Daynel Ingram

In the mid-1970s my father attended a high school in Queens, NY that was almost exclusively White with the exception of him and six other Black students. He endured almost 2 years of harassment and physical assault from his White schoolmates before he decided he needed to transfer. Similarly, my mother was bused from her predominantly Black, working-class neighborhood in Boston to a White middle-class high school. There, she felt alienated, misunderstood, and discriminated against by classmates and teachers. Fast forward to 2002. I entered a high school in Stamford, Connecticut that was racially, ethnically, and socio-economically diverse. Yet each day, I went off to my predominantly White honors and AP classes, where I was often the only student of Color, while most of my Black peers were systematically tracked into lower-level courses.

Did I really believe that I was the only Black student in my school capable of excelling in honors and AP courses? Definitely not. But what I didn't understand were the mechanisms that positioned me as such. Nor did I understand the mechanisms that have created schooling experiences for me that were not so different from my parents’ in spite of legal and other reform. Throughout my schooling, I struggled through many of the same issues of academic, social, and racial marginalization that my mother and father did a generation ago.

The Educational Studies program has challenged me and my classmates to recognize racism as more than an issue of the past or as hateful behavior, but as systemic and institutional, as ever-present in our society and in our schools. The program has helped all of us graduating today to understand schools as sites of social reproduction, where curriculum, pedagogy, policy, and practice work together to oppress or privilege students along lines of class, gender, sexual orientation, ability/disability, and more. We have learned to think critically about the intersections of these dimensions of identity and power. We have been challenged to recognize how these dimensions both significantly define who we are and yet constrict us as they fail to account for the uniqueness of our individual personalities, perspectives, and opinions. As a result, we've produced original research on topics ranging from library critical literacy to African American female disciplinary experiences to critical educational policy analysis and academic gender differences in K-12 schooling.

On behalf of the students in this program, I'd like to thank Professor Sabina Vaught for the very key role that she's played as our program director and as my amazing advisor. After taking hers and other courses, such as those taught by Professor Kathleen Weiler and Professor Brian Wright, it has become clear that mapping and understanding power dynamics in schooling is just the beginning of working toward transformation and equity.
Having to confront so many issues in education has at times been overwhelming. I often joked with Professor Vaught that ignorance was bliss. But ignorance isn't bliss. Recognizing the inequities in schooling is not always an easy pill to swallow. Nonetheless, with knowledge comes responsibility. And as we open our eyes to these issues, we, this graduating class of Master's students of Educational Studies, have a responsibility to keep reforming education until every child truly has an equal opportunity to learn, grow, and prosper.

I have many ideas about what I will do as I leave this program and in the future. But it's really about what we are going to do – what we all have an obligation to do – together. Classmates, peers, and colleagues, with that responsibility, I charge you to take our knowledge forward and make transformation.