ABSTRACT

Title of Document: POETRY, PROSE, & PORTRAITURE: VOICES OF 21st CENTURY BLACK ENGLISH TEACHERS ON IMPACTING BLACK STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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This dissertation study utilized Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and Portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005) to investigate five African American English teachers' perceptions of how they impact Black student achievement. Study participants included teachers who taught in two neighboring school districts located in a large metropolitan area in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Teachers' years of experience ranged from 2 to 15. Data collection methods included journal writing, focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and a questionnaire. Findings are presented in the form of individual poetic portraits for each teacher (Childers, 2007; Hill, 2003, 2005; Schendel, 2009) and emergent themes (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Teachers viewed themselves as impacting Black student achievement by employing a more-than-content teaching philosophy that emphasized helping students

develop life skills and knowledge that would be beneficial post high school. Teachers found it *difficult*, however, to positively impact Black student achievement because of frustrating situations they faced in their school settings. Teachers' frustrations are organized into five categories: institutional frustration, pedagogical frustration, relational frustration, positional frustration, and cultural frustration. Situated within the literature on Black teachers published post-1970, the findings add complexity to the common portrayal of Black teachers as culturally-synchronized (Irvine, 1990) othermothers (Foster, 1993; Irvine, 2002), mentors, and role models (Irvine, 1989) for Black students. Findings also deepen the scholarly conversation surrounding the negative, unintended consequences the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954) court ruling had for Black teachers and Black students.

The study's implications call for intra-racial professional development workshops and teacher education initiatives designed specifically for African American teachers; long-term ethnographic studies investigating the experiences and relationships between Black teachers and Black students in contemporary resegregated schools; policy initiatives aimed at creating a *Brown v. Board of Education* agenda for contemporary times; and theories that reconceptualize racial uplift pedagogy for 21st century schools.

POETRY, PROSE, AND PORTRAITURE: VOICES OF 21ST CENTURY BLACK ENGLISH TEACHERS ON IMPACTING BLACK STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

By

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Preface

It came to me as I was walking down the hall at the school where I was working as an assessment coordinator. I was in a hurry, focused on completing a task, but I could not help but notice idle students standing in the hall. Some in pairs, chatting or smooching, others in groups, a few alone just looking around and listening to their I-pods or talking on their cell phones. It was not a class change. They all should have been in class. This was not the first time I had witnessed (with great annoyance) this scene. But this time, I not only noticed them, but I also noticed me. I noticed myself walking right by them all, without a word.

That's when it came to me. In that moment, I knew within myself that despite its title, at its core, this dissertation project was hardly about teachers. It was about students –Black students.

It was about those students I allowed to continue loitering in the hallway. "*Why should I stop? There are no consequences. This is the culture of the building."* It was about the "empty shell of an existence"[1] many Black children appear to have embraced, an existence that devalues "doing school" the way I had done school as a youth: obey and respect authority (at least in authority's presence), do homework, class work; join clubs, play sports. Forget, for a moment, the title and the selected participants; recognize that this dissertation is about Black students, especially the ones who would *not* be tracked into what Du Bois (1903a, 1903b) called the Talented

[1] "Empty shell of an existence" is language my research participants used during a focus group to describe the culture of the Black students they taught.

Tenth, those students selected as the brightest in their race and nurtured toward higher education and professional careers.

This dissertation is about the achievement gap – not the gap between Blacks and Whites, but the gap between many Black students and academic proficiency. Moreover, it is less about the academic gap and more about the "engagement" gap, the "acceptable" behavior gap, and the "respect" gap – these are the gaps the teachers in my study wanted to talk about.

I did not interview any students or observe any classes. I looked at neither test scores nor classroom artifacts. I only talked to teachers. I wanted to know what was on their minds about these Black kids whom this dissertation is really about. I wanted to know what was happening in their classrooms, from their own points of views. I wanted to talk about the perplexing and shameful reality that Black students at large are underachieving – *even* when they are taught by Black teachers.

The teachers wanted to talk, too. For them, participating in the study was about them as teachers. They craved a venue where their voices would be heard and valued. They were starving for fellowship and frank discussion with other Black teachers. My dissertation project provided the much-needed break from their department, district, community, self, and society-imposed fast –that is, freedom from silence. Silence about their experiences as Black English teachers in predominantly White departments; silence about their feelings about Black students; silence about the discriminatory practices they witnessed in their schools; silence about the despair they felt in their jobs; silence about their content knowledge and sense of self-efficacy; silence about how the issues of race and racism were real factors in their

jobs – *even* with Black building leaders and *even* with a Black man as the president of the nation. So, although at its root, it is about students, this dissertation is still about Black teachers. It is about being Black and being a teacher of Black students, many of whom do not embrace education and are not achieving, and some of whom do not respect their teachers – perhaps because of, or maybe despite, the fact that their teachers are Black.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my first teachers:

Myra McLin, Dale McLin (RIP), and Traci (McLin) Buckner.

Acknowledgements

What a journey this doctoral process has been. From the Fall of 2007 to the Fall of 2012, I transformed from classroom teacher to researcher and emerging scholar. It was not until the dissertation process, when I began to witness the scholar in me emerging, that I realized that all of these years, I was a scholar in the making. There are key people who contributed to my development: Victoria-María MacDonald, my committee chair, advisor, and academic guardian angel. Dr. MacDonald, thank you for seeing promise in me from the start and for providing a safe and encouraging place for me to grow, think, and transform. Where would I be without you and M.U.E.? My mentors and committee members: Dr. Maria Hyler, Dr. Hanne Mawhinney, Dr. Jennifer Turner, and Dr. Linda Valli. You all have helped shape my thinking and strengthen my academic skills. Dr. Hyler, your "butt in chair" advice is part of what helped me get this dissertation written! Dr. Turner, our insightful conversations have helped me at pivotal points in my doctoral process. Dr. Valli, you have not only challenged me academically, but you have also opened doors for me that led to great opportunities. Dr. Mawhinney, thank you, also, for your methodological insights and earnest attention to my work.

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Finally, thank you, God, for your divine plan for my life and for ordering my steps accordingly.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction

In 1983, the United States (U.S.) Department of Education issued *A Nation at Risk*. This report warned of a "rising tide of mediocrity" in U.S. schools that if left unchecked would result in the United States losing its position as a global leader. *A Nation at Risk* was released nearly 30 years after the historic *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954) court case that declared segregated schools unconstitutional and changed the face of public school classrooms substantially, drawing more national attention to the achievement gap between Whites and Blacks[2]. Because Americans often avoid frank discussions about race and inequity, the effects of these constructs on student achievement are rarely discussed openly and systematically. The country's embrace of a colorblind (Monahan, 2006) philosophy of society silences discussions of race and social inequities, so that they have not been thoroughly explored in the quest to understand the achievement gap (Bell, 1992). This dissertation project does just the opposite – it privileges race in its discussion of student achievement, particularly by zeroing in on the "raced" perspectives of Black teachers who teach Black students and by using Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) as the study's theoretical framework.

