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The Plantation of Instructional Supervision

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Case

The Plantation of Instructional Supervision

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Abstract

This case explores a newly implemented Strategic Education Plan, spearheaded by Principal John Barlow, which has added some tensions and sparked concerns among parents and teachers that the myopic focus on standardized test scores risks erasing the cultural richness that defines the school. The narrative explores the complexities of balancing accountability and cultural responsiveness in an educational setting where both seem to be at odds. Readers are asked to consider the case through a plantation lens and consider the ways the traditions associated with it 'colors' the process of education and supervision. In this case, the reader explores how the plantation corporeally and discursively influences instructional and supervisory processes, most notably by erasing or reducing certain aspects of race, culture and diversity. The case is followed by a section that unpacks some of the issues of the plantation narrative and guides the reader through identifying these issues with a set of thought-provoking questions grounded in the literature. The article is concluded with a practical application section which outlines an emerging framework that centers and honors culture and race in the supervisory process. This framework is discussed as a way to move beyond superficial responses – such as merely increasing oversight to regulate behaviors – and affirm the power of history, race, and culture.

Keywords

instructional supervision; culture; racial equity; culturally responsive instructional supervision

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Introduction

The "historical, economic, socio-political, and moral" (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 3) aspects of inequality that shape this nation are deeply embedded in education through policies and practices like accountability, achievement, and reform. These policies and practices, which are intrinsically linked to race and culture, remain crucial factors in determining inequity in society, including within the educational system (Feagin, 2013). In both society and education, these frameworks perpetuate a wide and enduring set of racial stereotypes, prejudices, ideologies, images, interpretations, narratives, emotions, and tendencies toward discrimination (Feagin, 2013, p. 3). All of these find their way into curricula, instruction, and supervisory practices undergirded and informed by other systems such as the plantation.

Plantation systems emerged from a fundamentally racialized pursuit of modernity and industrial progress (Hesse, 2007), creating hegemonic distinctions between those racialized as White and those racialized as Black. The history of plantations is deeply rooted in the interests of plantation owners to maintain a system of coercive and surveilled labor relations, a dynamic that has been reflected in educational practices. More than just constructing large estates, plantations served both material and psychological functions of control, effects of which persist today. While plantations have varied across time and geographies, they laid the groundwork for other systems and institutions that perpetuate standardization, surveillance, and control. These practices are often evident in the regulation of teachers' and leaders' work within the supervisory process. Plantations were also "subject to constant experimentation, treated as laboratories" (Hook, 2023, p. 96) for developing new methods of production, organization, and management (Mitman, 2021; Purifoy, 2021).

Instruction and supervision have been characterized by centralized regulation of teachers, along with an educational caste system that continues to reproduce inequity and the racial and cultural exclusion of students (Hallett, 2010). Instruction and supervision have been tools of standardization and uniformity of curriculum, content, and pedagogies (Jennings et al., 2007). Viewed through this lens, schooling is reduced to its plantation roots, as evidenced by the persistent "problematization" of schools and teachers as "lacking" or "in crisis" related to achievement (Sriprakash et al., 2020).

Scholars have noted that the history of supervision lacks a clear theoretical and practical theme (Glanz, 1991; 2018). However, race—or the racist legacies that underpin much of society and its institutions, including education—may serve as a central thread in understanding supervision (Omi & Winant, 2014; Dancy et al., 2018). The new accountability movement, with its racialized implications, affects instructional supervision, drawing parallels to the enduring "plantation traditions" which persist across time, spaces, and institutions, and revealing the deep connections between contemporary educational practices and their racist origins (Beckford, 1999; McKittrick, 2013; Sharpe, 2016).

