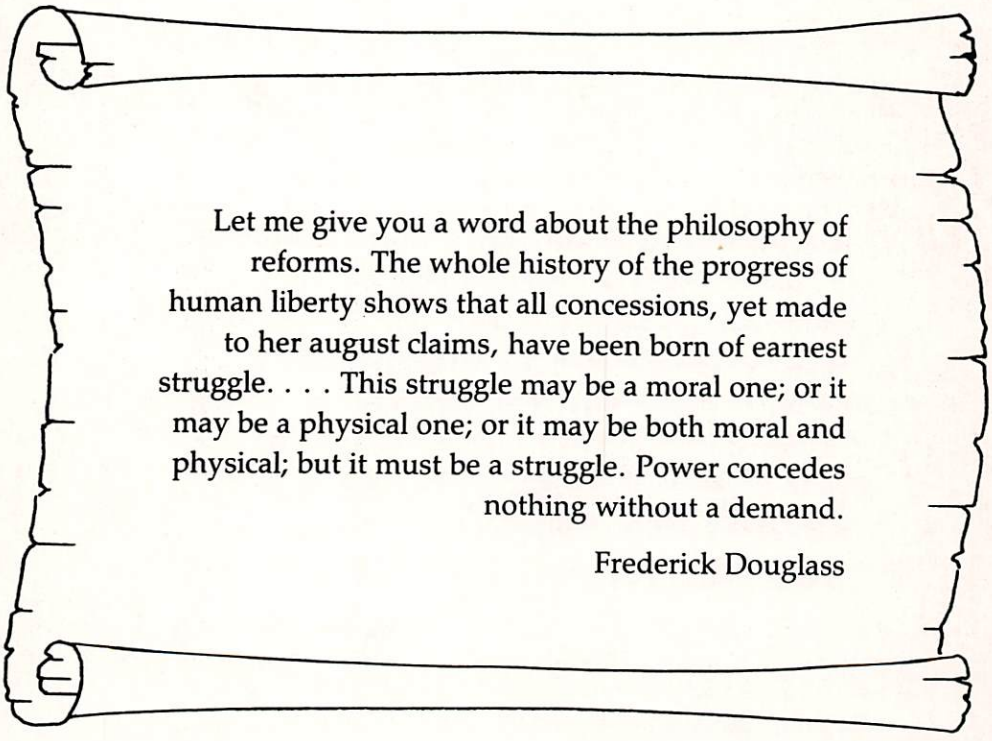
The Journal of Negro Education

Volume 52 Fall 1983 Number 4

A Howard University Quarterly Review of Issues Incident to the Education of Black People



ISSN 0022-2984

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The Impact of the Desegregation Process on the Education of Black Students: Key Variables

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Few, if any, events in this century have rivaled the impact of the 1954 Supreme Court decision, *Brown* v. *Board of Education*.[1] The decision evoked the passions, stirred the souls, and engaged the intellect of millions of Americans as they grappled with this singular legal decree. The plethora of books, articles, monographs, and commentaries written on this subject abound. Yet, after three decades of *Brown*, the academic community has not produced coherent analyses and well-conceptualized theories on the subject. Even more critically needed are analyses which assess the effect of desegregation on black pupil achievement and on life outcome chances for black children. To date, too few serious comprehensive theoretical analyses of *Brown* have been undertaken.

Unfortunately, the literature on this topic may be characterized as either abstracted empiricism lacking in theory or polemic lacking in both empiric and theoretic foundation. Clearly, what is needed is an attempt, however provisional, to synthesize the empirical with the theoretical. This paper is one such attempt to offer a degree of clarity. More accurately, it is an attempt to identify those variables that might be useful in clarifying and analyzing those issues involved in desegregation.

The effectiveness of desegregation appears mostly to be taken for granted. To do so, however, may produce what is known in medicine as iatrogensis, whereby the prescriptions or schedule of

[1]347 U.S. 482 (1954).

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tance in 1959. Federal and state court rulings, an organized pro-public school movement, and growing concern about the adverse effect of the school crisis on economic development all played major, highly visible roles. Nonetheless, in any accounting of the period the public school bond debt should be acknowledged as an important, if underlying, restraint in keeping an American state in the mid-twentieth century from dropping out of the public school business.

treatments produce an unintended and unanticipated ailment far worse than the original disease for which medical treatment was sought in the first instance. We may very well have reached such a point in the field of education as it relates to the issue of school desegregation.