A national report released in 2010 by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) (Barton & Coley, 2010) states that besides a brief period of narrowing in the 1970s and 1980s, that the achievement gap between Black and White students has continued

[2] Black and African American will be used interchangeably to describe Black people who are descendants of African slaves.

to widen since 1965, raising an eyebrow at the effects of landmark civil rights rulings and progress that occurred during that time:

> Had those things that were helping to close the gap stopped, or had they been overshadowed by new adversities that were not remedied by gaining equality before the law? Unfortunately, no comprehensive modeling by researchers is available that might identify and quantify the culprits, nor is it likely that there will ever be. (Nettles, as cited in Barton & Coley, 2010, p. 2)

As the authors of the ETS report assert, these alarming statistics should create a sense of urgency for greater understanding of the depth and breadth of this problem, understanding needed by the nation as a whole and by Black communities in particular (Barton & Coley, 2010). Answering the ETS call to action, my dissertation study starts with conversations with teachers in the Black community. As I report my findings, the conversation will move to the academy and then, to the nation at large. I start by defining and providing an historical analysis of the achievement gap. I do not focus on numerical statistics in gains or losses; rather, my discussion centers on the *idea* of the achievement gap as a concept.

Defining the Achievement Gap

Originally – and most often –the term "achievement gap" has been used to describe the gap in performance – typically on standardized tests – between Blacks and Whites (Hedges & Nowell, 1999; Hilliard, 2003; Orr, 2003). In the last few decades, however, with the increasing diversity in U.S. public schools, the gap discussion has expanded to include Asians and Latinos. Theresa Perry (2003) sums up its definition succinctly:

> On whatever measure one uses, from the SAT to the Stanford Nine, in school districts and schools across the country, irrespective of political orientation, demographic characteristics, or per-pupil spending, there exists a gap between the academic performance of Black and Latino students on one hand, and White and Asian American students on the other. (p. 7)

Essentially, the achievement gap is the common term used to describe the underachievement of Black and Latino students (Perry, 2003). Hillard (2003) and Boykin and Noguera (2011) argue that defining the achievement gap as the gap in performance between Black students and their White peers is flawed, and that instead the significant gap is the one between Black students and excellence, which is the conceptualization that informed this dissertation project. The existence of the gap, however, is not news anymore. What is important to examine is *why* the achievement gap persists even after multiple, ongoing efforts at closing it. I will discuss the persistence of the gap after first describing existing theories on what has caused the gap.

There are already several theories on what has caused the gap: disparities in academic tracking (Oakes, 1985; Oakes & Lipton, 2007); innate intelligence differences between Whites and minorities (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994); differences in family structures (Moynihan, 1986), family background and income inequality (Rothstein, 2004) and social class (Anyon, 2005; Barton & Coley, 2010; Lareau, 2003; Mandara,Varner, Green & Richman, 2009; Rothstein, 2004); group-wide racial discrimination (Fischer et al., 1996); disappearance of the Black nuclear family

(Barton & Coley, 2010); insufficient recreational and health infrastructures in poor Black neighborhoods (Barton & Coley, 2010); limited to no access to political capital (Ladson-Billings, 2006) and social and cultural capital (Barton & Coley, 2010; Lareau, 2003; Orr, 2003; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999); and teachers' pedagogical practices (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009). All of these factors have been noted as causes of the achievement gap. Next, I will discuss why the achievement gap persists.

1.2: Toward an Understanding of Why the Achievement Gap Persists

1.2.1: Historical Context – The Root Cause of the Persistent Achievement Gap

The broken promise of the *Brown* decision (Irons, 2002) has contributed to the ongoing achievement gap. Despite the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas,(1954)* desegregation order, a majority of Black and Latino students find themselves in highly-segregated, high-poverty schools, while most White students are more likely to attend more middle class, better-resourced schools with few students of color (Anderson & Bryne, 2004; Anderson & Kharem, 2009; Bell, 2004; Boger & Orfield, 2005, as referenced in Tatum, 2007; Orfield & Lee, 2006). Although officials would have the public believe that things are this way because of residential choices, critical race theorists would contend that things are this way because of deliberate court rulings that have weakened or reversed integration laws and efforts (see Bell, 2004; Irons, 2002; Orfield & Lee, 2006; or Tatum, 2007, for further discussion of relevant court cases).

As Ladson-Billings (2006) said in her 2006 AERA Presidential Address, the fact that there is a gap is not surprising, given the history of racism and inequitable distribution of resources in the United States of America. In her address, she depicts the achievement gap as being a result of a series of "debts" the U.S. has accumulated and "deficits" people of color have as a result. The historical debt she identified involves how the nation has viewed minority races as inferior and has profited from their free labor. This debt also involves how education had been legally denied to minorities and how assimilation theory has created minorities as outcasts. The economic debt involves how "separate schooling always allows for differential funding" (p. 6), the amount of funding schools receive rising with the increase in White students. Ladson-Billings argues that this achievement gap vs. debt idea can be compared to the income vs. wealth disparity. She argues that because Blacks' income has always been less than that of Whites, Blacks have not been able to build wealth at the same rate and level as Whites (Mandara, et al., 2009; Oliver & Shapiro, 1997). The same, she posits, could be true for achievement. Because Blacks' access to education has historically been more limited than Whites', collectively, their academic achievement levels may not be on par with their White peers. Of course, there are exceptions – Black people who outperform their White peers and White people who lag behind Blacks intellectually; however, in the same way Blacks have not been able to build wealth at the same rate and level as Whites because their income has historically been less, so are they not able to achieve academically at the same rate and level as Whites. Thus, Ladson-Billings (2006) asserts, there exists an achievement disparity. Next, she describes the sociopolitical debt in which "limited

access to lawyers and legislators has kept them [Blacks] from accumulating the kinds of political capital their White middle class counterparts have" (p. 8).

Lastly, Ladson-Billings discusses the country's moral debt owed to historically marginalized people of color, describing it as the "disparity between what we know is right and what we do" (p. 8). She argues that all of these debts must be considered when examining the achievement gap, asserting that personal responsibility must be paired with social responsibility. The fact that failing, segregated schools still exist causes her to question whether the country really gave *Brown* (1954) a chance. Near the time of her address, three-fourths of Black and Latino students attended predominantly non-White schools, with more than two million attending apartheid schools, which are re-segregated schools with high numbers of inexperienced teachers, inadequate resources, and sub-standard curricula (Kozol, 2005; Orfield & Lee, 2006). This dissertation considers these educational debts and deficits alongside the unintended negative consequences of the *Brown (1954)* in the framing of this study.

