COMPLICATING BLACKNESS IN TEACHER EDUCATION: RACE,
INTERSECTIONALITY, AND THE LIVES OF BLACK TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

CORLISS CHARONNE BROWN: Complicating Blackness in Teacher Education: Race,
Intersectionality, and the Lives of Black Teachers
(Under the direction of Jocelyn Glazier)

In recent years, there has been an increasing focus on preparing educators to teach

for social justice. Black teachers have been highlighted for their historical and present

work with black students, eliminating educational inequities seemingly through their race

consciousness and activism. The literature on black teachers has treated them as a single

identity, often failing to attend to the multiple identities (including race, class, and

gender) and intersectional lives of these teachers. There is frequently little discussion

regarding the identity of black teachers beyond them being categorized as black, leaving

teacher educators with an incomplete image of black teachers. Through using life history

methodology and critical discourse analysis, this dissertation unpacks the identity and

experiences of three black teachers, reflecting the following ideal types: black teacher as

colorblind, black teacher as savior, and black teacher as activist. An intersectional

framework is used to understand how the social categories of race, class and gender play

out in the lives of these teachers, specifically in reference to their understanding of

discrimination and privilege within each category. The findings suggest that studies on

black teachers need to be further contextualized in order to understand the meaning of

"black" for each teacher. Ultimately, the findings suggest that teacher educators must

find more responsive ways to incorporate the multiple identities of all teachers as they

prepare teachers for social justice in order to help teachers meet the needs of all their

students regardless of background.

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And finally, Calvin. You knew me before I even entered my elementary teacher education program. You were the first to call me Corliss Brown, Ph.D. when I didn't even think I was going to be a teacher. You were there when I first started teaching at an inner city school. You listened patiently as my dreams of saving the world fizzled. You were also there when I believed that racism was over and that every individual had an equal opportunity, and you were also there as I struggled to finish graduate school and this dissertation. During the dissertation you discussed and challenged my ideas and you helped me transcribe. What a guy! I look forward to our future together. Thank you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Educational inequity continues to be an issue that plagues the United States. Many factors—including school segregation, inequities in school funding, a lack of highly qualified teachers in high need schools—combine to achieve the large sum problem of inequity and achievement debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006a). Attention seems to be paid—in academic and non-academic circles (e.g. in films like *Waiting for Superman*)—to the one factor that appears, at least on the surface, to be least intractable: recruiting and preparing better teachers. Stropp (1996) argues that as popular culture, including cinematic representations, positions teachers as saviors (as cited in Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 255), more people, including teacher educators themselves, are looking to teacher education to better understand the role of teacher education in helping to eliminate educational inequity (Cochran-Smith et. al, 2009; Nieto, 2000; Zeichner, 2009). One longstanding effort in this regard has been the inclusion of social justice coursework within teacher preparation programs (McDonald, 2005). Due to the fact that the majority of teachers continue to be white[1] (Sleeter, 2001), attention in these courses has been on the preparation of white teachers for teaching minority students. However, as schools of education strive to increase the diversity of their student body (Irvine, 1989; Milner,

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[1]Throughout this dissertation, I use clustering terms that are common in the literature (e.g. white teachers, black teachers, teachers of color, etc.). Through my research, I seek to complicate these terms and make the case for a more intersectional view of identity. However, in the meantime, I have chosen to utilize the categorizing that exists so as to further illustrate the way this practice occurs in current research.

2006), additional attention will need to be given to what it means to prepare teachers of color to challenge inequity in schools and classrooms.

Since being fired in mass after the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling (Tillman, 2004), black teachers continue to be a rarity in schools. Overwhelmingly, the majority of teachers continue to be white females (Achinstein, Ogawa & Sexton, 2010; Sleeter, 2001). In teacher education, the few black teachers within teacher education programs are framed as the cultural experts (Montecinos, 2004) who have innate connections with black students and are framed as role models for their white colleagues and black students alike (Irvine, 1989; Milner, 2006), juxtaposing them against white teachers who are positioned as needing experience and knowledge regarding teaching non-white populations. Perhaps in part as a result of these two historical realities, a research focus on black teachers have been largely absent from the extant literature in teacher education, particularly with regard to their preparation for diversity (Montecinos, 2004; Sleeter, 2001). Because of this lack of research in the context of teacher education, there is scant information on the needs of black teachers in teacher education (Montecinos, 2004; Glazier, 2009) in comparison to the plethora of information on meeting the needs of white teachers. Given that teachers of color, specifically black teachers, are increasingly being recruited because of increasing numbers of minority students and the pervasive "educational debt" experienced by students of color (Ladson-Billings, 2006a), it is important to understand how to prepare black teachers in teacher education programs.

While studies exist on black teachers' experience, these studies are limited in scope. There has been a significant amount of historical work on black teachers (Foster, 1997; Kelly, 2010a; Moore, 2009; Siddle-Walker, 1996). However, much of this work

was written about teachers who lived and taught pre-desegregation. Additionally, in the more contemporary research that does exist, black teachers are frequently categorized only by their race, with some occasional attention to gender. Social class and location, for example, are frequently omitted from analysis. Limited attention to the intersectional identities (Collins, 1989; Crenshaw, 1988) of black teachers serves only to perpetuate the idea that black teachers are most qualified to teach black students by virtue of their race.

My Place in the Study

Like many of the black teachers written about in the literature, I entered education for an explicitly political purpose: to ensure that black students received a high quality education. Also like the teachers in the literature, I received limited support in teacher education dealing with issues of equity (Montecinos, 2004; Sleeter, 2001), and because aspects of my identity were ignored, there were educational perspectives that I had a difficult time understanding how they applied to practice. My identity was defined by others as static and singular rather than multiple and ever-changing. For example, at times I was identified as marginalized because of my race and my gender, and in other conversations I was considered privileged because of my social class.

Identity, however, is intersectional (Crenshaw, 1988; Collins, 1989). In other words, each individual has multiple social grouping categories (i.e. race, class, gender) that simultaneously influence the other identities, and these multiple identities are always combined and cannot be separated (Crenshaw, 1988; Collins, 1989). Further, they are always in constant flux (Hall, 1990; Holland et al., 1998). My story will begin to illustrate how my multifaceted identities influenced the particular beliefs and practices I carried with me into my first teaching job. It will further reveal the ways that these

beliefs and experiences complicated my graduate school experience, leading ultimately to this study.

Family

I was born into a middle-class, upwardly mobile black family. Since my grandparents were college graduates, going to—and graduating from—a university was a minimum expectation for my sisters and myself[2]. We grew up in white middle class neighborhoods, moving every few years as my dad was promoted within the same company. Every time we moved, I lived in a neighborhood where I had friends and I felt safe and comfortable, even though most people did not look like me. I always attended the neighborhood public school. Even though our schools were integrated, my reading and math leveled groups in elementary school, and my high-achieving classes in middle and high school were predominantly white, while other lower-tracked classes within the school were predominantly black. I had good teachers and classes that prepared me to be successful in college, and I was surrounded by an environment and peers that had values similar to my family.

Since history, family, and experiences influenced my worldview regarding education, I believed that getting a good education equaled upward mobility. In other words, I believed that people who worked hard and lived by a Christian work ethic were able to pull themselves up and make their lives better. As such I believed that if more black students were able to receive a good education, then they would be able to get better jobs and lead a more comfortable, productive life. I decided to become a teacher

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[2] My paternal grandparents attended a historically black college. My grandfather was a preacher and teacher. My grandmother taught elementary school. My parents attended predominantly white flagship institutions. My mother taught pre-school and was a homemaker. My father has worked as an engineer and in business management.

so that eventually I would be able to lead a school where all students would be able to receive a quality education for guaranteed success in their future life.

Pre-Service Teacher

I entered college knowing that I wanted to be an elementary school teacher in a high-need, predominantly black area in order to help black students achieve educational success. Throughout college I purposefully selected clinical experiences in high-needs areas. I also took additional coursework to prepare me for work in an inner-city school. When it was time for me to select a job, I only searched and talked to school representatives from schools with predominantly non-white populations and low-test scores. Even though I had a very different background, values and beliefs than my students, I was never questioned about my desire to work in a low-income school setting. It was assumed that I would be successful with these students since we shared the same skin color. In other words, the parts of my background, other than race, were not taken into consideration when I was seeking a teaching job. Further, I was not given any support in understanding how to work with students whose life context was different than my own. In my teacher education program we discussed different cultures, but those discussions were typically framed in terms of race and no other aspect of identity. I was viewed only as a black teacher, similar to my black students.

In-Service Teacher

Teaching at a high-needs, predominantly black and low-income school was challenging for many reasons, one of them being that my cultural identity including my social class and the type of neighborhood I lived and grew up in was different than that of my students. In addition, there was a vast difference in the type of teaching I was

prepared for in my teacher education program, and I what was able to do when I began teaching. In my teacher preparation coursework, I was taught to use creative, constructivist lesson plans to engage all of my students. However, at my teaching placement we were required to use a scripted curriculum, requiring direct instruction, for reading and math. Second, I was taught that with high expectations, and teaching designed to meet individual needs, all of my students would be successful.   In contrast, I found that I was not able to design lessons to meet my students' needs because of the scripted, tightly-monitored curriculum, and my students needed more than high expectations to help them make the types of academic gains needed in order to be on the correct grade level. I sincerely believed that all of my students could learn, but I found that many of them did not believe they could or they believed that learning at school was unimportant, a belief far removed from my own. Additionally, many of them had poor academic skills, making the scripted curriculum largely unhelpful. Third, I was taught in teacher preparation that if I used good classroom management (i.e. Harry Wong, First Days of School), I would have minimal behavior challenges. Instead, despite attempts to create structures to support what I had learned would lead to good classroom management, I had numerous behavior problems. In addition to my students being disengaged because of academic challenges, they also had family issues. Several of my students were homeless, living in hotels or shelters. Others had heavy responsibilities at home because of parents who were absent for many different reasons. My students came to school tired, hungry, and distracted. This was a reality that was far different from my own—both in childhood and adulthood.

With regard to the school community, teacher education prepared me to expect that teachers and administrators should function as a team, working towards that goal of helping all students succeed. However, at my school I found that teachers and administrators did not collaborate. Instead, teachers were told by administrators, curriculum facilitators, and support staff from the central office what to do regarding everything such as lessons plans, classroom physical set-up, and classroom management. Therefore any failure on the part of students was failure of the teacher. Regardless of these challenges, I knew that my students needed to learn as much as they could.

Reflecting back on my transition from pre-service to in-service teaching, I realize that my teacher education program taught teachers in a way that was similar to my own K-12 experience. It fit well with my own "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1974) and experience.   It was with this frame that I entered in-service teaching and was confounded by the differences between my school and what I had initially expected to find based on what I learned in pre-service teacher education and my own K-12 education. I soon recognized that there was something bigger going on than lesson plans or constructivist, differentiated activities could fix. Inequity abounded and the values from my middle class background that provided organization and meaning to my world such as meritocracy and colorblindness did not fit in this new context.

Even though my personal system of understanding and the strategies I learned in my pre-service program did not work, my students still needed to learn everything they could that school year. So I did what I could to learn on the job, particularly from my students. I adhered to the enforced regulations as much as possible, while at the same time, built relationships with my students so that they trusted me and so I could determine

how best to teach them as individuals. I did things such as have pizza parties, listened to my students' music, went to football games, tutored after school, baby-sat during parent job interviews, plaited and combed hair, offered love and support, made learning as fun as possible, and I saw parents outside of school by attending various events and supporting their local businesses. I was told by other teachers at school that I was "doing too much." Even though I didn't have the language for it at the time, I was engaging in culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2002). At the end of the school year, I was congratulated by the assistant principal who told me how much growth I had made with my students since the beginning of the year. However, even though, I had high expectations for my students, and I worked hard to help them, my students did not always meet the levels of success mandated by the district, state, and country as measured by passing the End-of-Grade tests.

Despite the growth that I made in teaching within my school's context, there were still challenges to overcome. My professional judgment as a teacher was not respected. Again, my classroom and practices were tightly controlled by the administration. The small bit of flexibility that I had been afforded my first year was taken during the second year. Also, although my students from the previous year made improvements, they continued to have a difficult experience in the next grade level, despite teachers, both white and black, with good intentions. Some of them had behavioral challenges and others had academic challenges. I knew that one successful school year was not going to be enough to give my students the same educational opportunities that I had. In other words, a student's success in school was far more complicated than what occurred between them and me in the classroom. As such, I knew there had to more going on in

our school and educational context. I felt like I had found ways to help my black, low-income students who were struggling in school, but because I was not treated as a professional, it made my culturally responsive teaching practices difficult to sustain. Further, I entered teaching to have a lasting impact on my students' success, but I felt that in my position as a teacher I was unable to do this because of the greater social context surrounding their lives and school. Thus, I decided to enroll in graduate school so that I could find more clarity about how to help teachers and students in a school with challenges similar to those I endured as a novice teacher.

In summary, I was woefully unprepared to teach. My beliefs and practices about teaching were based on my own life experiences and related beliefs, my own K-12 educational experiences, and my teacher education coursework. My in-service teaching experience pointed me to the need for more education to understand the educational context of urban schools and how to improve teaching for the benefit of black students.

Graduate Student

I brought to graduate school my worldview on education—the belief that all children can learn regardless of race or class and that schools should serve as a great equalizer for all people, along with my teaching experience which left me with questions about the function of schools for low-income black children. These questions were a result of a clash between my beliefs and life experiences and what I had experienced as a teacher. For example, as part of the middle class, I believed that the United States was a meritocracy and that education served to help people improve their socioeconomic standing. However, coupled with the belief in meritocracy is frequently a belief that people who do not work hard are not capable or are undeserving. I did not believe that

this was true because I believed strongly in capability, particularly for my black students. Furthermore, I recognized that a school system that had served me well was repeatedly failing other black students. My middle class beliefs and experiences challenged my understanding of racial inequity. In other words, my duel identities as black and middle class seemed not to always fit comfortably together. I was recognizing the ways that my identity—including but not limited to my social class, race and gender—was indeed multiple, complex and ever-changing.

Despite my growing recognition of the intersectionality of my own identity, in graduate school I found that discussions regarding educational beliefs typically positioned people in a binary manner: black or white, rich or poor, male or female. And, most often, one was defined by one of these singular identity structures. Because topics were discussed in an either/or fashion, I frequently felt as if I had an interstitial existence, constantly in the gap of the new ideas that were being discussed. The ideas did not fit with what I had always been taught and believed, but they also did not fit with my classmates' opinions. The conversations around colorblindness, for example, illustrates my experience in the gap. In many graduate classes we talked about how a colorblind ideology (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001)—teachers suggesting "I don't see race" or "I treat all my students the same"—has been detrimental to students in schools. In graduate school, colorblindness was always discussed in the context of white teachers. There was never a discussion of black teachers and their use of colorblindness and why black teachers may support a colorblind ideology. Because I am black, I could see the importance of teachers appreciating and acknowledging you for who you are, but I also benefited as a student from colorblind ideology. I was always taught to look at people

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and to demand that people look at me "based on the content of my character," and not based on my skin color like Dr. Martin Luther King suggested in the *I Have a Dream Speech*.

Just like in my pre-service program, in graduate school, there was no opportunity to unpack how the multifaceted nature of my identity, connected with my worldviews, influenced my beliefs and teaching practices. In one discussion when I identified as black, I was labeled as the oppressed, and in the same conversation when I was labeled as middle class, I became an oppressor. How could the values and beliefs that helped me have a successful education be part of the same ideology that causes black students' failure? Further, how could I as a black middle class teacher adapt my teaching practice when my very reason for being a teacher was to help students enjoy the same privileges that I had? Here, the multi-faceted nature of my identity conflicted with the information I learned about schools and society in my graduate education. These challenges regarding the connection between ideal educational practices and the realities of schools become more challenging for black teachers perhaps because of a lack of diversity within the school of education faculty or an inadvertent privileging of whiteness benefitting white— the majority of teachers in teacher education.

My life experiences, including my graduate experiences, point to the importance of multiple and intersectional identities of teachers and their related ideologies about education. In the literature in the field of teacher education, there has been an assumption that teacher beliefs and practices will be similar because of a shared race (Dixson, 2003; Irvine, 1988; Milner, 2006). However, my experiences show that there were multiple influences on my beliefs including race, class and gender. My story also demonstrates

the critical role of teacher education in helping teachers question their beliefs and at the same time prepare them for working with students of different backgrounds. My history and background was not taken into consideration when I was preparing to become a teacher. Some of the very beliefs that made me become a teacher led me to reinscribe dominant beliefs and practices on my students who had the same racial identity as me, but lived in a different context and were in a different social class. The lack of recognition of my full identity along with the conflicts that arise due to opposing values amongst different identity groups became more significant when I became a teaching assistant for a class in a master's degree program for practicing teachers and saw black teachers grappling with similar conflicts.

Teaching Teachers

While a graduate student, I had the opportunity to teach in master's degree program for in-service teachers. This program gave teachers the opportunity to earn a master's degree while they are still actively teaching full time. One of the courses in the program purportedly helped teachers develop a critical consciousness about their own experiences as a student and as a teacher. Witnessing the experiences of black teachers in this program pointed to dilemmas that they also had to face in teacher education and graduate school. In this class we talked about aspects of identity including race, class, gender, among others and the effects on teaching and learning. Discussions in class and after class with black students, pointed to the conflict between what white students expected black students to know or believe and what black students actual lived experiences were. The black students in the class had multiple identities and experiences. Some were from rural areas, others were from cities. Some of the black students had

dark skin and one had a very fair complexion. Some were married and mothers, others were single. All of these identities combined to inform who they are. These multifacted identities in turn influenced their beliefs about and experiences of education. In a graduate course with a full agenda to discuss regarding how to reinvent teaching and learning based on ideas of equity for all, there was little time to fully discuss and address issues of personal identity, never mind do it safely. If teachers have difficulty finding how their previous experiences and ideologies—their lives—fit within educational discussions, then it will be challenging at best to figure out how to apply some of the new things that they have learned.

Research Questions

My personal experiences and the gaps in the literature on black teachers in teacher education coupled with the great need for strong teachers for black students points to the need for further study on the identity of teachers and the beliefs and practices which stem from their identities. In this study, I set out to learn more about the experiences and identities of black teachers. I specifically wanted to know how these teachers defined themselves and how their identities related to their teaching philosophies specifically in regards to teaching black students. The questions of my study are: How do black teachers talk about their intersectional identities and how do black teachers intersectional identities influence their teaching beliefs and practices?

The organization of this dissertation is as follows: Chapter two situates this study in the field of teacher education through reviewing the literature. Starting with the issue of social justice in education I describe how black teachers have been overlooked in the discussion of teacher education for social justice. Then I explain how I believe identity

should be theorized including a discussion of intersectionality, which I suggest as a way to better understand the complexity of black teachers. Next, I connect the literature on intersectionality to the literature on black teachers. Chapter three describes the methodology of this study. I describe the participants, their program of study, recruitment, data collection strategies, and data analysis. In chapters three through four I present my analysis through the description of three "ideal types" of black teachers. Chapter four describes the ideal type, black teacher as colorblind. Chapter five portrays black teacher as savior, and chapter six details black teacher as activist. In each of the analysis chapters, I give an in-depth description of each teacher's identity, experiences, and beliefs and I connect this to their current teaching philosophies. Then I briefly describe what is learned from the ideal type at the end of each chapter. I conclude this dissertation with chapter seven in which I discuss intersectionality across the three women, and I end with implications for scholarship on black teachers and teacher education.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

As I mentioned previously, the status of black students in education continues to be bleak. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), black students on average score 25-30 points lower than white students in math and reading (Vanneman, Hamilton, Anderson, Rahman, 2009). Ladson-Billings (2006a) contextualizes the magnitude of this achievement gap by talking about the low achievement of minority students as not just a problem in itself, but as a result of the mounting "education debt". In other words, because of the lack of investment in minority education historically, economically, socio-politically, and morally, every year, the debt comes to fruition on achievement tests as a gap in scores between white students and students of color (Ladson-Billings, 2006a).

Even though this is a multi-dimensional problem (Ladson-Billings, 2006a), the general public (buoyed by the ever present focus on education in the popular press) still expects teachers to singularly solve it. *Waiting for Superman*, a popular documentary, placed the blame for educational problems on "bad" teachers and teachers unions. The director of the film, David Guggenheim, further describes his feelings about the importance of teachers on his website:

> When I feel like the issue is too complex, too hard to grasp, impossible, fixing our schools, I go to the place where I did when I started this movie. We are never going to have great schools without great teachers. So if you're looking for a way to get involved, if you're looking for a way to give every kid in America a great

education, it starts with great teachers…We're never going to have great schools without great teachers (Guggenheim, 2011).

I believe that this film and the writer's sentiments represent the feelings of many regarding the responsibility of teachers. Even in the educational research literature, there are studies that place the responsibility of reforming schools squarely on the shoulders of teachers. More specifically, Agarwal, Epstein, Oppenheim, Oyler, and Sonu (2010) cite Lalas, saying, "When seeking to transform inequities inherent in society and expressed so sharply in schools, classroom teachers can be understood as 'the most essential element [as] they have the ultimate responsibility to navigate the curriculum and instruction with their students" (Lalas, p.2007, p. 19). As a key piece of the puzzle of reform, though certainly not the only piece, it's important to examine what prompts teachers to seek to act in ways that are in all students' best interests.

Teachers and Beliefs

Teachers, similar to the dominant society, have particular beliefs regarding education that prompt how they teach (Leonardo, 2003). Leonardo (2003) argues that the ideology or beliefs that teachers have about education are unavoidable:

> Ideology as necessary is like paying taxes: You can't seem to avoid it. Seen this way [ideology]…becomes a necessary network of sense-making strategies that enables people to establish meaning from their lives. Ideology is composed of discursive repertoires that teachers and students take up, first to create their worlds and then to gain meaning from them (p. 35)

Since a worldview is unavoidable and necessary for teachers to make sense of their worlds, it is important to consider teachers' beliefs about education as we consider what sort of role they might play in challenging the educational debt.

Not All Teachers Are the Same

Lisa Delpit (1995) provides a practical example of how underlying beliefs about education differ according to one's cultural background and experience. In her book, Other People's Children, she illuminates the beliefs and ideas of what she refers to as good intentioned "middle-class liberal educators". In describing an elementary reading program, Delpit pulls out quotes that are indicative of these educators' beliefs about education. Some examples of these teachers' beliefs follow:

1. Child-centered whole language, and process approaches are needed in order to allow a democratic state of free, autonomous, empowered, adults, and because research has shown that children learn best through these methods.
2. It's really a shame but she (that black teacher upstairs) seems to be so authoritarian, so focused on skills and so teacher directed. Those poor kids never seem to be allowed to express their creativity.
3. Children have the right to their own language, their own culture. We must fight cultural hegemony and fight the system by insisting that children be allowed to express themselves in their own language. It is not they, the children, who must change, but the schools. To push children to do anything else is repressive and reactionary (p. 31-37)

In contrast, Delpit (1995) discusses how people of color's beliefs and experiences are different than those of white liberal educators. She summarizes the differences between liberal education's ends and the beliefs of people of color by writing,

> I suggest that students must be taught the codes needed to participate fully in the mainstream of American life, not by being forced to attend to hollow, inane, decontextualized subskills, but rather within the context of meaningful communicative endeavors; that they must be allowed the resource of the teacher's expert knowledge while being helped to acknowledge their own "expertness" as well; and that even while students are assisted in learning the culture of power they must also be helped to learn about the arbitrariness of those codes and about the power relationships they represent. (p.296)

According to Delpit, the middle-class, liberal, white ideology is very different from the one expressed by people of color in that the white educators do not explicitly address the need for black students to be directly taught skills that would enable them access to

dominant ways of knowing. The white teachers believe that direct instruction is harmful to students since it constricts the students' expression or freedom.

There are two important points to be made in thinking about the teachers' beliefs described by Delpit (1995). First, she suggests that these ideologies regarding education differ according to identity. This is a critical point, though one might critique Delpit's narrowing of identity to simply race and class[3]. I believe that inquiry into teachers' multifaceted identities are critical in understanding what teachers believe about their practice. Second, she argues that teacher education has a role in influencing these ideologies. Delpit (1995) describes her "skills [as] a progressive black educator" saying that as a black student in a predominantly white program, she learned many progressive beliefs in graduate school as well as in her teacher education program. As she continued teaching she found that many of her progressive practices worked well for her white students but not her black students. While beliefs influence one's worldview, education—in this case teacher education—can shape those beliefs in ways that may be helpful or harmful to students. Given the potential importance of teacher education in shaping teachers' beliefs (Shulman & Shulman, 2004; Tatto & Coupland, 2003), it is important to consider what teachers are taught about improving educational inequities.

Teacher Education and Social Justice

Many teacher education programs place some degree of emphasis on teaching teachers about social justice (McDonald, 2008). Teaching for social justice is an overarching term used to describe any work that helps teachers understand the inequities

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[3] According to Leonardo (2003), "ideology is a multi-layered concept. It includes class, race, and gender vectors that have their distinct issues but are never ideologically separate" (p. 48). Delpit does make reference to identities beyond black and white such as black-working class and white middle class, but at times she refers to the black community as a whole versus the mainstream community. Narrow conceptions of identity such as this do not take into account the multiple "vectors" that Leonardo mentions.

in the social structure, the effect of the inequities on education, and how as teachers they can work to help students receive high-quality education despite the structural and societal challenges (McDonald, 2008; Spalding et. al, 2010). There are many different types of pedagogies, programs, and actions that fall into the category of social justice including the following: Critical multicultural education, anti-bias education, antiracist teaching, equity pedagogy, anti-oppressive teacher education, culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy (Agarwal et. al, 2010).

One thing that most of these social justice pedagogies have in common is that they were created largely with white teachers in mind (Sleeter, 2001; McDonald, 2008). For example, in their discussion of culturally responsive pedagogy, both Gay (2002) and Villegas and Lucas (2002) begin by illustrating the context as the white teaching population versus the growing number of non-white students in K-12 public schools. This is common contextualization in other research as well. Sleeter (2001) describes the predominance of focus on white teachers in multicultural teacher education. Virtually all of the studies she reviews had a noted "overwhelming presence of whiteness". For example she says

> The great bulk of the research has examined how to help young White preservice students (mainly women) develop the awareness, in- sights, and skills for effective teaching in multi- cultural contexts…For preservice students of color in pre- dominantly White programs, the overwhelm- ing presence of Whiteness can be silencing. (p. 101)

If research and teacher education programs focus on the preparation of white teachers, then what experiences and perspectives do teachers of color have regarding working in underserved schools? Additionally, how are they prepared to work in underserved schools and teach for social justice if they are not taught to do so in teacher education?

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Many of the studies in teacher education define teachers as a block, using collective phrases such as white teachers, teachers of color, minorities, and non-white teachers. This is not unique to research on teachers. The same occurs in discussions of students. Ladson-Billings (2000) discusses this lumping of ethnic and racial identities in talking about preparing teachers to work with black students and argues that it is important for teachers to recognize the unique social and cultural needs of black students. If the black experience is unique for students, then the same logic would follow that it is also for unique for teachers. I believe however, that Ladson-Billings did not go far enough in teasing out the diversity in identity. Because of the multiple influences of different identities within one individual, it becomes difficult to classify people according to just race without further exploration. In other words, Ladson-Billings did not discuss the differences in the identity of black students due to classifications such as class, and gender and *within race* classifications. Because of the focus in teacher education on white teachers and because of the static, narrow treatment of identity in teacher education, a review of the existing literature on black teachers is necessary. However, before reviewing the work on black teachers, I will discuss a framework for reviewing studies of black teachers in a way that accounts for a more complex analysis of identity.