Supervision remains deeply intertwined with its origins in accountability and its historical ties to the inspection, surveillance, and regulation of teaching and learning (Zepeda, 2014; Gordon, 1997). For decades, educational policy in the United States has been heavily influenced by the belief that standardized testing and strict accountability measures would close achievement gaps

and improve educational outcomes for all students. This approach, which gained significant traction with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, vowed to hold schools and educators accountable for student performance. However, the reality has been far more complex and, in many cases, detrimental to the very students it aimed to help and the teachers who teach them. The accountability experiment is still rooted in the idea that setting high standards and rigorously measuring student outcomes would drive educational equity and improvement. Educational leaders, teachers, students, and even families bear significant consequences for failing to meet established benchmarks. These included punitive measures such as funding cuts, staff reassignments, and even school closures.

There were other consequences. A notable consequence is a narrowing of curriculum, instructional practices, and the supervision of instruction. With a strong focus on core subjects like math and reading—those most often tested—schools have increasingly prioritized these areas at the expense of a broader educational experience. This has led to the marginalization of subjects such as social studies, science, the arts, and physical education, which are often viewed as less critical to a school's accountability metrics. Teachers, under pressure to improve test scores, may allocate more instructional time to drilling test-related content, leading to a curriculum that is less diverse and more focused on rote memorization rather than one that is racially and culturally affirming and supportive of critical thinking and creativity.

The narrowing of the curriculum has also disproportionately affected students from marginalized communities, where schools are often under more intense pressure to meet accountability standards. In these contexts, the drive to improve test scores can result in a highly restrictive educational environment where students receive a limited range of learning experiences. This not only diminishes their overall educational opportunities but also fails to engage them in a way that reflects their cultural backgrounds or interests. The consequence is a more uniform, less responsive curriculum that overlooks the importance of a well-rounded education, ultimately limiting students' preparation and success for the complexities of the world beyond standardized tests.

Educational accountability has significantly reshaped instructional supervision, often shifting its focus from supportive, developmental practices to more rigid, compliance-driven measures. With the rise of high stakes testing and the pressure to meet standardized benchmarks, instructional supervision has increasingly emphasized the monitoring of teacher performance and adherence to prescribed curricula. This shift has led to a greater emphasis on evaluating teachers based on student test scores and other quantifiable outcomes, rather than on the holistic development of teaching practices. As a result, supervision has often become more about ensuring compliance with accountability standards than fostering professional growth, limiting opportunities for teachers to engage in reflective practice or to innovate in ways that could better meet the diverse needs of their students.

Moreover, the accountability-driven approach has intensified the surveillance aspect of instructional supervision. Administrators are often tasked with conducting frequent classroom observations and evaluations to ensure that teachers are following standardized procedures and meeting performance targets. This has sometimes created a climate of control and surveillance, where teachers may feel they are being constantly scrutinized rather than supported.

Consequently, the potential for instructional supervision to serve as a collaborative and developmental process has been diminished, with a greater emphasis placed on control and oversight in the name of accountability.

Case Narrative

Central Heights Elementary School (CHES) serves 416 students in pre-kindergarten to fifth grade and is located in a diverse, urban neighborhood. The school demographics highlight a diverse student population (45% Black, 30% Hispanic, 20% White, 5% Asian) in a large metropolitan district in the Midwest. The community surrounding the school has a rich cultural history, with deep ties to civil rights movements and grassroots activism. The school is situated in a community with a profound and multifaceted history. The neighborhood is known for its strong cultural heritage, deeply rooted in the struggle for civil rights and social justice. Many of the families in the area are descendants of individuals who were active in the Civil Rights Movement, with some still participating in local activism and grassroots efforts to promote equity and justice. The community prides itself on its resilience and collective spirit, often rallying together to address the various challenges they face. The area surrounding CHES is also rich with cultural landmarks, such as murals depicting historical figures, community centers that host educational workshops, and churches that have been hubs for social activism for decades. These institutions continue to play a vital role in maintaining the cultural identity and unity of the neighborhood, offering support to residents and serving as reminders of the community's enduring commitment to civil rights.

However, the neighborhood is not without its challenges. The community has long struggled with high poverty rates, a legacy of economic disinvestment, and systemic racial segregation. Many of the residents live in low-income housing, and local businesses often face financial difficulties, leading to a lack of economic opportunities for the younger generation. The area's schools, including Central Heights, reflect these broader social and economic issues, with underfunded programs and limited resources being common concerns.