Goals of U.S. Schooling

Universal schooling in the United States was not intended to educate everyone (Spring, 1994; Tatum, 2007). Initially, schooling beyond the third grade was meant for children of the elite and a select few of the brightest working class. Upon this country's founding, education was meant for White males, not women – and especially not people of color (Cremin, 1980; Tatum, 2007). Although efforts have been made to educate African Americans, such education was based on the premise that "if you know what works for the White child, then you know what will work for the Black child" (Perry, 2003, p.4), an assumption that has been proven false by

multi-cultural educational researchers such as Irvine (2003) and Delpit (1995, 2006). Because "from the beginning, American constructions of race and class have determined who had access to education, and to a large degree those constructions still shape how we think about who can benefit from it" (Tatum, 2007, p. 40), an answer to Tatum's (2007) call to start talking about race is way over due. The country is still resistant, and, partly, as a result, the achievement gap persists.

1.2.2 An Alternative Gap Perspective – The Opportunity-to-Learn Gap

An alternative view of the achievement gap is the opportunity-to-learn gap (Hillard, 2003; Irvine, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2010). This alternative view considers the achievement gap through a *process* lens rather than a *product* lens. This process perspective frames the gap as the *opportunities* (Hilliard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2006) students have to learn, rather than the *fact* of their underachievement in relation to their White peers. As I have already discussed, Ladson-Billings (2006) argues that the United States has denied Black Americans historical, economic, socio-political, and moral opportunities that have resulted in a persistent achievement gap. These stolen opportunities have resulted in an educational deficit (i.e. in an achievement gap) for Black students and closing the deficit – providing opportunities for progress – should be the focus of reform efforts. Other factors contributing to the opportunity-to-learn gap include deficit mind-sets, color blindness, cultural conflicts, the myth of the meritocracy, and context-neutral mindsets (Milner, 2010). Milner (2010) suggests that awareness of these contributing factors will "[help] educators bridge and shed light on opportunity gaps" (p. 13).

Hilliard (2003) equates the opportunity-to-learn gap to the "quality of service" afforded to Black students. He argues that reform efforts have focused too much on the achievement outcome and not enough on the *quality* of the teaching service that impacts achievement: "A review of research from the past century will reveal that the overwhelming body of inquiry has been focused on child deficiencies. Only a minuscule number of references have focused on 'savage inequalities' in service" (p. 140). Likewise, Boykin and Noguera (2011) argue that creating more *opportunities* for students to learn will help in closing the achievement gap, and that some of those opportunities come in the form of quality teaching: "In many cases, individuals who possess the capacity to achieve – and even produce greatness – are denied the opportunity simply because the educators charged with cultivating talent are unable to identify and support students whose gifts are not readily apparent" (Boykin & Noguera, 2011, p. ix).

The opportunity-to-learn gap is still a culprit in causing Black student underachievement, even today, over 50 years after the *Brown* decision, a mere five decades after the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and even with the majority of Black teachers teaching Black students (Berry, 2005). Scholars have theorized that this opportunity-to-learn gap is a result of inequitable macroeconomic policies such as harsh labor laws, ineffective federal policies, and unfair income and corporate tax laws that produce tremendous hardship for Blacks and Latinos (Anyon, 2005), as well as school-level structural inequities such as racial tracking, weak curriculum, and poor teaching (Anyon, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2004). All of these theories are viable and are worthy of further inquiry. This study, however, is based on the premise

that good teaching can close opportunity and achievement gaps (Hilliard, 2003); therefore, teachers were at the center of my inquiry.

1.3: Research Goals

The goal of this research project was to deepen the scholarly conversations about African American English teachers' roles in impacting Black student achievement. I also expected this research project to spark communication and reflective thought in communities of practice. I hoped to illuminate and address pedagogical and ideological issues relevant to Black English teachers as they strive to increase Black student achievement in an era in which schools have resegregated, but that in their resegregated state, do not resemble the community pillars Black schools were often depicted as before the Supreme court ordered schools to be integrated *(*Fairclough, 2004; Foster, 1993; Milner & Howard, 2004; Patterson, Mickelson, Hester, & Wyrick, 2011; Walker, 1996, 2001, 2004). Personally, I hoped the process and product of the research would create new understandings, insights, and inspiration for the researcher, the participants, other Black English teachers, and the educational community at large. I aimed to answer one overarching research question**:** What are Black English teachers' perceptions of how they impact Black student achievement?

I am interested in Black teachers' views of how they impact Black student achievement not only because I am African American and therefore have a special interest in and commitment to helping Black students achieve, but also because I am aware that there has been no large-scale solution to the nation's persistent minority achievement gap. I am aware, through first-hand teaching experiences and scholarly

study, that the achievement gap between Black and White students continues to persist, even after desegregation efforts, even after affirmative action programs, even after culturally-relevant pedagogical reform efforts, even after No Child Left Behind – and, even *when* students are taught by Black teachers.

Some research suggests that once Black teachers reach the middle class, they begin to adopt the White middle class mainstream view that Black students themselves, not racism, are the cause of underachievement (Delpit, 2006; Fordham, 1996; Foster, 1997; Lynn, Bacon, Totten, Bridges, and Jennings, 2010;). Recently, researchers found that some Black teachers lack confidence in Black students' ability to learn (Lynn, et al., 2010). None of these studies, however, offer deep insights into teachers' *own* perceptions of how their own attitudes and practices might contribute to Black students' achievement or underachievement. My study asked teachers to think reflectively and introspectively about the relationship between their practice and Black student achievement. Such perspectives are important because Black teachers are most likely to teach Black students (Berry, 2005) and current reform efforts aimed at increasing Black student achievement do not take this reality into consideration. Moreover, historically, Black teachers have prided themselves on their ability to work successfully with Black students (Foster, 1997; Irvine, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994); indeed, a recurrent theme in the research literature is that Black teachers are role models and mentors for Black students (Foster, 1993; Irvine, 1989). Still, though, many Black students who have access to Black teachers continue to underachieve (Fordham, 1996; Lynn et al., 2010). These contrasting depictions of the effect contemporary Black teachers may have on Black student achievement warrant further

inquiry into Black teachers' perspectives on and experiences with teaching Black students. My dissertation study aims to add to the literature in this area.