Identity

Identity is a term and a concept that is laden with complexity. Different theorists describe the term in a variety of ways. Scholars from anthropology, sociology, psychology, and linguistics all have varying takes on the term (Erikson, 1968; Hall, 1990; Holland, 1998). Though the term identity has shifted over time, one idea that many theories have in common is that identity involves the individual self and it also involves

society, meaning that a person's identity is constructed and influenced from within and from outside the person. One scholar whose work is cited throughout various disciplines is Stuart Hall. For Hall (1990, 1996) identity is something that is unfixed; it is based in discursive, meaning making practice, thus connected to power and knowledge; and finally, identifications are a dialogic process of an individual identifying and being identified by a social group.

Identity is a process that is grounded in history, yet unstable, unfixed, and always in flux. More specifically, Hall (1990) states:

> Cultural identity…is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. Cultural identities have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture, and power…identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past (p. 225).

In other words, identity is always changing and subject to influence from the past and the present. Identities are influenced by oppression, privilege, other people, and the various contexts in which they are subjected.

Hall (1990) further describes how these unfixed identities are constructed through discursive practices, yet at the same time they have "real, material, and symbolic effects"(p. 226). Discursive practices include texts that people use to construct meaning. This definition interpreted broadly includes conversation, written texts, popular culture, and personal narratives. Hall (1990) elaborates saying "[identities are] always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth" (p.226)

The discursive nature of identity relates to the dialogic nature of identity for Hall. Identities are not formed in isolation. Hall (1996) uses Stephen Heath's (1981) term

"suture", which means to join together, to describe the process of identity construction. Hall says that identity formation is a two-sided process. In this process, the individual is "hailed" by a social group, through discursive practices, and in turn the individual must 'agree' to this calling also through discourse. In this way, identity is a connection, stitching together the individual with an identification. Finally, it is important to reiterate the first point: an identity is never static. Like the discourses that form identities, they are always shifting and changing meaning based on context.

Hall's work is particularly helpful for the discussion of black teachers, because he specifically talks about racial identification. For Hall (1997), racial identity is also discursive and fluctuating. More specifically, Hall argues against conceptions of race that treat it as a fixed category. He references W.E.B. DuBois to say that categorization by race is significant because common racial ancestry references shared history, meaning, and experiences. For example, being black references a shared history of slavery and discrimination. However, when many people refer to race, they are suggesting that people will act in predictable ways based on skin color. Hall (1997) goes on to quote DuBuois as saying "Physical characteristics of skin color are to no small extent the direct result of the physical and social environment…in addition to being too indefinite and elusive to serve as a basis for any ongoing classification or division of human groups" (n.p.). Hall believes race functions more like a language, specifically calling it a "floating signifier". Even though Hall does not see race as a fixed category, he does believe the importance of race. Again, referencing DuBois, he writes that race, "is important because it serves as a badge for the social heritage of slavery, the dissemination, and the insult of that experience" (n.p.). In summary, Hall surmises that

identity is fluid, discursive and a tool that enables people to understand the world around them. In addition to Hall's notions of identity, feminist theorists in their discussion of intersectionality also add to the discussion of identity in a way that is useful for furthering the conversation about the multi-faceted nature of teachers' identities.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a framework that can provide a way to study the various strands of an individual's identities and how they connect and work together. Intersectionality specifically argues against compartmentalized analyses of identity such as those that have been common in the research in teacher education as cited earlier. Yuval-Davis (2009) cites Crenshaw (2001) who likens intersectionality to a major crosswalk within a city:

> Intersectionality is what occurs when a woman from a minority group…tries to navigate the main crossing in the city…The main highway is "racism road". One cross street can be Colonialism, the Patriarchy Street…She has to deal not only with one form of oppression but with all forms, those named as road signs which link together to make a double, triple, multiple, a many layered blanket of oppression (p. 49)

In this example, the woman cannot choose which street she would like to stand in because she experiences all of them at the same time. For the purposes of my work, I consider intersectionality in regards to Crenshaw's example of the woman crossing the street. When considering the beliefs and practices of teachers it is important to consider all aspects of their identity, not just racial identity, as well as the many different ways that racial identity plays out. Given the multifaceted, interconnected identities of Black women, it is important for analyses of teacher identity to take this into consideration. With this in mind, I suggest that research on Black teachers must be considered through an intersectional understanding of identity.

In addition to a broader, yet more specified conceptualization of identity, intersectionality speaks to issues of power. Luft (2009) summarizes Collins and Crenshaw in a helpful way:

> Intersectionality "denotes the various ways in which [social forces)] interact to shape the multiple dimensions' of experience" (Crenshaw 1995, p. 258)… [I]ntersectionality reflects "the notion of interlocking oppressions [which] refers to the macro level connections linking systems of oppression such as race, class, and gender" (Collins, 1995, p. 492)" (p. 102)

For the purposes of this project, using intersectionality as a framework to understand the identity of teachers will allow me to understand black women teachers' experiences individually as well as the context of the greater systems of power in which they live and work.

Overall, intersectionality is a more specified way to look at difference. However, in organizing difference in a more specified way, there is also room to find similarities, allowing people to find ways to work together. Keating (2009) explains

> This intertwined acknowledgement of differences and commonalities, coupled with a willingness to risk self-exposure, can revolutionize our approach to difference… demonstrating that it is not differences that divide us but rather our refusal to openly examine and discuss differences among us. (p. 86)

In other words, even though intersectionality seeks to understand systems of oppression and understand differences between groups, the end goal is one of better understanding in order to end oppression and better meet the needs of individuals.

Intersectional analyses of the identity of teachers can give a better understanding of who black teachers are within and beyond their race and how their identity influences their pedagogy. Patricia Hill Collins (1993) argues that, "we must first recognize race, class, and gender as interlocking categories of analysis that together cultivate profound differences in our personal biographies"(p. 3). She goes on to explain that these varying

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aspects of our identity cannot be separated or analyzed separately, because people experience all of them intertwined together. Collins (2000) also specifically addresses intersectionality in regards to conceptualizing black women's identity saying intersectionality is an "analysis claiming that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organization, which shape Black women's experiences and, in turn, are shaped by Black women" (p. 299).

Coupling Hall's work with intersectionality posits identity as a fluid, meaning making construct that is comprised of race, class, and gender among other identifications. Given this definition of identity, I will now return to the discussion regarding the identity of black teachers in the classroom and black teachers in teacher education programs.

Studies on Black Teachers

Black teachers have been viewed in different ways for various reasons across time. After reviewing the literature on black teachers several themes have emerged that warrant further consideration: a merging in the literature of groups of teachers labeled non-white or teachers of color, a narrow treatment of racial identity, and scant attention to identity beyond race. In some of the earlier work on black teachers there has been a narrow conceptualization of racial identity and a negative depiction of black teachers. Foster (1993) explains that most of the work about teachers has been about white teachers and the work on black teachers has been negative. There are several texts that she and others (Kelly, 2010a) cite as representing black teachers in a negative fashion (Frazier, 1957; Rist, 1970/2000; Spencer, 1986). None of these texts specifically focus on the construct of identity, but identity is implicated because scholars (Frazier, 1957; Rist,

1970/2000; Spencer, 1986) have chosen to discuss characteristics of teachers based on their racial grouping. In other words, teachers are described through static descriptions of their identity without any depiction of what the social categories mean. The teachers' practices are then attached to these social categories. For example, Frazier (1957) critiques the status-driven black teacher without allowing the teachers to describe who they are: "Negro school teachers who devote their lives to 'society' like to display twenty to thirty pairs of shoes, the majority of which they never wear" (p.230). In this instance, illustrative of excerpts throughout the book, the author describes teachers based on their race and class without explaining what the category of black actually means. Partially writing against these negative depictions of black teachers, several researchers have completed projects that more accurately depict black teachers and their work with students (Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 1996; Kelly, 2010a). These studies have led to more accurate or balanced depictions of black teachers. However, the changing contexts and identities of black teachers in the classroom and in teacher education has not always been described by scholars. In other words, teachers even within these more recent studies are grouped by race, referred to simply as "black teachers", for example, without any discussion of what it means to be black or how race intersects with other identity markers. Even though race is a social construction, subject to change, it is frequently treated as a static category.

Many existing studies use the term *teachers of color* to study non-white teachers. One example of a study (Kohli, 2009) that examines pre-service teachers of color, including black pre-service teachers focused on their experiences with racism in K-12 schooling and in teacher education. In this study, even though not mentioned explicitly,

identity plays a major role in the discussion. First, the author creates two social

categories for her analysis: white and people of color. She then uses Critical Race

Theory (CRT) to problematize the treatment of teachers in schools within this study.

These social categories in the study are treated as immutable. Even though it is not

explicitly stated, these teachers are grouped according to the physical characteristic of

race. Usage of this collective category physical race and the term "teachers of color"

does not allow for fluidity within identity and it blurs distinctions between lived

experiences and differing histories of people of color.

Montecinos' (1999) study similarly examines the beliefs of pre-service teachers of

color (14 African-American, three Mexican Americans, and one Korean American).

Montecinos also does not specifically mention identity, but she does question the

assumptions that are made in teacher education based on teachers' ethnic group status.

Specifically she says,

> It is assumed that teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds will engage in
> culturally relevant pedagogy…Second, it is assumed that teachers of color will be
> more likely than their White counterparts to embrace approaches to multicultural
> education…Third, it is assumed that teachers of color will be more likely than
> their White counterparts to advocate for students of color…Taken together, these
> assumptions suggest that teachers' ethnicity is predictive of teachers' orientations
> toward multicultural education (p. 34)

In the study she points to the need of teachers of color to have more in-depth

understandings of multiculturalism. Frequently, teachers of color are not given the

opportunities to develop these understandings in teacher education programs.

Montecinos concludes the study by critiquing teacher education programs for focusing

solely on the needs of white teachers. She suggests that the needs of teachers of color

also be considered. Even though she critiques the ramifications in teacher education of

racial categorization of teachers, she does not question how these categories are used. From this, it is deduced that identity is conceptualized as a fixed social category. There is no mention of teachers having different experiences or creating different meanings within these categories.

Similar to this article, other studies in the teacher education literature collapse teachers into a group labeled *teachers of color* (Montecinos, 2004; Sleeter, 2001). They however, do this also for the explicit purpose of highlighting the extensive focus on white teachers in teacher education. Even though this type of study is beneficial in that it highlights the lack of responsiveness of teacher education to teachers who are not white, including black teachers, there is a need to move beyond this type of study to find a greater specificity in who teachers are.

Irvine (1989), for example, posits the need for black teachers and offers that black teachers directly benefit their black students. Irvine directly links the decline in black student success in school to the decrease of black teachers stating, "[Black teachers] are cultural translators and intercessors for black students, thereby contributing to their school achievement. Black teachers are more likely to understand black students' personal style of presentation as well as their language" (p. 51). In this study, race alone seems to be what defines these teachers' culture and pedagogy.

Similar to Irvine (1989), Milner (2006) also equates teachers' culture with only their race. In his study, he interviewed black researchers about the need and benefit for black teachers working with black students. The questions the researcher asked specifically related to the influence of the Brown versus Board of Education decision on black teachers, black teachers' position in schools, and how black teachers benefit black

students. One of the major themes addressed regarding the importance of black teachers is that they are beneficial because they create "culturally informed relationships" with their students (p. 98). Milner sums up this idea by saying "Black teachers, by virtue of their out of school interactions and their deep cultural understanding of what it meant and means to be black in America often brought a level of knowledge and connectedness into the classroom that showed up in their teaching" (Milner, 2006, p. 99).

In both of these articles on black teachers, the only aspect of identity that is focused on is race. Further, the treatment of race in these articles is narrow. There is no discussion of differences in black teachers' experiences. Even though it is not specifically stated, because these researchers liken race to certain ways of acting in the classroom, they are using a biological conception of race (Hall, 1996). In other words, individuals are expected to act a certain way because of their physical characteristics. Within this usage of race, there is no room for variation or understanding of difference among same-race individuals. In order to understand a person's cultural experience, identity must be broadened to include more categories of analysis. In other words, the Black experience is classed and gendered among other categories. Other literature on black teachers moves toward developing a more nuanced view of black teacher identity.

Dixson (2003), for example, moves toward a more complex discussion of the identity of black teachers. The goal of the study was to clarify and illustrate black women teachers "us[ing] their identity in a positive and liberating manner" (p. 222). Identity in the study is posited as race, class, and gender. These three categories do not represent the totality of identity, but according to Dixson they are important because they are frequently left out of analyses. These social categories of identity are treated as inherent

categories with no description of what the categories mean to the participants. Additionally, even though the triad of race, class, and gender are initially said to be of importance, race and gender are the only threads of the fixed social categories that are followed through the findings of this study.

Dingus (2008) uses generational distinctions to examine the identities of black teachers. Three sets of grandmother, mother, daughter triads, who worked in education, were studied in order to determine how family members socialize each other and how they are socialized into teaching and also how they are mentored while they are teachers. Throughout this study, the race, gender, and class identity of the teachers are discussed as fixed categories. Dingus even mentions that these categories are an important part of the background of the study. "These themes underscore the complexity of individual and collective socialization [and] they also accentuate the looming intersections of race, gender, and class" (p. 613). In this study, the influence of social groupings on socialization and teaching are discussed; however, the categories are predetermined and unchanging.

Knight (2004), like many of the other authors, does not specifically reference identity. However, she uses teachers' race as a way to describe and position their experiences. A major difference between this study and other previously described ones is that Knight does not use the category of race as a category from which meaning can be derived. Instead, Knight describes her teacher participant's family experiences, schooling experiences, and her teacher education program. These descriptions are used to describe how the teacher comes to her particular ethic of caring. In other words, the teacher's characteristics are not solely attributed to her racial identity. Because the

teacher shared her story, Knight was able to describe parts of her identity that influenced the teacher's beliefs and practices. The teaching experience, background and beliefs explain who she is beyond simply a black teacher.

Henry also uses categories other than race to more fully describe teacher identity. Henry (1996) describes the standpoint of five Black women teachers regarding their pedagogy in a predominately Black elementary school in Canada. In this study, the term standpoint can be equated with identity. More specifically Henry (1996) says

> Teachers' standpoints reflect complex, contradictory, and ever-changing configurations of personal, social, and historical contingencies such as cultural contexts, countries of origin, gender identities, sexuality, socio- economic backgrounds, age, and so forth…they critique child-centered pedagogy, "the dream of the pedagogy which will set children free" (Walkerdine 1984, p. 153) as a "fan-tasy"or a "fiction"(p. 364).

As evidenced in this text, standpoint (identity) is not only comprised only of social categories, but also serves as point of origin for understanding and critique. Even though the teachers come from similar backgrounds, their differences are displayed throughout the text as Henry describes their experiences as teachers.   In this way, Henry treats identity as a construct, built around the teachers' discourse, revealing variation within teachers, even though they are all black and Caribbean.

Kelly (2007) also looks at other characteristics of teachers beyond race in order to broaden the description of who they are. The six black teachers in the study, working in predominately white schools, were classified as tokens. This study is unique in that it uses physical location and environment as an aspect of teacher identity in addition to race. Beyond considering the environment that teachers are located within, Kelly suggests examining teachers' ideologies to gain a better understanding of who teachers

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are. Through examining location and ideology, in addition to race, a better understanding

of the teachers as well as their beliefs and practices is evident.

Lewis (2008) moves the closest to using an intersectional framework through his

concept of "multipositionality". Through studying teachers' autobiographies, his text

> treats the teachers as multipositional actors, whose presentation of self
> complicates any singular notion of them as merely black or just teachers. The
> result is a more textured view of black teachers, a view that rejects simple
> constructions of teachers as uni-dimensional individuals capable of 'single'
> consciousness: just blacks seeking a place in America. Multipositionality
> considers the various ways that American teachers of African descent wrote
> themselves into the affairs of the day" (p. 342)

Lewis expands DuBuois' (1903) idea of double-consciousness. Specifically he highlights

the tensions between African-Americans because of color and class. Further, he uses

Higgonbotham (1992) to explain that race has been used effectively to move forward the

cause of blacks as a collective, but simultaneously the use of race hides the vast

differences within African-American communities.

The majority of Lewis' text is spent exploring multipositionality, which

illuminates teachers' identities in a multifaceted way, similar to intersectionality. There

is no connection explicitly made between teachers' identities and pedagogy, but aspects

of identity such as race, class, skin color, and location are included.

In all of the studies cited on black teachers, there is no specific mention of the

term intersectionality. Some articles do discuss differences in black teacher identity

based on class, gender, and location (Dingus, 2008; Dixson, 2003; Kelly, 2007).

Dixson's article mentions teachers' race, class, and gender identities, but gender and race

are the only two aspects that are discussed in the article. Dingus (2008) adds a different

aspect of identity to the literature through studying a family of black educators and

describing generational differences and similarities. Kelly (2007) uses black teachers' position as tokens in a predominantly white school to describe teachers' beliefs. In other articles on black teachers, the only category of identity that is mentioned is race (Henry, 1996; Knight, 2004).

To summarize, many articles in teacher education lump black teachers into one category of minority teachers. This loses the distinction of historical and present events that influence individuals' identity. Other studies go further, categorizing black teachers by racial group, but these studies also frequently treat the experience of race in a monolithic way (Irvine, 1989; Milner, 2006). Different studies begin to look at identity from multiple perspectives including gender, social class, location, and ideology (Dingus, 2008; Dixson, 2003; Henry, 1996; Kelly, 2007, 2010a).

Examining black teachers with an intersectional lens would be a possible way to honor the complexity of teacher identity. Given that black teachers are expected to be able to work with all students, but especially black students, it is important that teacher education supports these teachers through thoroughly understanding the identities and beliefs which affect their classroom practices and experiences in order to provide more targeted educational experiences.

Conclusion

There are several conclusions stemming from this review of the literature that point to the need for further study. In addition to the narrow treatment of black teachers' identity, little is known about how the variation in black teachers' racialized experiences influences teachers' beliefs about education. Because of the heavy responsibility that society places on teachers, and the push to recruit a more diverse teaching force, it is

important to know who they are and how these identities influence what they believe about teaching students, particularly black students because of the inequities they receive in education. A better understanding of teachers' worldviews will help teacher educators consider how to better support teachers—and teacher educators—in their efforts to alleviate the educational debt.

Even though there are documented pedagogical needs that black teachers have, there is a lack of attention to black teachers in teacher education. Teaching for social justice is written about/studied as if it is only for white teachers. Because of the educational debt, and the implication of teachers in solving it, it is important to consider how all teachers are being prepared for it through their life experiences and their formal teacher education.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study is to better understand black female teachers'
identities, beliefs and teaching and learning experiences so as to inform the field of
teacher education. In general, the methodology falls within the broad category of
narrative research, the life history research paradigm in particular. In this chapter, I
provide a description of the participants, the data collection and analysis, my role as the
researcher, and limitations to the study design. The majority of the chapter is devoted to
a description of how data was collected and analyzed in order to answer the research
questions. The overarching research questions are: how do black teachers talk about their
intersectional identities and how do those identities influence their teaching philosophies?

Life History Methodology: This study was conducted using a life history
methodology. Life history methodology, also referred to as life story methodology, is an
approach that uses many methods to develop a deep understanding of a person's
life. Barbara Harrison (2009) defines life history methodology as follows: "A number of
methodological approaches which puts individuals, their lives, the experiences, and the
contexts in which they are situated, to the forefront of both theoretical and substantive
concerns and foci for investigation" (p. xxiii). According to Chaitin (2004), who
summarizes Rosenthal's (1993, 1998) description of life story methodology, there are
three important underlying notions regarding the use of life story. First, each individual
has a unique experience and a unique way of telling that experience. Life story

methodology encourages each participant to tell her story with little interruption from the researcher. Second, life story not only shares information on the individual's life, but also on the social and cultural context in which the individual lives. Third, life story assumes that people retell their lives in systematic organized ways. As such, life story seeks to understand the logic in the way the participant tells her story.

Dhunpath (2000) provides many useful insights into why life history methodology is a useful approach for studying teachers' identities, noting that in educational research, teachers have historically been left out of the conversation regarding educational practice. Life story methodology can be used to bring teachers' voices to the forefront of educational practice and theory discussions. Dhunpath also notes why the methodology itself is a useful tool for collecting information about teachers.   Quoting Kelchtermans (1993), he writes that "life story method is narrative, constructivistic, contextualistic, interactionistic, and dynamic'' (pp.443–456). Narrative is the format in which individuals share and understand their lives. It is constructivistic in that the narrative is a composite of salient events and occurrences within an individual's life. Contexualistic refers to the need to interpret life stories within the social, political, and historical context rather than take meaning from narratives extracted from the greater setting. Interactionistic refers to how each individual's life story was constructed from interactions with other individuals and also the context, as previously mentioned. Finally, life story methodology is dynamic in that it is constantly changing. The life story that is constructed represents the individual's narrative at one particular time. In this way an individual's life story can be used as a snapshot of understanding and meaning that can be revisited and rethought overtime. The structure of life story narratives makes this

methodology a good choice for the study of black teachers' identities and their beliefs about teaching and practice. This method allows for the teachers' to not only share who they are and what they believe, but also the contextual influences that affected the development of their beliefs and practices. Appropriating Cortazzi (1993), Dhunpath puts it succinctly, "biographies and other forms of life writing enables the reconstruction and interpretation of subjectively meaningful features and critical episodes of a teacher['s]…life, allowing us to see the unities, continuities, and discontinuities, images and rhythms" (p. 545). Ultimately, life story methodology is a useful tool to understand the teachers' intersectional identities as well as the experiences that have informed their beliefs and practices. Hearing the teachers' stories about their lives provided detail to their identities beyond the social categories that frequent describe teachers.

Participants

There were six original participants in my study. All of the teachers were black female, currently teaching K-12 teachers. Who had recently finished or were currently enrolled in a masters degree program. The six participants collectively range in age from 27-40 and their years of teaching experience at the time of the first interview ranged from four years to 14 years of teaching experience. I recruited participants from all types of public K-12 schools.

Data Collection

Data collection for the study was initially supposed to include two individual interviews, artifact review, a focus group interview, and a member checking interview with each participant. However, I added an additional interview after the focus group to clarify themes that emerged from each participant. At the outset of the study I believed

that each data collection strategy would correspond to either the first or second research question. However, all of the data collection strategies in their totality assisted me in answering both research questions.

The Life History Interview and the Current Experiences Interview: The life history interview, which I conducted at the beginning of the study, provided an initial opportunity for the participants to share their life stories. The interview was conducted in a location that was convenient for each teacher. I began the interview by asking participants to "tell me the story of your life that led you to become a teacher". As each participant talked about her life, I listened for what was present and as information that was unclear. After the participants finished their stories, I followed up with more specific probes to ensure I had all of the necessary information regarding the teachers' families, childhood experiences outside of school, K-12 school experience, life after high school including pre-service teacher education or teacher licensure, and entry into teaching (See Appendix A). This in-depth interviewing approach provided a foundation for describing the teachers' identities that developed before becoming a teacher.

The current experiences interview was initially planned to be conducted in the teachers' classrooms within two weeks after the initial interview (See Appendix B). However, the interview was scheduled at the teachers' convenience; therefore, the amount of time between the first and second interview ranged between two weeks and one month. Also, because the interviews took place during the summer, two participants did not have access to their classrooms so for those interviews we met at a quiet café. In the interview, the participants described the demographics of fellow teachers, students, and parents at their school as well as the location of their school. Additionally, the

teachers were asked how they as teachers were positioned (Harre & van Langenhove, 1994) and perceived at the school by other teachers, administrators, parents and students. The participants were asked to discuss their positioning and experiences related to their identities. This interview helped determine how the teachers view themselves and their students in the school context as well as provided information on how teachers viewed the practice of teaching and learning for all students, specifically black students and why they viewed it this way. The classroom context enabled some teachers to reference specific spaces or artifacts that are physically represented in their classroom. The two participants whose classrooms I was unable to visit did not participate in the artifact review, which I explain in the next section.

Artifact Review: The artifact review was used as a way to encourage further conversation by participants about their educational views, beliefs and practices. Each participant was asked to bring two or three objects that represented their teaching beliefs and practices for the current teaching experiences interview. Participants were asked how the items represented what they believed about student learning and schooling. Hoskins (1998) posits that researchers can " [obtain] more introspective, intimate, and 'personal' accounts of people's lives when … [asking] them about objects, and [tracing] the path of many objects in interviews supposedly focused on persons" (p. 2). As such the objects were used in order to elicit the participants' knowledge of their identity and their classroom beliefs and practices. As part of the description of their beliefs, participants were asked about their experiences that they thought helped form those particular teaching philosophies. The description of the artifacts was included as part of the transcript from the second interview.

Focus Group Interview. All participants were invited to attend the focus group. With five out of the six in attendance, I was then able to follow up and ask the same questions from the focus group protocol of the participant who was unable to attend. According to Kitzinger (1995), focus groups are particularly useful for "exploring people's knowledge and experiences and can be used to examine not only what people think but how they think and why they think that way" (p. 299). The focus group interview allowed the five participants in the study to talk collectively, and allowed me as the researcher to see with more clarity similar and differing perspectives across the group.

The focus group built upon the conversation in the current experiences interview about educational experiences and beliefs related to racial identity. For instance, after I solicited their beliefs about the education of black students, participants were asked about their perceived and collective beliefs about their role as teachers as well as other concepts that are reflected in discussions in teacher education courses such as meritocracy, colorblindness, and the achievement gap. The conversation around these topics helped forefront the teachers' beliefs about students and schooling experiences and shed light on their experiences dealing with challenging concepts in teacher education. (See Appendix C).

The focus group was particularly useful in this study because participants not only responded to my questions, but they also responded to each other. For example, when I asked what was the cause of the difficulties in education for many black students, one participant answered "the media". After describing particular television shows and television channels that she thought were harmful to children, three of the other participants cited examples of culture, including television and music that were harmful

to black students. In some instances there were disagreements between individuals, but the disagreements in the focus group were not surprising given the varying beliefs espoused across the participants. For example, one participant believed that it was up to children and their families to set lifelong goals, but two of the other teachers believed that teachers should help students set goals, even when it means the teacher is imposing their values on the students. Despite disagreement between the different participants, the beliefs shared in the focus group were consistent with what each participant shared in their individual interviews. In this way, I used the focus group to confirm and disconfirm the data collected in the interviews.

Data Analysis

Life History Interview: The goal of the life history interview analysis was to develop an in-depth understanding of the participants' intersectional identities. For each individual interview, I used open, in-vivo coding to look closely at each line of text to determine how the participants described their backgrounds and identities. After open coding, I coded specifically for identity markers (e.g. references to race, class, gender, etc.). I coded for these social categories of identity and other words associated with race class and gender (e.g. black, white, neighborhood, vacations, women, man) because I wanted to understand the intersectional identities of the teachers (Collins, 1993; Crenshaw, 1988, 1991; Luft, 2009). After this first stage of coding, I anticipated writing an initial description of each participant's intersectional identity, noting the different ways they defined themselves and their experiences through various identity lenses (e.g. racial, gendered, classed, etc.). However, three of the participants did not name explicit social categories unless they were specifically prompted by me. This suggested to me

that they may have been somewhat uncomfortable talking about race. As such, I decided to not write an initial description of the teachers' identities until more data was collected.