To be sure, analyses of desegregation or attempts at providing understanding of it are confronted by a host of problematics. The most obvious problem confronting desegregation researchers is agreement on the operational definitions. What constitutes a desegregated school environment? Is desegregation the same as integration? What is a necessary and sufficient racial mix to be considered a desegregated situation? These are questions for which there are no easy, readily available, or satisfactory answers. Yet, these are precisely the terminological issues which, in part, have prevented the academic community from advancing toward conceptual clarity.

Researchers' unit of analysis has usually been a school or district undergoing desegregation. The immediate concerns were the identification of the appropriate independent variables and the definition of their relationship to any given set of dependent variables, such as academic achievement of black and white students, interracial attitudes, or other psychological variables such as black and white self-concept differences. Determining the independent and dependent variables by this method were simply ways researchers ambiguously defined desegregation.

Endless debates on what is meant by desegregation are, in some limited sense, useful exercises, but such discussions carried to extremes are at best misguided, misdirected energy, and time consuming exercises. There is an implicit assumption made by those who give undue attention to terminology that the core issues of desegregation will be resolved if the meaning of the terms could, in advance, be agreed upon. A more productive approach might be to seek agreement (allowing some initial ambiguity) on core issues from which will follow agreement of the precise way(s) of communicating these core issues. Debate on words will not bring about clarity on essential issues of any point of substance. The point to be made is not that debate on basic concepts and terms to be used is unimportant, but that such debate focuses on the wrong kinds of concepts and on a very limited range of concepts.

There are other sets of problematics confronting an analysis of desegregation which few current researchers have acknowledged. This problematic focuses on the broader social ramifications of school desegregation. Either in anticipation of or immediately following the *Brown* decree a number of early black educational analysts, most

notably Charles Johnson[2] of Fisk University, recognized and commented on the fact that the *Brown* decision went beyond the question of the constitutionality of maintaining separate school facilities. Johnson, and others, understood clearly the significant social implications of the decision as well. There is clear enough evidence, Johnson wrote in 1954,

> . . . that the court was aware of the social implication of its unanimous decision. The principle enumerated was not merely that of the unconstitutionality of racially-separate schools, but of the constitutional untenability of racial segregation. . . . If segregation is unconstitutional in educational institutions, it is no less unconstitutional in other institutional aspects of our national life.[3]

In retrospect, Johnson's comment might appear at a superficial level to be common sense observation. On second glance, however, there is deeper meaning to be extracted. Johnson anticipated the demise of racially separate schools as but one (the most obvious) implication of the *Brown* decision. He recognized the implication that other facets of the black and white racial order would be equally affected. His comments indicate a recognition of the inexorable changes that would occur in more subtle, but no less dramatic, ways in the institutional structures of the black community as well. He correctly perceived the simultaneous effects of desegregation in the educational and social arenas.

In the rush to measure the so-called educational benefits of desegregation for black children's achievement, contemporary analyses of desegregation eschew the multi-dimensional effects of *Brown*. Consequently, scant attention is paid to the importance of broader socio-cultural facets of desegregation dynamics. Assessing the effects of desegregation independent of the contextual significance of the broader socio-cultural and historic roots of blacks, as a people, misses a central component of how such a system is implicated in the learning process.

Three units of analysis presented in this paper show how the primary and secondary effects of desegregation impact black pupil achievement within the broader socio-cultural context. The units of analysis to be used are the interpersonal, institutional, and community levels. At each level, both primary and secondary desegregation effects can be discerned. However, the overall impact of desegregation does not and has not affected each unit to the same degree. The primary desegregation effects are most noticeable at

[2]C.S. Johnson, "Some Significant Social and Educational Implications of the U.S. Supreme Court's Decision," *Journal of Negro Education*, 23 (1954), 364–371.