The student body reflects the diversity of the community, with a mix of racial and ethnic backgrounds. Many students are first- or second-generation immigrants, and the school is known for its vibrant multicultural programs. Despite this diversity, the school struggles with achievement gaps, particularly among its Black and Hispanic students, who often face systemic barriers both inside and outside the classroom. The school, much like its surrounding community, is a place of contrasts. The school is a melting pot of cultures, languages, and experiences, with students from diverse backgrounds coming together under one roof. The student body is vibrant, with a rich tapestry of traditions and perspectives that enrich the school environment. This diversity is celebrated through various school programs, including multicultural clubs, heritage months, and events that honor the different cultures represented in the student population.

Despite the school's efforts to create an inclusive and supportive environment, the challenges faced by the broader community inevitably influence the day-to-day experiences of the students and staff. Many students come from households where economic instability is a constant concern, and some face additional challenges related to food insecurity, lack of access to

healthcare, and exposure to community violence. These factors contribute to a complex environment where the school must address not only academic needs but also the broader social and emotional well-being of its students.

Administrators at CHES have been grappling with significant academic challenges, particularly in the context of the district's rigorous accountability measures. The school's standardized test scores have consistently fallen below state and district averages, particularly in key subjects such as math and reading. These scores have placed the school under increased scrutiny, with the district leaders and school board mandating interventions aimed at improving performance.

"Accountability is Key"

Mr. John Barlow, the White, male principal of CHES, has been serving as the head of an urban high school for the past two years. While he has consistently demonstrated a strong commitment to improving academic outcomes, he has placed particular emphasis on accountability through standardized testing. Under his leadership, his previous school maintained moderate to high test scores, which he cites as evidence of his effective leadership and why he was hired by the current school board. This past summer when school report cards were released, the school board gave him two weeks to create a plan to address test scores. As a result of this plan, he has implemented several measures focused on raising test scores. He titled his new plan, *Accountability is Key: Central Heights Strategic Education Plan*. One of his strategies has been to limit what he calls "extra activities" that he believes reduces time and focus on core subject matter instruction. As a part of this strategy, he reduced or eliminated various school programming including community heritage events, field trips, and assemblies related to groups and/or cultural histories. In their place, he developed intensive test preparation, additional all grade "Power Hour" (extra study or remediation times), and twice weekly "walkthroughs" for every classroom. During these walkthroughs, administrators use a standardized form to document adherence to the new school instructional plan that becomes part of the teachers' annual performance review portfolio. In addition, subjects not directly tied to standardized tests, such as the arts, have also seen reduced time to once a month as the school now focuses more heavily on the tested areas.

During the quarterly "Parent and Community Night" at the school, there was a session in the school library, "Ask the Admins." This session is a 30-minute Q/A session with a panel of CHES administrators in which parents can ask questions related to a specific number of topics. One of the topics for this night was curriculum and instruction. Numbered microphones are located in several places in the auditorium for parents or community members to stand and pose a question related to the topic. An audience moderator calls the number of the microphone, and the audience member can ask their question. Mr. Joseph, who is a parent of a fifth grader and the Director of the Central Heights Civil Rights Center (CHCRC), was called next to speak. He asked, "I would like to know why one of the longstanding field trips to CHCRC has been canceled. I have had three children come through CHES and the sixth-grade experience always included a month-long unit on the city's history including several field trips to the center. I also know that you have also decided not to assign certain books included in the unit and you have canceled an author assembly related to one of the books from the unit. What is going on?!" As Mr. Joseph was speaking, a group of parents of color began nodding and talking.

Mr. Barlow responded, “I know many of you have had some questions about this. I do think that students should be exposed to various learning opportunities. However, our leadership team worked all summer to make some difficult decisions on goals for the school year. One of those goals is related to our last school report card and looking at our achievement data. We want to provide more time for focused instruction in the classroom and have less time outside of the classroom. This is also a part of our plan to hold our staff accountable as well around quality teaching and time focused on subject matter content.”