Current Experiences Interview and Artifact Review: The artifact review was included in the analysis of the current experiences interview, with each participant's description of the artifact captured as part of the interview transcript. Similar to the life history interview, the current experiences interview was analyzed using open, in-vivo coding. Using this method, I was able to carefully examine how the participants described their current experiences in teaching. After this first stage of coding, I expected to be able to write an initial description of each participant's experience in teaching and to begin to consider how each individual made sense of their experience relative to identity. After coding, similar to the life history interview, it was evident that the same teachers who did not use social categories in the first interview did not use them in the second interview, even after additional probes. They did, however, begin to explain why they did not use social categories to describe themselves or their teaching experiences. For example, in the life history interview, Shayla shied away from questions about race. However, in her classroom she shared with me, as an artifact, a poster of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s quote about recognizing people for the "content of their character", and she explained that her parents had taught her not to judge people by their race.   In this way, teachers talked about their life experiences and their teaching beliefs in practices, reiterating the relationship between teachers' lives and their teaching philosophies.

After having a broad understanding of the teachers' current experiences, I thought I would be able to describe how the participants' lives led them to their current location and experiences in teaching. However, I still did not find enough clarity in the data to

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begin constructing the teachers' identity narratives. So rather than using codes that emerged from the data, I instead, used a priori codes for culturally responsive teaching (Villegas & Lucas, 2002) since each participant described being responsive to students' needs in ways that reflected, at least initially, a culturally responsive teaching stance. However, culturally responsive teaching did not fully capture nuances in the differing descriptions of the teachers' pedagogy. Therefore, moving back to open coding I created a description of each teacher's talk about beliefs and practices related to teaching.

Focus Group Interview: The focus group interview was open-coded, similar to the individual interviews. Colorblindness, race, cultural deficits, frustration, and teachers' viewing themselves as "good" teachers were some codes that had begun to emerge from analysis of other data. As the teachers talked together, similar to the other data collection strategies, the teachers revealed information about their teaching and their lives. All of the teachers used social categories in this conversation. And the codes that emerged elsewhere were evident too in this data.

Follow Up Interview: The follow-up interview was also open coded in order to understand what ideas emerged from the participants. The follow up interview had a more explicit focus on race. Each teacher responded to what they had discussed in the focus group interview and explained the reasoning behind their opinions.

Analyzing Across the Data Sources: At this point, it became evident that I needed to examine the data more closely in order to decipher the teachers' descriptions of their lives. While I had a sense of the overall data at this point, I didn't yet have a clear sense of the individual cases. I used critical discourse analysis (Gee, 2011) in order to conduct a more detailed examination of each of the teachers' stories, specifically looking for

instances of identity, marked through the use of social categories. Critical discourse analysis, as a method studies an individual's language in order to reveal sociopolitical influences within dialog (Gee, 2011). Using critical discourse analysis, I marked each reference to race, class and gender in every transcript. I also noted when in the transcripts additional identity markers were used. Not only did I look for explicit mentions at this point, but I also looked for implicit ways of describing race, class, or gender within transcripts. For example, words such as "inner-city" and "bougie" were coded for race and class. Bonilla-Silva (2010) posits that white people typically discuss race in coded ways. Based on the interviews that I conducted, black teachers also talk about race in a coded manner.

Grouping Participants for Analysis: After analyzing the discourse of each interview individually, I grouped each teacher's data together and scrutinized each teacher's story using the marked instances of social categories from the critical discourse analysis. At this point, I was able to describe how each teacher talked about her identity across the data.

I also was able to categorize the teachers into various groups based on how they described themselves, which enabled me to see the beginning of particular ideal types (See explanation of ideal types on page 51-52). First, I separated the teachers into two groups based on who attended a PWI or an HBCU. Even though the teachers went to different types of institutions, there were similarities across both groups in regards to their teaching experiences and descriptions of identity. Then I regrouped the teachers based on their beliefs about race. Four of the six teachers espoused some beliefs related to a colorblind ideology. The other two teachers showed little to no evidence of a

colorblind ideology. One of the teachers who did not espouse a colorblind ideology was

the teacher with 14 years of experience. At that point in the analysis, I decided to focus

only on the teachers who were most alike in their experiences as fairly new teachers and

who attended the same school for their undergraduate degree. In this way, I minimized

confounding variables in order to compare the most similar teachers. The three who

attended the same university were selected for the final analysis and write-up. The fourth

teacher was not selected because she represented a colorblind ideology, similar to

Tamarra whose story is represented here.

Member Checking Interview: With three focal participants, and having a

clearer understanding of the teachers' identities, I conducted member checking

interviews, following up with each teacher on any missing information and ensuring that

I had captured their life experiences. After conducting the member checking interviews

with the teachers, I added additional description of teachers' identities to the description

of their teaching beliefs and practices. After completing this process for each teacher, I

then returned to the literature in order to be able to describe each teacher.

Introduction to the Narratives

To review, the literature in teacher education and on black teachers praises black

teachers while at the same time makes assumptions about who black teachers are and

what they believe (Dixson, 2003; Foster, 1997; Irvine, 1989; Milner, 2006; Sleeter,

2001). For example, throughout the literature on black teachers, there is the assumption

that black teachers can more easily relate to their black students than other teachers

because of shared racial background (Dixson, 2003; Foster, 1997; Irvine, 1989; Milner,

2006; Sleeter, 2001; Kohli, 2009). The assumption is that black teachers and students not

only have a shared ethnicity, but a shared culture upon which they can create a classroom environment that meets the needs of all black students. Black teachers also are politically minded and necessarily advocate on behalf of their black students (Dixson, 2003). Dixson (2003) further suggests that not only has there been a history of activism among African-American teachers, but that currently practicing teachers are implicitly political by advocating for black students against unjust policies and practices within schools.

Finally, the literature suggests that students of color, including black teachers who themselves were students at one time, have more experience related to diversity than white students (Sleeter, 2001). Sleeter (2001) writes: "Preservice students of color bring a richer multicultural knowledge base to teacher education than do White students. Students of color generally are more committed to multicultural teaching, social justice, and providing children of color with an academically challenging curriculum" (p. 94). Similarly, Kohli (2009) further specifies that this multicultural knowledge is rooted in experiences with racism. The assumption is that teachers of color, including black teachers, in contrast to white teachers, have experienced racism and are aware of its effects and are committed to challenging it.

The commonality across these studies is the focus on a singular identity marker of the teachers in the studies. Interestingly, the same scholars suggest that it is important not to over-generalize. For instance, some studies have been careful to add that these characterizations do not necessarily apply to all black teachers and they choose to use terms such as "many" or "generally" in reference to black teachers (Gay, 2000; Milner, 2006; Siddle-Walker & Snarey 2004). Milner, for example, describes at length the importance of not homogenizing black teachers as a whole and not implying that only

black teachers are able to be successful with black students, by referring to Gay (2000):

> The need for more Latino, Asian, Native, and African American teachers in U.S. schools is unquestionable. But to make improving the achievement of students of color contingent upon fulfilling this need is based on a very fallacious and dangerous assumption. It presumes that membership in an ethnic group is necessary or sufficient to enable teachers to do culturally competent pedagogy. This is as ludicrous as assuming that one automatically knows how to teach English to others simply because one is a native speaker..." (p. 205).…There is a huge range of diversity even within groups, and we cannot oversimplify the characteristics of any group of teachers… (p. 90)

Even though addendums are made to analyses, "these descriptions are extended to all African-American teachers" (Foster, 1993, p. 373). By referring to black teachers solely by their race, the literature perpetuates a singular portrayal of who these teachers are. The work I present here begins to offer more nuanced portrayals of black teachers, images that examine not only who these teachers are but what they say influences their teaching philosophies and practices.

My Place in the Narratives

As a former, black elementary teacher, my experiences are reflected in the study in two important ways. First, like all of the teachers in the study, I attended graduate school for my master's degree while I was still teaching. In graduate school, however, I did go through the experience of realizing that I was "miseducated" in regards to who I was as a teacher, the purpose of schooling, and who my students were (Cozart, 2009; Woodson, 1933/1990). Cozart (2009) describes her experience similarly: "I was miseducated to value a static and dependable school culture and to uncritically navigate schools to my advantage; that is, I am miseducated to believe that 'fitting' the American social order should be my goal" (p. 24). In my own miseducation, I thought my job as a teacher was to fill my students with knowledge and to help them prepare for a successful

life, according to my definition of success, which was based on my middle class life experiences as a token black female. Further, while I recognized my students were black, I believed that race did not matter in terms of their success. To me, race was simply a skin color. Entering teaching, I was sure that I could help my black students be successful like me.   All they needed was a good teacher with high expectations. All of these beliefs and understandings that I had were challenged in graduate school, and I explore them further throughout the dissertation.

Secondly, I am reflected in this study because like some of the teachers in my study, my life experiences and more specifically my experiences as a teacher were not evident in the literature I read on teachers. For example, the literature says that black teachers more easily relate to the cultures of their students. In contrast, as a teacher, I had to go out of my way, purposely learning about the culture (music, speech patterns, sports) of my black students, and proving to my students and their parents that I was a trustworthy teacher who truly cared for their children. Ways of communicating, dressing, worshiping, and leisure time were all very different for me, and for my black students. Our "culture" was not the same even though we shared the same race.

While I did advocate on behalf of my black students, as a black teacher, sometimes, my advocacy was misinformed, in part because of what I learned from my pre-service teacher education program. For example, I encouraged some of my students out of the classroom and into special education or into the principal's office for disciplinary reasons, instead of realizing that black students are disproportionally affected by referrals to special education and suspensions (Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2006; Townsend, 2000). Contrary to what the literature suggested, that black teachers

have more experiences with race and relate to the culture of other black adults and students, I felt like I was discriminated against by my black peers more than my white peers, and I did not experience what I considered racism. I believed racism was something that happened in the past. My graduate school coursework forced me to reflect and problematize my own black experiences, my experiences as a black teacher, as well as learn about privilege and the social contexts that schools are situated within. These "racial" challenges that I faced as a black teacher were not written about in the literature, and I wondered if other teachers had similar experiences.

My place as a teacher educator and researcher

When I had the opportunity to work with teachers in a social justice oriented masters degree program in a class called "Culturally Responsive Teaching", I became very curious about how teachers would understand culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) and how they would use it in their classrooms. I decided to conduct a pilot study to determine what sort of sense our former students in the program made of CRP and what that looked like in their classrooms. Four classroom teachers—all recent graduates of the program—self-selected to participate in the study. The pilot study found that each participant characterized culturally responsive teaching in varying ways, making evident in their talk what aspects of CRP were salient to them. From the study, I gained a greater understanding of how *white teachers* were learning about and using CRP, but I still was curious about black teachers experiences and understandings. Because no black teachers volunteered to participate in the study, it made me wonder why they did not participate and whether black teachers make different meanings from these types of classes than their white peers.

When I had the opportunity to work with a similar class, I took a special interest in the black teachers taking the class. I had conversations with these teachers after class, and I wondered what they were thinking as the white teachers unpacked their whiteness and learned about children of color. There were also shared moments of anger and individual moments of frustration in the class. These moments were not shared publicly in class and I did not get to hear about these teachers' experiences at length during the class. However, given the nature of studying social justice, it became apparent the course, like many other similar ones offered in teacher education programs across the country, was created for white, privileged teachers to talk about their own whiteness and their non-white, unprivileged students (Montecinos, 2004; Sleeter, 2001). For example reading McIntosh's (1990) "Unpacking the Knapsack of Whiteness," one reading in the course, positions black female teachers as unprivileged. The article specifically focuses on the unearned privilege of being male or of having white skin. The article does not take into account other areas of privilege and oppression that black teachers may experience such as social class. We also read the introduction to *White Like Me* by Tim Wise (2008), another text with an explicit focus on whiteness. Further, during the same week students read the introduction to *Everyday Antiracism* (Pollock, 2008). The topic of the first section of the book is about eradicating teachers' notions of biological racism. From the lived experience of being black, it is my assumption that most, if not all, black people know that they are not biologically inferior; thus, again, this reading from my perspective is geared towards white teachers. Finally, we read a chapter from *Privilege, Oppression, and Difference* (Johnson, 2006). While this text highlighted multiple categories of privilege and oppression including race, class, gender, ability, and sexuality

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among others, we did not have time to discuss how these privileges and oppressions were interconnected (Collins, 1993; Crenshaw, 1991). Also, it appeared that, because the majority of the class was white teachers, they dominated most of the conversation (Montecinos, 2004; Sleeter, 2001). Reading articles about racism in schools positions black teachers as "more knowledgeable others," (Vygotsky, 1978), because they have experienced racism. Further because black and low –income are frequently conflated, black teachers are seen as understanding their "poor, black" students and white teachers in the class looked to black teachers for answers.

At the end of the class, I was left with many questions about black teachers' experiences in such a teacher education program. First, how did their black experiences vary and how did those experiences shape their ideologies? I wanted to explore who these black teachers were beyond their racial classification and how they were thinking about race, culture, teaching, and their students. I wanted to know what were they learning, and how could a master's program for practicing teachers, and all classes on the social context of education, be changed to benefit educators of all backgrounds, not just white teachers.

Ideal Types: A Brief Note

To answer these questions that I grappled with throughout my study, I present the teachers stories as ideal types. The following chapters describe three different "ideal types" of black teachers who emerged from this study (Weber, 1999). Ideal types are descriptive cases that provide a structure for scrutiny and analysis of a phenomenon (Swedburg, 1999). "At its most basic level", as Ritzer (2008) explained, "an ideal type is a concept constructed by a social scientist, on the basis of his or her interests and

theoretical orientation, to capture the essential features of some social phenomenon" (p. 115). According to Morrison (2006), Weber had four goals in mind when he theorized ideal types. First, they are used to argue that the type described actually exists. Second, ideal types allow for "social and historical" comparison across cases. Third, an ideal type does not claim to be objective reality, but it does provide a detailed description for the purposes of observation and analysis, and finally the ideal type creates a structure for the construction of new ideas within a social context. The teachers in the study, whom I will talk about as ideal types, represent more than just individual teachers; they characterize many more teachers who may be found in teacher education programs everywhere. The ideal types that emerged from within my study are as follows: Black teacher as colorblind, black teacher as savior, black teacher as culturally relevant.

Reflexivity

One goal of my study was to bring voice to black teachers as multiple and multivoiced beings. Through the description of their experiences and their teaching, I try to honor the teachers' voices, how they see the world, and how they see themselves. I recognize, though, that because this is my analysis and interpretation, I present the teachers' stories through my own lens, influenced by my own experiences. I am as much a participant in the study as the teachers here. As such, I recognize that there are benefits and challenges associated with my proximity to the study. In many ways, my similar background benefitted me in this study. I was an elementary teacher; I attended a predominately white institution for a masters degree program while teaching; and I am a black middle class, female. I believe these similarities helped the teachers feel comfortable with me in the interviews and focus group. I recognize, though, that assumed

similarities may have led to unspoken assumptions on my part and that of the participants. To avoid this, I sought to provide multiple probes for interview and focus group questions so that the unspoken didn't remain such.

In addition, even though I may come from a similar background as some of the participants, because I am a Ph.D. candidate conducting research, I have a certain privilege not afforded to the teachers. Therefore, while I stand on the same side of the 'border' as these teachers in some respects, I must engage in some "border-crossing" (Villlenas, 1996) as well. As such, I try here to express the participants' views as best I can while at the same time am cautious in using the voices of the participants in writing up my findings in a way that will be harmful to them.

Limitations

There are limitations to this study. First, the small sample size of a very specific population makes it difficult to use the findings from this study to generalize across black teachers as a larger population, though the use of the ideal type framework allows me to get closer to that end. More importantly, the creation of ideal types offers opportunities for further research from my exploratory efforts. Second, all of the data is self-reported in the form of interviews and artifact collection. No other sources of data such as observation are included. Relatedly, it will be impossible to say for certain whether the connections between identity and beliefs and practices made are fully true and thorough.

I have approached and conducted the study within a postcritical stance (Noblit et. al, 2004), paying careful attention to positionality, reflexivity, objectivity, and representation. The small sample size then is not a limitation, but strength in that I am better able to provide thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of my participants without the

goal of generalizing to a larger sample. Further, the search for objectivity was not a goal.

Instead, it is important to recognize the subjectivity of each individual and the

intersubjectivity of all the participants including the researcher in conducting and

reporting the study. Finally, the lack of observation data forces me to fully focus on the

source of knowledge as the participants' words, thus honoring and privileging their

voices, while at the same time as a theorist, offering my critique (Fine, 1994).

CHAPTER 4

BLACK TEACHER AS COLORBLIND

I define myself first by my family: who my parents are, who my brother and sister are and the kinds of experiences I've had with them. Then I define myself by the other relationships I have with other people. The type of friend that I can be. The type of colleague that I can be. The type of stranger that I can be…The people around me help identify who I am first and foremost. That starts with my family and then spreads out to the more [people] I meet…And I've always done it that way, without being able to label it or anything. Who are you? 'Well, my daddy told me this and my mommy says this. And my sister always talks about this.' That's always the first thing I would say. I'm extremely comfortable with that because I feel like that sense of identity is so much stronger than me being black. I can back up so much more of what I feel and my opinions with my family and the people I know than I can with the color of my skin. -Tamarra

Colorblindness is an ideology, deeply ingrained in how people think and view the world (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). In the field of education, colorblindness, teachers' unwillingness to recognize the race of their students, (Howard, 2000), is typically a description associated with white teachers (Gordon, 2005; McIntyre, 1997; Sleeter, 2001; Valli, 1995). For example, colorblindness is a central theme in Race in the Schoolyard (Lewis, 2003), a book that describes white teachers teaching predominantly white students. Lewis shares how members of the school community did not understand why she would even want to conduct research there on race given that there were few non-white students attending the school. This is just one example of these teachers' unwillingness to see race in themselves or their students.

Gordon (2005) describes colorblindness in white teachers as follows:

"Colorblindness is not blindness: It is not an inability to see color. Rather, it is a

refusal…what Jervis (1996) calls 'White resistance to seeing' (p. 553). This resistance is learned and nurtured to protect the status quo, which privileges …and occurs on both the individual and systemic levels" (p.139). Important here is the notion of privilege implicated in colorblindness ideology. More than just deciding to not acknowledge skin color, colorblindness is about not recognizing power associated with the social construction of race.

King (1991) also described teachers protecting the status quo by dismissing racialized experiences and outcomes as "dysconscious racism." She explained: "Dysconsciousness is an uncritical habit of mind…that justifies inequity, and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given" (p. 135). When King describes her teacher education students she notes that they learn about social inequality and reject it "tacit[ly] accepting dominant White norms and privileges" (p. 135). McIntosh (1990) presents a different perspective on privilege noting that privileges are "conditions of daily experience…[taken] for granted as neutral, normal, and universally available to everybody (n.p.). McIntosh (1990) also makes the point that being privileged can be "unconscious". Whether denying unearned privilege is intentional or unintentional, it is clear that privilege is oppressive to those who do not have it (King, 1991; McIntosh, 1990).

Skin color itself is not enough to maintain a structure that distributes privilege, but it is the ideological system associated with colorblindness that work together to creating meanings that are associated with skin color. In other words, race is not simply a biological marker, but it is a social construction. "Race and races are products of social thought and relations… races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires

when convenient (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). So when a race such as "black" is referred to, it is not just the physical marker that is summoned, but it is the history and current meanings associated with the physical marker. In other words, colorblindness means more than not seeing skin color, but it means that an individual ignores all of the additional meanings that race entails.[4]

In schools, colorblind ideology works to blame individual students and families for underachievement. Each individual is responsible for their own success without regard for the broader context. Colorblind ideology does not allow space for discussion of larger social structures that may impede—or support—school success. Ulucci (2007) names cultural deficiency, meritocracy, and colorblindness as separate myths that work together, but for the purposes of this paper all three of these ideas will be encompassed using Bonilla-Silva's (2010) colorblind ideological framework.

Bonilla-Silva (2010) posits that the colorblind ideology is comprised of four tenets: "liberalism", "naturalization", "cultural racism", and "minimization of racism". These tenets are used to understand ideas and experiences that involve race. Each tenet in itself represents colorblind ideology. In other words, if an individual uses one of these tenets by itself such as naturalization to explain an idea related to race, then they would be exhibiting colorblindness. The multiplicity of tenets that individuals use to explain discrimination related to race points to the pervasiveness of colorblindness in the United States at large. Liberalism relates to the idea of equal opportunity, individualism, and incremental progress (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Kelly (2007) captures this idea of liberalism in his description of "traditional civil rights ideology" in his study of black token

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[4] Throughout this dissertation I use the term "black" to identify race and "African-American" to identify ethnicity.

teachers.   The beliefs inherent in liberalism ideology (Kelly, 2007) are as follows:

>1. Because of past prejudice and discrimination, oppressed groups need equal opportunity and colorblind access to institutions in society.
>2. Individuals can act to change racist attitudes and societal barriers through intergroup dialogue and interaction.
>3. Progress is slow and evolutionary; once racist laws and policies are eradicated, everyone will be treated fairly. (p. 231)

Particularly important to liberalism is the idea of equal opportunity. Equal opportunity means that each person has access to the exact same thing, without taking into consideration what experiences and privileges individuals already have. This idea of equal opportunity is related to a belief in meritocracy (Bonilla-Silva, 2010): If everyone is given the same opportunities, then hard work will enable all individuals to make progress.

Cultural racism is an aspect of colorblind ideology influenced by liberalism (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Cultural racism is attributing negative characteristics to a racial group based on that group's common culture, including things such as the groups beliefs and way of life—as well as perceived way of life-- in order to explain the group's social standing. For example a participant from Bonilla-Silva's (2010) study expressed "Maybe if [black people] get off [their] butts and get an education like whites" they would be successful (p. 158). In this statement blacks' lower social status is explained by the attributed cultural characteristic of laziness.

Minimization of racism, another component of the ideology laid out by Bonilla-Silva (2010), implies that racism is no longer an important factor in determining or influencing the course of people of color's lives. This would include the denial of the impact of discrimination or a dismissal of the need to understand outcomes based on race. For instance, when asked about discrimination within hiring practices, participants

indicated that job selection is related to ability with the most qualified people being chosen. One participant explained, "If [black people] are qualified, they'll hire you. If you are not qualified, then you don't get the job" (p. 45).

A fourth component, naturalization of racism, suggests that racialized patterns— such as the existence of segregated neighborhoods-- are natural happenings. For example one of Bonilla-Silva's participants explained "Every race sticks together and that's the way it should be… I grew up in a white neighborhood…most of the blacks will live in their black neighborhood" (p. 39).   With the belief in naturalized racism comes a lack of attention to larger social structures that may have led to the resulting "naturalized" state.

Given that much has been written about colorblindness in white teachers, there is scant research that documents teachers of color as colorblind.   Sue (2011), writing about Mexican teachers, describes colorblindness as, "a belief that race is not an important determinant of life circumstances," (p. 538) and she offers that teachers of color can subscribe to this belief system (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Collins, 2005; Sue, 2011). Through the use of Tamarra's story, I argue colorblindness is not restricted to the socialization of white people, but rather that people of color are socialized into colorblindness as well in order to maintain a belief in the myth of meritocracy and its privileges.

Socialization of Colorblindness

As mentioned previously, colorblindness is an ideology. Leonardo (2003) posits that ideology includes the frameworks that help people make meaning of the world. Ideologies exist, but frequently people are unaware of the ideologies that influence how they understand and see the world. Ideologies are laden with power; they are not neutral (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Leonardo). As an ideology, colorblindness also has power

implications. To repeat Gordon (2005), "[Colorblindness] is not an inability to see color.

Rather, it is a *refusal*" (p. 139). Tamarra's refusal is neither overt nor obstinate. It is part

of how she has been socialized from a young age. Bonilla-Silva's framework can provide

a structure for thinking about how colorblind ideology developed and is perpetuated in

Tamarra's personal and professional lives.

For Tamarra, colorblindness is an ideology that she has been socialized into from

a young age. Her life experiences including her experiences in her family and in the

schools she attended provided her with structures and experiences that pointed her in the

direction of colorblindness. Tamarra's family and their status as middle class African-

Americans exposed them to liberal ideals. Further, it was liberal ideology espoused

during the civil rights movement that allowed them to enjoy the privileges that they

currently have (Collins, 2005). For example, Collins (2005) suggests that many African-

Americans became middle class "via the route of individual social mobility" (p. 77). For

Tamarra this manifested in her belief in the importance of individuality, an understanding

of her own cultural behaviors that pointed her towards success, as well as an

understanding of the cultural behaviors of others that hindered their success.

Liberalism: Exception to the Rule

Tamarra's reflections on her identity, focus first on her experience as a member of

her immediate family. This is where her liberalism and concept of self as an individual

began. Growing up with two parents in the military shaped Tamarra's image of herself

and her outlook on life. In the military, Tamarra's family moved to different locations

including Hawaii, Arizona, and Washington D.C., always living on or very close to a

military base. From her experience living in varied places, Tamarra recognized and

developed an appreciation for different people and places: "…they may all look the same, but they were so different," remarked Tamarra about the people she encountered in the various places she lived. She recognized early on that people in different places had different ways of life—different ways of speaking, eating, living—prompting her to recognize, "I was nowhere near a close-minded person." Tamarra's sense of self as individual was constructed in part through her recognition of—and reaction to—these differences. Even though she had seen different ways of life, these differences were not neutral. Certain ways of living were valued over others. With two parents serving in the military, Tamarra describes herself as solidly middle class. Values and practices associated with the middle class become the standard for Tamarra, which she measures everything else against.

As a "Matthews Girl", Tamarra and her siblings were different from the rest. "We're the Matthews family", Tamarra explained. "[There are certain] things that we do. And I would see that most often when I would invite friends over, and [my dad] would do something wacky and crazy and say, 'don't worry—that's what a Matthews will do'. And like when we… go to family reunions I hear that a lot too. "Oh, that's our family—that's the characteristic of who we are." In this case, "we" is not thought to be simply "black" or "African-American". "We" specifically refers to the Matthews family as a group.

The Matthews are a close-knit family. Family time has always been and is still important for Tamarra. When Tamarra moved to North Carolina for college, her family moved to North Carolina the next year. Moving Tamarra to college was a "complete family deal. First child to go to college. Everybody came. My sister and brother had to haul my clothes up the steps. My mom came, my dad came. My dad came with me for

like the orientation session… And the whole family came for the move in. And when there were visits the whole family would come." Now that she is married and now expecting her first child, she is still very close to her family. Currently, her parents live 15 minutes away and her sister lives within walking distance. Tamarra's family supports each other through being near each other so they can help when needed.

Tamarra's standard of success is intricately linked to the close relationship that she has with her family. Both her mom and dad instilled middle class values such as individualism which became part of her standard cultural frame against which she now measures everyone else. For example, multiple times in her interview, Tamara refers to her family as being "different". Though black, she considered her family "different", or exceptional, in that they did not necessarily fit what is considered 'normal' characteristics, of a black family. So even though her immediate family members all behaved in a similar manner, they were different from those outside her home, including at family reunions. This difference between Tamarra's family and what was expected of them because of their race influenced her rejection of social categories and moved her towards classification of herself, and others, as individuals.

One difference that Tamarra perceived between herself and her classmates was the value she and her family placed on education. Part of being a Matthews meant being successful in school. From elementary school, Tamarra knew that doing well in school was a priority for her family as well as herself. For the Matthews, education was important and that included going to college.

> Conversations at home were not *if* you were going to college – it was *whe*n you're going to college, and what college you were going to go to. It wasn't that we were being pressured it was just after high school comes college. You know, there's things that you should do so that that will be your next step.