[3]Ibid, p. 364.

the interpersonal level as it pertains particularly to the interactional relationship between black children and their white teachers. The secondary desegregation effects are pronounced at the institutional and community levels to the extent desegregation has proven disruptive to the integrity of the black community's historic institutional systems and to the extent it has dramatically altered its base of communal solidarity. Since culture is best expressed as a unity phenomenon, disruptions or changes in its features have profound implications for the totality of black life and not simply on the achievement scores of black children who attend integrated schools.

INTERPERSONAL

As Coleman[4] and others have consistently found in their research, socio-economic status factors are the primary predictors of academic performance. Children whose parents have achieved high occupational and educational status are likely to be higher achievers than children whose parents have not obtained high occupational and educational status. There is no compelling evidence to the contrary that academic performance of black children in segregated schools varied significantly from this achievement pattern. There is evidence to suggest that prior to segregation, black teacher expectancy for successful pupil performance pivoted on the interactive effect of pupil ability and social class factors. The advent of desegregated schools introduced the element of race as a confounding variable in the learning environment. For black children, desegregated schools and teaching staffs necessarily meant that teacher-pupil interaction relationships changed from an essential two-way interaction, i.e., pupil ability and class, toward a three-way interplay of pupil ability-social class-race interaction.

The introduction of the race variable is signficant to the context of empirical studies that show the relationship between teacher expectation and pupil race. For instance, Cornbleth and Korth,[5] using student teachers as their subjects, sought to determine, among other things, differences in teacher perceptions of students' potential achievement, classroom behavior, and personal characteristics. They concluded that teachers in their study perceived black and white students differently, as indicated by their ratings of students' potential achievement, classroom behavior, and personal characteristics. Overall, white students were perceived more favorably

[4]J.S. Coleman et al., *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1966).

[5]C. Cornbleth and W. Korth, "Teacher Perception and Teacher-Student Interaction in Integrated Classrooms," *Journal of Experimental Education*, 48 (1980), 259–263.

than black students. These results extend Gay's[6] findings regarding teacher perception of the quality of teacher-student interaction in the integrated classroom. Apparently, teachers "differentiate their black and white students on a number of dimensions that might have relevance for classroom processes and student learning."

Massey, Scott and Dornbusch[7] found a more interesting paradox confronting black students in desegregated schools in San Francisco. The title of the study provides a clue into this paradox, "Racism without Racists: Institutional Racism in Urban Schools." In this study they found that overtly racist attitudes of white teachers were not direct factors upon which black children were receiving an inferior quality education. On the contrary, the teachers in this study displayed warmth and often praised their students. In fact, the amount of praise given black students was most curious in that low achievers perceived teachers as giving more praise than did high achievers. On the average, black students perceived the highest amount of praise from teachers and yet were receiving by far the lowest grades. The central issue of this study was that black students were permitted to fantasize about their performance, believing that they were doing better than they actually were.

Even when the issue is neither racism nor lower level expectations for black pupil academic performance there are differences in the level of motivation and future success expectation black teachers hold that is markedly different from future success expectation held by white teachers for black children. This point is clearly illustrated in a study conducted by Charles Beady and Stephens Hansell.[8] Their data were essentially a reanalysis of the Brookover sample data in the state of Michigan. A total of 441 teachers (129 black and 312 white) and a total of 60 schools were population units for this study. The purpose of their study was "to examine expectations for future student success, and perceptions of current student achievement and effort held by black and white teachers in predominantly black and white schools." They found that teacher race was strongly associated with expectation for students' future success in college. Black teachers had significantly higher expectations for their students than white teachers in both low and high-achieving black schools.

[6]G. Gay, "Teachers' Achievement Expectations of Classroom Interactions With Ethnically Different Students," *Contemporary Education*, 46 (1975), 166–172.

[7]G.C. Massey, M.V. Scott and S.M. Dornbusch, "Racism Without Racists: Institutional Racism in Urban Schools," *The Black Scholar*, 7 (1975), 10–19.

[8]C.H. Beady and S. Hansell, "Teacher Race and Expectations for Student Achievement," *American Education Research Journal*, 18 (1981), 191–206.

In an extensive review of the literature, Eyler, Cook, and Ward[9] reported that newly desegregated schools disproportionately discipline black children. For instance, black students were two to five times as likely to be suspended at a younger age, received lengthier suspension, and were more likely to be suspended repeatedly. The same trend held for the black expulsion rate.