“But how did you make the decisions on what to keep and what to remove?” asked Mr. Joseph.

Mr. Barlow replied, “We certainly discussed them as a leadership team but also in consultation with the School Board who is concerned about our test scores.”

Another parent at another microphone said, “You mean a bunch of white people decided to cut all the Black stuff in the curriculum!”

Another community member behind this parent leaned into the microphone and blurted, “And you might as well be banning books! Even though you haven’t come out and said so, I KNOW you are not assigning certain books anymore because two school board members don’t like them!”

At this point the moderator indicated that he was deactivating the microphones as they were approaching time and that they were free to begin their visits to their child’s classroom and the refreshment area.

The next day, the principal held his monthly faculty meeting of all administrators and faculty. Classroom teachers reported that parents raised concerns during the classroom visits that the new focus seemed to “erase” their children’s cultural identities or interests. Ms. Ross, a third-grade teacher chimed in, “I guess I just want to say that I have felt stressed since school started. I just don’t feel like I can be creative or innovative and provide any joy right now in my classroom. I’ve been trying to meet all the new benchmarks, but it feels like the heart of teaching is being lost.”

Other teachers reported that the new curriculum left little room for flexibility. Some of them mentioned feeling constrained by the prescriptive lesson plans, noting that they had less autonomy in tailoring their teaching to meet the diverse needs of their students. There was a growing sentiment among the faculty that the rigid focus on academic outcomes, though perhaps well-intentioned, overlooked the emotional and social aspects of learning, particularly in such a culturally diverse school community.

Mr. Johnson, a veteran fifth grade teacher, echoed the concern, adding, “It’s not just about what we’re teaching, it’s about how we’re teaching. I’ve seen my students withdraw, especially those who come from different backgrounds. They’re quieter, less engaged, and it worries me. Also, my day is disrupted by the frequent ‘walkthroughs’ that you and the assistant principal are doing.”

Several heads nodded in agreement, and the room grew silent for a moment. The principal, sensing the weight of the discussion, stepped in. “I hear all of you,” he began. “We introduced this new approach because we believed it would improve student outcomes, but I did not expect this impact it's having on both you and the students. However, I will tell you though, that the school board members want this, but I also believe that bringing more structure is going to get us to where we need to be. I believe that a lot of things we have been doing during the school day takes away from core instruction.”

Several teachers began grumbling and whispering to each other. The principal could hear one teacher say to another, “He doesn’t even know the community he’s in. This isn’t the suburbs.”

The school counselor, Ms. Lewis, raised her hand and spoke next. “We all want to see students achieve, but maybe we need to revisit your plan. You never brought us into the conversation before you and a few school leaders decided this. We can have the goals for student achievement, but we have to make sure teachers have what they need and there's space for innovation and, importantly, cultural relevance. Our students aren’t just numbers; they bring rich experiences and backgrounds into the classroom.”

The principal held up both his hands to get everyone’s attention. “I don’t want to dismiss those concerns. But the bottom line is when I look at our academic performance, we’re falling behind. Our students need to be successful, and right now, they’re not. It’s my responsibility to make sure we’re giving them the tools to succeed, and that means tightening up where we’ve let things get too loose. This is about holding each other accountable.”

Ms. Jackson, a second-grade teacher, hesitated before speaking. “But at what cost?” she asked.

The room fell silent as the weight of the question lingered in the air. The principal took a deep breath before responding. “I’m asking all of you to trust the process. It can provide a foundation for students to build upon. Once we get them where they need to be academically, we can reintroduce some of the other elements that make education more enriching. This isn’t an easy decision, and it’s not something we’re going to solve in one meeting. Let’s tighten things up for now, focus on core instruction, and measure the impact. If we see that it’s not working, we can adjust. But right now, we must try something different.”

The principal reminded the group that they had a full agenda to cover in the meeting and that they needed to move to the next item.