There are also important reasons I chose to focus on the Black English teacher singularly. Focusing my study on the Black English teacher not only fills a significant void in the general Black teacher literature, but it also fills an even greater gap in the English education literature. The majority of the Black teacher literature discusses teachers' experiences in general. There is, however, a nascent but growing body of discipline-specific literature, but most articles focus on the Black science teacher (see, for example, Goldston & Nichols, 2009). Few studies investigate Black English teachers at the secondary level and in a comprehensive and targeted way, and those that do focus on Black secondary English teachers do so by default, not by researcher design (see, for example, Adkins, 2006 or Adkins-Coleman, 2010). Furthermore, a review of the major English education journals published by the National Council of the Teachers of English (*English Journal*, *English Education*, and *Research in the Teaching of English*) yielded no studies centered exclusively on the practicing Black English teachers' perspectives on Black student achievement. Rather, the scant amount of literature focused on Black teachers in these journals mainly explores Black *pre-service* English teachers' experiences, particularly as they relate to the teachers' problems with passing the English teacher licensure exam (Albers, 2002) or with implementing a multi-cultural curriculum (Agee, 2004). None of these leading English education or mainstream journals included articles that focused on Black English teachers' perceptions of their impact on Black student achievement. Even seasoned English education scholars were unable to point me to a

single article analyzing the experiences of Black English teachers. The void in the English education literature, coupled with the eye-opening experiences I had as one of very few Black teachers in a predominantly White English department, has made giving voice to Black English teachers one of my top research priorities.

In the following section of this chapter, I discuss my background and the personal journey that prompted this dissertation project, influenced its design, and informed my analysis.

1.4: Personal Interest

1.4.1: Becoming a Black English Teacher

I started my teaching career in a predominantly Black middle school in a large predominantly Black school district. When I told people where I'd be working, many exclaimed, "Really? Are you gonna need to wear a bullet proof vest?!" The school was located in a neighborhood that bordered a city notorious for violence, poverty, and crime. I had heard about another school with an excellent reputation, a high school located within walking distance from my home in a neighborhood known as "a nice area – with good schools." "Nobody gets in there, because no one ever leaves," I was told. Through networking, I gained employment at the coveted school as an English teacher. It was a large high school with a special science and technology magnet program that constituted approximately 20% of the student population. The school was predominantly African American; however, the magnet population was majority White. African American students who were not in the special magnet

program – the majority of the Black students – took comprehensive[3]-level classes or special education courses. When I announced I was considering working at this school, the building principal where I was currently working as a middle school teacher warned me: "beware, they like to get African American teachers over there to teach the Black students; they don't allow them to teach the advanced, mostly White classes." A naive new teacher, I did not buy into this principal's warning. However, after I worked for several years at the magnet high school (teaching majority African American comprehensive-level classes), and began to study the research literature on Black teachers, I began to understand what may have prompted my former principal's warning. I believe she had experienced and seen some things that I, as a young, new Black teacher, had not. A seasoned educator, she probably knew something about what it had meant to be a Black teacher in the United States of America since school integration. Given her age of around 60 years, I believe she knew about the experiences of Black teachers being assigned to mostly-Black schools and relegated to teach lower-level classes and lower grades, and being denied opportunities to teach White students (Foster, 1991; Milner & Howard, 2004). A Black educator herself, I suspect she knew about the trials and challenges of being a Black teacher, and as the principal of a predominantly Black, de facto segregated school, she, like many Black teachers who taught in the South when segregation was the law of the land, probably also knew of the joy, satisfaction – and racial responsibility – of working with and seeing Black students achieve.

[3] Comprehensive-level classes consist of students who are tracked at or below grade-level. I will use the terms comprehensive-level and regular-level students interchangeably. Special education students include students who have a documented disability for which they receive services through the school system.

Researching the experiences of Black teachers has helped me better understand and appreciate my former principal's perspective; it has also provoked me to focus earnestly on exploring, understanding, and improving the experiences of contemporary Black teachers in public schools, and, in particular, their experiences as they relate to impacting Black student achievement.

1.4.2: Embracing a Researcher's Gaze

Fast forward five years – after multiple graduate school classes, several focus groups with Black teachers, and employment in two predominantly Black, failing urban schools – to an evolved perspective on and lens through which I view the state of Black student achievement and Black teachers' impact on their learning. While preparing to collect data for this dissertation project, I entered the public school classroom again as a high school teacher in a chronically failing inner-city school. The cold, harsh introduction to the children with experiences and upbringings so different than my own shook me. Many of the boys in my classroom were under some type of court probationary orders. One wore an ankle bracelet connected to law enforcement. Profanity was every-day speech in the classroom and halls – even for the adult leaders. Maintaining order and delivering instruction required constant, extreme vigilance. Many students literally could not read, and they shared classrooms with students reading at advanced levels. Providing differentiated and individualized instruction in such an environment proved to be beyond challenging.

I had never seen so many students demonstrate such bold defiance in a school setting; had never had multiple social workers entering the classroom, checking on students, peering in the window on a daily basis. Had never heard administrative

building leadership use multiple four-letter words as a way to communicate messages to students and staff in the name of "cause that's what they understand." I did not know this world. I did not want to teach in this world. I decided to pursue a non-classroom based position as I continued on in my doctoral work.

In my new position as school testing coordinator, I entered a new world that helped to inform my perspective: test score data. I saw that a significant number of students in the school had not passed the algebra end-of-year assessment. I also began to suspect that achievement for *all* students was not necessarily the number one motivating factor for school leadership; rather, how to ensure the school met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)[4] often motivated decision-making, even if it making AYP meant focusing remediation efforts only on the students staff members felt could actually pass the test. I also realized how big of a beast managing a school is and how the school leader must do more than have a vision; he or she must be able to enact the vision, despite resistance from students or staff. These two experiences caused me to reflect on how different my schooling experiences had been from the experiences of the students in those schools. For the first time, I recognized my status as member of the educated Black middle class – a part of what Du Bois (1903) termed The Talented Tenth, and I realized how unfamiliar I was with the other 90%.

1.4.3: Recognizing & Reflecting on My Black Middle Class Status

I was born in 1977 in Cleveland, Ohio, to a middle class family. I consider my upbringing middle class even though neither of my parents nor their parents held college degrees at the time. As a child, I did not even know what middle class meant.

[4] Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is designed to measure the continuous improvement each year toward the No Child Left Behind goal of 100% proficiency in 2004 (www.mdreportcard.org).

I did not even realize my parents were not college-educated. I just knew we lived in a nice suburban neighborhood, populated by both Black and White people, and that whatever material items my sister and I needed –or wanted – we received. There was always food on the table, and my sister and I were expected to - and always did – do well in school. We went to diversely-populated public schools. My parents took advantage of a magnet school bussing program made available as a method of integrating schools, making my sister and me both beneficiaries of *Brown's* promise of equal schooling opportunities for all and, in particular, for historically disadvantaged groups.

