flawed undergirding assumptions unaddressed in our science. A fundamental remaining question may be the complicating role of minority group status, itself, given contextual experiences had across the entire life course. Given the lack of interrogation, ghosts of *Brown v. Board* still haunt the social context called 21st century America. The patterned character varies for diverse youth in pursuit of parallel goals universally shared: a good

15. Seaton et al., *supra* note 14.

16. Robert W. White, *Motivation Reconsidered: The Concept of Competence*, 66 PSYCHOL. REV. 297 (1959); Robert W. White, *Competence and the Psychosexual Stages of Development*, 8 NEB. SYMP. ON MOTIVATION 97 (1960).

life, health, and well-being. The underlying question is whether or not unresolved attitudes and beliefs regarding “difference” impact vulnerability and, if so, how and for whom? Other queries include: Do unresolved American identity issues minimize the human vulnerability level for some while maximizing it for others? The concern includes whether or not opportunities for everyone’s resiliency favor some citizens over others. More specifically, do normative challenges for some when accompanied by privileging levels of access to resources thoroughly compromise the opportunities and promises made to all citizens? Are we left in a situation regarding children’s development as the one described by Albert Einstein?

Hopefully, while making use of culture-sensitive and context linked theoretical opportunities for the design of research and analysis of findings, specific development sensitive responses to these queries will be achieved. With any luck, the remarks shared have—at least—complicated our thinking and suggested strategies for obtaining authentic changes of the type actually imagined in the *Brown* decision.