Tamarra perceived this perspective as being somewhat different that some of her

school peers even though her peers in middle school were of the same race. Instances

such as this illustrated to Tamarra that skin color could not help her predict the values of

people. Instead, she found more meaning in seeing people as individuals.

Cultural Racism: Coded Language

Tamarra uses a cultural deficit perspective when describing her black, low-

income middle school classmates. She also uses this cultural perspective when thinking

about her own individuality and how she became successful. For example, she believes

that her success was partially due to the value that she placed on education, in contrast to

her classmates whom she believed did not value education. For example, while Tamarra

looked like her peers, she recognized that she was different, a difference that she tried to

obscure in some instances as exemplified in her reflection on middle school:

> I [did] worry sometimes that like I would have been found out you know that I
> wanted secretly to go to college and I was the one getting the high scores on the
> testing things because I certainly didn't bring it to light you know? I was kind of
> relishing in the fact that I did look like [the other black students], to try and fit in.

Tamarra makes the assumption that all of the other students did not do well academically

and did not aspire to do well academically. Also Tamarra notes that she wanted to go to

college and had to keep this a secret because the other students did not feel that way. In

Tamarra's middle school experience all of the students were black. However, she makes

it clear that even though she and her classmates had a shared racial membership, they had

little else, if anything in common.

Tamarra always knew that part of her educational trajectory would include

college and she began preparing for this goal in middle school. At the military base in

Washington D.C. where Tamarra and her family lived, there was one middle school that all of the students were assigned to attend. However, in high school, the students got to choose and apply for where they would go to school. During Tamarra's middle school years she was very aware of different types of schools and students. She also knew what was needed in order to go to college and be successful. This was an example of Tamarra's middle class cultural capital (Lareau, 1987) which provided her with a set of 'instructions' for what she had to do to get "some things worked out, finagled" to ultimately be successful in her path to college:

> The high school I went to was an academic high school and so I had to apply for that and middle school kind of split us all up so the kids that went to the good schools and the kids that had to go to neighborhood schools. And neighborhood was synonymous with a bad school… There was a – there was a chance I wasn't going to be able to go to that school because of transportation from the base to the school and I remember almost being in tears because I knew what would happen to me if I had to go to a neighborhood school. But, *we got some things worked out, finagled some things* so that we could get a bus there.

Even as a teacher, Tamarra labeled this school "bad" without describing the reasons why. What was important to her was making sure that she did not end up there. Tamarra knew that she needed to be at a "good" school that fostered hard work. Tamarra's middle school and high school were black. Her middle school was "bad" and her high school was "good". The differences between the schools related to the values and behaviors of the students. Tamarra relates these values and behaviors to individually choices, not a larger social pattern.

Tamarra's success in high school allowed her to go to the college of her choice: a large predominantly white, elite public university which enabled her to prepare for her dream of becoming an elementary teacher. Going to college was a natural step for Tamarra in reaching her career goals: "in my mind to be a teacher it was high school,

college and then to be a teacher. Like that was the path I had to take." Tamarra explains that the educational decisions she made as an individual helped her graduate from an elite university and then with a master's degree and a job she enjoys. What Tamarra does not realize, for example, is that many of her decisions that allowed her to do this were influenced by her middle class cultural capital.

Tamarra's description of her middle and high school experiences previously include cultural references that are implicitly characterized by race. Consistent with Tamarra's explicit desire not to use race to categorize people, she uses other terminology to describe race. For example, the terms "rowdy-inner-city", and "hood" only refer to her classmates in middle school and high school, all of whom are black. The terms "rowdy-inner city" and "hood" are code words for people of the black race (White, 2007). Further, her reference to 'neighborhood' schools in describing her own middle school experience suggests racial coding. She explains:

> I think once you went to that high school your kind of outlook on life is sort of fixed. You know if you went to a neighboring high school you know where kids were doing all sorts of stupid stuff in the science lab and they were amused I feel like that's one of those situations where you kind of have to like crawl out. Like you know how they say like I have to get out of this place. And then just thinking about the kids from my high school and because I know from other high schools and where they are now, and it's not the same career paths.

In this instance, cultural racism is couched in coded language. Tamarra is attributing cultural behaviors and characteristics to the black-low income students at her school. She describes these behaviors and then attributes them to the students' current social standing.

In contrast to Tamarra's unwillingness to use the term black or African-American to describe her school peers, she willingly introduced the categorization of "white" into our first conversation. "[I lived in] Deserton… until I was eight or seven… Deserton was

a mainly white population so I guess that was my first encounter, my first schooling. And not only were they white but they were all rich. Like crazy rich, like race car track in their back yard rich." Tamarra's willingness to label her peers in Deserton as white, without being prompted by me regarding race is important because it contrasts with other data collected. In the first interview, Tamarra uses the term black nine times, and each time Tamarra uses the term "black" it was only after I asked a specific question and also used the term "black." The above quote where Tamarra uses the racial category "white," without prompting from me, in contrast to her unwillingness to use the term black, illustrates that it may not be solely racial categorization that she has a problem with, but specifically categorizing people into the black race—her race. This points back to Tamarra's desire to be an individual which is connected to the negativity she sees that surrounds black culture in her current school, a topic I will return to later in the chapter. Tamarra's ability to see herself as an individual, instead of as a part of the larger group, influenced her to distance herself from negative characteristics of the culture, such as not valuing education.

Minimization of Racism

Related to a colorblind ideology, Tamarra believes that she, as an individual, cannot characterize people or their experiences based on their race, though admittedly she does this in coded ways across the data. In this way, she minimizes the effect of race and racism in her belief system. Tamarra believes that race cannot be used to characterize her students, nor herself. She explains that society uses race to define people and sees it as problematic to do so:

> Race and gender and social class or social conscience really…You know it's a way in order for society to classify somebody because you know we just have a

need to organize and classify somebody in a hierarchy. Um, but… one person can fall into many different categories. I feel like I change categories even now. Um, so its kind of an old research lens…You know where it used to be so easy to put someone in this bracket. Now that people are changing so often, people are entering more groups and more groups themselves are, you know merging and the gray areas and you know the orange areas are, now the lines are becoming more blurred and you've got to take into account that its more than just those categories.

Tamarra here is referring to the classification system of race and class as problematic because they are used to create power structures and the classification system is out of date because the categories mean different things than they used to and people fit more than one category. Through rejecting race as a lens of analysis, she minimizes race. Bonilla-Silva describes this tenet as "suggest[ing] discrimination is no longer a central factor affecting minorities life chances" (p. 29). By Tamarra suggesting that race is no longer a relevant term to describe people's experiences, she is suggesting that racism is no longer an issue that needs focus.

Tamarra indicated throughout her interviews that being black does not affect her experience. "If I ever identify myself as black, it's because I have to check a box on a piece of paper." Tamarra does not identify herself by race, except when required to do, and she does not see the need to affiliate with other people because of a shared racial background because, as she identified numerous times in the data, a shared racial background does not indicate similar values and experiences. Tamarra realizes that many other people do group people by race and in one of our conversations she described what she believes causes this:

I think the reason why it's so hard for the black culture and the white culture to [black people] as individuals instead of one group is because it really used to be that way. There used to be a time where all the black people, it all meant the same thing…It used to be that if you were black, it meant exactly this and only this… it's taken years and going to take years that now this core group of [black]

people… have spread out and they've been influenced by all the other cultures around them and they are no longer exactly the same. That's still hard to grasp… I mean even as Martin Luther King [brought people together during the Civil Rights Movement]… If we're together, we can defeat this other foe. But it's no longer [blacks] against [whites]. We're a part of them. How can we fight the same person that's our neighbor and have been our neighbor for 15 years?

In this quotation, Tamarra shares that grouping people by skin color has a history, but now the context has changed. She also expresses her personal conflict with race-based identity politics. This is important because throughout my conversations with Tamarra, she uses language that does not make race explicit. Race is in her conversation but she uses her words in a way that obscures race, another aspect of colorblindness.

In sum, the idea of individualism is connected to Tamarra's minimization of racism. She was taught that no matter what her skin color, or anyone else's, it was up to them as individuals to work hard in order to be successful. From Tamarra's description of her classmates, I argue that she believes that those who are struggling are doing so because of their own personal choices. Tamarra attributes decisions her classmates made are strictly related to their individuality and follow no patterns related to social categories. Social categories such as race, class, and gender are not useful in describing who a person is or what their experience is like, since this is how Tamarra was raised. Her belief in a person's individual ability to make progress, without any consideration of the social context, helps her explain her own success and that of others. Tamarra's own experiences before teaching influence how she teaches (Lortie, 1976). As such, she carries her colorblind ideology into the classroom and her beliefs about teaching.

Becoming a ColorblindTeacher

When Tamarra was preparing to become a teacher, aspects of her colorblind ideology informed her beliefs about teaching and her future teaching career. A few

things stood out for Tamarra in her pre-service teacher preparation at her university, and

in her view, in the university classroom Tamarra was perceived as an individual with

special talents to offer which mirrored her sense of self-as-individual. For example,

when talking about one of her pre-service elementary education classes she said:

> Unanimously the class chose me to be the teacher while they were the students
> and then so I went through it just like they were kids and unanimously they were
> all like I'm glad we chose [you]…you're exactly what a teacher would [be]. You
> said it all like a teacher would and I was like okay!... I'm being recognized,
> because like everything I've done so far is like what a teacher is.

In this example, Tamarra perceived herself as being highlighted as an individual because

of her teaching skills. When talking about this example in our conversation, Tamarra

became excited. It was apparent from her tone and her body language that she enjoyed

being positioned as the one who already knew about teaching. This was an example of

Tamarra's liberalism in how she views her individual talent and her individual ability to

be independently successful.

 This individualized stance was reflected as well in Tamarra's clinical experience.

Tamarra did her student teaching at a rural school where the students were predominantly

white and of lower socioeconomic status. Tamarra disliked her student teaching,

remarking, "student teaching… was not enjoyable at all". First, Tamarra believed that

she did not learn anything new at the school. "I felt like the school experience didn't

have a lot to offer me that I didn't already know". Related to not learning anything new,

Tamarra believed that the school was out of date, not using the new practices that she had

been learning about in graduate school.

> It was kind of frustrating because that school is not as progressive as I would have
> wanted it to be… I mean you go to Brownhill University, a really great education
> program and they teach you all these things that are on the cusp of research and

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now I'm in this elementary school where they're you know, so [many] years behind.

Tamarra focuses on the school being many years behind without consideration of why the school may be "behind". This school is rural and many of the students there are learning in spite of their status as low income, but there is no consideration of the additional resources needed in order to be equal to the more progressive educational settings that Tamarra references. She implies that the school is an individual structure, independently responsible for its success, or failure and in this way, colorblind teachers, such as Tamarra, abstract people and institutions from society, as if they were in a vacuum, without influence from the social context.

Tamarra's student teaching experience helped her recognize that she wanted to be in what She deemed a more progressive school that was also diverse when she became a teacher: "Neighborhood schools, [schools that are mostly comprised of students who are of one race and one socioeconomic status], remind me of my student teaching experience…There were, it's just, it's hard to move forward because everybody is content with where they are and because everybody is in the same place. It's harder to be more opened-minded." Tamarra's desire for integration and progressive ideals are representative of her traditional civil rights ideology.

Overall, Tamarra's pre-service teaching experience helped her understand where she wanted to work: a racially and socioeconomically diverse school where progressive ideas about teaching and learning were welcomed and where individuals are encouraged to excel. Tamarra seems to believe that racially and socioeconomically segregated schools are behind because teachers and students are content with being behind, according to her standard. The blame for lack of progress is placed on the individual

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without consideration of the social context. It is assumed that individuals are not motivated to work harder. According to the myth of meritocracy, if these teachers and students would work harder, then they would be able to make progress. Because this is not happening, blame is placed on the individual (Ullucci, 2007), which is characteristic of colorblind ideology. Thus, Tamarra enters teaching immersed in a colorblind ideology that has detached schools and their students from the social structure, and values individual merit and progress.

Currently, Tamarra teaches at a linguistically and ethnically diverse school that focuses on leadership. One of Tamarra's favorite things about the school is the diversity. At the school there are 61 languages represented along with many different nationalities and ethnicities. As a magnet school, Palm Tree Global Leadership Institute has special programs sponsored by non-profits and corporations interested in science, technology, and leadership. The school, an officially designated leadership magnet, is guided by the ideas in the *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by Steven Covey. One specific leadership trait that students know about and work towards is being prepared to find a job after getting out of school. Another example of leadership in the school is in the way students are expected to behave as leaders. The concept of leadership reflected at the school is one that is focused on the individual role as leader rather than collaborative leadership. This philosophy reflects Tamarra's belief in an individual's own characteristics as an indicator of success. The idea of being a leader places a large amount of responsibility on each child as an individual. Overall, the school places an emphasis on liberal ideals.

Tamarra enjoys the leadership magnet because it provides extra resources, opportunities, and support for her and her students. For example, Tamarra shared that she, and other teachers at her school, give model lessons for visitors around the world. Tamarra's school has frequent high-status visitors including the governor. The school is high performing; students excel academically, and the leadership expectations help the students to exhibit excellent behavior. The emphasis is on each child being in charge of themselves and their future success which resonates with Tamarra's own stance and beliefs.

A "Colorblind" Teaching Philosophy

Within the school that Tamarra selected because of its liberal, progressive values, she continues to rely on her ideology of colorblindness to help her understand her own teaching practice and to help her students understand school. A description of Tamarra's teaching philosophy will illustrate how colorblindness permeates her beliefs about teaching and her sense of self as a teacher.

Tamara's Classroom Context

From Tamarra's perspective, who she is as a teacher is influenced by who she is as an individual, not characterized by her race or her socioeconomic status, and in turn, she views her students in the same way that she sees herself: as individuals with unique backgrounds and experiences. Tamarra believes that her job as a teacher is to help students learn what they need to know so that they can be successful in whatever individual goals they choose. All of her teaching practices and beliefs point towards this mission in her teaching. More specifically, for Tamarra, the overall purpose of education is decided by individual students and in order for education to be effective, it must be

differentiated according to each person according to their individual needs and desires. Again Tamarra believes that it is up to the individual to make incremental progress, part of a colorblind ideology.

Even though Tamarra believes in student choice and autonomy, she also believes part of education is learning how to be successful in the school community as currently constructed. She referred to this as "introducing [students] to the discourse of school" in our conversations, reflecting Gee's (1996) concept of "Discourse". As identified previously, her school community "Discourse" focuses on leadership. As such, many of her beliefs about the purpose of teaching relate to helping students to become leaders.

> Corliss: [Is there] a certain way of being here at this school that people have to be…socialized into?
>
> Tamarra: Right, definitely. That's the first three [Covey]habits… be proactive put first things first, um, being with the end in mind…They need to know to look for a job…the Covey habits are enforced for them to stay at the school. The first three are about themselves and self-control and the next three are all about interacting with others and thinking win-win, seeking first to understand, and strategizing. Um, and so all that ties in with our social etiquette. Using good manners, having firm handshakes, reinforcing good eye contact, and that's something that every teacher does in every classroom all throughout the school.

There are specific individual behaviors and values that students are expected to uphold in Tamarra's classroom and throughout the school. These behaviors and values are associated with the middle class (Lareau, 1987) and reflect her own experience in school, even though Tamarra does not recognize it as such. For example, "*good* manners" vary depending on the context. Since the purpose of education, for Tamarra, is driven by student choice and helping children to become leaders, her beliefs and practices regarding teaching relate to supporting students through the choices that they as individuals make.

Colorblindness in Teaching: Liberalism

Liberalism, more specifically universalism and equality, the ideas that all human beings are the same and that all humans are equal, is another ideal apparent in Tamarra's teaching. For example she says, "they're all children to me and these are the things that I need to teach them and I'm gonna teach them as many different ways as I can so these different children understand it but I'm not going to, like make a lesson for black children and make a lesson for white children." Tamarra does not distinguish between her students, which are admirable qualities in a teacher according to a traditional civil rights ideology (Kelly, 2007). While equality would seemingly be a worthwhile goal, the reality in many settings is that students do not enter school on an equal playing field, therefore treating them as equals further perpetuates inequality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Further, even though the aim of many teachers is to treat all students the same, this goal is frequently unaccomplished. Even in Tamarra's own description of her teaching, she discussed how her black students were treated differently.

> It was behavior and race, because a lot of the students we got were black students... I, I didn't like that part about it though... I could tell if they were bouncing up and down in the hallways or shouting out or would like walk right passed a teacher and not say anything. Um, because I guess to me I didn't want it to be, uh, that they were new and black... That's, I remember walking down...we were walking outside on the sidewalk one day and one teacher was like looking at my class and she was like, Oh, he must be a new friend right there and I, I kind of, I didn't know how to take it…he was new yes, and I think it was because he was black that she mentioned it, I don't know.

In this excerpt she notices a pattern based on race, and she admits to being uncomfortable with it, because of her liberal intentions, and eventually dismisses it. Through avoiding race, Tamarra may be causing her black students more difficulties instead of helping them navigate their new school environment. Further, Tamarra believes that making race-conscious changes for an individual is problematic and promotes stereotyping.

Tamarra's liberal values of equality, point her towards an understanding that all people are the same and have the same chances for success. In order to uphold this ideal, she reverts to minimizing race as a descriptor that influences people's lives.

Colorblindness in Teaching: Minimization of Race

In Tamarra's current school, even though she dislikes categorizing her students by race, it is part of how her school operates. At the beginning of the school year Tamarra and the other teachers at her school were told by their administration to prepare for a new population of students coming into the school. The new students, who entered the school when district lines were redrawn, were primarily black and because they were new to the school, they were unfamiliar with the rules and expectations that governed the school. The school administrators prepared the teachers in advance for this new influx of students by letting the teachers know that they were going to have to shift their teaching to help these new students be successful. The teachers also went on a bus ride at the beginning of the school year where they were able to see the neighborhood from where the new students were coming. Despite the request from the administration to teach differently, Tamarra decided not to change anything about her pedagogy. According to Tamarra, even though she did not change her pedagogy, her black students were still successful.

Tamarra believes that race should not matter: "I can definitely change and modify, for each individual student in my class [but] whenever I think of, of having the focus on one…group [I decide] … we just have to do it for everybody… Every child is different, even within the same race. Grouping them together, doesn't sit well with me." Tamarra sees grouping students by race as a direct affront to her goal of seeing people as individuals. However, instances such as this in which her students are not behaving as

individuals but can be grouped as such by race and by behavior conflict with Tamarra's

personal belief system. Happily for Tamarra, her new black students eventually adhered

to the behavior patterns in the school without her having to change any of her practices or

beliefs.

Tamarra believes that equality is achieved for her students when she is able to

meet their individual needs and wishes. As a teacher, she changes her pedagogy

depending on the needs of individual children.

> I think it's my flexibility in my own thinking; knowing that not everybody in my
> class is the same and that I have to teach things different ways for different people
> and different families have different situations and I cater to that and so parents
> are always appreciative of how I am very accepting of their child. And whether
> their child is different or whether their child fits in I'm very accepting of that and
> sort of bring out the best in all of our children.

Tamarra's perceptions of her flexibility stems in part from her own growing-up

experiences and being in different places and meeting lots of different people. For

Tamarra, as a teacher, she adapts for the students instead of expecting students to adapt to

her. Tamarra is able to make changes for the students because she has an individual

relationship with each child. In addition to knowing each child personally, Tamarra

knows what each child needs academically and the combination of both helps her to help

each child learn what they need to learn. "I can go a lot deeper than just the test score. I

know what skill it is they're struggling with. And I know that that one particular skill is

not related to, whether or not that student buys lunch." Tamarra believes that education

is an individual endeavor, not influenced by the students' race, class, gender or cultural

reality she does not explicitly consider these factors when she teaches. Her beliefs

regarding teaching are divorced from any concerns regarding society at large. Tamarra

realizes that society influences education, but sees it as outside of her "circle of

influence" based on her own personal experiences. Therefore, examining social

categories such as race, class, and gender of her students, herself, or other individuals, in

Tamarra's mind, is not useful. She explains of her students:

> They're all children to me and these are the things that I need to teach them and I'm gonna teach them as many different ways as I can so these different children understand it but I'm not going to, like make a lesson for black children and make a lesson for white children. I'm going to make sure my class understands that we're all different and we're different for, so many reasons…and that we're gonna do our best. You know and that, I feel like that, that's what the focus should be. I, you do need to be aware of the races of the children in your class and the economic statuses and you know, their home situations, but only to know that this is not all the same.

Here Tamarra minimizes race, saying that it has no influence on students' experiences at

school, and she does this by referring to the liberal argument of equality, divorced from

an understanding of larger social structures. In other words, she says that even though

everyone is different, every student is the same because of their humanity without regard

for their social experiences due to race or other power structures.

The social categories of race, class, and even gender are not explicit in how

Tamarra describes who she is and what she does as a teacher. In fact, she overtly rejects

assumptions that others make that because she is black, she is necessarily like other black

people in the school. When she first started teaching, Tamarra was greeted immediately

by many other African-American women in the building:

> I was the only black teacher at that school. But a lot of para-professionals were black and a lot of them would stop by my door and would be like, "I'm glad you're here." And they would go like this and be like, "I'm glad you're here." I'm like 'What? Are you teaching the same grade I am? How are we connected?" And it turns out it was only because the color of our skin. I didn't know their values or the kinds of things that they believed in. I can't just jump on a bandwagon like that because I know every black person is different. We're not all the same.

In this quote Tamarra again views herself as an individual. In Tamarra's view, the African-American para-professionals assumed that Tamarra would immediately relate to them because of shared racial membership. However, Tamarra needed more than just a shared race to suppose similar experiences and beliefs and values. Tamarra's unwillingness to acknowledge that race makes a difference in the lives of individuals classifies her in part as a colorblind teacher.

Colorblindness in Teaching: Cultural Racism

Cultural racism is also evident in Tamarra's teaching. In describing black culture as a whole she explained:

> I guess that's… part of the culture sort of weighing on itself, you know it's not cool to be smart when there's a lot of black kids in the classroom. And it's very different if there's a lot of white kids and a few black kids then it's okay to be intellectual and discuss with the teacher. But it's not okay because when you go home you'll get teased because you're being smart at school or beat up or whatever.

Here, Tamarra is describing a cultural deficit perspective in regards to black culture. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) expressed a similar sentiment with their "acting white" thesis. Tamarra continues, referring to the liberal ideal of incremental progress (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Kelly, 2007) in order to help black students move beyond the negative influence of this culture.

> So that is a big hurdle because the culture itself is historically known for weighing itself down. So lifting it back up one child at a time I guess and making it okay to be smart, making it okay to shine, making it okay to work hard and to succeed.

Cultural racism, attributing cultural characteristic of a group "to explain the standing of minorities in society" is part of a colorblind ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Tamarra uses these explanations to explain the cause of black students' problems, again, not looking at broader social influences on students that may contribute to underachievement.

Throughout Tamarra's story, she seemed to realize that cultural racism is problematic, and she made attempts to avoid it. For example, she focuses on "difference" without saying that those differences are positive or negative. In referring to her new black students at the beginning of the year, she said: "I could tell if they were bouncing up and down in the hallways or shouting out, [but]… it didn't seem like our…[behavior] was higher or better than theirs…it was just different." In this quote when she says "our" she is referring to herself and her students who understood the discourse of her specific school, the white and middle class students. Even though she suggests that it is okay to be different, she shows a preference towards cultural behaviors associated with the middle class. At her school, in most cases, middle and upper class is associated with white and low income is associated with black.

Middle class cultural characteristics are also described by Tamarra as "academic personalities". For example, in one of our conversations, Tamarra described an easy relationship she was able to develop with one of her students:

> I think I easily relate to the students that have that academic type of personality because that's kind of what I have. I understood school and went through school and did everything I was supposed to do like a rule follower. So when I see students like that in the classroom we can easily relate and I have a girl who's really smart and she's one of those really great students and we can laugh and joke and then get right back to work and it happened like on day one. And then I have another student…it was a lot harder to develop a relationship with him because he didn't have that same academic success as I did I guess and that was hard for me to understand because I didn't come from those types of experiences. So it took me longer.

In this example Tamarra shared that it was because of the student's behaviors, values and shared academic success that made it easier for her to relate to that student, whereas she had a more difficult time developing a relationship with the student who did not share the same values, experiences and behaviors. Interestingly, the student she identified with

was white; the one she didn't readily identify with was black. Again here, she implicitly uses cultural characteristics to explain the success of students in education.

In contrast to some of the literature in teacher education which assumes otherwise, Tamarra does not form relationships more readily with people, or more specifically her students, because of a shared race. The assumption in education is generally that teachers of the same race relate more easily to students of the same race (Dixson, 2003; Irvine, 1989; Milner, 2006; Sleeter. 2001). As previously mentioned, "…cultural connections" are often prevalent in relationship with Black teachers and Black students. These culturally informed relationships allow Black teachers to develop meaningful, relevant… and responsive… curricula and pedagogy in classrooms with black students" (Milner, 2006). This is certainly not true for Tamarra. In Tamarra's experience in relating to people across multiple settings, she positions herself as an individual in relationship to them. This experience, similar to others in Tamarra's life, justifies the need to get to know people based on what she refers to as individuality: their experiences, values, and behaviors, not simply their race, for example.

In summary, Tamarra does not like to group herself or other black people by race. It appears that for Tamarra, there is a negative association with the categorization of "black" or "African-American" so she shies away from using it as a descriptor. In contrast, she characterizes herself and others as individuals. Within a colorblind ideology, paying attention to race is traded for liberal ideals such as individualism and equal opportunity. Colorblind ideology in Tamarra's teaching manifests in her working to treat students as individuals while ignoring race.

Maintaining Privilege and Colorblind Ideology

Even though Tamarra critiques the "categorization" of individuals, commenting for example that those historical categories (specifically naming race and gender) "are becoming more blurred," she does partake in this categorization, though not explicitly. She, too, "organize[s] and classif[ies]… in a hierarchy." Again the purpose of a colorblind ideology is to establish and to maintain privilege. In Tamarra's story she places a higher value on characteristics associated with middle class culture. Throughout Tamarra's description of herself, she positioned herself and others as individuals. Individuality for her means who a person is based on their beliefs, values, and experiences, "their values [and] the kinds of things that they believed in". For Tamarra, a person's individuality is more salient than to which identity group they belong: "I don't know…I don't know if those results, [test scores disaggregated by race], will tell me anything because I know so much more about the individual child". However, what Tamarra may not realize is that identity, based on social groupings, is embedded throughout her discourse and experiences, particularly that of race and class. Social class is important to note in Tamarra's story because her middle-class experiences influence her beliefs about teaching as well as her beliefs regarding race.

Tamarra inadvertently uses colorblind ideology to maintain her privileged status. Specifically she uses the marker of her social class in order to make distinctions between herself and those of lower-income status. Because race is closely associated with class, colorblind ideology in her personal life helps position herself as a "different type of black person". Instead of race, she prefers using the notion of the individual in order to make distinctions. Without this notion of the individual, she could be grouped with the other

black people who are low income. Tamarra values middle class characteristics more than others, so when she says she values individuals, she is actually valuing middle classness.

Tamarra does not overtly use the term "middle-class" when she describes her life, but middle-class values and experiences are imbued throughout her narratives. Rita Mae Brown, quoted by bell hooks (1984), succinctly explains:

> Class is much more than Marx's definition of relationship to the means of production. Class involves your behavior, your basic assumptions about life. Your experience (determined by your class validates those assumptions, how you are taught to behave, what to expect from yourself and from others, your concept of a future, how you understand problems and solve them, how you think, feel, act… (p. 3)

In addition to behavior and experience, for African-Americans, Collins (2005) describes the prerequisites of middle class life.