I was an honor roll student. Often a teacher's pet, I wanted to be one of the "smart" kids, and I was. It was in middle school that I recall getting placed in the "gifted" or, I would say, "Talented Tenth" track. Before I entered middle school, my sister took it upon herself to take me up to the school to introduce me to the teachers who had helped her along the way. I remember sitting at a desk in Mr. Leonard's room while my sister cashed in some of the social capital she had acquired along her way. By introducing me to this teacher and asking that he "look out" for me, I gained entrance into a network that would open doors that otherwise might not have been opened. For example, halfway through my first year there, I was moved to the accelerated "pre-algebra" track so that I would be able to take Algebra as a seventh grade student. My teachers also recommended me for the honors Language Arts class, and so I was set on the middle class track to opportunity and high academic achievement. I entered the Talented Tenth track (i.e., in honors classes and involved in extra-curricular school activities), and, having few learning and social experiences

with students not on the Talented Tenth track, I think I learned to live life as if the 10% were all that existed. I was only familiar and comfortable learning in an environment with people who appeared to interested in and focused on learning. My productive work habits were similar to most of the students with whom I sat in class. I do not remember ever seeing students blatantly disrespecting teachers. School was a safe and fun place to be. Teachers and other adult staff members, such as secretaries, coaches, and advisors taking a special interest in me is what helped make my secondary schooling experience positive. Teachers – both Black and White – were allies and advocates.

After high school, I went to a predominantly White institution of higher learning. I chose that particular university because the admissions representatives gave me the warmest welcome and the most generous financial aid package. I excelled academically and socially in college. In addition to serving as an officer for the residence hall student government and writing for the campus newspaper, I joined what Du Bois (as referenced in Alridge, 2008) called a Talented Tenth organization: a historically Black public service sorority. Armed with this resume, there was no doubt that after graduation I would enter the ranks of the Black middle class. So, having been placed on the Talented Tenth track in middle school, I have remained on it into my adult life. It was this middle class perspective that occupied my thoughts as I designed and conducted this research project. Inevitably, this perspective influenced the questions I asked, my interpretation of the data, and the conclusions I drew.

In the following chapter, I discuss the literature published about African American teachers' experiences since the implementation of school integration and I identify gaps in the literature that I think my study – an investigation into the perceptions Black English teachers have of how they impact Black student achievement – can fill. In chapter three, I describe my theoretical framework: Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Next, I explain my methodology – Portraiture – as well as my specific data collection methods. I then present my findings in the form of poetic portraits (Childers, 2007; Hill, 2003, 2005; Schendel, 2009) and emergent themes (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Finally, in my conclusion, I discuss the implications this research project has for practice, research, policy, and theory.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter includes a discussion of the literature that has been published about Black teachers since 1970, when states actually started implementing the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas,* desegregation order (Irons, 2002). I cross-searched education-related databases, including Education Research Complete (EBSCO), ERIC, and JSTOR, for articles published from 1970 to the present using the following search terms: Black teachers, Black English teachers, African American teachers, and African American English teachers. I then narrowed my selections to articles that focused on Black teachers' experiences and perspectives. I also consulted books written specifically about Black teachers, such as Michele Foster's (1997) *Black Teachers on Teaching* and Jacqueline Jordan Irvine's (2002) *In Search of Wholeness: African American Teachers and Their Culturally Specific Classroom Practices.* Using the reference lists in these books, I identified additional publications centered on Black teachers' experiences and perspectives. Using the same search terms listed above, I also searched all of the National Council of Teachers of English journals written for practicing teachers and English education scholars.

In the following sections, I discuss the ways the *Brown* ruling negatively impacted Black teachers, the scholarship about Black teachers' roles, experiences, and perspectives in newly integrated and predominantly White settings, and the perspectives of Black teachers on Black student achievement.

2.1: The Impact of Brown vs. Board of Education *on Black Teachers at Large*

Even in the 21st century, many scholars are still reflecting on and analyzing the impact and unintended consequences *Brown* had on Black teachers, Black students, and the Black community (Fairclough, 2004; Milner & Howard, 2004; Walker, 2009). Thus, a discussion of Black teachers' experiences post-*Brown* must begin with a discussion of the historic *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* (1954) desegregation court case, as the experiences of Black teachers in American schools have been shaped by this decision.

In 1954, lawyers employed by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) successfully argued the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, case that declared segregated schools unconstitutional and ordered that all schools integrate their staffs and student bodies. Many education leaders, scholars, and historians have questioned whether this court decision accomplished its supporters intended goal of equal educational opportunities for all students regardless of racial group, some even suggesting that desegregation did more harm than good to Black students and Black teachers (Foster, 1993; Fultz, 2004; Walker, 2009), mainly because it led to the drastic decline in the number of employed Black teachers, as well as to the decline in the status of Black teachers in the eyes of Black students and parents (Milner & Howard, 2004; Fairclough, 2007). Moreover, research indicates that Black teachers' hostile experiences in integrated and predominantly White settings hurt their professional and personal self-esteem (Fairclough, 2007; Milner & Howard, 2004).

2.2: The Decline in the Number of Black Teachers

With the exception of a few early dissenter-scholars such as Du Bois (1935), it was not until the 1990s that scholars began to delve into the possibility that desegregation did more harm than good to the Black community. Black activists were hesitant to critique the implementation and consequences of *Brown* because of the extraordinary efforts of the Black community and civil rights activists to achieve school desegregation (V.M. MacDonald, personal communication, February 1, 2008). Hudson and Holmes (1994) argue that the way in which racist policy makers carried out the *Brown* desegregation order caused teaching to become nearly a lost career for African Americans. The way it was implemented implied that the White school system (particularly its teachers) was better than the Black system and that the Black system had no value and thus could be expunged in the quest of integrated schooling (Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Walker, 2009). Desegregation led to the closing of Black schools and the laying off and dismissal of thousands of Black teachers, who were denied jobs in White schools (Cecelski, 1994; Foster, 1993; Fultz, 2004). Within 10 years of the *Brown* decision, 38,000 teachers had lost their jobs in the Southern and Border States (Ethridge, 1979). Throughout the country, between 1971 and 1986, the percentage of Black teachers decreased from 8.1 to 6.9 percent (Foster, 1993), and this percentage continued to contract into the 1990s (Jackson, 1992; King, 1993) and even into the 21st century (Berry, 2005; Milner & Howard, 2004). Since desegregation, the numbers of Black teachers have continued to decline (Fultz, 2004). The Black educator has even been called an endangered species (Cole, 1986).

Partly as a result of *Brown* and the consequential loss of teaching jobs for Black teachers, the number of Black college students majoring in education dropped.

Between 1975 and 1985, the number of Black students majoring in education declined by 66%, devastating the numbers of Black teachers produced during that time period. In addition to decreasing numbers of students majoring in education, there are many other reasons cited as to why the numbers of Black teachers have continued to decline over the decades: prospective Black teachers cannot pass certification tests; there are more lucrative job options for Black people, jobs that pay more and are more prestigious than teaching (Berry, 2005; Fultz, 2004; Irvine, 1988), and college attendance rates in general among Black students has decreased (Irvine, 1988). Recent statistics indicate that the percentage of newly-hired Black teachers in the United States has declined from 8.3% in 2000 to 5.6% in 2008 (NCES, 2010).