The student-teacher interaction variable is not to be overlooked in these data. Eyler, Cook, and Ward report that the disparity found in disciplinary action stems from "insensitivity of school professionals to cultural differences in behavior" and from lack of consistency in applying rules. For instance, black children in desegregated schools were found to be suspended for subjective rather than objective offenses. Subjective offenses require teacher personal judgement. Such offenses include disobedience, insubordination, disrespectful behavior, and dress code violation. Objective offenses include such behavior as use of alcohol, drugs, assault, and truancy. The point seems obvious that the achievement of black students in desegregated schools is profoundly influenced by the likelihood of suspension or expulsion resulting from teachers' subjective perceptions of what is appropriate and respectful behavior for black youngsters.

Two points stand out as important considerations about the studies cited above and, in general, about the empirical literature in this area: (1) the teacher expectation variable is an important and salient factor in black pupil achievement, particularly in a desegregated school situation; and (2) few desegregation studies account for or otherwise control for the variable of teacher expectations in their assessment of the extent to which desegregation affects black pupil performance. In summary, the primary effect of the desegregation process was its impact on school population relationships resulting from the requirements that black and white children share the same classroom space and black and white teaching staffs share the same school facilities. Few educators or jurists took into consideration that desegregation would not dramatically alter the nature of racism or racial stereotypes. The outcome seems to be that desegregation may have significantly altered the pupil-teacher relationship which has historically been the foundation for black student achievement.

Institutional Level

The effect of the desegregation process at this level is related to the perception of control people have over certain vital institutional

[9]J. Eyler, V. Cook and L. Ward, "Resegregation: Segregation Within Desegregated Schools," (Paper presented at Annual Meeting of American Education Research Association, New York, March 1982).

structures—the degree to which a group feels autonomous and independent from external forces. The segregated black community was in some sense an imposed circumstance. The issue, however, is that this imposed circumstance turned into a functional system. It demarcated its boundaries and acted as a protective mechanism to screen out the harmful effects of racial diatribes hurled at its members from the larger hostile society. It had governing and regulating norms; it constrained and sanctioned its members.

The black church stood at the center of black institutional life, free from white control and white domination. It alone could claim complete independence and autonomy. Second in importance to the lives of blacks were their schools. Black schools were semi-autonomous organizations. They were not independent, for instance, in determining policy decisions, budget, hiring, and a host of other school matters. Thomas Sowell[10] describes the semi-independent status of black schools aptly: "Under the dual school system in the era of racial segregation the lack of interest in black schools by all-white boards of education allowed wide latitude to black subordinates to run the black part of the system, so long as no problems became visible."

In effect, then, black schools were for all intent and purposes black-controlled—controlled in the sense that they were administered by black principals, staffed by black teachers, and served a black student population. More significant to the issue of independence is the fact that these schools represented and took on uniquely stylized characteristics reflective of their members—patterns of communication, cultural preferences, and normatively diffused modes of behavior.

Black schools during the segregation era were also extremely complex organizations. They were not only educational institutions in the narrow sense of that term, but they addressed the deeper psychological and sociological needs of their clients. Sowell, citing an interview with a black principal in New Orelans describes the principal's experiences in an all-black school. . . . . recollections of how teachers promoted the idea of the worth of the individual; how they always called the boys "mister" and the girls "miss"—emotionally important titles denied even adult Negroes throughout the South at the time.

Still at other levels, these schools functioned to solidify the communities they served by providing clothing for needy children, by being the centerpiece of community pride in sporting events,

[10]T. Sowell, "Patterns of Black Excellence," *The Public Interest*, 43 (1976), 26–58.

and by serving as the core focus for individual and collective aspirations.

In other respects, black schools served as the instrument through which black professional educators discharged their responsibility to their community. Black educators labored to help students realize their achievement goals. In this role both principals and teachers were mere but profound extensions of the interests of the black community. Their professional and personal identities were organically tied to sources in the community network system, not to outside structures and agencies.