> …Upward mobility typically required access to higher education' the protections provided by strong anti-discrimination and affirmative action programs in education and employment; the assimilation of White norms and value….as well as the social skills needed to handle increasing contact with White people as colleagues and friends" (p. 77).

Tamarra's experiences met all of aforementioned requirements of upward mobility. Even though her parents did not go to college until after Tamarra was born, they benefited from training and employment in the military. As a military family, the Matthews lived in a predominantly white community and they accepted and bought into the norms of that community. For example Tamarra's parents knew and trusted everyone in the community, and Tamarra and her sister enjoyed spending time away from her parents with her friends. Tamarra recalled during the interviews her experiences playing with her white friends at their houses and outside. The norms and values that Tamarra experienced as a child prepared her for her adult life. Tamarra has friends of all different races and she is one of very few black teachers in her predominantly white school. The

experiences Tamarra has along with the values and beliefs that justify those experiences relate to the socioeconomic status of her family and her ability to interact with others who shared that social class. Even though she does not specifically describe here the unsafe neighborhood that she is referring to, she later mentions that her inner-city peers also lived in unsafe neighborhoods.

During Tamarra's childhood she had specific beliefs that guided her knowledge about school and education. The students in her middle school did not live up to her expectation for how students should carry themselves. This was evident in her description of her school:

> It was kind of homogeneous. They were all like inner city – inner city kids. With I guess all the stereotypes that come along with it. Disrespectful, and rude and not always on the path to college. Low economic status, very worried about the material things and easily angered I guess; so fights and all sorts of things like that.

Here Tamarra explicitly explains that these students were of a lower socioeconomic status. Along with naming their socioeconomic status, she also provides a judgment on the character of these students by describing them as "disrespectful and rude". She distinguishes herself from them because they were not on an academic path that led to college. As Tamarra explained in her story previously, in contrast, going to college and being successful in school were important values for her, and these values are part of her middle class cultural capital. The concepts that Tamarra looks for in others—that enable her to relate to others—are related to social class.

Tamarra also makes social class distinctions between herself and other students in high school. When describing her effort to get into a particular high school, Tamarra explains:

> The high school I went to was an academic high school and so I had to apply for that and middle school kind of split us all up so the kids that went to the good schools and the kids that had to go to neighborhood schools. And neighborhood was synonymous with a bad school. So it was really funny the personalities were the same but the goals were also the same now at this point. And I would also say I had – I went to school with a bunch of smart thugs. So they were still, you know, just as … hood. They were still just as hood but all wanted to go to college and all knew what they needed to do to get to college and would do it. Yeah. It was a very interesting experience but I loved it. I loved that it – like I didn't have to change the people that I enjoyed in middle school, because they were now going to do something with their lives.

When Tamarra refers to "personalities [being] the same", she references her description of the students from middle school, "Low economic status, very worried about the material things and easily angered" so she is still making a class based distinction. However, she noted a shift in values of these students from middle school to high school: everyone cared about going to college. In other words, these were the same students Tamarra went to school with in middle school, but now their values were more aligned with hers, and their values shifted towards seeing the importance of college and having developed the skills necessary to go to college. In other words, even though these students were financially of a lower status, similar to the middle school students, their behaviors and values now pointed them towards becoming part of the middle class. Therefore, Tamarra related to those students and did not feel as if she had to hide like she did in middle school. Even though Tamarra did not have to hide, she still made the distinction between herself and those who were "hood," still pointing to her need for individualism, not wanting to be associated with that group even though they were of the same race.

Not only did Tamarra characterize how she related to students based on socioeconomic status, she also characterized her friends from childhood and as an adult.

At the age of eight, when she lived in Deserton, she described her friends as "crazy rich, like race car track in their back yard rich". Even more telling in regards to who she is now is how she describes her friends from high school whom she is a still friend with today.

> They lived – they didn't live in the poorer neighborhoods. They actually lived in pretty good neighborhoods. The neighborhoods that were closest to the government buildings that costs more but you know it doesn't look like they're very expensive houses but they cost a lot because they were close to the capital or close to the major train station. Because they look like normal houses but it wasn't until I got older that they're like well this is a such and such hundred thousand dollar house because it's on D.C.

In this quote Tamarra associates poor with bad neighborhoods and wealthy with good. What is interesting here is that Tamarra says her friends were not poor and lived in "good" neighborhoods. These are a different group of students from those that she previously described as "hood" or "inner city". The students that were of a higher socioeconomic status were her friends. In this instance, Tamarra does not refer to understanding her friends as individuals or try to separate herself from them in any way. In other words, Tamarra uses the distinction of being an individual only when she wants to disassociate herself from a group, in every instance of a lower social class, as in the examples of disassociating herself from her "disrespectful… , rude, and not always on the path to college" classmates as well as the previously mentioned example of disassociating herself from the black para-professionals, in her school.

Tamarra's middle class values are imbued in her teaching as well. Not only has the privileging of middle class values and colorblindness led to the maintenance of Tamarra's privilege, but it also translates into privileging students who also subscribe to these values. The magnet theme of leadership in the school and the focus on *The Seven*

Habits of Highly Effective People socializes students into a certain behavior and value

system that supports middle class norms, which are taught so that students can be

successful in the mainstream workforce. "Using good manners" are habits that are

associated with middle class norms of the school such as raising your hand and taking

turns to speak but are certainly not distinctly "middle class." These habits help to

socialize students into middle class norms. Tamarra sees this "middle class" socialization

as an important part of school and one of the characteristics that makes it a great school.

> Tamarra: All of the kids are… great leaders and [use] their manners and are using social etiquette that we reinforce.

> Corliss: So you're talking a lot about…behaviors [such as] hallway behavior…[is there] a certain way of being here at this school that people have to be… of socialized into?

> Tamarra: Right, definitely. That's…where the Covey habits come in too. A lot…about controlling yourself.

In this quote Tamarra indicates that there is a certain standard of behavior, heavily

enforced, that the students follow. For Tamarra, this is an unquestioned standard, based

on middle class ideals, that represents a code of behavior that all people should follow.

In this way, individualized behavior and action from students is not encouraged, but

students are actually required to carry themselves in a specified way. In summary, even

though in Tamarra's description of herself and her teaching, she describes the importance

of individualism, not only is her own identity formulated in relationship to particular

class distinctions, but she is also subscribing to and coaching her students in what she and

others perceive to be middle class values, privileging her students who already subscribe

to this discourse. In this way she shows that middle class culture is more valuable to her

and should be the standard for choices and behaviors in her classroom.

Lessons Learned from Colorblind Teacher

As a colorblind teacher, colorblind ideology has been a part of Tamarra's life since she was born. Espousing the liberal values of a colorblind ideology helped her family and currently help her students, who embrace the same values, be successful. Colorblind ideology is, however, problematic for teachers in that it divorces an understanding of people, in this case her students, from the larger social context, thereby blaming them for their lack of progress. Further, since Tamarra, similar to other colorblind teachers has experienced no discrimination (Sue, 2011), that she is aware of, and she is categorized as black, further propagates the idea of individualism and personal choices as related to success without realizing the influence of colorblind ideology on her belief system.

Even though all of Tamarra's experiences point to her as colorblind, she does not identify herself as such. After taking a social foundations class in her master's degree program she stated,

> [My] color blindness was kind of shot at that point because… I feel like I can no longer be blind because now I'm like well, I am a black person. And I don't have the same things as a white person has… But I'm also okay with knowing, and I keep saying the historical background to it because that's what I really clung to from the class

Tamarra shared this alongside her desire to not use racial categories to define herself or others. Even though now she sees skin color, she does not fully understand the concept of colorblindness or realize how her belief system could be harmful to her students. As Valli (1995) posits, "not seeing color blinds White teacher[s] to their own dominating culture and behaviors (p. 126), the same is true for black, colorblind teachers. However, the phrase "seeing color" is too simplistic. "Color" actually appears to refer to the

connection between skin color, race (as a historical, political, and social construct), and culture. Thus being *color*-blind means not seeing, for whatever reason, how skin color, race, power, and culture work together. As illustrated any teacher can be colorblind, regardless of racial classification. This highlights the need for a teacher education that helps teachers unpack their own experiences and beliefs related to education, going beyond classification by race in order to understand teachers' racial ideologies.

CHAPTER 5

BLACK TEACHER AS SAVIOR

"I keep my Bible in my room, and I read it before they get here. [It represents my] strong belief that all things are possible and I think, in this position and the school environment, I've made some pretty impossible things possible. So that's why it's important… Just a daily sense of motivation and knowing that there's a greater purpose beyond our own because I think that… other people's needs are important to me." -Angela

"This is my "Sphere of Influence"… everything in the circle I can control but only this stuff outside of it I can't control because I was stressed out trying to do everything. And that's why that was important because here it's hard not to try to do everything… you get burned out". -Angela

The "teacher as savior," also known as the "teacher as rescuer" and "teacher as hero", wishes to save students from their communities and to ameliorate their lives. There are several descriptions of teacher saviors throughout the literature (Ayers, 2001; Grant, 2002; Johnson, 2006; Markgraf & Pavlik, 2009; Reyes & Rios, 2003; Stofflett, 1996). Grant (2002) posits that the teacher as savior is characterized by four characteristics including 1) a commitment to teach in a lower income and predominantly non-white area and ultimately "rescue" students from that area; 2) a desire for students to become more like the teacher; 3) a desire to save a group of students as an individual teacher; and 4) a lack of consideration for the social, political, and economic contexts of the school and its students. Grant (2002) puts it succinctly:

> Within this view of teaching, especially as students think about teaching in schools located in poor, ethnically diverse areas, is a paternalistic wish to single-handedly help students, by molding them into individuals more like themselves. This view of the relationship between teachers and urban schools disregards the powerful political, economic, and social forces at play in urban schools and frames the teacher as a savior who not only rescues the child from a dangerous environment, as in the films, but sets them on a path leading directly out of the community in which they live. (Grant, 2002, p. 85)

Johnson (2006) describes Jennie, a pre-service teacher, as a "teacher rescuer". In Johnson's class the teachers were asked to draw a picture that represented themselves as teacher. Jennie likened her students to the third class passengers on the *Titanic*. Johnson (2006) explained that "images of the socio-economic class system on the doomed, passenger liner is used metaphorically to parallel differential treatment of students in schools. 'The third class passengers who were underneath the deck'… were the students in the public, less privileged school system whom the teacher wished to rescue through equitable teaching methods" (p.125-126). Similar to third class Titanic passengers, in the teacher's view, all of her students are on track to suffer a dire fate, illustrating the severe consequences of substandard educational practices. As the teacher rescuer, it became Jennie's job to independently save them.

Similarly, Stofflett (1996) describes Gregory, a black South African who went to school in the black South African system, also as a teacher rescuer. Gregory remembers his schooling experience as plagued by "suffering, oppression and deep frustration… [where students were part of] a people disillusioned and demoralized" (p. 583). Now as a teacher, Gregory feels a personal responsibility to improve the situations of similar students:

> As rescuer I aimed at saving these students from the harshness of reality by literally opening their minds and mercilessly pouring masses of knowledge into them... All I wanted was for my pupils to work and pass, as to uplift themselves from their poverty stricken lives and to improve the standards of the community (p. 583).

Gregory positions himself as a knower, assuming that his students were void of knowledge and needing to be filled. Such philosophies of teaching can lead to particular teaching practices. For example, Freire (1970) refers to this ideal as the "banking

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concept of education" whereby:

> In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who
>
> consider themselves knowledgeable upon those who they consider to know
>
> nothing….[These teachers p]roject an absolute ignorance onto others…(p. 72).

Gregory desires to fill his students with knowledge because he is invested in the cause of

helping his oppressed students. Further, he desires to see them alleviated from that

oppression and he believes that education, through himself as the teacher, is a means to

empowerment, or at least out of their current situations. Like other teacher saviors,

Gregory seeks to save his students from their oppression by having them become more

like himself: an individual who was able to use his education to get a job and be self-

sufficient, in contrast to his students' families who had trouble meeting basic needs such

as electricity and food (Stofflett, 1996, p. 583).

Teacher as hero, similar to teacher as savior, emphasizes the "self-denial" of the

teacher (Markgraf & Pavlik, 2009). Markgraf and Pavlik (2009) posit that teachers who

are heroes are willing to deny their own desires or needs in order to make sacrifices for

their students. For example, Mr. Escalante in the award-winning, nationally acclaimed

film, *Stand and Deliver*, helps his poor, underachieving students understand math while

sacrificing his own health. After having a heart attack, he comes back to teach his

students earlier than required. Mr. Escalante, as a teacher savior, seeks to rescue his

students—many of whom share his Latino cultural background—from their oppression.

The descriptions of Jennie, Gregory, and Mr. Escalante point to the emergence of

the ideal teacher saviors, rescuers, or heroes who are on a mission to save impoverished

students through their individual teaching. As individual teachers, they use their beliefs

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and experiences to dictate first that the students need to be saved and also what salvation (i.e. knowledge) looks like. Students are saved by their teachers from their communities and their families.. Generally, in the literature, discussions of teacher as savior relate to white teachers. "Most commonly the teacher is a middle class European American, who arrives on the scene with *superior skills, ethics, cultural* values than those of the ethnic and racial other" (Reyes & Rios, 2003, p.9). However, Gregory as an African male and Mr. Escalante as a Latino male, among others (Ayers, 2001), reveal that the "teacher as savior" typology is not restricted to white teachers. What all of these teachers have in common is that they are trying to rescue low-income students from oppression, as defined by the teacher.

In the case presented in this chapter, Angela, while the same race as her students, appears to believe that she has "superior skills, ethics, and cultural" values than those of her students. In Angela's case, I will examine how her life experiences influenced her development as a teacher savior and how she exemplifies the teacher as savior stance. Historically, in films and in the literature on teachers, black women have been frequently described as having an attitude and being angry in juxtaposition to white teacher saviors who portrayed as friendly and sacrificial. For example, in the television series *Boston Public* the black teacher, Ms. Hendricks was portrayed as "cruel, uncaring, and mentally unbalanced" according to Tillman and Trier (2007). Whereas "Ms. Davis, a White teacher with blonde hair, is frequently described as 'elegant' by the principal and is generally thought to be a Michelle Pfeiffer-like figure in terms of her dedication to all students, but particularly students of color and low income students" (p. 128). Whiteness is attached to the idea of savior. As such, Angela as a black teacher savior is an image

seldom seen in popular media.

Commitment to Teach in Lower Income and Predominantly Non-White Contexts

Angela's path to teacher as savior began in part in college. While there, she took part in service opportunities in which she had the chance to mentor black youth who had been labeled "at-risk" by the organizations in which she served. During Angela's time at BU she volunteered with three similar organizations, and she took a service learning class that focused on helping "at-risk" children. Beginning in her freshman year, Angela began working with University-Community Connections (UCC) as a mentor and tutor. According to the program's website, UCC was started at Brownhill University (BU) in 1992 by a black professor with the goal of helping local elementary children from the housing projects be academically successful and learn about BU. Based on my conversations with Angela, UCC functioned under a banking model of education (Freire, 1970), with an understanding that the university had much to offer the students and their communities: a one-way relationship that saw those coming from the university as the knowers and those from the housing projects as needing knowledge. Angela said she enjoyed this program because she liked being able to help students and their communities within this specific context.

UCC peaked Angela's interest in other service programs, including the Literacy USA program: an undergraduate work-study literacy program. In this program, Angela also worked with identified 'disadvantaged students' one on one in a school setting. It was this program that Angela credits with her desire to become a teacher: "[I] originally…wanted to go to radiology school, but I liked my Literacy USA job so much." Angela also participated as a mentor in the Allstars Mentoring program, a program

geared toward helping minority children be successful in school. Griffin (2012) critiqued this same program and other similar mentoring programs for their deficit-oriented perspective regarding black people. More specifically Griffin (2012) explains that these programs express the following beliefs: "I can provide better opportunities for your child; I can teach your child what they need to be successful; I can help your child learn better ways of being; My way of being, doing, thinking, is better than your way; I am better" (p. 5). Even though this program does not explicitly espouse these beliefs in their mission[5], Angela's participation in programs modeled like this one likely influenced the development of a teacher as savior perspective. It was participating in programs such as these that influenced her not to go into medicine, but instead to be a teacher specifically in low-income, high minority settings. Angela specifically described these experiences as her "entry into teaching".

In sum, Angela participated in multiple educational service opportunities at BU that specifically served low-income students with the goal of helping students improve their educational experiences and outcomes. Even though she was initially interested in the sciences and medicine, she changed her career focus in order to become a teacher to help low-income students in particular be successful. All of these experiences that Angela enjoyed at BU positioned her as a knowledgeable helper, and positioned the participants as people needing assistance.

In Angela's first teaching position, she chose to teach at Edwards High School, a rural high school in a small town called Marington where a large number of students were economically disadvantaged. Teaching at a high poverty school was very important to Angela.

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[5] See Griffin (2012) for a detailed description of the mentoring program.

I… wanted [to teach at] a school… [with] a [low] socioeconomic status… That was really important to me because I felt like I could have mass movement of just educating kids and making them aware that they have options and resources out there. To [help them] know… [that they] didn't have to stay in the same place.

As a high poverty school, and one of the 20 worst performing high schools in the state, Edwards fit this description. For Angela, it was an ideal teaching context that mirrored the programs that inspired her in college. Even though these students had challenges, they still had the desire to be successful. The fact that "the kids wanted to go beyond where they were," was both appealing to Angela and one that she could foster by, as she states: "making them aware that they have options…They didn't have to stay in the same place" Angela further described her students' desire for improvement:

The kids that I worked with in Marington are all over, not just [the state], but all over the country… Even if they have [a low socioeconomic status], like they have [that]… background and… experiences… they don't want to stay in Marington. They don't. I can tell you out of the 20 some kids that I [had]… except for one [student]… The rest of them have left. And when I think about having them in English 9, they always wanted to leave. By reading their journal entries, they never wanted to stay… They felt like [Marington] was boring.

Angela's students, overall, disliked living in their small town. They believed that doing well in high school would help them get a job or go to college so they could leave. Angela's students also believed that getting their high school diploma and working or going to college would help them financially. "They've always wanted money. They had that concept that school equals more money." Since they saw that connection, they were motivated to earn their diplomas because they saw it as a way to reach their goals. According to Angela, her students truly saw school as an important aspect of reaching their future goals, and they readily accepted her assistance. For Angela, her experience at Edwards exemplified what teaching was supposed to be about: helping kids improve their lives and leave their communities.

For her next teaching position, Angela chose to teach at Washington High School in Villesboro, another low-income, predominantly non-white environment where students needed her: "It was my goal to go to an environment where I felt like I could give kids this wealth of knowledge that I had because I felt like I learned about all these ways that minorities are disadvantaged." This school too was on the list of the 20 worst performing schools in the state. In recent years, high stakes testing scores at Washington have improved slightly. However, it is still regarded as one of the worst high schools in the state and the district. Washington was also the first black high school in the district and still boasts a large, active alumni base. However, since the 1980s, according to Angela, the school has become increasingly low income due to how districting lines were drawn, separating the black middle class from black lower income housing areas.

In 2011, more than 75% of students at Washington High School[6] were identified as economically disadvantaged. Washington's school assignment plan also contains many Villesboro housing projects. Angela noted throughout our conversations that these housing projects and low-income neighborhoods have been stricken with problems common to high poverty areas including violent crime, drugs, mass incarceration, and high teenage pregnancy. The problems encompassing these areas are multi-generational so not only have Angela's students been affected by these problems but their parents and grandparents have also had to deal with the challenges of generational poverty. She explained, "A lot of my parents went to Washington and lived in that area, and a lot of their parents lived in Washington area." For the students that Angela works with, their difficulties are compounded because of their special education label and needs.

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[6] More has been written about Washington High, this historically black school. The sources will not be listed here to respect the participant's and the school's anonymity.

Washington High School's location in an area plagued with generational poverty makes understanding the social, political, and economic context of the school and of the community critical. It is within this urban, low-income school environment that Angela seeks to save students by making them more like herself.

Becoming More Like the Teacher: A Black Middle Class Lifestyle

The teacher as savior ideal type reinforces the idea that "My way of being, doing, thinking, is better than your way; I am better" (Griffin, 2012, p. 5). That way of being, for Angela, is a particularly middle class way of being as illustrated by her experiences in school and in culturally diverse—though economically homogeneous-- neighborhoods. For Angela, her success was a result of her ability to integrate, her ability to be successful in school and, in essence, her ability to differentiate herself from "a different type of black person". As illustrated in Angela's example, a black teacher savior is different from the white teacher savior because the black teacher shares the same status as a minority. Therefore, because she is also black, but has been able to be successful, she should know that race is not a reason that hinders individuals. Or does she?

Valuing Racially Mixed Settings

While Angela was born in a culturally homogeneous area, her parents soon moved to a more diverse city. The message Angela learned early on from her family was that diversity was important:

> I've always been in a situation that pretty much mimicked the demographics of the United States. I think that was important to my mom. She never wanted me to be in an all anything situation, because she always thought it was important to get to know everybody.

Angela grew up in racially mixed settings. Angela's parents both grew up in predominantly black environments and lived in similar neighborhoods when Angela was

a small child, but the family moved before Angela started school. Not only did Angela live in racially mixed neighborhoods, but Angela's mother also specifically instructed her to integrate herself in with a variety of people.

> My mom always preached to me [to] get to know people from different walks of life, of different [races]… when I was born we lived in a well-to-do black neighborhood, but when it was time for me to go to school we moved to a mixed community.

Angela describes the neighborhood that she spent all of her schooling experience in as middle class with ethnicities that were reflective of the entire United States. "I could tell the difference between Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean. And we all lived in our same neighborhood. I had an Indian friend. My friends came from a number of different backgrounds". As a child, the message that Angela appeared to receive was that in order to be successful, it is important to integrate yourself among people of different races.

Doing Well in School

One of the things that was valued in Angela's community was education. As a child, education—and doing well in school—was always important for Angela's family. "We always knew to go to school…. school was always important. I guess there was always that underlying positive reinforcement that if you did go to school. I couldn't imagine doing poorly and I don't think it'd be a good outcome."

For Angela and her friends, college "was like a path…that already existed." Getting into an elite university was expected. "College was never an option. It was something that you did. I think that I've always approached school as what you're doing in school paves the way for your future." Angela's family has several people that modeled for her the importance of education. Angela's parents both had postsecondary education: Angela's dad earned a bachelor's degree and Angela's mom earned an

associates degree. Her paternal grandfather was in the military and her paternal grandmother was a nurse. All of Angela's aunts and uncles on her father's side went to college. As such it was expected that Angela and her siblings attend college as well.

Angela's entire career in school was about preparing to go to college and being the best academically. "I think that that's one of the things I liked, too… being competitive. My friends that I grew up with, we always compared grades. We always tried to outdo each other until we went to college." Angela's group of friends that she competed with all took upper level classes. She remarked, "my exposure to children or kids that were not [in one of] those… higher level tracks, it was very minimal in high school. Everybody was either in IB or AP classes… It was a hard concept for me to grasp that you weren't in [at least in a] honor's class". In addition to being in these upper level classes, Angela was also very involved in extracurricular activities. One of the requirements on the career path to attending an elite public institution was being involved in extracurricular activities. Angela was involved in many activities including National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), band, and Students Against Tobacco. Not only was Angela involved in activities, but also she took on leadership roles such as the treasurer of the NAACP. Angela noted that all of the people involved in extracurricular activities were in either the Advance Placement track or in the International Baccalaureate program.

Angela's high school experience centered around other students who were in higher level classes and extracurricular activities. Also, important here is that it was hard for Angela to understand not being in an upper level class. Students that were not in her classes or in extracurricular activities with her were outside her periphery. As such, she

did not understand why or how individuals would be placed on a lower-level track. Her

exclusive interaction with those who were successful in school continued into college. In

other words, Angela's peer group did all of the things that they needed to do, from the

beginning of school in order to get into a competitive elite public institution. It was part

of their middle class "concerted cultivation" (Lareau, 2011). For Angela at the time, it

was the 'normal' course of events. Angela understood the importance of school as well as

knowing how to navigate high school in a way that prepared her for college (Lareau,

1987, 2011).

"A Different Type of Black Person"

Perhaps because Angela grew up in a racially mixed community, and did not

experience racial discrimination, while she identified as black, it "never really mattered to

me. I never understood what being black was…" Angela's experience with her black

peers occurred as a token (Kelly, 2007) in the IB classes and extracurricular activities

mentioned in the previous section and in her experience as part of her all-black church

youth group.

> I went to a black church… we all did group stuff together. We sang in the choir,
> went on field trips and did stuff as a church…we all ended up going to college,
> too and we had similar backgrounds, even though we went to different schools…
> All the other black kids [I associated with] had the same experience I had.

Angela's experiences reveal that she was part of the black community, and she identified

as a black person. However, when she says that she "never understood what being black

was" also begins to reveal her racial ideology.

Angela subscribes to a traditional civil rights ideology (Kelly, 2007) believing in

equal opportunity, the ability of the individual to foster change, and incremental progress.

For Angela, race was strictly a physical marker that indicated a *history* of oppression and

discrimination, not necessarily *current* subjugation. Angela believes that because of the Civil Rights Movement of the past, now everyone has the opportunity to individually improve their lives. Her involvement in the NAACP as an officer illustrates her commitment to help other black people "advance" as she and her family were able to do. As a child, Angela did not experience discrimination and saw no evidence of current political, social, or economic oppression. As such, even though she saw black as part of her identity and went to a black church, race held no present-day meaning in regards to people's experiences and expectations for their lives, except for an awareness of the past.

However, there were times throughout her growing up when she came in contact with people who had a different experience with race than she had. Angela noted that it was in the third grade that she realized that there were different types of black people, and that "black" had a meaning that she was unfamiliar with. It meant listening strictly to hip-hop and R&B and associating primarily with other black people. It also meant regularly eating the lunch from the school cafeteria, wearing different clothing, talking a different way, and having a different relationship with school.

> We started going to school with kids who lived in Winding Creek and stuff (a low-income neighborhood)…and that was a new experience for me because I had black friends but they were more like me. And I hadn't had those experiences that the other kids had had. But I didn't think it mattered. But I learned that it did matter… there was this girl that lived over there and she bullied me in 3rd and 4th grade... So that kind of started that trend, but it never really mattered to me. I never understood what being black was.

The differences between herself and some of the other black kids at the school became apparent to Angela. Angela was the same race as the students from Winding Creek, but she had a different way of speaking and dressing. The kids played different games and listened to different music. The kids from Winding Creek were of the same race, but

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according to Angela, they had a different culture. Angela also shared that she was different from these students in that she was academically gifted and pulled out of class for enrichment, whereas the kids from Winding Creek typically did not do well in the regular education class. The girl who bullied her did not pass 4th grade, for example. Angela noted that her experience with the kids from Winding Creek "started the trend" with a "different kind of [black people]". This different type of black person behaved differently and they did not do well in school, which was different from Angela's black experience.

This was a pattern that continued throughout her schooling experience. As mentioned previously, in middle school and high school Angela's classes were leveled based on academic achievement. Therefore, Angela had little contact with the students from Winding Creek or other similar students. "I think lunch was the only time that we really interacted. We all hung out after games at Cici's, but that was the only time... we rarely had the opportunity to mix and mingle". Angela did have lots of contact with people of multiple races, including her "black friends [that] were more like [her]" in her classes and in extracurricular activities. Again, these black friends lived in similar middle class neighborhoods and did well academically. Angela's experience in middle school and high school reinforced her belief from elementary school that one type of black person, exemplified through herself and her friends, were academically successful, and the other type of black person, such as the students from Winding Creek or the students in lower level classes throughout high school, were not academically successful.