2.3: The Decline in the Status of Black Teachers

In addition to causing a decline in the number of Black teachers, the way *Brown* was implemented also hurt the status of the Black teacher and the Black teacher's relationship with Black parents, students, and other Black teachers themselves (Fairclough, 2004; Foster, 1993; Milner & Howard, 2004). Prior to desegregation, the Black teacher was honored, revered, and held to high esteem in the Black community (Foster, 1993; Milner & Howard, 2004; Walker, 1996, 2001, 2004). After desegregation, Black teachers lost their designation as competent authority figures in the eyes of Black students, as did Black principals, who were demoted to assistant principals at integrated formerly all White schools, where their primary responsibility was to discipline Black boys (Walker, 2009). In pre-*Brown* segregated schools, Black teachers were more than teachers, they were respected community members (Foster, 1993; Milner & Howard, 2004; Walker, 1996, 2001,

2004). With the dismantling of Black schools, that crucial link between school and the Black community was severed (Fairclough, 2007; Foster, 1993; Milner & Howard, 2004; Walker, 2009).

2.4: Perspectives and Experiences of Black Teachers in Integrated Schools

While society at-large celebrates *Brown* as a treasured civil rights victory for Black people, Dingus (2006) discovered African American teachers' counter-stories to this dominant narrative. In her study, teachers reported that it was difficult for children to transition to new integrated settings. One said, "I think there should have been a little more preparation for both kids and the teachers" (Dingus, 2006, p. 225). Some teachers, such as the one described in Dingus's (2006) study, were conflicted about integration, with some Black teachers supporting it and others resisting it. Some Black parents did not embrace Black teachers who supported integration, and thus, such Black teachers were seen as traitors to the race. Usually, the teachers who supported integration were the ones who were either chosen to work in newly integrated schools or who had family members who were selected (Dingus, 2006).

The process of integrating the staffs of formerly all Black and all White schools was called a "switch over" (Madsen & Hollins, 2000), a practice about which Black teachers were less than enthusiastic: "The intent was that *willing* European American teachers would voluntarily teach in schools where the majority of students were African American and *qualified* African American teachers would be transferred to schools that were being desegregated" (p. 6, emphasis added). Black teachers were recruited to teach the "undesirable" (p. 129) students or to coach sports teams (Foster,

1990) and White teachers were often employed to teach higher level math and science courses (Fordham, 1996). By the 1970s, White Americans replaced Black teachers as the majority in predominantly Black schools but by the 1980s, Black teachers were being recruited for positions in both Black and White schools. Black teachers continued to face racism in their new schools, now experiencing racism in school systems in which Black *students*, rather than structural racism, were considered the problem (Foster, 1990). School integration came about slowly. Even up to the 1960s, no meaningful integration had taken place. Teachers who applied for jobs in northern White schools found that their applications would mysteriously disappear, with school officials claiming they never knew about the Black teachers' applications (Foster, 1997). Some schools, such as those in cities like Boston and St. Louis, integrated as late as 1974.

Black teachers chosen to integrate White staffs were faced with professional development activities in which "experts told White teachers how to get along with the Black child" (Foster, 1997, p. 7) but that gave no time or attention to how the Black teacher was to interact with the White students (Foster, 1997). In the North, Black teachers were relegated to schools with few to no White people. And when they entered White schools, they were not permitted to teach certain children and certain levels. In one case, a Black teacher was not given any students at all, and just stayed in a room and did nothing all day (Foster, 1990).

In many *de jure*-segregated schools, Black teachers taught Black students more than content; they taught them racial pride (Foster, 1990, 1993, 1997; Irvine, 1989, 2002; Walker, 2000, 2001) and approached teaching as a political act motivated

by the antiracist struggle (Dixson, 2003; hooks, 1994). On the other hand, in several integrated schools, some middle class Black teachers who embraced dominant cultural values that privileged a White middle class way of life held low expectations for Black students (Fordham, 1996; Foster, 1993). Additionally, in integrated schools, Black teachers witnessed and encountered racism by White teachers and school officials. Black teachers perceived that White teachers had low expectations for and were prejudiced against Black students (Foster, 1997). Also, some Black teachers perceived school officials as seeing Black teachers as nothing but "glorified students" (Foster, 1990, p. 131) and were thought to be ill-qualified to teach White children. Lighter-skinned Blacks were chosen over darker skinned Blacks to take positions in White schools, and in those schools, Blacks taught lower level classes if they taught at all (Foster, 1990; Milner & Howard, 2004). As a result, some Black teachers favored lighter-skinned students. Thus, contrary to the aims of *Brown*, many Black students were more alienated and made to feel more inferior in integrated schools (Foster, 1994; hooks, 1994), where they were separated from what one teacher in Foster's (1993) study called their "salvation" – the Black teacher. Even when Black teachers still taught Black students in integrated schools, they could not engage with them the way they had in segregated schools. Foster (1990) observed that,

> [Teachers] reason that desegregation has sharply curtailed African-American teachers' ability to talk with African-American students, in terms they understand, about the personal value, the collective power, and the political consequences of choosing academic achievement. As a result, they contend not only that desegregation has weakened their solidarity with Black students,

> but that desegregation has also limited their ability to engage in critical dialogue with African-American students, dialogue necessary to engage students in their own learning. (Foster, 1990, p. 133)

As a result of the integrated settings, African American teachers' voices were diminished in the education of Black students, a fact that bothered many Black teachers (Fairclough, 2004; Foster, 1990, 1997; Walker, 2009).

2.5: Perspectives and Experiences of Black Teachers in Predominantly White Schools

Dealing with what Du Bois termed "the color line" and battling internal and external "double-consciousness" (Du Bois, 1903a) pressures characterized Black teachers' experiences in predominantly White schools. They often found themselves either inclined to, or pressured to, perform a balancing act to meet the expectations of both White and Black cultures. Madsen and Hollins (2000) is one of the few contemporary studies that focuses solely on exploring the challenges Black teachers have faced in predominantly White settings at the dawn of the new millennium; therefore, I discuss this study in great depth, as it is most relevant to contemporary times. In the Madsen and Hollins (2000) article, the authors discuss the influence of the culture of power (Delpit, 1995/2006) on school organizational culture and particularly that the rules of the culture are established by White America. European culture, as defined by Fordham (1996), is based on competiveness, while Black culture is more community-oriented. It is in such cases that teachers had to become cultural translators (Irvine, 1989) for students. Teachers in Madsen and Hollins's (2000) study reported difficulty fitting into the school culture, experiencing the pressure to "meet the district's image of 'their kind of Negro'" (p. 15), one who not

only subscribes to the norms of the school's European organizational culture, but who "measures up to an idealized model of majority group values and behavior" (p. 15). The authors describe the tensions that existed between Black teachers as a result of this pressure:

> Jane and Shelly from Common Elementary School were the most concerned about how to "play the game" or be "their kind of Negro" to maintain their positions at the school. They were quite vocal about the need to play a passive role and downplay "Black pride stuff." In essence, these African American teachers felt they had to conceal their own cultural identity to protect themselves from the negative judgments of their peers. (p. 15)

Other teachers in Madsen and Hollins's (2000) study chose never to conform to the dominant culture's expectations of them as Black teachers: "Pam was the most vocal about her relationships with the European American teachers. She chose not to compromise her cultural identity to conform to the norms at the school. Consequently, she had many conflicts with her colleagues" (p 16). Even though Black teachers in this study expressed different levels of conformity, the authors noted that they all had to be "bi-cultural" in order to be successful in a predominantly White organizational culture.