Teaching Notes and Discussion Questions: Unpacking the Plantation

The accountability movement often downplays, ignores, or even denies the salience of race and culture (Farley et. al., 2021). Exploring the plantation traditions of instructional supervision is more than just a provocative exercise. This exploration uncovers how achievement efforts leach out culturally and racially responsive practices in the name of accountability and a form of equality. The lens of plantation traditions helps to further name and identify some of its “everyday” workings of neo-accountability, whose outcome is often deleterious for those of

color. Unpacking modern-day plantation traditions in education challenges the creation of mere surface restructuring and overhauls in favor of equitable responses within schools (Douglas et. al., 2015; Witherspoon, 2010).

The case narrative highlights how "mandated curricula… institute narrow definitions of accountability aimed at holding [teachers and students] accountable for increases in student achievement" (Glanz et al., 2007, p. 1). The plantation traditions of **authority**, **inspection**, **discipline**, **regulation**, **accountability**, and **control** may be understood as race and culture blind responses to issues related to student outcomes rather than responses to often systemic issues that exist beyond curriculum and instruction. These plantation traditions deny the ways education and policy reify educational injustice and oppression by seeking to standardize and color-blind educational practices (Mette et al., 2023). Instructional supervision, teaching, and curricular responses are reduced to universal solutions (Lipman, 2004) which function as an "academic policing enterprise" (Witherspoon Arnold, 2014). This is in spite of the fact that positive school outcomes can often be linked to the culture, belonging, and community (Chambers et al., 2014). Consequently, traditional instructional supervision practices perpetuate plantation practices and often fail to incorporate culturally responsive paradigms necessary for deconstructing these remnants."

The drive to boost test scores often results in the elimination of racially and culturally diverse curricula, instructional methods, and supervisory practices, all under the guise of closing the achievement gap. These race- and culture-blind approaches overlook the importance of identity in education. Mr. Barlow's decisions diminish the value of racial and cultural identity, positioning them as obstacles to academic success. This marginalizes the experiences of students of color and perpetuates the false belief that academic achievement must come at the expense of cultural relevance and responsiveness.

By removing significant cultural events, heritage studies, and opportunities for students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum, Mr. Barlow's methods risk alienating students whose identities are deeply connected to their learning experience. The belief that standardization and test-focused instruction alone will close the achievement gap neglects the crucial role of culturally responsive teaching, which both affirms students' identities and fosters inclusivity.

Such actions undermine education's role in developing well-rounded individuals ready to succeed in a diverse world. Mr. Barlow's strategies are too focused on superficial outcomes, failing to address the systemic inequities that sustain the achievement gap. True educational equity requires embracing, not erasing, the rich racial and cultural identities of all students, ensuring that each child feels acknowledged, valued, and prepared to succeed.

The Plantation of Supervisory Context

Plantation traditions inform curriculum, instruction, and supervision in ways that sort students and teachers based upon metrics that do not take into account places, spaces, and histories in schools and communities (Arnold & McMillian, 2024; Khalifa, 2020). In the rush to manipulate certain student outcomes, school and district leaders operate as though race and culture are barriers to student success rather than inspirations of it. Simply creating new policies, plans, and

programs do not, by themselves, negate what are often pervasive and systemic inequities in the curriculum, instruction, and supervision processes. Instead of recognizing and valuing the cultural and racial diversity that students bring to the classroom, leaders frequently treat these factors as issues to be managed or minimized. This failure to fully engage with the lived experiences of students and teachers perpetuates a cycle of exclusion, where the needs of marginalized groups are either overlooked or inadequately addressed.

To move beyond this plantation tradition, there must be a shift in how educational leaders approach their roles. Instead of relying on top-down measures that focus solely on control and intervention, there is a need for a more holistic understanding that incorporates the historical and social realities shaping the educational landscape. This includes recognizing the ways in which systemic racism and colonial legacies continue to influence schools, as well as fostering an environment where race and culture are viewed as assets that enhance learning and leadership. Without this shift, the efforts to reform education will remain superficial and fail to disrupt the entrenched inequalities that continue to disadvantage marginalized students.