In contrast to herself and her black friends, what she was used to, she referred to other black students in these classes, neighborhoods, and different culture as "a different

type of black person". The trend of "a different type of black person" followed her throughout her schooling experience. Because Angela was also black and had friends who were black who were successful at school and who enjoyed middle class home lives, she did not believe that race was a factor that could influence one's life experiences. However, culture, as illustrated by the "different" black students she encountered, who did not do well in school, did seem to be a factor that could influence one's life experiences.

For Angela, success was not associated with a race for individuals. Having friends from all races who she deemed as successful, Angela knew that because individuals were of a certain race, specifically black, it did not mean that they could not be successful. However, at the same time, Angela also noted that a "different type of black [people]", who segregated themselves in all-black settings and who were culturally different from the mainstream were not as successful as she or her other black peers were. What Angela describes is two different cultures of black people. She was immersed in her mainstream, middle class culture which gave her limited exposure to other black people who were not middle class. Additionally, because she was bullied by kids from a low-income black culture, she was not motivated to spend time getting to know them or their norms. Lack of exposure and not realizing the political, economic, and social influences that created these different cultures of people within the same race, leads Angela to subscribe to a form of "cultural racism" (Bonilla-Silva, 2010) in her teaching, viewing her lower-class black students' culture in a negative light while at the same time trying to get them to be more like her middle-class black self.

An Individual Teacher Saving Her Students

The mission of a teacher savior is to rescue their students from what the teacher perceives as negative influences including family, community, and even the students' themselves (Ayers, 2001). Angela's successful experiences in school and college as a black person, as previously mentioned, shaped what success is, how she believes students should be saved and to what end. Angela's method of rescue is her teaching, which is characterized by her caring and making instruction relevant for students' lives.

Her goal, as a teacher savior, is to help students learn the curriculum, through whatever means necessary (Ayers, 2001) while simultaneously caring for her students. Angela explains, "You have to have some sort of responsibility to that child and you have to care." As such, Angela treats the students as if they are part of her family. For instance, remember that Angela refers to "my parents" on page 92. "A lot of our approaches here are… from… the parent [perspective], when you were a child… it's more from a nurturing perspective… You know it's very relational…". Teacher saviors believe that with love and support, they can help lift their students out of their current impoverished situations. As Farber and Holm (1994) describe regarding teacher heroes,

> Time after time, we witness the saving grace of genuine love and care between students and teacher…paired with a wish for achievement… the reassuring sense that a troubled group of students… might finally get on track for a future, thanks to the work of a teacher who really cares. (p. 170).

Similarly, as a teacher savior, Angela believes that students will do better in school when they are loved. "They're more embracive because… I nurture them more".

As nurturer of her students, Angela at times sees herself more like a parent than a teacher. She explains, "The kids are really needy, the demands of the job are strenuous…the kids need love, they need attention, it's like you had a baby". The image

of a baby implies someone who is helpless, unaware, and will not survive without intervention from a more developed, experienced person, in this instance, a caring teacher. Farber and Holm (1994) describe this pattern of teacher hero as provider and students as needy. According to Farber and Holm (1994), "The [teacher hero] has a vision of what the young need (although they do not know they need it), and he struggles with obstacles that make it difficult to convey what it is…" (p. 159).

As a type of parent, Angela saves her students by explicitly telling them what they need to do in regards to their future. However, there is a thin line between parenting and paternalism when the children you love and care for are not your own (Klein, 2000).

> [As] a teacher/parent [I tell my students what they need to do] 'You gonna get out yo mama's house and you're gonna go to school'. So for me that's where I teeter the line…I try not to but it's very hard for me not to take on a parent role and impose some of my values on my students because I kid you not, all my seniors are registered in school. I don't care. That's what we're doing.

In this quote, she describes a directive for her students in which she forces her beliefs on her students, pleading for them to leave their parents houses to go to school. Similarly, Mr. Escalante, the teacher savior from *Stand and Deliver* makes demands of his students, encouraging them to put school first, regardless of their parents' suggestions or influence at home (Ayers, 2001). The teacher savior challenges the students to be successful, calling on them to rise above the challenges of their realities. In this way, the teacher as an individual leads the students against the world. Farber and Holm (1994) describe this in their description of Mr. Clark from *Lean on Me*, who is solely responsible for the turn around of the high school, but the students, however, also have to take on the challenges of their difficult home and community environments by working hard to pass state tests.

In my study, Angela's caring is also evident through her efforts to make the curriculum relevant for her students. For example, Angela explained: "We have to draw on their life experiences and really get them to gauge what the outcome is going to be and how that's going to affect their life experience." Angela, did not however, describe any specific examples of how she made learning relevant. Instead she used the phrase "draw on their life experiences" in order to explain how she makes learning important for her students. However, even though she has the desire to make learning relevant, the question remains as to whether she is drawing on students lived experiences as defined by the students themselves or their lived experience as perceived by her. As Emdin (2011) explains

> A true representation of youth experiences is not always present even among progressive educators that are fighting to teach with a consideration for Black youth culture. The particular vantage point of Black youth is unique, complex, and expressed differently within different social settings… (p.286)

In other words, even though teachers, such as Angela, make an effort to understand students' realities, the complexity of culture makes it difficult to fully grasp. In *Dangerous Minds*, another widely popular film, for example, the teacher savior also made learning meaningful for students by teaching through music, but it was the music that she believed the students would enjoy, not necessarily the students' music that represented the students' lives (Gale & Densmore, 2001).

Because Angela feels that "all things are possible" she is willing to make sacrifices to ensure her students are saved. For example, some evenings Angela stays at school working until 11 pm. She is also on the school leadership team along with being chair of her department. Because of the sacrifices she makes for her students, she is now burnt out. For instance Angela shared: "Because [I'm] exploited all the time…[I] just

get tired…I'm tired…this is my fifth year at Washington." Despite her exhaustion, her ethical commitment as a teacher savior drives her to do whatever she in order to rescue her students from their impoverished lives through education. Angela in this way is similar to Mr. Escalante who endures many trials for his students as a teacher savior, including dealing with unsupportive parents, a rigid administration, and supposedly getting his car stolen, which leads to his burn-out (Farber & Holm, 1994).

Consideration for the Social, Political, and Economic Contexts

One characteristic of the teacher savior is a lack of consideration for the social, political, and economic contexts that influence schools and teaching. The teacher as savior sees the classroom as the locus of change: the world outside is perceived to be just that: external to what happens in the classroom. Economic context refers to all things related to consumption, production, and wealth. Political context refers to the distribution of power and the allotment of privilege. Social context refers to the organization of society and its institutions. All three of these contexts influence each other and work in tandem. As such, schools, teachers, and students are impacted by all three. More specifically Angela, as a teacher savior, shows a lack of understanding regarding contextual influences over students' lives, her own life, and over school as an institution.

In Angela's own life, as black and middle class, she saw her experiences, described previously, as normal. What she did not understand is that as a middle class family, her parents had the financial means to make choices in regards to housing, and specifically living in an integrated neighborhood. Angela seemed unaware that the values she espoused such as meritocracy are part of larger middle class belief system (Collins, 2005; Lareau, 1987). As part of the middle class, Angela is imparted privilege,

even though she is black (Collins, 2005). These privileges in school for Angela included access to experienced teachers, adequate resources, and a rigorous and meaningful course of study (Blanchett, 2006), leading to a very different educational experience than her students—or her Winding Creek peers—have. Because this was the norm for Angela, she does not recognize the influence of context on her privilege (McIntosh, 1990)

Angela's beliefs about her students and their families are disconnected from the social, political, and economic contexts that influence their lives. For example, Angela describes her students:

> [My students are] very complacent with where they are, and they don't go anywhere… I feel like I cannot win[7], because I feel like it's cultural. A lot of my parents went to Washington and lived in that area, and a lot of their parents lived in Washington area, lived in that area. And the unfortunate part is that they're young, meaning like you'll have 30 and 40 year old grandmothers and stuff there. The kids are having babies while they're in high school. It's a pattern. It's a clear one. They're okay with that. I] can't want more for the child than what they want… because they're not going to want something that you want for them. The best [I] can do is expose them to other things, but they really don't want that exposure. So who am I to tell them that this is wrong?

Contrary to the literature on black teachers in teaching, Angela describes her students as having a cultural deficit, and she sees that the values and actions associated with this deficit are cyclical across generations. However, she never discusses where the effects of generational poverty come from or how they are sustained. The lack of awareness of the historical and sociopolitical context, surfacing as a cultural deficit, is characteristic of teacher saviors (Bonilla-Silva, 2010).

Angela further describes behaviors of some of her students, which she also correlates with a cultural deficit perspective:

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[7] Angela's goal as a teacher savior is to get all of her students to participate fully in school and to see its value in their lives, similar to what she believes she was able to do at Edwards. Because she cannot accomplish this same goal at Washington she says that she cannot "win".

I have kids say… I don't want to get a job because they'll stop my check or if they're on a, or they get supplemental Social Security. Or I'll have kids say well I don't need to work you know I can just have kids. And then I look at those things and I feel like society holds us back or holds that particular group of African Americans back because they create different ways to provide support, which I think, enables those random behaviors.

Here Angela begins to question the system that creates dependency. However, she believes the behaviors are random instead of part of a larger societal pattern. Part of the pattern involves families not having the economic means to provide basic needs without assistance. Angela also notes that a "particular group of African Americans" are affected by this pattern, which relates to her idea, mentioned previously of "a different type of black person". Angela sees the consistent patterns, but unaware of the societal structures that create these challenges, she places responsibility squarely on the individual.

Angela further places the blame for generational poverty on individual choices, instead of questioning a system that segregates families in substandard housing for generations. For example she says:

When I got to [Washington], it was just like how do you not want more? You see your mom struggling. How do you now want more? You see this happening. How can you not want to better the situation… I always [questioned]… don't you want more for your family… or don't you want more for yourself?

Notice that Angela formed this belief when she first arrived at Washington, without taking the time to learn about the students and their community, fully understanding the depth and complexity of poverty. Instead, she places the blame for students' lack of success in school—in life—on each individual. This does not take into consideration students' history in school and why they do not see school as an opportunity for improvement.

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Angela also sees patterns related to race and education, but again her understanding is detached from the social context.

> I'm coaching at a different school this year. And… the two schools are night and day where one is a predominantly white affluent school on the other side barely in Villesboro [and Washington]… With [the white] school I've had four parent nights. I just started [last month]…[and] everybody [comes], but [if] we have a parent night at Washington, unless there is food or you need your report card you're going to have 20 [or so] parents. Do I respect the fact that people have to work? Yes. But I also know a large population of my parents don't work at all.

In this quotation, Angela notes the differences between her white school and her black school. She even takes into consideration that parents may have to work, but to her, that is the only marginally acceptable reason why families would not attend. Angela does not take into consideration that families may dislike school or not feel comfortable there because of previous experiences (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994). The parents at Washington may have had an independent relationship with school rather than an interdependent relationship with the school as might have been the case at the white affluent school. In the case of an interdependent relationship, parents see themselves as equal partners with the school in educating their kids whereas an independent relationship puts primary onus on the school. In both cases, the perceived value of education may be the same, its expression just different (Lareau, 1987). Angela recollects her own experience of school and does not understand why families would not come to school events. Like many teachers, she uses her own experiences as a frame of reference (Lortie, 1976), instead of understanding her students' lived experienced, very different from her own. Understanding the context of her students and schools as institutions would help teacher saviors, such as Angela, begin to understand the challenges they encounter in the classroom. It may be assumed that Angela would already know about

the sociopolitical context of schools because of her graduate school experiences. The question remains as to why she did not leave her graduate teacher education program with a deeper understanding, or what is it about the structure and practices of schooling that makes it impossible to see otherwise.

There are also beliefs about education, specifically special education in this instance, that Angela has which are uncontextualized. For example she says: "The purpose of [special education] is eventually for you not to need these services". She believes that special education is supposed to help students catch up, eventually exiting them from the program. However, most students that get labeled as exceptional carry the label with them throughout school (Blanchett, 2006). Further, in Angela's school, many of her students' parents were themselves identified as needing special education services, so the special education label is carried across generations. Angela reflects: "A lot of my kids that I have now, their parents were either in a similar [special education] program or a self-contained program". The history and the patterns of special education show that students, especially black students, are labeled more often and infrequently exited from the program. This is a larger social pattern that relates to, according to Blanchett (2006), school funding, a lack of cultural responsiveness, and inexperienced teachers. Angela, however, sees special education as an individual endeavor:

> Some of [students]… just *don't* get [academics]. And some of them, it's like your I.Q. and your educational scores are to the point where you just *can't*. But some of them are in situations where the child's behavior in conjunction with the learning disability has increased this great deficit where they're just going to need services either way.

Angela demonstrates here that she believes that children's innate ability is how they get placed in special education. Her view is divorced from the larger context, ignoring that

special education services disproportionally place students who are black and male (Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005).   She also indicates that students' behaviors can intensify learning problems, making the need for special education services greater, without questioning what conditions at home or at school may influence those behaviors. When specifically asked about the disproportionality of special education labeling, Angela was fully aware that blacks students are labeled more often, but she questioned what students and families were doing as individuals instead of questioning the nature of the system that seems to target families of color. In all of the instances in this particular interview, where Angela describes students' identification as an EC, she never considers the biases within the larger system of special education (Blanchett, 2006).

In sum, Angela's lack of understanding of social, political, and economic context of schools and lives of students outside of school characterize her as a teacher savior (Grant, 2002). Her misunderstanding leads her to believe that her students' challenges in school are strictly due to negative cultural choices that individuals make.

Lessons From a Teacher Savior

Frequently teacher saviors are typified as white; however, as illustrated by Angela black teachers can also be savior types. Because black teachers share minority status with their minority students, it is important to understand how teachers view race in their own lives and in the lives of their students. Angela, like other teacher saviors, have a sacrificial commitment to intervene in the lives of her students, saving them from their poverty and their communities in order to eventually help students mirror the life of the teacher savior.   Finally, teacher saviors attempt to rescue students without an understanding of the social, political, and economic context of school and society. The

lack of understanding of the historical and sociopolitical context can cause burnout and frustration among teacher saviors such as Angela. In contrast teachers who understand the contextual complexity of schools can also suffer burnout. Burnout and frustration related to the historical and sociopolitical context of schools is a topic that warrants further consideration. Perhaps, if Angela knew that her actions as a teacher, her students, and schools were not operating in a vacuum, perhaps she would have a better conception of how schools with individuals working together can be used as a force for sustainable and culturally affirming educational change.

CHAPTER 6

BLACK TEACHER AS ACTIVIST

I think for black students to be successful it takes caring people. And in fact, I was gon' say family, but you know that's not always true because I know people who don't have their mom or don't have their dad or whoever and are able to succeed. But I think that it's somebody in their life who cares, who will look out for them, who you know if they need anything, you got it, you know if you need any help with anything I'll find it. If I can't help you, I'll find you help. –Kendra

Teachers of black students have a long history in the United States of working for racial uplift as activists in the United States starting during the era of slavery (Anderson, 1988; Perkins, 1989; Williams, 2005), pre-Civil Rights Movement (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Foster, 1992; Kelly, 2010a; Siddle-Walker, 1996), and post-Civil Rights Movement (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Dixson, 2003; Foster, 1992; Henry, 1992; Jackson, 2012; Milner, 2006). Across the changing historical context the political nature of black teachers, teaching black children has remained consistent. Prior to Emancipation, teachers of slaves worked in secret to educate blacks who would then in turn educate other blacks (Anderson, 1988; Perkins, 1989; Williams, 2005). Black teachers during legal segregation also worked to uplift the race (Foster, 1997; Kelly, 2010a; Siddle-Walker, 1996). These teachers are described as having a collective responsibility to ensure that progress was made for black children and families through education. Since the Civil Rights Movement, the legacy of black educators, teaching with political aims in order to improve the lives of black children and their families continues (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Dixson, 2003; Foster, 1992; Milner, 2006) even

though the historical and political context has shifted. There are many commonalities between the way black activist teachers are described during the "Jim Crow"[8] era black and black activist teachers today.

Black Teacher Activists Prior to the Civil Rights Movement

Michele Foster (1992; 1997) was one of the first scholars to emphasize the need for narrative accounts of black teachers. Foster described the politics of race for teacher pre-segregation and after desegregation. She found that the African-America teachers she interviewed had an understanding of the sociopolitical context of education; they did not blame students and families for educational shortcomings; and they engaged black students in their educations, using learning as a venue to challenge the status quo. In Foster's work she deftly described the temporal location in which the teachers were working, making it clear for the reader the contextual setting that produce the type of teacher she described.

Siddle-Walker (2001) described teachers from the Jim Crow Era, more specifically the years 1940-1960. Similar to Foster, she described the historical location of these teachers as well as the physical location in order to understand who these teachers were and where they were coming from when she described values that guided their work. She posited that these teachers believed in the following: Developing relationships with the black community, upholding professional principles in their work, caring about students, making the curriculum relevant for students, and being open to the reception of community and family support.

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[8] "Jim Crow" in reference to teachers from the period post-Plessy vs Ferguson and pre-Civil Rights Movement was coined by Kelly (2010). I use the term to reference teachers during de-jure segregation.

Kelly (2010a) also examined teachers pre-desegregation. Similar to Foster and Siddle-Walker (1996, 2001), Kelly describes the historical and geographic context of the teachers he described. In his study, Kelly confirmed three themes from Siddle Walker (2001), developing relationship's with the black community, caring about students, and making the curriculum relevant for students, illustrating that these teachers worked for racial uplift, while supporting his own contention that race and class influenced black teachers during the Jim Crow era.

Studies on black teachers, post-desegregation have also followed similar themes. One shift in the literature, however, is the scant attention to context and identity of the black teachers being described. Critical race theorist Adrienne Dixson (2003) describes contemporary black women teachers as activists. As activists, teachers are fundamentally political in their work. For these teachers, political means having an awareness of how power is distributed in society particularly with regards to race. They understand that historically, race has been used as a mechanism to distribute power and privilege to the advantage of white people while disadvantaging and disempowering people who are not white, especially black people (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Dixson, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Siddle-Walker, 1996). Dixon (2003) identifies three ways that black teachers carry out their political mission: They embrace "teaching as a lifestyle and service", engage in "relationship building", and practice "othermothering". Briefly, teaching as a lifestyle and service refers to the responsibility to advocate for black students beyond the classroom. Relationship building is a way that activist teachers build trust with families who have frequently been maltreated by schools. Othermothering refers to the love that teachers share towards their students, seeing them—and treating

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them—as extended family members.

Dixson (2003) specifies that political activism, as embodied through these traits, is part of black teachers work. In *Let's Do This! Black Women Teachers' Politics and Pedagogy,* Dixson implies that it is because these teachers are black women that they are political activists. For example she refers to "African-American women teachers" throughout the text, without clarifying what caused these women to be political other than their membership in the black race. This suggests that all African-American teachers embody a political commitment because of their racial membership. To the contrary, in the current historical period, shared racial membership does not imply shared experience. As demonstrated by the work of scholars who wrote about teachers prior to desegregation (Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker 1996, 2001; Kelly, 2010a), described a different context that included de jure segregation, Jim Crow laws, and a more contiguous black community[9]. It is important to clarify and explain the experiences that are referenced when using the term black or African-American (Hall, 1997; Jackson, 2012) teacher, as I have set out to do in my descriptions of the ideal types, including that of black teacher as activist. Despite this conflicting view, I use Dixson to describe black teacher as activist because she adeptly describes the political mission of this type of teacher and how it is interspersed throughout all of her work as teacher. Notions of "activist teachers" are not unique to Dixson (2003), but they are found throughout the literature on black teachers historically, black teachers today and on contemporary teachers who are successful with black or other children of color (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999, 2002; Foster, 1993; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2000, 2006, 2010; Milner, 2006; Siddle-Walker, 1996;

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[9] See *Jim Crow's Teachers* (Kelly, 2010) for a discussion regarding the difference between teaching pre-desegregation and today.

Villegas & Lucas, 2002)

Contemporary Black Activist Teachers

The crux of Dixson's (2003) argument about black teachers is that they are politically motivated to ensure that black students receive the support they need in order to get a good education, reaching "their highest potential" (Siddle-Walker, 1996). Likewise, Beauboeuf-Lafontant (1999) refers to the political nature of teachers' work as political clarity. She posits that politically relevant teaching "emphasize[s] the political, historical, social, as well as cultural understandings that… teachers bring to the profession" (p. 704-705). When teachers exemplify political clarity, ideally, children begin to understand the status quo and then explicitly work against it in their daily lives. Another part of political clarity is ensuring that students have the support they need in school and outside of school in order to be successful, realizing the political impact on students who do not get what they need in school.

Others refer to the political nature of teachers work as "sociocultural consciousness" (Villegas & Lucas, 2002) or "sociopolitical critique" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2000). Villegas and Lucas (2002) suggest that in order for teachers to be responsive to the needs of students, they need to understand that schools and society privilege students based on their social location. Teachers who specifically work toward ensuring the betterment of the black community through their black students' education have been described as working towards "racial uplift" (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Dixson, 2003; Foster, 1992; Jeffries, 1994; Kelly, 2010a; Siddle-Walker, 1996). For the activist teacher, an understanding of the politics of race and how her students' are affected by it, drives teachers' work in classrooms and out of the classroom and is

evidenced in all the three traits described by Dixson (2003), teaching as a lifestyle or service, relationship building, and othermothering.

Political clarity is fused with the idea of teachers' work as a lifestyle or service (Dixson 2003). In particular, black teachers view their jobs as a lifestyle or "calling" (Siddle-Walker, 1996) feel obligated, by nature of their connection to the community, to give back through helping black students. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) identifies this lifestyle as an "ethic of risk". She describes these black teachers as seeing the work of educating their students as a moral imperative, not strictly a job. Villegas and Lucas (2002) suggest that teachers be prepared to treat teaching as a service; they need to have the "commitment and skills to act as agents of change" (p. 24). Villegas and Lucas also posit that as "moral agents" teachers have an ethical responsibility to ensure that each child in their classroom is learning. As part of seeing teaching as a service, activist teachers understand that schools can be a vehicle for societal transformation while at the same time recognize that without intervention, schools function to replicate the status quo, disempowering students of color (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Relationship building is the second characteristic that exemplifies the black teacher as activist (Dixson, 2003). Dixson (2003) suggests that the relationships teachers build with their students is the basis for classroom management, discipline, as well as teacher-student expectations. Building "affirming" relationships with students is the foundation for teaching (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Villegas and Lucas suggest that teachers need to learn about students by understanding their experiences outside of school. Visiting students' homes and working closely with people from students communities, including their parents, are possibilities to further relationship building

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(Kelly, 2010; Siddle-Walker, 1996; Villegas and Lucas, 2002).

Like Villegas and Lucas, Dixson (2003) also suggests that relationship building extends beyond the students to their families and communities. Once relationships are established, black parents begin to trust and work more closely with black teachers in regards to their child's education. Black teachers also gain a better understanding of the black parents' desires for their child's education. In this way solidarity is built between teachers, families, and the community. With unity established, activist teachers are able to address issues of inequity with support of parents and the community.

Finally, othermothering or caring is the third characteristic that is found throughout the literature on black teachers (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Collins, 2009; Gay, 2010; Henry, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Milner, 2006; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Dixson (2003) explains that othermothers are "connected to the community, use… kinship terms when referencing their students (more specifically, their Black students), and [subvert]… the school curriculum" with the intent to disrupt the status quo" (p. 230). Othermothers have been part of the black community for at least centuries. Collins (2009), referencing Troester (1984), posits that black communities have

> Recognized that vesting one person with full responsibility for mothering a child may not be wise or possible. As a result, othermothers—women who assist blood mothers by sharing mothering responsibilities—traditionally have been central to the institution of black motherhood. (p. 192).

Sharing mothering responsibilities includes all aspects of child rearing (Collins, 2009). In many cases when, the mother is not able to care for the child, an othermother will take full responsibility for a child's upbringing.

Henry (1992) describes African-Caribbean teachers who centered their activism around othermothering, challenging the Eurocentric idea of the nuclear family.

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Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) suggests that being an othermother is political. She

describes othermothers as

> Women who, through feelings of shared responsibility commit themselves to the
> social and emotional development of all children in a community (Collins, 2009).
> ' Othermothering has also been described as a ' universalized ethic of care' or a
> 'collective social conscience'… in which the caring that othermothers engage in
> is not simply interpersonal but profoundly political in intent and practice. (p. 676-
> 677)

The othermother is a long standing tradition that connects black people regardless of

biological family of origin, and in the case of teachers, helps them connect deeply with

their students.

The description of black teacher activists pre-Civil Rights Movement (Beauboeuf-

Lafontant, 1999; Foster, 1992; Kelly, 2010a; Siddle-Walker, 1996) and post-Civil Rights

movement (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Dixson, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994) is

essentially the same despite the difference in temporal location. I argue that Kendra is

part of a long-standing tradition of activist teachers in the black community; as activist,

similar to her contemporaries, as well as her forbearers, Kendra's teaching is political,

meaning she is working against power structures. Seeing teaching as her lifestyle and as

a service, she builds relationships with students, families, and the community in order to

learn about students as well as build trust and solidarity. As an othermother, she loves

her students as if they are part of her family and teaches them as mothers do their

children, preparing them for the real world that is before them. In the previous ideal

types, black teacher as colorblind and black teacher as savior, Tamarra and Angela,

similarly, exhibited caring relationships towards their students. However, as Dixson

(2003) points out, activist teachers have an explicitly political mission, making Kendra

different from the other teachers. Kendra exemplifies this type of teaching because she

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grew up in the same town, identifying her self as part of the black community and seeing the need for change.

Development of "Political Clarity" in Kendra's Life

"Political clarity" created the foundation of Kendra's teaching as an activist. Kendra understands the social and economic dynamics of her current residence and hometown, Anderson including the privileges that she has encountered in her educational career. She also has herself witnessed racial discrimination, which deepened her political clarity. Kendra's understanding of race relations in Anderson began for her as a young child. Kendra grew up near downtown Anderson, a small town of about 16,000 people, where she currently teaches. The town is about 60% African-American and 36% White with a growing population of Latinos. Even though the town is majority African-American, most African-American adults are clustered into low paying jobs and low-income neighborhoods in Anderson. Kendra explained, "Some of them are unemployed, don't work, and others work around the clock… A lot of the black parents, they work in factories as well and, of course, you have fast food and retail and different things like that that they might do." Ladson-Billings (2006b, 2010) argues that culturally relevant teachers, political activists in their own right, have an understanding of the sociopolitical contexts in which they live and work. Kendra as an activist teacher knows that teaching in a place such as Anderson is a different social context than the area in which she learned to teach, a predominantly white, suburban community. In my conversations with Kendra she noted the differences in the resources of the school, families, and the community in addition to cultural differences in the students and families. As such, an awareness of the city's racial make up and economic context, especially in regards to

black families is important to her because she uses this knowledge in her teaching.

Kendra is well aware of the difficulties that surround the lives of black people in

Anderson, especially those who did not do well in school.

> A lot of people… who [didn't do well in school]… I see them now like walking
> the streets like, I taught some of their kids. You know you see them coming in the
> school and picking up children and see them in the store, you know especially
> girls with a lot of babies. A lot of guys are, you know, into dealing drugs and stuff
> like that. A lot of young people lately like just getting killed, shot, you know, and
> different things and you're like, dang, this is really getting out of hand. It's crazy.