Madsen and Hollins (2000) also found that Black teachers in predominantly White settings felt excluded from White cliques and organizational clubs, reporting not being invited to certain gatherings and events. Teachers also reported the perception of low expectations and questioning of their competence by White parents

and colleagues, and an avoidance by school administrators to acknowledge and address the racial overtones that accompanied such occurrences. Teachers in this study said White teachers often felt threatened when Black teachers performed well and would even attempt to sabotage their work. This caused Black teachers to put extra effort into performing exceptionally well in an effort to outperform their White peers, even though they received little recognition for the efforts from other colleagues.

Black teachers in predominantly White settings must contend with the pressure of being the resident Black expert (Madsen & Hollins, 2000), often finding themselves "pigeonholed" into experiences in which African American knowledge or knowledge of other minorities is needed (p. 21). Teachers expressed disgust that even though they were to be the Black expert, they were not expected to do anything extra special for Black children (Madsen & Hollins, 2000). Because of this color-infused lens through which Black teachers perceived Whites saw them, Black teachers felt self-conscious about eating lunch or congregating with other Black teachers. The researchers analyzed this occurrence as an attempt to divide the Black teachers:

> At Common Elementary School, the European American teachers attempted to dissolve the strong bond among the African American teachers. Both Shelly and Jane described the discomfort their European American colleagues displayed when these teachers were "having too much fun" together. (p. 21)

The challenges of teaching in predominantly White schools were emotionally taxing for African American teachers (Foster, 1991; Madsen & Hollins, 2000). They often experienced battle fatigue and discouragement, causing them to shut down and remain silent on issues concerning racism, so as not to be seen as the Black teacher rabble-rouser, but this silence hurt their confidence and crushed their spirits. As defense mechanisms, they used spirituality, consistent interaction with the Black community, and isolation from White peers when possible (Madsen & Hollins, 2000).

Absent from the general discussion of Black teachers are accounts of their experiences in de facto-segregated schools, even though an increasing number of scholars are recognizing the importance of researching and theorizing about how the rapid resegregation of schools that has occurred over the last three decades has devastated the equitable educational opportunities activists and parents had hoped *Brown* would secure for Black students (Horsford, 2011; Tatum, 2007, 2010). In an effort to capture these important perspectives, I have purposely chosen to include in this study the perspectives of teachers who teach in predominantly Black schools.

2.6: Black Teachers' Perspectives and Roles

Prior to Michele Foster's (1997) extensive life-history research on a 16-member contingent of Black teachers, the experiences of Black teachers, from their own perspectives, had been largely ignored in the literature (Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Foster, 1997; Irvine, 2002). Foster's data collection began in 1988 and she has published several accounts and analyses of these data, the most referenced being her culminating book, *Black Teachers on Teaching* (1997). She has explored and analyzed the politics of race from Black teachers' perspectives (1990), the

educational philosophies of Black female teachers (1993), as well as the views (1994), lives (1991) practice, and pedagogy (1991,1995) of exemplary Black teachers. Her work has been cited or discussed in nearly all subsequent publications on Black teachers, as has the work of Irvine, who has theorized extensively about the disappearances of Black teachers (Irvine, 1988) as well as their teaching practices and philosophies (Irvine, 1989, 1999, 2002), especially in relation to their culture.

2.6.1: More than Role Models and Othermothers: Black Teachers as Mentors & Advocates

The general consensus in the published research on Black teachers is that Black teachers are more than teachers of content and that the saliency of their cultural background to their role as teacher is often a major part of their teaching success, particularly when teaching majority Black student populations. Black teachers have been described as saviors and othermothers (Foster, 1993), cultural translators and intercessors (Irvine, 1989), healers (Dixson & Dingus, 2008), activists (Dixson, 2003) and community workers (Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Foster, 1993). In all of these cases, teachers' cultural experiences as Black Americans and their ability to relate to and inspire Black children by employing an "ethic of caring" (Patterson et al., 2011; Walker, 2004; Ware, 2002) have been central to their practice. Most research strives to interpret Black teachers' experiences through some aspect of these notions of culture and caring or that of being more than a teacher of content. There also exist studies in which teaching is portrayed as spiritual work for Black teachers (Dingus, 2008; Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Irvine, 2002).

2.6.2: Mentorship and Racial Solidarity with Black Students

African American teachers have long been described as racial role models for Black students. However, research has shown that Black teachers are much more than role models; they are mentors (Irvine, 1989). Black teachers did serve role model functions pre-*Brown*, when schools were segregated and teachers were seen as familial and celebrity role models, and provided racial uplift to Black students, seeing an investment in Black students as an investment in the Black community at large. These circumstances did not always continue after desegregation, however (Irvine, 1989). Irvine argued that we need more teacher mentors: "Mentors are advocate teachers who help Black students manipulate the school's culture, which is often contradictory and antithetical to their own" (Irvine, 1989, p. 53). She continued:

> The distinction between role models and mentors implies that minority children need minority teachers who are school mentors and school advocates. Minority students need minority teachers who are willing to question and defy rules and regulations that are not in the best interest of their students. (Irvine, 1989, p. 54)

Black teachers report this mentor role as a cherished duty and also as a burden (Dickar, 2008). Dickar found that Black students discussed race openly with Black teachers, but not at all with Whites, and that Black teachers and students felt they should have a sense of solidarity with one another because of their race. However, some teachers' racial and cultural solidarity were questioned because of their use of standard English or other mainstream markers (Dickar, 2008; Maylor, 2009). Still, Black teachers found themselves having to intervene to diffuse conflicts between Black students and White teachers (Dickar, 2008) and witnessing covert and overt

school practices designed to negatively affect Black students (Irvine, 1988). It is also important to note the assertions of scholars who say Black teachers should not only be categorized as role models for Black students, but rather for all students (Williams, Graham, McCary-Henderson & Floyd, 2009) and that African American teachers are more adept at understanding issues of equity, culturally relevant pedagogy, and developing moral character of all students (Howard, 2001).

Do Black teachers want to be role models?