One of the most significant issues is the perception that Mr. Barlow's decision-making is culturally insensitive. His actions to eliminate community heritage events and field trips, such as the visit to the Civil Rights Center, has sparked concerns among parents and community members—particularly parents of color—that these decisions are erasing important aspects of their children's cultural identities. One parent explicitly voiced concern about "white people deciding to cut all the Black stuff in the curriculum," highlighting a deeper issue of perceived exclusion and marginalization of cultural and racial content and a devaluing of community context. The absence of input from the broader school community, particularly from teachers and parents who understand the needs and values of the student body, has created a sense of distrust between the administration and stakeholders. The principal's approach to curriculum changes and subsequent instructional supervision reflects a top-down decision-making process that does not account for the diverse backgrounds of students.

Question for Discussion

1. How might principals "value diversity in theory and in practice to ensure that teaching and learning are made relevant and meaningful to students of various races and cultures" (Klotz, 2006, p. 11) and lead schools at which students engage in authentic learning?

The Plantation of Assessment and Development

The curriculum and supervision framework strongly emphasizes data-driven instruction and test-based accountability, with constricting guidelines to ensure that principals and supervisors monitor instruction (Cheng et al., 2014; Frazier-Anderson, 2008). Schools serving communities of color are particularly impacted by these shifts. The emphasis on data and accountability often exacerbates existing inequalities, as these schools face heightened scrutiny and pressure to produce quick, quantifiable improvements. This results in a paradoxical situation where these schools become both "hyper-visible" and "invisible" (Turner et al., 1999). On one hand, they are hyper-visible because they are constantly monitored, with every aspect of their performance dissected and evaluated through the lens of standardized testing and data metrics. On the other

hand, these schools—and the students they serve—are rendered invisible in terms of their unique needs, contexts, and challenges. The rigid focus on data-driven outcomes ignores the socioeconomic, racial, and historical factors that shape the educational experiences of students of color. It also erases the cultural wealth and community knowledge that could be leveraged to support more meaningful learning experiences. Instead of being seen as individuals with diverse backgrounds, strengths, and aspirations, students are often reduced to test scores, while the broader systemic inequities they face are overlooked. The nuanced and complex realities of their communities are ignored, as the data-driven approach often fails to capture the cultural, social, and emotional dimensions of their education.

The case narrative highlights the continued focus on standardized test outcomes and newer measures of accountability which creates a plantation-informed web in which the instructional supervision process is ensnared in a "devaluation of Blackness" and a valuation of whiteness that continues through contemporary governance and policy (Woods 2017b; Henry 2021). Moreover, the case highlights the role school boards and other policymakers play in engineering the direction of schooling. These policies often exert significant influence over instruction, supervision, and curriculum, which directly impacts the experiences of students, teachers, and administrators. The school board shaped instructional priorities and plans by directing Mr. Barlow to create a plan based upon public reporting systems, such as school report cards and standardized test scores, at the expense of other metrics such as growth rate, school climate, satisfaction, and teacher and student retention (Schwartz, 2023). In fact, the case shows that teachers in these schools felt constrained by rigid instructional guidelines, unable to tailor their teaching to the specific needs and interests of their students. Instead, they are pressured to "teach to the test," leaving little room for other types of teaching. Consequently, teachers' own development and growth is stunted by focusing on a small set of skills instead of promoting sound principles of pedagogy, content knowledge, and culturally appropriate, strengths-based instruction (Zepeda, 2012; 2013). Focusing on this small set of skills results in low teacher confidence, self-direction, engagement, and motivation (Stephens & Waters, 2016; Rafferty & Restubog, 2011).

Question for Discussion

1. How might educational leaders manage schools and supervise teachers in which "the curriculum, expectations, teaching styles, school culture, accepted student behaviors, accepted parental interactions, artifacts, and acceptable language and culture are all incompatible with, or even exclusionary toward certain cultures" (Khalifa, 2012, p. 7)?