Kendra notes that in Anderson, there is a connection between not doing well in school

and future life outcomes, especially for black people. This type of awareness,

understanding that race has an influence on life experiences, is true of teachers who have

a sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2006b, 2010; Beauboeuf-Lafontant,

1999, 2002).

The few black students who were successful in Kendra's high school generally

left the area once they graduated. Referring to her group of friends and other African-

Americans who left Anderson for college, she said, "… So, if you don't get out of

Anderson and if you don't have a job it's not good for you… Once we get successful we

move on." Here Kendra further explains the connection between school and future

outcomes for black people in Anderson. If you do well in school, typically you leave and

go away to have more opportunities. People who stayed in Anderson typically do not

fare as well. Activist teachers recognize the challenges in school that black students face

because of racism. Further, they understand the detriment to students' lives beyond

school if black students do not receive the education they need (Beauboeuf-Lafontant,

1999; Ladson-Billings, 2010).

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In addition to social problems that plague the community of Anderson, there is still significant racial tension. Kendra described a situation where a white, male storeowner pointed a gun at her friend's son, a 6th grader:

> [He's] just a baby... He went to the store and… the guy in the gas station told him to 'get out of my store' and he pulled a gun… He pulled a gun on him and told him to get out of the store. And you know [the boy] could have [responded]. " 'What? You know I ain't got a gun!' But he didn't… [He said] I'll leave but and he told his mom what happened.

Kendra said it was indicative of the type of racial tension that goes on in Anderson. Incidents such as this have occurred throughout Kendra's life in Anderson and help her to know that race still influences life experiences. Kendra also described examples of her black male friends being stopped by the police while walking down the street. One of her black male friends was recently standing in his yard and was stopped by the police. Activist teachers such as Kendra have an awareness of the influence of racism on the lives of their students because they have lived through it. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (1999) described this as part of the benefit of teachers who have political clarity. Teachers who have experienced racism and discrimination directly or indirectly, can relate to students who have similar experiences (Dixson, 2003; Irvine, 1989; Milner, 2006; Siddle-Walker, 1996). I believe that this is true of Kendra, who lives in a particular town with racial tension. It is not necessarily true of all black teachers.

Kendra also talks specifically about the challenges of being a black male in Anderson. Being young and being black, especially being a male… I had a brother who grew up here and he's moved to Raleigh but I mean just watching him and watching friends, its always somebody out there that… want[s] to have a nasty attitude towards them". Kendra notes that black males do not receive the same treatment in Anderson that

black females do. She has witnessed this in the lives of her friends. "My guy friends…

went to college but its like they struggle to find jobs. They work, [but] they're working

outside of their major. I… maybe [have]one guy friend who is actually in his major.

They're *still* trying to find jobs." Kendra described her male friends in contrast to her

female friends who all are working in professions for which they were trained. Kendra

notes that all of her friends grew up with supportive, families, got good grades, and went

to college, but there are still differential outcomes for black men in Anderson. Kendra

believes the struggles that black people go through in Anderson are due to race.

Also in Anderson, according to Kendra, there is an overall disconnection between

white and black people. The majority of the population of Anderson is black. However,

many of the black people, according to Kendra are under-employed, unemployed or are

involved in illegal activity to make money. There are less white people, but the white

people in Anderson hold positions of power. For example the police chief is white and

the mayor is white. White people hold power in Anderson, but they are few in number.

Kendra says that these factors, in addition to a recent wave of crime in Anderson has

helped maintain a level of racial tension.

Despite the tenuous racial relationships in Anderson, Angela grew up in a middle

class white neighborhood just outside of downtown Anderson. When Angela moved

there as a young child before elementary school, her family was the first non-white

family in the neighborhood. Angela did not recall experiencing any problems in the

white neighborhood. She remembers neighbors such as Anderson's town manager who

lived nearby and the boy next door she used to play with. Even though Kendra grew up in

a white enclave of Anderson with no racial challenges that she was aware of, she

preferred the company of other black people. Church was just one place where Angela formed relationships with other African-Americans. Kendra's father was a part-time minister so she spent a lot of time at church. "We went every Sunday. My dad was the preacher so of course I was at church all the time. I would go every Sunday, Vacation Bible School, Revival, all of that kind of stuff." Despite living in a primarily white neighborhood, Kendra was primarily immersed in the black community. As such, while not often a victim of discrimination, she was witness to the experiences of racism and discrimination of her peers. These experiences, among others, helped her develop sociopolitical awareness across her life. More specifically, even though Kendra lived post-Jim Crow, she was a part of the black community. Being a part of the black community, and being taught by her family explicitly about racism made her aware of the political nature of race in her community.

Political Clarity in Schools

K-12 school settings are another place where children learn about race. Though middle class and labeled academically gifted (AG), she experienced challenges in education because of her race. In middle school Kendra was tracked into the higher-level classes such as Advanced Placement (AP). She remembers there being mostly white kids in her English, Math, and Science classes and it wasn't until electives that she saw her black friends who were tracked into the other, lower level classes. Kendra's classes in middle and high school were tracked with her being enrolled in all of the higher-level courses. The majority of the students in her academic classes were white and she noted that it was not until electives that she saw "everybody else", referring to her black friends. "Everybody else" here refers to Kendra's black peers. Even though Kendra was

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labeled as AG and did well in upper level classes in middle school, she had to fight to get into upper level classes in high school. At her school, according to Kendra, many teachers and counselors assumed that if you were black, it meant that you were not smart.

Kendra did not experience racism or problems with students in her mostly white classes, but she still preferred the company of other black students. She explained that although white people were always around, they were not her friends:

> I would say as far as being involved in sports and different things, I always saw [white people] there… Or me being a part of AP of course we had to interact there but as far as like socially… not so much… So, I mean you could kinda tell especially when, when you go into the hallway in the morning like everybody's crowded and like everybody's talking[all] the blacks are cliqued up over here [on one side] and then on the opposite side of the hall is mainly where all of the white kids were… I [hung out] with the black kids.

Kendra did not maintain contact with any white people outside the classroom, even though she interacted with them inside the classroom. Her black friends however, were like family to her. Again, Kendra sees herself as part of the black culture and community. Kendra was able to switch between the dominant white culture and the black culture with no challenges. Similar to the students described in Carter (2003) Kendra "employ[ed] both dominant and non-dominant cultural capital, negotiating strategically between [her] community, family, peer, and school spaces" (p. 139).

In college at a predominantly white, elite institution, Kendra by default was around many white people, but she still found support and friendship from other black students at Brownhill University (BU), similar to her high school experience.

> It was good and bad I would say. Because, of course now the classes are mainly white.…Um so, I think I kinda cliqued up more with the blacks that were there and we did develop strong relationships with one another. We always still had our fights [with white people].

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Not only did Kendra affiliate with other black people at BU, but she also associated being black with having to deal with racism, further developing in her a sense of political clarity:

> I feel like if someone is black they have a shared experience and shared history. That's how I feel. If you see someone who is black you know they've been through something….It's rare that you meet a black person who hasn't had some type of struggle or some type of discrimination or something happened to them.

Kendra associated, throughout her life, more readily with black people because of shared experiences, specifically discrimination. Further, she sees herself as part of the black community and black culture. Kendra uses her knowledge of discrimination and her affiliation with the black community in her mission to teach her black students.

Throughout the description of Kendra's K-12 and college schooling experiences she described her fragile relationship with white people compared to the strong ties she shared with other black people. In school, even though Kendra was in classes with mostly white people, she chose not to develop personal relationships with them. Further, she has a preferential treatment towards other black people. It appears that Kendra's lived experience is similar to the black teachers who lived during Jim Crow in that she is not integrated into the white mainstream.

Teaching as a Lifestyle

Kendra sees the poor conditions of her school and community as part of the oppressive condition of being poor and black in Anderson. For example, she talks about her students being placed in an under-resourced school. The school Kendra attended in elementary school, also in Anderson, but on the other side of the railroad tracks, was very different from the school where she currently teaches.

[At my old school there] was just more opportunities and the teachers actually… cared and… wanted to push you to the next level….Compared with the school I'm at now, which [does not] have [many] resources, it seems like no one cares about us over here.

Here Kendra notes that her current school not only is under-resourced but is also staffed with teachers who do not care. It is documented that poor schools are staffed with teachers who are more and inexperienced (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Further Kendra describes how the community surrounding the school is also under-resourced.

Some of [the houses] look rundown. There's one house right across the street on Iris that just burned down to the ground [and] nobody even bothered to clean the area up. Some of the houses are abandoned like near the school and oh the playground! I didn't even know there was a playground. I kind of just like ran up on this one little [piece of equipment]. So when I got ready to take my kids out I'm [asked] "Where's the playground?" and they sent me back to that same [piece of equipment]. It's really sad.

The physical conditions of under-resourced schools continue in the Post-Civil Rights Era. Similar to Pre-Civil Rights teachers, Kendra works around the lack of resources in her school. As previously mentioned, teachers prior to segregation worked towards racial uplift. Kelly (2010b) further specifies how teachers during the Jim Crow Era help student learn, through what he refers to as "educational capital" in spite of the lack of resources distributed by school systems. Teachers made learning relevant for children; they built relationships with people across varying communities, and they found ways get students the physical provisions needed in order to learn. Kendra bears a striking resemblance to these teachers. Kendra has experienced other schools with more affluent and racially diverse kids, and she knows that the physical aspect of school is not equitable to others and is detrimental to her students' education. It is important to note that in Kendra's awareness she does not attribute blame to the students or their families' cultural choices. Kendra is aware that her black students are at a disadvantage. As such, she has

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made it her mission to ensure that her students receive an education that will help them learn how to make the world a better place and how to be competitive in the current society.

Teaching as a Calling

Kendra believes teaching is her "calling" (Irvine, 1999; Siddle-Walker, 1996). "I love teaching. I think it's what I was called to do". Because teaching is her calling, she sees it as more than just a job, it is her mission (Dixson, 2003), and it is her mission because she knows what is at risk for her kids. More specifically she sees teaching black children in Anderson as part of that mission: "[It] was my desire to come back to my hometown and work and help out all the people here." As an Anderson native, she recognizes what it took for her to get through school successfully, and she also has peers who did not finish school prepared for post-secondary education or training. She knows that the odds are against black students doing well, so she is willing to do what it takes to help them. She explains, "I feel like when I see my black children, it's like I really need to work hard to help them… And you know those are the kids I really want to help the most [because]I know the struggle." Educators that believe teaching is a mission is a common theme that has been documented in black teachers since the Reconstruction period[10] (Perkins, 1989). These educators, pre-Civil Rights Movement and post-Civil Rights Movement, used their lives to help "lift" their students (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Dingus, 2006; Dixson, 2003; Kelly, 2010a; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Siddle-Walker, 1996).

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[10] See Perkins (1989) for a description of the American Missionary Association and its influence on teacher training.

One way that Kendra supports her mission is by using her own money to support additional classroom initiatives. Kendra explains, "Maybe if I moved to another county, they might have more money and more funds... here… if I need to purchase something, it's going to be out of pocket… well, I'm just going to make it on me." One example of something that Kendra started on her own initiative is a Students Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE) club:

> I feel like the counselor for kids sometimes. Instead of sending them to the counselor, they send them to talk to me. And I do that, but I also [started] a club though [to help with that]. It's the SAVE club which is Students Against Violence Everywhere. So I run that club and that's pretty much for the third [grade] and up. It's about 15 kids in the club… I pick the kids…. We talk about issues from violence, bullying, drugs, all those types of things.

The club takes additional time and money from Kendra, but she feels like it is worth it because it is helping to meet kids needs. Siddle-Walker (1996) describes the importance of clubs historically in black schools as a way of helping to develop students. Activist teachers like Kendra recognize the importance of finding ways beyond the standard curriculum to help meet the needs of students (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006, 2010; Siddle-Walker, 1996; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Activist teachers believe that they are accountable to their students and the community. As such, teaching is a lifestyle for them, and their work extends beyond teaching the required curriculum. Kendra exemplifies this stance through using her own money to start activities for students such as the serve club. Kendra also demonstrates her activism through the commitment she makes to her students and her families. She feels like she was called to teach. It is her mission.

In addition to spending additional time and money, Kendra calls on help from a higher power to help her students achieve in her classroom.

Everyday I'm… praying 'God, please let somebody learn something today'. Like I said it is so many [students] and I don't really [as much time] time to do one on one and small groups. I try as much as I can… I don't want to leave anybody by the wayside… That's so important to me but at the same time I know I can't kill myself either.

Kendra's spirituality is connected to her mission as a teacher. She connects her religiosity to her role as a teacher, yet another connection to black teachers pre-desegregation (Fairclough, 2007).

Building Relationships

Kendra describes relationships as being the essential part of her teaching and her biggest strength. The relationships that she forms with students and her families are essential to her teaching her students academic content:

As a teacher I would say I am my students. So, whoever they are, that's who I am. You know I try to be as much of them as I can, as much of them as I can learn about as I can, as much of their families, you know I can get to know I do and I try to put all of that into my teaching.

Like other activist teachers, Kendra sees herself as intimately connected with the community (Kelly, 2010a; Siddle-Walker, 1996). Similar to the teachers described by Kelly and Siddle-Walker, Kendra is part of the black community and does not create any hierarchies between herself and the students and their families. However, as an activist teacher, Kendra realizes that there are hierarchies built into society. Teachers during the Jim Crow Era also were aware of social and political ladders that placed black students and their families at the bottom while white people retained the power. Black teachers saw believed the relationships they built with students, family, and the community could help work towards bridging this power differential.

Even though Kendra does not distinguish between her status and her students and families, she realizes that this is not the norm. Some families are not valued as highly by

the school, especially students who come from homes that represent a culture very different from schools' culture (Delpit, 1995). In this way, Kendra was privileged in school because her life between home, school, and church was seamless. She feels like she had the same messages, such as the importance of learning and respect enforced at school and at home. For example, Kendra talked about being taught the Golden Rule by her parents, grandparents, church, and school. However, Kendra realizes that her students' lives are vastly different at home and at school. As such, she builds relationships with families to help ease the disjunction between home and school.

Relationship building is an integral component of the work the Kendra does with her students. Kendra shared "I think my biggest strength is the whole relationship piece." Dixson (2003) explains, "the relationships…teachers develop with their students and the students' families are a critical element of their pedagogy—it serves as a vehicle for the political messages and import of their classroom teaching (p. 227-228). Kendra believes building relationships with students and their families helps her be a better teacher. For example, Kendra described:

> I think what the students bring into the classroom is very important because it, it actually shapes the way that I teach. If I have… kids that I know are interested in sports and things of that nature then I will try to, build my lessons around that or I will try to find something to incorporate in my teaching that has to do with their interests. So, I like to learn as much as I can about my kids so that I'll know… exactly where to go with my teaching.

In this instance Kendra describes how learning about her students' interests helps her understand the students so she will know how to engage them in learning. Like other contemporary activist teachers, Kendra's pedagogy starts with the relationships she builds (Gay, 2010; Irvine, 1988; Milner, 2006; Siddle-Walker, 1996; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Present day activists in this way carry-on the work of building up the black

community through relationships similarly to teacher activists before the Civil Rights Movement. Kelly (2010) explained: "Teachers worked with parents and the entire community…A common theme in the literature on black teachers is the strong and healthy relationships community members had before integration" (p. 58-59).

Beyond getting to know students' interests, Kendra also uses relationships to better understand students' personal needs and challenges:

> I feel like if I know their history, if I know their background and where they're coming from and what they're dealing with at home… it's easier for me to be able to talk to them, talk to the parents and… try to find the best help for them that I can…

An example of knowing the students' histories relates to a number of Kendra's students who live in a homeless shelter. Living in a shelter creates learning challenges for students. Because Kendra builds relationships with families, she understands the challenges that they are undergoing. Instead of labeling kids as a "behavior problem", Kendra understands where the behaviors are coming from and how to work with the students through these challenges. She sees this as part of her responsibility as a teacher. Siddle-Walker (1996) described a similar stance in teachers at the Caswell Training School prior to integration. "The teachers saw getting at the source of the problem and improving the child's attitude as an important task that was necessary to keep the child receptive to learning" (p. 153). There is a specific history of black teachers working with black families and students, building a bridge from the classroom to the community that Kendra continues.

Kendra believes that is important to develop relationships with students outside school, especially for kids that may be struggling or not as outgoing in the classroom. Though this sort of relationship building is a critical aspect of Kendra's teaching, it is

challenged and not supported by other teachers in the school. She explains,

> I took two little boys from my class out to take them to the library like once a week and take them out to eat. And [other teachers said] "Why is he going home with you? Why are they leaving with you and why are you doing that? You know, you don't need to do that". But [the boys] loved it. And it just came to the point where I was like "you all can't tell me where I'm going [and how teach]". The parents reacted well to that [and I had a] positive relationship with them whereas somebody else might not.

Kendra builds relationships with her black male and female students inside and outside of the classroom. However, she does pay special attention the black boys because she believes they have more of a struggle. The excerpt also points out that teachers at Kendra's school believe that there should be a distinct division between school and home, and that teachers should not go out of their way to bridge that divide. This division between home and school is characteristic of schools after integration, but was not necessarily true of segregated black schools (Foster, 1992; Kelly, 2010b; Siddle-Walker, 1996). As such Kendra is going against the status quo at her school through building relationships with her families that move beyond the classroom walls.

Othermother

Through her own school experience, Kendra had a family that supported her. More specifically, Kendra believed that her success in school was because of specific women who cared for her.   As a teacher, Kendra's mother knew how to help her be successful in school. Even though Kendra was a good student, there were instances where Kendra's mother had to come to school and advocate for Kendra's needs. "…Going back to my mom, I think she pushed [me] to do good and the teachers pushed me as well and knew that they had to teach me and then whatever they did, you know whatever they taught me, my mom would be there and she was an active parent." Her

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mother's involvement in her school experience was important for Kendra, because even

though she was identified as AG and was in the advanced track in middle school, in high

school she was placed in lower level classes.

> I think [student success in school] goes back to support, family support and
> having the support at school too. [For example] I was I was discouraged, you
> know from taking Honors [classes]. When I got to high school [and was placed in
> general classes] my mom was like 'no… she needs to be in that class'.

Kendra's mother helped ensure that her daughter got the education she needed.

> For Kendra, support for her education extended beyond her biological mother.

Kendra's cheerleading coach, also a school counselor, became her mentor and also

advocated on her behalf:

> [My cheerleading coach also said] "she's gotta be in that class". Even my senior
> year… I think she was supposed to be the freshman counselor but I [went to] her
> for everything. She helped me with all of my college applications. I never saw
> that senior counselor, ever. She signed off on everything for me… To this day I
> probably wouldn't have gotten into BHU if it wasn't for her… I mean, [she]
> helped me out so much. But you know [on the other hand] I can specifically
> remember some counselors at the high school [say things] like "you don't need to
> do that [class]" and "why don't you try this [class or school]" and "we don't want
> you to fail in there"… Just trying to discourage you.

Here Kendra describes how her mentor specifically influenced the outcome of her high

school experience and where she was able to go to college. Kendra believes that she

would not have been as successful in school without the help of her cheerleading coach.

> Kendra not only cited the importance of mentorship, but also she noted good

teachers who made the curriculum meaningful. For Kendra, a good teacher was one who

cared about students and who made learning interesting such as her third grade teacher.

> My third grade teacher she was, really fun. That's mainly what I remember about
> her, being really fun, being kind to everybody … she kinda related to us in a way
> even though she was a white lady but even though she was white she kinda, tried
> to do things we would like… we used to play a lot of games we, you know, she

sung a lot of Hip-Hop music and a lot of different things to get us interact[ing] in the lessons.

This teacher was fun, made learning interesting, and she was kind. This exemplified good teaching to Kendra. This teacher also recognized the importance of academic excellence, and she saw the academic potential in Kendra so she recommended her for the academically gifted program. "She I guess was the one who… started me on this whole track of… 'you're smart' because she recommended me for AG." Kendra models her own teaching after this teacher. In addition, however, Kendra recognizes that it takes more than good teaching to help students, especially black students, be successful. In Kendra's case, the support of this teacher, from her family and her cheerleading mentor, enabled her to be successful. As such, in her own teaching, Kendra strives to be a good teacher while at the same time acting as an extension of the students' families through building relationships with parents and extended family members and caring for students.

Othermother as Teacher

Kendra's interest in caring for her students at an underprivileged school was sparked by her pre-service teacher education program. For example she said, "when I… got into the teacher education program and we started having those conversations and reading different articles, it… really sparked my interest and made me want to work [at an underprivileged school] because it [made me ask], well who is really helping these kids? So, I… wanted to be in that mother-hen role." As a mother-hen, Kendra frequently mentioned in her interviews loving her students or her students need for love. "Some kids just need love. You know, once they get that, they'll start learning." In this way, Kendra believes that love is a prerequisite for learning. Historically, black teachers who

worked for racial uplift saw caring as an essential quality of teaching (Siddle-Walker, 1996).

Kendra refers to her students in "kinship terms" (Dixson, 2003), further exemplifying her love for her students. For example she said, "You know those are definitely *my babies* and you know I just, I just try as hard as I can to do right by them". She also refers to her students as "my" students, for example. Kendra also referred to her students as "my children". For instance she said, " I feel like when I see *my black children*… I really… work hard to help them… those are the kids I really want to help the most… I really, I really try to mentor them." By using terms such as "my", "babies", and "children", Kendra shows responsibility for her students. She also says that she specifically makes an effort to mentor them.

During one of our conversations Kendra offered advice for new teachers on how to teach (love) black children.

> Please, please, please don't let the kids hear you talking about them. That's one thing I hate to hear, a teacher talking about a child and you know, in a bad way in front of them. Because that really damages their spirit and as long as you keep encouraging them and motivating them and just trying to, try to find anything you can do to just give them some kind of drive or motivation… but don't discourage them, don't talk down to them and say, well you can't do this—that's the worst thing you can do.

In her advice to new teachers, Kendra pleads with them to protect children. Much of the advice given to new teachers relates to control, structure, and classroom management (Wong, 1998), but Kendra has a different approach. Kendra talks about the "spirit" of the kids. Instead she wants to motivate and inspire kids. Teachers with political clarity see it as their responsible to give students hope. As Siddle-Walker (1996) explains, "Although the students lived in a world outside the school that offered negative appraisals of what

they were capable of doing, the teacher functioned to counter these messages and offer new ones of hope and possibility through education" (p. 121-122).

Kendra indicates that she has seen other teachers say and do things that damage children. She sees it as her job to protect them from these things. Throughout our conversations, Kendra emphasized the importance of people and human connection in the education of black children. Children need "somebody… in their lives and somebody who can talk to them and relate to them and get in their face. I think that they can be successful, most, most everybody I know who has somebody in their lives". Each child needs someone in their lives who can be there to support them. When she says someone who can "get in their face" she is referring to a loving type of discipline. A student at the Caswell Training School prior to integration, (Siddle-Walker, 1996), remembered that the teachers, although proud of their students, would still be stern: "Some times the teacher had to 'bless us out' " (p.152), comparable to Kendra "get[ting] in [students] face[s]". Similar to other teachers working towards political ends, a caring discipline is necessary to ensure that students are learning (Ladson-Billings, 2006, 2010; Siddle-Walker, 2004).

Part of Kendra's caring for her students is ensuring that they are academically successful. Even though Kendra's students are disadvantaged she makes no exceptions for what they need to learn academically. Similar to other teachers working to improve the lives of marginalized students, an emphasis on excellence in academics is key (Dixson, 2003; Gay, 2010; Kelly, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006, 2010; Milner, 2006; Siddle-Walker, 1996). Reading is the most important skill for her. When Kendra says that she "goes hard" on reading, she is describing not only her expectations for her

students, but the effort she puts into teaching reading to ensure that each child leaves her classroom as a reader:

> I just think [literacy is] something that will get you through life. I mean if you're able to read then you can almost do anything. You can write, you can, you should be able to solve Math problems if you can read them… and that's what most people are going to look at when they get older as far as finding jobs and things like that. I mean, do they have those reading skills, do they have writing skills and speaking skills.

Even though Kendra's students are in kindergarten she looks at the long-term trajectory of their education, knowing that in kindergarten students learn foundational skills that they will build upon year after year. Reading is a basic skill, but it is a skill that African-American students, over all, lag behind (Green & Anyon, 2010). Less than half of the African-American students at Kendra's school were proficient in math and reading last year. It is with this in mind that Kendra pushes for her students to be ready for the next grade when they leave her classroom.

Kendra helps ensure that her students are academically successful by supporting their interests and making learning meaningful. Teachers working with a political mission make sure that learning is meaningful for students so they will stay engaged (Gay, 2010; Kelly, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2010; Siddle-Walker, 1996; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Kendra sums this idea up by saying "Truly everything I try to do is [for the kids]. I don't think anything I do in this room is something that they don't like." An example of this is allowing the kids to choose their own interests.

> I… support whatever they want to do… I don't necessarily make choices for them or you know putting my opinions on them. I might say, oh you're really good at this you should think about it… I always feel like it's their choice as long as its something positive… Especially… [I] have those kids that want to be athletes and the rappers and things. I'm gonna support all of that… most every job that you have… you still need to have some type of knowledge or education.

As a teacher Kendra does not demean any of their aspirations such as being a rapper or an athlete. Instead, she connects those interests to the skills and content that she is teaching them. Once she has their interest, she can teach them new things.

> Even with the rappers they, you know I try to you know I tell the kids okay, you know you're gonna have to be somewhat of a writer….You know, stay open to writing if you want to be a rapper or a singer. You have to have the ability to you know use metaphors and all that different type of thing. You can, you can still use academics to support whatever they want to do. Even with Math… I tell them all the time… you need to know you know how to add and how to do all of this because you don't want nobody messing your money up.

Kendra indicates that every student interest can be supported by learning and she sees it as her job to help students make those connections. Kendra reiterates, however, that it is not just making learning relevant to her students' interests that can help them achieve academically. "The kids [need] somebody there who can show… them the positive things about Hip-Hop and Rap and entertainment. I feel like… it's good for them." In this way, Kendra points out that even with relevant instruction, students still need caring adults to help them.

Kendra also shows the students that she cares about them through valuing their culture. Other teachers have pointed to rap and hip-hop as negative aspects of black culture, but Kendra affirms it and uses it to help the children learn. "Like I was just saying about poetry and you know using metaphors and similes… you notice all those type of things in Rap. I do anyway because… even with Lil' Wayne or somebody… sometimes I listen to them and I'm like, 'that is crazy'! How did you think of that"? Here Kendra marvels at the lyrical talent of rappers. When she brings music into her classroom, she does not simply tack it on to the curriculum because the kids enjoy it, but she has a genuine interest and respect in something the children are interested in. In this

and other ways way Kendra helps students build an appreciation for their culture (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas and Lucas, 2002).

Lessons Learned from an Activist Teacher

Kendra is part of a contemporary cohort of black activist teachers who are part of an even larger historical legacy of black teacher activists. As an activist teacher, Kendra matches the literature on black teachers more than any of the other ideal types. This is not surprising given that she has been affiliated with the black community and witnessed and even experienced discrimination throughout her life. She works towards racial uplift through her pedagogy inside the classroom and in the community. I argue that the context of her community, with its tenuous racial relationships and the context of her segregated, under-resourced school makes the setting she works in similar to a pre-desegregation school. If Kendra were working in a more diverse setting she may be seen as showing favoritism or even being unprofessional. However, in the current context of her school, she has received support from administration, parents, other like-minded teachers as well as her students.