Desegregation struck at the heart of this social-institutional system in two ways. First, as Charles Johnson[11] alludes, desegregation altered the unique institutional arrangements in the black community, particularly in the black schools. Second, it was the segregated schools in the black community that were made to carry the burden of accommodating integration. Put more directly, black schools were the ones dismantled. This was virtually a foregone conclusion given the power imbalance between the contending groups. Since the Supreme Court remanded to the states and local school authorities the major responsibility for implementing its decree, the ultimate power to decide which schools were to be closed were in the hands, as Crain called them, of "political men."[12]

An additional consequence was the direct effect these decisions had on the professional status of a number of black educators, a key component of the black community's leadership cadre. Significant numbers of black teachers and principals were summarily dismissed, demoted, or otherwise reassigned as a response to desegregation mandates.[13] The most revealing data is supplied by Picott[14] who notes that there was a ninety percent reduction in the number of black principals in the South between the years 1964 and 1973, dropping from over 2000 to less than 200. Most of them were relegated to "assistant principals, classroom teachers, or 'special' projects central office personnel with limited decision-making power."[15]

In many school districts, desegregation mandates visibly changed the racial composition of the teaching staff while the composition

[11]Johnson, "Some Significant Social and Educational Implications of the U.S. Supreme Court's Decision," pp. 367–371.

[12]R.L. Crain, "Why Academic Research Fails to be useful," *School Review*, 84 (1976), 337–351.

[13]See, e.g., E.W. Haven, *"Minorities in Educational Administration: The Principalship* (Washington D.C.: National Institute of Education, 1980); and D. Coursen, "Women and Minorities in Administration," *Leadership Digest*, Series 11, 1975.

[14]R. Picott, *A Quarter Century of Elementary and Secondary Education*, (Washington, D.C.: Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1976).

[15]Haven, *Minorities in Educational Administration* (1980).

of the student body remained unaltered. The effect was that new, mostly white teachers were placed in all-black schools in which they did not want to work. These teachers served their time and requested transfers as soon as they were eligible. The result, according to Bruno and Doscher,[16] is that the best teachers were chosen by the requested schools, leaving less-qualified teachers at the black schools. These researchers have demonstrated that the higher the percentage of black students at a school, the larger the percentage of teacher transfer requests. The higher the percentage of black students in a school, the less "attractive" a school is described. One can only speculate about the quality of the instructional programs in black schools which are characterized by teachers assigned to these schools against their will, teachers who request transfer as soon as they are eligible, teachers who are unable to transfer because they are not accepted by the requested school, and teachers who perceive their work site as unacceptable.

In sum, the data cited regarding the significance of the teacher variable in the learning process for black children might be tied to the secondary effect of the desegregation process in that black children no longer were assured that those who taught or administered them would represent their best interest. The number of role models declined; in their stead, there were placed teaching and administrative staffs that were either foreign or overtly hostile to the black students. As James Haney[17] comments:

> With more and more black educators leaving the classroom because of demotion, reassignment, or firing, black students will more than likely receive most if not all of their instructions from teachers who are not as familiar with their culture patterns as they should be; or as sympathetic in helping them obtain their educational objectives; or worse, who are actually prejudiced against their race.

Community Level

The effect of the desegregation process relating to the community level is linked to the institutional level but extends beyond it, to the extent that the issue here turns more on the consequences of the loss of institutional integrity. The concept of community is more intangible in this sense, but no less a real force. The community might be conceived of as the sum total of institutions. In addition, it regulates norms and values that give meaning and articulation to

[16]J.E. Bruno and M.L. Doscher, "Contributing to the Harms of Racial Isolation: Analysis of Requests for Teacher Transfers in a Large Urban School District," *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 17 (1981), 93–108.

[17]J.E. Haney, "The Effects of the *Brown* Decision on Black Education," *Journal of Negro Education*, 47 (1978), 88–95.

the institutional arrangements. The community is spatially specific and geographically bounded.

The "historic" black communities met and exceeded these requirements. The question, in the context of desegregation, is, What has happened to the "historic" black community? One of the secondary effects of the desegregation process was that it slowly but inexorably began to transform a number of facets of black life. Black pupil achievement and educational attainment are ultimately derived from sources that are social in nature. In the case of the black community, achievement represents the collective, or group, aspiration for racial equality. There is, as it were, a collective stake in the educational process of the youth in the community. In its turn, the family, the school, and the community contribute to the overall production of educational achievements of black youth. This suggests that each of these sources supports or otherwise contributes to the educational outcome.