The Plantation of Knowledge and Learning

The plantation ethos and mythos of standardization and homogenization continues to create controls related to content, pedagogies, and work products or learning outcomes (Cohen et al., 2018). Content is often controlled to get back to the basics or "core" content. Curriculum content is often rooted in a white racial frame (Feagin, 2013), prioritizing Eurocentric narratives, values, and histories. This racialized framework perpetuates a vision of education that normalizes white, Western perspectives as the default, while rendering the contributions, struggles, and histories of other racial and ethnic groups as secondary or invisible. Moreover, this plantation-based

approach to instruction and supervision reinforces a deficit view of students from marginalized communities. When curriculum content is rooted in Eurocentric norms, it positions these students as lacking the necessary knowledge or skills to succeed, rather than recognizing and valuing their racial and cultural capital (Trueba, 2002). This can lead to a cycle of remediation, where the goal is not to cultivate the unique strengths of each student but to bring them up to the standard defined by the dominant group. The focus on control and homogenization thus extends beyond the curriculum itself to the students, who are often treated as needing to be molded and corrected rather than nurtured and empowered. As a result, students may not receive a fully inclusive and representative education, which is essential for fostering a more equitable and just society.

The control over instructional content and methods, justified by the supposed scientific effectiveness of certain pedagogies, also mirrors broader patterns of surveillance and regulation in society, reminiscent of the plantation. Just as marginalized communities are often subjected to increased surveillance and policing in public spaces, schools serving these communities are frequently monitored more closely "in private" for their compliance with standardized teaching practices and outcomes. In this case narrative, community members entrust their children to the school with the expectation that they are entering environments that respect and value their cultural knowledge, prior experiences, perspectives, and the unique learning styles of their diverse students.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are ways for educators and policymakers "to value diversity, conduct self-appraisal, mediate difference, acquire and institutionalize cultural knowledge, and adapt to the cultural contexts of the communities they serve" (Arnold, 2016, p. 2014)

The Plantation of Supervisory Operations

On plantations, agency and autonomy were severely limited. Instruction and supervision, despite some changes, mirror these panoptic plantations by shackling the autonomy and agency of both teachers and their supervisors (Hook, 2023; Lyle & Peurach, 2024; Smyth, 1984). These same teachers and schools more keenly experience the negative effects of plantation traditions that inform accountability or reforms which are often touted as "politically and racially neutral, progressive, beneficial, and inherently good" (Cook & Dixson, 2013, p. 1251). The policies and norms imposed on teachers and schools are framed as essential for maintaining quality and accountability, yet they frequently undermine the very conditions necessary for fostering authentic learning environments. The rhetoric of neutrality and progress masks the racialized dimensions of these policies, which disproportionately impact schools serving communities of color by subjecting them to heightened levels of scrutiny and intervention. This surveillance-driven approach creates a culture of fear and anxiety, where educators feel constantly judged and evaluated not on their ability to foster deep learning, but on their capacity to produce data-driven outcomes that conform to external benchmarks. State and district strategic plans, are often motivated by fear about perceived educational decline, with this driving reforms centered on maintaining control over both teachers and students, ensuring that educational outcomes can be managed.

Instead of being spaces for academic empowerment (Heggins & Pitre, 2009), schools increasingly resemble test-focused, standardized institutions driven by national norms, dominant policies, and prevailing educational agendas (Lipman, 2004). This creates a paradox in education, where policy often conflicts with the principles of culturally responsive supervision. The language of "accountability," along with its associated practices, social dynamics, and value systems (Lipman, 2004, p. 171), dominates school discourse, prioritizing efficiency and performance metrics over more holistic and inclusive approaches to learning. As evidenced in the case narrative, a centralized focus on the totality of the instructional process creates frustration over the lack of involvement in the decision-making process, which is a key best practice of supervision and care (Arnold, 2018). The supervision process between Mr. Barlow and the teachers lacks a sense of shared responsibility, connection, and care, which are essential for achieving both the teachers' goals and fostering personal, social, and academic success for both students and teachers.

Questions for Discussion

1. How might a supervisor create caring in a formative supervision process—one in which supervisor and supervisee collaboratively create positive outcomes for themselves and students?