It is an interesting finding that Kendra's approaches to teaching resembles the pedagogy of teachers, pre-segregation, so closely. Jackson (2012) explored the differences in approach to "teacher as activist" between pre-Civil Rights Movement black teachers and post-Civil Rights Movement black teachers and found differences based on their lived experiences. The teachers in Jackson's study believed that times have changed significantly since the Civil Rights Movement. Kendra would likely agree that times have changed, but in the town of Anderson, especially for her low-income black students,

their school and their life experiences do not reflect the equality that Tamarra and Angela, conversely suggest is now available to all individuals.

The demographics of Kendra's school are changing, however. When I visited her for the member-checking interview she explained to me that she had Spanish-speaking students in her classroom this year, and she indicated that she needed to take a Spanish class. She even suggested that it be required for teachers to take Spanish as their foreign language. Kendra admitted that she has not built the same type of connections with her Spanish-speaking students, but that she is working on it. This indicates that Kendra cares about developing relationships and teaching all of her students regardless of ethnicity. In this way, it seems that Kendra's teaching is about more than a connection to blackness. Indeed, teachers can advocate for children beyond racial membership (Ladson-Billings, 1994). This would be a space for contemporary activist teachers to expand the legacy of activism for racial uplift of one group, and instead actively work for the uplift of marginalized students across multiple races and even in different social categories.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the lives of black teachers, determining how they talk about their multiple identities, and their teaching beliefs and practices in order to better understand how to prepare all teachers, especially black teachers for social justice. The social justice teacher education courses—the means by which teacher education programs purportedly prepare teachers for diverse classrooms—are primarily designed for white teachers (Sleeter, 2001; Montecinos, 1999; 2004). In contrast, the literature on black teachers frequently positions them as a homogenous group, with all black teachers being knowledgeable about racism, advocacy for black students, and closely connected with the culture of their black students (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Foster, 1993; Irvine, 1989; Milner, 2006). As a teacher educator in a School of Education that promotes social justice, I had an explicit interest in gaining a deeper understanding of the identities of the black teachers in a master's degree program, what they believed, and how I, as a teacher educator, might better design future courses and programs that meet the needs of this diverse group of teachers. The purpose of this study was to explore the lives of black teachers, determining how they talk about their multiple identities, and their teaching beliefs and practices in order to better understand how to prepare all teachers, especially black teachers for social justice.

Tamarra, Angela, and Kendra are all black. More importantly, in this study, their lived experience of being black is vastly different. Three ideal types (Ritzer, 2008;

Weber, 1999) of black teachers emerged from my conversations with the teacher participants about their lives and their teaching: Black teacher as colorblind, black teacher as savior, and black teacher as activist. These ideal types demonstrate the varied nature of these black women's lived experiences as well as the distinctive teaching approaches of these different types of black teachers. So too, as I discuss later in this conclusion, do they resonate beyond these three participants.

Intersectionality

I began my inquiry with the theory of intersectionality (Collins, 1993; Crenshaw, 1991) in order to differentiate between the lived experiences of being black. Collins (1993) suggested that there is a need to examine distinctive social categories while at the same time understanding their interconnectedness. She explains: "We need… new categories of analysis that are inclusive of race, class, and gender as distinctive yet interlocking structures of oppression" (p. 69). Thus, my task has been to understand how intersectionality, composed of each of these social categories, are individually distinctive, while at the same time understanding how race, class, and gender work together to create different experiences with privilege and marginalization and how that in turn might influence one's approach to teaching.

On a surface level, Tamarra, Angela, and Kendra all fall into the same categories: they are all black, female and middle class. But their experiences related to each of these categories are very different. Crenshaw explains, "The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference… [but] that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences" (p. 1242). In other words, there is no way to distinguish between

the lived experiences of women if all women are categorized in the same way, assuming a shared experience as women.

Intersectionality theory's solution to the conflation problem in identity politics is to consider the relationship between multiple identities at the same time. However, as in the case of my participants, all black, middle, class women, looking at the intersection of broad social categories still glosses over their differences. I argue that using the same categories, albeit in an overlapping manner, to understand the complexity of individuals yields the same problem as singular analyses of identity that intersectionality is purported to solve. I posit that the same conflation of identity can occur when examining people from an intersectional perspective unless social categories of identity are un-essentialized. Unless these categories are treated as fluid and varied, intersectional analyses that attempt to combine race, class, and gender will result in reified conceptions of identity, similar to singular analyses of identity.

As such, my next step was to unpack each of the social categories for each teacher, in a specific educational context, in order to understand what racial identity meant for each teacher. I began by exploring what "black" or race meant for each teacher by closely examining all references –explicit and implicit—to race. I then did the same for class and gender. Looking across the ideal types in this way enabled me to understand in more depth each teacher's experience *within* the social categories before looking at their experiences *across* social categories.

Race, Class, and Gender

The category of race was different for Tamarra, Angela, and Kendra. As it turns out, these differences relate to their beliefs about identity and their beliefs and

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experiences in particular related to discrimination. For Tamarra it was clear that she did not use race to identify herself or others. She believed that race no longer had bearing on the lives of individuals, though race came up in her data in coded ways (e.g. inner-city.). Angela was different from Tamarra in that she explicitly identified herself and others as black. However, she was similar to Tamarra in that she believed that race no longer influences people's lives. For Tamarra and Angela, it was the individual who controlled all aspects of their lived experiences; race had nothing to do with it. Conversely, Kendra identified as black and she explicitly believed that discrimination is related to racial membership. Being black meant always—historically and presently—at risk of being discriminated against.

The teachers' experiences related to class were similar. They all explicitly talked about class influencing their lives, mentioning things such as their "middle-class neighborhood" and others' "poor" neighborhoods. All of the teachers also talked about class implicitly. Each teacher discussed values and experiences in their lives that are related to class, such as being expected to go to college. These experiences were implicitly discussed in that they did not directly say that they experienced certain things, as varied as vacations and values, because of their middle class status. They identified with others—like-minded friends—based on their class. However, none of the teachers specified or gave examples of how they received privilege because of their class status nor did they describe others as being influenced by discrimination based on class. There was also no reference to historical class affiliation or class discrimination. In contrast to understandings of race that differed across participants, participants shared in their limited recognition of social class.

For the social category of gender, Kendra was the only participant who recognized the role of gender in her and others' lives. She commented that her male friends and brothers experienced more discrimination than she and her female friends did. More specifically she saw in her own life, through looking at her friends, that all of her black male friends had more experiences of discrimination and were able to secure jobs in their areas of study less often than she and her female peers were. In contrast, Angela and Tamarra did not see gender as a salient part of their identity, nor did they believe that gender discrimination was occurring. They both believed, however, that historically gender may have been an important factor in individuals' lives.

The social categories of race, gender and social class played out differently for each of these teachers. While present—either explicitly or implicitly—in these teachers' stories, how these teachers' understood these categories necessarily influenced how they approached teaching and their students.

Race, Class, and Gender in their Students

Tamarra, Angela, and Kendra all saw the role of race differently for their students in school. For instance, even though Tamarra did not see patterns of race in her own life, she noted that her black students were the ones who got in trouble more frequently. She did not recognize this, though, as evidence of racial discrimination, describing it instead as related to personal choices. Thus, she denied that race mattered in the lives of her students. Angela, while she noticed race in her students, she believed their challenges were also due to individual choices. One reason Angela believed that her students experienced challenges was because they chose to live in segregated neighborhoods. Tamarra believed that she could help her students, regardless of race, with their

challenges by identifying the specific academic skills with which her students needed help. Kendra, on the other hand, believed that her black students experienced discrimination—in school and outside of school—which led to their lack of standard success in school. Because of the discrimination that Kendra's students experienced, she used her teaching as a tool for "racial uplift". Kendra never blamed students for their challenges; she worked at school and in the community to help her students learn as much as they could.

All of the teachers held similar beliefs related to class and its significance in the lives of their students. They all noted that lower income students did not do as well in school. As such, they identified low-income students as part of the same group. However, they did not see discrimination of those students as related to class. Tamarra believed that she as a teacher could help her low-income students catch up by assessing their individual needs and then differentiating instruction. Angela, again, believed that her students belief system held them back. For example, she said "I have kids say well, I don't want to get a job because they'll stop my check or… I'll have kids say well I don't need to work you know I can just have kids." Kendra believed that her low-income students' academic challenges were related to the lack of support their families were able to give them at home and being taught by bad teachers. None of the teachers recognized that schools systemically privilege middle and upper class students while disempowering lower income students (Lareau, 1987).

With regard to gender, Kendra was the only teacher believed that gender influenced students' lives. More specifically, she described how her male students struggle more than her female students so she makes a special effort to help them. She

believed that black males, even black male children, were specific targets of discrimination inside and outside of school. Angela and Tamarra did not specify that they saw a common identity among their male or female students. They also did not describe discrimination affecting their students based on their gender.

Ultimately, the teachers' own experiences with identity and discrimination influence how they see identity and discrimination in their classrooms. It is their lived experiences that help them create meaning around privilege and discrimination as teachers. Therefore, unpacking social categories to determine teachers' beliefs regarding discrimination and privilege yield a deeper understanding than strictly classifying teachers based on these broad social categories alone.

Lessons learned

Examining each teacher's social categories more explicitly relative to one another yielded rich information that helped further explain the emergent ideal types. For instance, in regards to the teachers' understandings of race, it is clear that the activist teacher understood racial identity and she related this to her understanding of racial discrimination. This ideal type is reflected in the literature that points out that black teachers relate well to their students because of their racial identity (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Dixson, 2003; Foster, 1997; Irvine, 1989; Milner, 2006). My findings show that it is more than the lived experience of being "black" that helps Kendra relate and advocate on behalf of her black students. In contrast, it is her understanding of racial identification and race-based discrimination in her own life and in her students' lives that gives her this stance. In contrast to the black activist teacher, the black teacher as savior does not have the understanding of racial marginalization that the literature might suggest

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that she should. Part of the reason may be that the teacher savior has seemingly "overcome" the historical challenges of racial oppression and now has a desire to help black students do the same. Therefore, she is unaware of the current systemic racism that her students face. Conversely, the colorblind teacher who does not identify herself as black, refuses to see patterns related to race, and does not understand discrimination. Therefore, she does not feel comfortable specifically working on behalf of black students, particularly those students whose experiences and lives are far different from her own.

Class functions in a different way for the teachers than race does. Actually, all types, teacher as savior, teacher as colorblind, and teacher as activist, look similar in regards to their understanding of class. They do not seem to understand that their descriptions of values and behaviors are related to class. Consequently, they do not understand class-based discrimination.   In regards to their students, they talk about patterns that they see in their low-income students related to their struggles in school, but they do not relate their students' low-income status to their being marginalized in school. I would suggest that to an extent, all of the teachers I studied are "class-blind" meaning that they do not see systemic oppression related to class. They believe that with hard work, good teachers, and parental support these students can catch up and have similar experiences as their middle class peers. Similar to the white colorblind teacher who does not see her privilege (Hytten & Adkins, 2001), these middle class teachers also do not see their class privilege.

Gender is a category that again the activist teacher understands more than the teacher savior and the colorblind teacher. She realizes the way her black, male students are positioned in school and society relative to her black, female students. This example

speaks to the importance of context and intersectionality. Historically, women are considered marginalized compared to men. However, because of race, the experience of black women and men and oppression has always been different, with black men never having equal treatment as white men (Collins, 2005). In schools, black boys struggle more than black girls and all other groups (Davis, 2003; Howard, 2008; Jordan & Cooper, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2011). The activist teacher is aware of this and makes a special effort to advocate on behalf of her black males. It is also important to note that in this case, the activist teacher does not necessarily have to belong to the oppressed group, but still sees a pattern of discrimination and can therefore advocate on behalf of black males.

Implications

My research demonstrates that black teachers talk about their intersectional identities in complicated ways. They all talk about the interconnectedness of social categories in their lives, even without realizing it. And, their intersectional identities influence their beliefs and practices about teaching whether they know it or not. I illustrated the nuances of each teacher's lived experiences and perceptions of their beliefs and practices about teaching through the demonstration of the ideal types: black teacher as colorblind, black teacher as savior, and black teacher as activist. The ideal types demonstrated the differences between three teachers who would likely be categorized within the research literature as the same because they are black, middle class, and female.

The socio-political nature of black teachers' work is highlighted across throughout the literature on black teachers, frequently with the only distinguishing feature

being that of their race (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Dixson, 2003). For instance, Dixson (2003) posits, "African American women teachers wage daily political battles on behalf of their students and the African American community" (p. 217). In other words, the literature seems to say that these teachers are political because they are black. I argue, similar to Kelly (2010a), that it is important to differentiate the historical context of the teachers being described. Further, the teachers in my study are living under what Collins (2005) refers to as the "new racism"[11].

New racism suggests that there has been a shift from the "old" overt racism that occurred prior to the Civil Rights movement. The new racism takes into consideration new economies, global citizenship, and the influence of media and popular culture. Especially important, and aligning with the ideas of "colorblind racism" are cultural justifications for mobility. Collins explains, "In the context of the new racism cultural explanations for economic success and poverty substitute for biological arguments concerning intelligence or genetic dispositions for immorality or violence" (p. 41). In short, racism still exists, but the way that it works is changing.

The new racial context makes racial oppression covert and it even implicates black people and other people of color as participants in oppression (Collins, 2005). Lines of privilege and marginalization are blurred and society begins to falsely appear as "post-racial" (Bonilla-Silva, 2010), particularly in regards to the black middle class (Collins, 2005). The black middle class experience with discrimination is different, depending on context, from those black families who live in lower income settings. This context must be considered when referencing the lives of contemporary teachers as well as when discussing ideas such as racism.

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[11] See Collins (2005) <u>Black Sexual Politics</u> for a full description of the "new racism"

However, just because the historical context has changed does not necessarily mean that contemporary black teachers may not be similar to black teachers historically. In the case of the activist teacher, as referenced in Chapter six, Kendra is similar to teachers who taught during the Jim Crow Era (Kelly, 2010; Siddle-Walker, 1996). The variation across all three black teachers' ideologies described in this study does, however, suggest that the category of "black" is not enough to make assumptions about a teacher's pedagogy and philosophy. Unpacking these social categories, as I have done, can help define what race means for teachers.

Initially, I began this study thinking that examining the interconnection of race, class, and gender in the analyses of teachers would help illuminate differences regarding their teaching beliefs and practices. I learned that each category, black, middle class, and female must be unpacked individually first to determine each teacher's experience within that category. Speaking back to the literature on black teachers, I would argue that because of the change in historical, economic, and social context, and because of intersectionality, it is no longer that black teachers, perhaps even teachers of other races, will have similar experiences simply because they are from the same social categories. By not examining the lived experience within social categories, specifically the lived experience of being black, the literature on black teachers will continue to be limited. It suggests that black is a stable category that does not shift within each person or from person to person. I argue that when using the category of race, or any other socially constructed category, it is important to understand how it functions for each individual. It is in understanding the multiplicity of these identities in conjunction with recognizing that each identity individually has implications for teachers' beliefs and practices, that a

deeper understanding of teachers is gleaned. Therefore, I believe that each category, in and of itself with no further descriptors, is unhelpful.

Implications for Teacher Education

Given the explicit historical shift related to race and the varying experiences of individuals related to race, I believe that teacher education should reconsider, at the very least, how black teachers are prepared to teach for social justice. First, the ideal types demonstrate that black teachers do not necessarily come from the same communities or cultures as their black students—or each other. Therefore, it is just as important to prepare black teachers for social justice as it is white teachers (Montecinos, 1999, 2004). Further, even teachers who do come from the same community as their black students and share in the same culture, would benefit from a teacher education program that allowed them to explore their own lives. For example, in the case of Kendra, although she had a thorough understanding of race, she was lacking information about the social category of class. More specifically, she did not understand how class functions in her own life as well as the lives of her students. Additionally, it would be important for her to learn how her experience as a black middle class woman privileges her in ways that her students' low-income status does not do the same for them.

The literature on contemporary black teachers suggests that because teachers are black, they have experiences that will cause them to sympathize with the racism their students experience, as well as advocate for their black students and form cultural connections. The ideal types demonstrated different examples of black teachers. Further, unpacking the social categories of race, class, and gender helped further flesh out differences between the teachers.   This demonstrates that just because a teacher shares a

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social category with a student, that does not necessarily mean they will be prepared to advocate on that student's behalf. The converse is also true: if teachers understand identity politics within a social category, they can understand the need to advocate for students even if they do not share the same background.

I posit that teacher educators need to unpack racial categories with and for their students in order to determine how to help teachers understand identity and discrimination. For instance, based on the ideal types, the colorblind teacher needs to learn more about identity and discrimination whereas, the teacher savior, who already knows about racial identity, needs to learn about racial discrimination. The colorblind teacher and the teacher savior both, for example, need to learn that the historical patterns of the legacy of race, which they both acknowledge, continues to manifest in the lives of people today.

Understanding teachers' intersectionality can help teacher educators understand how to better facilitate learning for teachers. Teacher education has a responsibility to help inform teachers of the advocacy that is needed in schools. Unpacking intersectionality, as I have illustrated, is a helpful way to examine what teachers know (and do not know) from their lives and their students' lives as it relates to social categories. I believe that the more understanding that teachers have regarding themselves as teachers, their students and the sociopolitical contexts that influence the work that they do, the less frustrated they will get and the less likely they will be to leave teaching due to unmet expectations or the feeling of helplessness. This is particularly important for black teachers who leave teaching more quickly than any other demographic (Ingersoll, 2011).

Further Research

Further research in this area is needed. In this dissertation I have only described three types of black teachers. There are likely many more that have not been documented. Further, my analysis was based on teacher interviews and focus groups. Additional methods, such as observations, would add understanding of how teachers' classroom practices relate to their teaching philosophies. This entails studying a larger sample of black teachers. All of the teachers in this study grew up in a middle class household. I would like to expand the study to examine teachers that did not grow up middle class. Also, all of the teachers that were examined went to predominantly white institutions. It would be important to examine teachers' who attended a historically black college or university (HBCU) because, based on my interviews with teachers from HBCUs, their teacher education programs were different, with a more explicit focus on teaching for "racial uplift". Also, there is a need to study the intersectionality of black teachers who are older and grew up in a different historical context. It would be interesting to compare the experiences and understandings of black teachers who experienced Jim Crow racism. As previously mentioned, black teachers continue to leave teaching more quickly than any other group. A deeper understanding of black teachers' beliefs and experiences in teaching may help researchers and teacher educators understand how to retain these teachers.

As Collins (1993) and others (Crenshaw, 1991; Keating, 2009), have suggested, intersectionality can be used as way to collaborate with others across and within difference. The various places where individuals' identities overlap are spaces for collaboration and coalition building. For example during the Civil Rights Movement, black women and men worked together, based on their discrimination as black people.

Black women, temporarily, set aside their concerns regarding oppression related to women in order to form a more powerful coalition with black men (Springer, 2005). Intersectionality can allow coalitions to be formed among unlikely groups. For instance in teacher education, it is possible, that there are similarities among female middle class teachers in schools regardless of race. Middle class teachers could together explore their class privilege while also understanding that there are differences in lived experiences because of their other identity categories. They could also examine their experience of marginalization in a profession that has been labeled as "women's work"[12] (Grumet, 1988). They could even form a coalition to push for change around this common identity of being workers in a feminized profession.

As such, it would be important to consider how intersectionality works for all demographics of teachers, not strictly black women (Nash, 1991). Intersectionality is a way to examine privilege and oppression. Therefore, I would be interested in studying white teachers who are resistant to discussion of privilege and race, class, or gender (King, 1991). Perhaps unpacking their intersectionality would help teacher educators theorize ways to help privileged teachers, regardless of race, find ways to develop a more "critical consciousness" (Hinchey, 2004) as opposed to "dysconciousness" (King, 1991).

Teacher education for social justice has the goal of helping to prepare teachers work towards ending inequity in education and in broader society. I believe that helping teachers learn how inequity is distributed in society in a multifaceted, yet clear way, is critical for teachers who come into teacher education classrooms. I, as a young black teacher, had hopes, similar to the teacher savior, of helping black students improve their lives through education, but my advocacy was misinformed because my lived

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[12]See the discussion of teaching as "women's work in Grumet (2008)

experiences were different from my students and I did not receive support to learn such during my undergraduate program. Therefore, I quickly became frustrated and burnt out because I was not making the difference that I wanted to make or that the literature assumed I inherently knew how to make. I had the privilege of returning to graduate school for seven years to learn why inner-city schools, teachers, and students have tremendous challenges and how as a teacher I could have helped my students. We should give teachers these same experiences while they are in the teacher education classroom, perhaps prompting them to continue teaching long enough to make long-lasting differences in the lives of their students.

Appendix I

1. Tell me about your family
    - Who are your parents?
    - What did your parents do?
    - Describe relationship with parents
    - Who are your siblings?
    - Tell me a memorable experience that characterizes your relationship with each of your siblings.
    - What are each of your siblings doing now?
    - Tell me a memorable experience about your childhood.
    - What three values were most important for your family growing up?
    - Tell me about your grandparents.
    - What did they do?
    - Describe your relationship with them.
    - What other family members did you have close relationships with?
    - Describe those relationships
    - What role did you serve among your family?

2. Tell me about the places that you lived before you went to college?
    - What cities/towns did you live in?
    - Describe the cities or towns you lived in.
    - Did you live in the suburbs, city, country?
    - How would you describe or characterize suburbs, city
    - If you stood in a window at your childhood home(s), what would you see? Who would you see?
    - Describe who lived in your neighborhood.
    - Tell me about a typical week during your childhood.
    - What types of activities did you participate in that were not related to school?
    - Tell me about a memorable experience at a non-school related activity.

3. Tell me about your K-12 school experience.
    - What teachers do you remember?
    - Tell me about your teachers.
    - What do you remember about your classmates?
    - What type of student were you?
    - Who were your favorite teachers and why?
    - What is your favorite memory of school and why?
    - What is your least favorite memory of school and why?
    - If you looked in the window of your classroom what/who would you see (elementary, middle, and high school)

4. Tell me about your childhood friends

- Describe your closest friends/the friends you remember the most/the friends you spent the most time with?
- How did you meet your friends?
- What did you do with your friends?
- Tell me a story/experience that characterizes your friendships.
- Are you still in touch with any of your childhood (pre-college) friends?
- What are your childhood friends currently doing?
- What role did you serve amongst your childhood friends?

5. Describe your life after high school.
   - What did you do after graduating and why?
   - Describe your college experience.
   - Describe your teacher education/certification program.
   - What classes did you take?
   - What classes resonated with you the most?
   - What classes didn't resonate with you at all?
   - Describe your clinical/student teaching experience.
   - What was most influential in your program?
   - Do you feel like you program prepared you for teaching?
   - After finishing the program, how did you feel about teaching?
   - What role did you serve in college/teacher education program?

6. Describe your entry into teaching.
   - How did (do) you feel about your first teaching placement?
   - Why did you decide to become a teacher?
   - When did you decide to become a teacher?
   - How did you choose your teaching placement?
   - In how many different grades/locations have you taught?
   - If you are not in your original teaching placement, why did you leave?

Appendix II

1. Describe the demographics of your school (Teachers).
   - Age
   - Race
   - Gender
   - Socioeconomic status
   - Married/Single/Divorced
   - Local/Transferred from other location
   - Graduate degree/NBCT
2. Describe the demographics of your school (Students and Parents)
   - Race
   - Socioeconomic status
   - Parents
   - Local/Transferred from other location
   - Academics (EOG scores)
   - Title I
3. Describe the location of your school
   - Describe the physical condition of your school
   - Describe the neighborhood surrounding the school
   - How did you choose your current school?
   - Where do you live in comparison to your school?

4. Describe yourself/your positioning at your school.
   - How would your principal describe you?
   - How would a distanced colleague describe you?
   - How would your close colleagues describe you?

5. Does your race influence how you are perceived at the school?
   - By teachers/administrators? Tell me an incident
   - By non-certified staff (e.g. assistants, custodians, cafeteria) Tell me an incident
   - By parents?
   - By students?
   - How?
   - How do you feel about this?
   - What role do you serve at the school?
   - Do you act or treat people differently based on their race? Other teachers, students, parents, etc.
6. Describe an incident when you believe race influenced an interaction at school.

Artifact Instructions
> For the focus group please bring in 2 or 3 artifacts that you believe represent your philosophy of teaching black students. This could be a lesson plan, a letter home, a photograph, a student product, a classroom map, a description of classroom groupings, a

documentation of a classroom practice, an object from around the house, etc. These can be items that you currently use or that you would like to use in the future. These can also be items that are symbolic of your beliefs. During the focus group, you will have the opportunity to reflect on these items. I will take digital photos of these examples.

Appendix III

1. What is the purpose of education?
   - What do you hope that your students will gain after being in your classroom for a year?
   - Imagine that all of students had a successful K-12 experience. What would that look like? What does that mean for them upon graduation?
   - Do you believe education serves the purpose that you suggested for all students?
   - If not, why not?
   - What role do teachers have in serving the purposes of education?
2. Historically, black teachers served a special role in the education of black children, and education was seen as a means for racial uplift and improvement.
   - What are your feelings about this statement?
   - Do you believe that the role of black teachers in particular has changed?
   - Do you believe that you serve a special role for your black students/parents, families, etc.?
   - If so, why, and what is that role?
   - If not, how have things shifted so that black teachers' role is different from what it used to be?
3. When I say the term colorblind in regards to thinking about children and education, what do you think?
   - What does the term mean?
   - What challenges are associated with this word
4. How do you define culturally responsive teaching?
   - Do you believe that is a useful form of pedagogy for you as a teacher? Why or why not?
   - How is culturally responsive teaching challenging?
5. What concepts have you discussed during professional development or graduate school in which you were positioned in a particular way or in which you believe your viewpoint was not supported?
   - How were you positioned?
6. When I say the following term, what is the first thing that comes to mind?:
   - Meritocracy
   - Discourse
   - Identity
   - Achievement Gap
   - Racism
7. How were your feelings towards these words formed?

Please describe the artifacts that you brought in and tell us how they represent your philosophy of education.

Appendix IV

Focus Group Protocol

Thank you for coming today. Please share with us your name, what you teach, and where you teach.   The handouts that I have given you have the questions that we will discuss as a group. Before we get started, please take a few minutes to write down your responses to these questions. Feel free to use these notes in our group discussion. I will collect the handouts at the end of our conversation.

1. How does a teacher's identity influence teaching practice?

2. How do students' identities influence teaching practice?

3. How does context influence teaching practice?

4. How should teachers be prepared to provide equitable education for all students?

5.   Given the importance of closing the achievement gap/reducing the educational debt, what should teachers know and be able to do?

6. What is responsible for the success of black students in education?

7. What is responsible for the failure of black students in education?

Thank you for participating in the focus group. Please take a few minutes to reflect on the back of this paper. What remaining questions would you wish we had discussed? What was difficult about this conversation? What was helpful about the conversation? Any other comments or ideas that you would like to share?

Appendix V

Third Interview Protocol

Follow up questions from focus group based on each individual.

1. How do you define yourself? Who are you? How do others define you? What social categories do you/others put yourself in?

2. Share an experience/tell me a time when this particular social category/identity was important/noticeable.

3. When you are in the classroom, which identity/social category is most noticeable to you, students, parents, other teachers, leadership, etc.

4. How would you describe your identity as intersectional?
   How does your intersectional identity influence your teaching

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