Research on the effect of desegregation on black pupil achievement, however, omits consideration of these community variables. The role of community has been a crucial nexus for black achievement and may be critically important in understanding a portion of the anomalous aspects of black achievement under desegregated schooling conditions.

Understanding the black community involves understanding its basis for solidarity, its implied sense of control, its values and its collective aspirations for its young. Moreover, it involves understanding how its institutional resources and other means are arranged to meet the ends. In short, it involves the totality of what is to be understood by the term community. Literature is woefully lacking in the treatment of the black community as a structure that possesses integrity in this regard. Nevertheless, it is possible to indicate, if only in a suggestive fashion, that such a community arrangement did exist, and to some degree continues today, and is intimately tied to the quality of education black children receive.

Support for the proposition that community influences the production of achievement motivation is derived from the theoretical work of Edward Barnes,[18] and Andrew Billingsley,[19] and from the empirical work of Natalie Rogoff.[20] The significance of the role of community in achievement motivation does not minimize the respective influences of family and school on achievement. These

[18]E.J. Barnes, "The Black Community as the Source of Positive Self-Concept for Black Children: A Theoretical Perspective," in R.L. Jones, ed., *Black Psychology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

[19]A. Billingsley, *Black Families in White America* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1968).

[20]N. Rogoff, "Local School Structure and Educational Selection," in A.H. Halsey, J. Floud and C.A. Anderson, eds., *Education, Economy, and Society* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964).

influences are not mutually exclusive factors. What it does suggest, as Rogoff[21] indicates, is that a totality of forces operate within an ecological environment which produces educational and achievement motivation. The significance of community in the overall process is suggested by the concept "diffused normative climate," which affects all its members to some degree. Depending on the nature of the community, the normative climate sets both a floor and a ceiling on achievement and educational attainment of its members.

This is essentially the analysis and conceptualization of Billingsley[22] about the function of the black community as a source of achievement. It is worth noting how Billingsley conceives of the black community in this respect. He states,

> In every aspect of the child's life a trusted elder, neighbor, Sunday school teacher, school teacher, or other community member might instruct, discipline, assist, or otherwise guide the young of a given family. Second, as role models, community members show an example to and interest in the young people. Third, as advocates they actively intercede with major segments of society (a responsibility assumed by professional educators) to help young members of particular families find opportunities which might otherwise be closed to them. Fourth, as supportive figures, they simply inquire about the progress of the young, take a special interest in them. Fifth, in the formal roles of teacher, leader, elder, they serve youth generally as part of the general role or occupation.[23]

As is clear from Billingsley's comments, black professionals, and particularly black teachers and principals, are a central component of the black community complex. Their displacement, resulting from political decisions in implementing the various desegregation programs, signalled a decline or, in some cases, a total loss of the community's formal and informal functions. First, their institutional functionary roles were undermined. Second, their more informal role model functions were diminished or otherwise not made available to black youth.

Desegregation has altered the concept of the collective whole, the collective struggle, and the collective will. There has been a transformation from the collective to the individual achievement value position whereby the individual is perceived as the entity who achieves success through merit and effort. Several factors have contributed to this transformation, the most obvious of which has to do with the fact that the nature of educational environments most black children attend is not reflective of their primary value system.

[21]Ibid.
[22]Billingsley, *Black Families in White America*, (1968).
[23]Ibid., p. 99.

That is, desegregated schools, with desegregated teacher staffs and administrators, are not likely to permit the expression of Afrocentric cultural traits and beliefs. The "well adjusted," "good" black student is one who reflects in behavior and attitude a Eurocentric world view, eschewing black behavioral modalities and cultural preferences. The black child is urged to adopt a Eurocentric achievement orientation—viewing himself as a singular unit responsible only to himself, placing himself at the center of his world, and requiring severance of affective ties to family and from his group in order to succeed.