Learning Activities

Unpacking the plantation helps us further name and identify some of the normalized workings of the plantation and neo-accountability, whose outcome is often deleterious for those of color. The plantation helps us reflect and respond to supervision’s continued participation in and reproduction of an inequitable racialized system. However, unpacking the modern-day plantation traditions in education challenge mere surface restructuring and overhauls in favor of equitable responses within schools (Witherspoon & Taylor, 2010; Douglas et. al., 2015). As such, the field must look more closely at the development of culturally responsive instructional supervision paradigms and practices.

The equity narrative encompasses both the processes and outcomes of achieving equity (Roegman, 2020). It highlights the innovative and often subversive methods that individuals and groups, along with their leaders, employ to navigate and circumvent systemic barriers to equity (Witherspoon & Taylor, 2010; Khalifa et al., 2016). These efforts can and should be addressed through various forms of culturally responsive instructional supervision practices. Another includes correct problem identification by analyzing historical and existing oppressions that serve as foundations of inequity (Green, 2015; 2017). Still others include interrogating existing structures of promoting and measuring in/equity that may be inadvertently grounded in deficit models or that blame individuals or groups for their inequity (Green 2017; Khalifa et al., 2016).

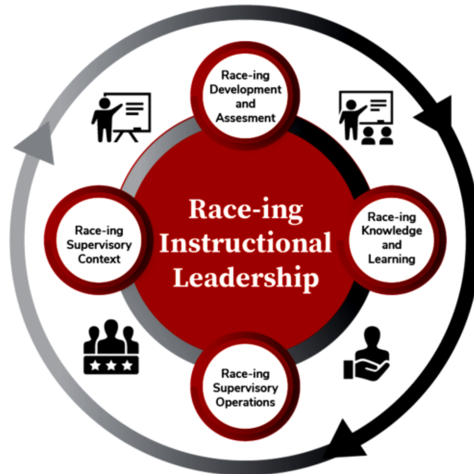

Figure 1: *Race-ing Instructional Leadership: An Emerging Approach* (from Arnold & McMillian, 2024)

The following activities are intended to be used in conjunction with *Race-ing Instructional Supervision* (Arnold & McMillian, 2024), a paradigm that is a central piece to the emerging culturally responsive instructional supervision framework. Using this framework, educators can engage in the following activities:

- Complete an analysis of their schools' improvement or equity plan. Consider two goals in the plan related to student outcomes, specifically in the area of access and exposure to culturally responsive instruction. Create supervision sub-goals that address racial or cultural inequity in the curriculum.
    - Consider the professional development that is required to increase cultural competence and awareness for teachers to sustain change over time.
    - Identify how and in what ways instructional supervisors might learn to leverage the cultural assets of students, including various sociocultural identities that are different from those of teachers in a school building.
- Select one area on your school report card. Create a goal with racial or cultural equity as the driver for a response to the area.
    - Discuss how data can be collected and used from student information systems, as well as observations and walkthroughs, that can help inform if the racial/cultural equity goal is being met.
- Hold a focus group with students about their views of standardized testing. Use the data from those focus groups to create assessment strategies that address their views.
    - Consider how these data, particularly the perceptions from marginalized students, informs how instructional leaders support the development of meaningful and authentic assessments and learning opportunities.
- Create a mission and vision statement for instructional supervision that considers the sociocultural identities of supervisees.
    - Discuss how supervision has traditionally centered the sociocultural identities of the supervisor, and why it is so important for instructional leaders implementing

culturally responsive instructional supervision to be aware of their privileged sociocultural identities.

Conclusion

'Race-ing' instructional supervision represents a growing movement toward more humanizing, responsive, and critical approaches to supervision. Questioning how we move beyond plantation practices within supervision requires us to completely reimagine what data we collect to use in the feedback process with teachers, and how these practices lead to greater emancipatory outcomes (Arnold & McMillian, 2024). We know that race-responsive supervisors allow instructional leaders to counter traditional plantation practices that are deeply embedded within supervision, and as such, we must work collectively to create new frameworks and paradigms within supervision that center race (Dei, 1996).

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