To be sure, there exists for black children and the black community in general a most curious and paradoxical situation. The expectant achievement gains for black children have not been fully realized, now twenty-nine years into the desegregation process. The paradox is that the nurturing environment necessary for such achievement has been undermined by the very process designed to offer these benefits.

Conclusion

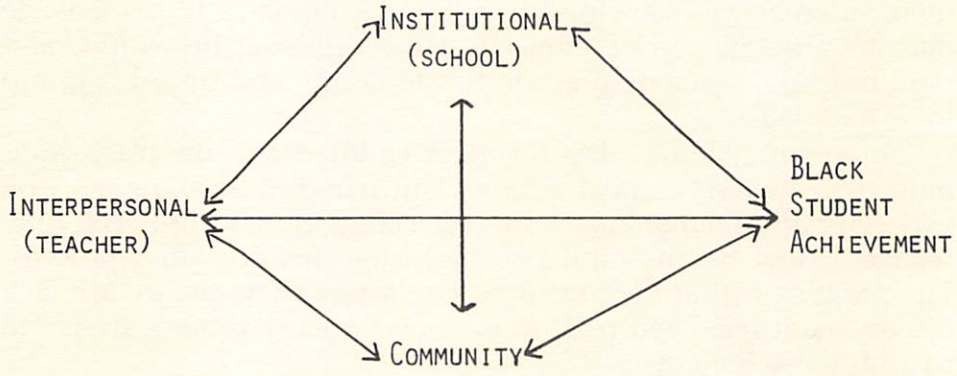
Figure 1 indicates the interrelationships between and among the interpersonal, institutional, community, and black achievement variables before and after the historic *Brown* decision. As illustrated, during the pre-*Brown* era of black education these variables interacted and influenced each other in culturally compatible ways. The goal of black student achievement was attained in a homeostatic social system with an established pattern of checks and balances, a defined boundary, interdependency, goal orientation, formal and informal sanctions, and equilibrium.

After the dismantling of this black educational social system (post-*Brown*), this interaction between and among these variables was rearranged. The interpersonal variable, primarily characterized by white teacher-black student interaction, became the primary and most prevalent influencing variable. Secondarily, the school and the black community independently impacted black student achievement in ways that were either antagonistic, incompatible, or oblivious. This observation may be reflected in a recent meta-analysis by Ronald Krol[24] on the effect of desegregation on black student achievement. Krol found that there was no statistically significant research from 1955–77 which showed that desegregation influenced black student achievement positively.

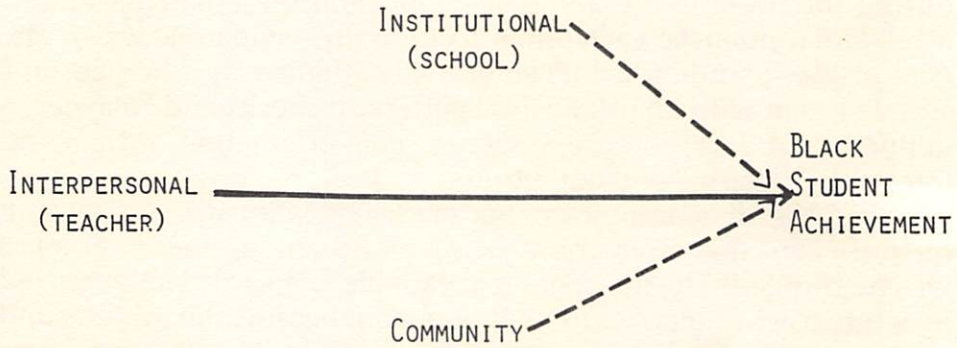
[24]R.A. Krol, "A Meta Analysis of the Effects of Desegregation on Academic Achievement," *Urban Review*, 12 (1980), 211–224.

FIGURE 1

PRE-BROWN



POST-BROWN



This paper is not a call to abandon or lessen the commitment to desegregation. It is a caveat, suggesting that educators, political scientists, and sociologists research this issue in broader, more systematic ways that would include consideration of interpersonal, institutional, and community variables. A desegregated education for black children will prove beneficial only to the extent that such an ecological approach is utilized and that careful consideration is given to the possible consequences of a blind commitment to an "ideal" concept based on equality and integrity in a "real" world characterized by discrimination and exclusion.