Scholars in London, England, who also research experiences of Black teachers, question whether or not Black teachers *desire* to be role models and whether or not students see them as role models (Maylor, 2009). These scholars found that Black children in London did not relate to their Black teachers. Fordham (1996) found something similar in her study of an inner-city predominantly Black school in Washington D.C. She found that there was a significant spatial gulf between middle class Black teachers and urban Black youth, a gulf that went unacknowledged by adults in the school. Furthermore, she found that Black teachers in her study were torn between affirming their own and their students' racial identities and embracing the middle class White identity associated with educational and career success. One of the teachers in Dickar's (2008) study described this tension as "being caught in the crossfire;" that is, feeling an allegiance to students because of their shared race and, at the same time, an accountability to school officials as representatives of the professional teaching community. A teacher in Madsen and Hollins's (2000) study expressed similar concerns, saying that "by assuming an advocate role for her students, her relationship with her colleagues was jeopardized" (p. 19). Maylor

(2009) contests the notion of race-matching in student-teacher mentorships, asserting that,

> ethnic (and gender) "matching" in teaching is too simplistic an approach as it does not take into account Black pupils' perception of or reaction to Black teachers, and/or Black teachers' perception of the concept of role modeling and their experience of role modeling with Black pupils. (p. 17)

Teachers in Maylor's study rejected the role of mentors and were concerned more with simply ensuring quality teachers were providing quality teaching.

2.8: Mentoring Cohorts among Black Teachers

Not only were Black teachers mentors to students, but they were mentors to other Black teachers. Recent work has focused on mentoring cohorts amongst Black teachers, particularly as it relates to intergenerational families of women teachers (Dingus, 2008; Dixson & Dingus, 2008). These cohorts are crucial to the retention of Black teachers as they offer a space for Black teachers to discuss racism, and to discuss the low expectations White teachers held for Black students (Dingus, 2008). Dingus's (2008) study, which investigates Black teachers' participation in mentoring networks amongst Black women within the same family, found that some Black teachers participate in culturally-based mentoring relationships. Her study explored the answers to three relevant questions regarding Black teachers' experiences with mentoring: Why do women participate in mentoring networks? How does mentoring act as a buffer against racism? How do mentoring networks shape Black teachers' professional ideas? She concluded that culturally-based mentorships provide

mentoring without the expense of one's racial identity; that is, race-based mentoring, rather than mentoring for conformity. She found that Black women's beliefs about student abilities, their teaching philosophies and pedagogical practices differed from White teachers, in that the philosophy underlying their practice includes self-love, cultural pride, spirituality, connections, history and acceptance of self. For these Black women, mentoring involved more than learning the technicalities of teaching or the ins and outs of the school culture with no attention to ethnic, cultural, or gender diversity; rather, mentoring for them was reciprocal and contextual, considering factors of equity, race, gender, and class.

Black teachers joined mentoring networks out of tradition and necessity. Mentoring networks are rooted in shared cultural values and trust. In these networks, there is an environment of camaraderie instead of competition, a space in which Black teachers can vent frustrations with systemic and individual racism. Also in these networks Black teachers are able to model professionalism and encourage other Black teachers to take on leadership roles (Dingus, 2008).

2.9: Black Teachers' Perspectives on Black Student Underachievement

Most research findings indicate that Black teachers collectively share an emancipatory pedagogy and philosophy about teaching (Foster, 1990; Irvine, 2002; Lynn, Johnson, and Hassan, 1999), one in which they play the roles of mentors and advocates (Foster, 1993; Irvine, 1989) for students. A few studies, however, including the pilot study I conducted myself, contradict the general consensus in the Black teacher literature that Black teachers are generally successful with Black students in their roles as "othermothers" (Foster, 1993; Irvine, 2002) and "role

models" (1989). I will discuss these divergent cases at length, as they further justify the need for inquiry into the perception Black teachers have of their impact on Black student achievement.

In a recent study, a team of researchers found that Black teachers lack confidence about Black students' abilities to learn. They found that most of the teachers in the study adopted a deficit view of Black student achievement, blaming underachievement on the students themselves, the community, and the parents (Lynn, et al. 2010). These findings echo the results of Fordham's (1996) long-term ethnographic study of students and teachers in a predominantly Black high school in Washington D.C. in which teachers viewed underachieving African American students as academically, socially, and morally inadequate, and ultimately traitors to the Black community. She concluded that African American teachers in her study recognized a psychological and spatial gulf between themselves and the students whom they were teaching. Fordham described this knowledge as "one of the best-kept secrets at the school, in that virtually no one publicly acknowledges his or her alienation and isolation from the vast majority of the students they teach" (p. 234).

Fordham's summation, I believe, is a sobering analysis of the disconnect that appears to be happening between many Black teachers and their Black students since the civil rights period[5]. Fordham has articulated what teachers in her study – and I suspect Black teachers in general – are not willing (or perhaps capable) of admitting – that something is missing with the connection between Black students and their Black

[5] I am aware that some Black scholars (see Horvat & O'Connor, 2006) have critiqued the "acting White" theory Fordham asserted with Ogbu (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986); however, Fordham's work at Capitol High moved beyond the "acting White" theory to a broader, more class-based analysis of Black student achievement, one I find relevant to this dissertation project.

teachers. I saw this clearly in a pilot study I conducted of an African American English teacher. I provide an excerpt from my field notes to illustrate the connection:

> I became intrigued, though, when another class of students came in, one I was not scheduled to observe but one that seized my attention, causing me to continue jotting down a few observation notes. I was torn as to whether I should spend time observing the teacher in this class, since this was not the class we had discussed and she was not conducting a writing lesson. I found myself so intrigued that I wondered if I needed to change my research focus. Why was I so interested in this group of comprehensive-level, disengaged Black and Latino youngsters in a way that I was not for the mostly White honors students? Why did Ms. Day's (pseudonym) demeanor change so dramatically when this group came in? In previous discussions, she had shared with me her frustration, disbelief and disappointment with this class's lack of engagement, but seeing her feelings depicted in her interactions with these students affected me. While she stood erect in the honors class, she sat looking deflated in this one. I found myself wondering about the perceptions these Black students had of their Black teacher. What existed in the air between these ethnic comrades? Should there be something different, something more, than what would exist between them and a White teacher? How did they feel about looking at someone who shared their race? Out of approximately 20 students, only two looked excited to be there. All

> the others were lost in some elusive haze of nothingness. (McLin fieldnotes, October, 15, 2009)

The prevailing accounts of the relationships between African American teachers and their African American students, in which the teachers assume the roles of mentor, role model, or cultural translator do not seem to be represented in this classroom. Was Ms. Day the "role model" (Foster, 1993) that Black teachers have been depicted as in the literature or was she one of the "book-Black Blacks[6]" described in Fordham's (1996)? Did the students feel that their middle class Black teacher "could not relate to Black people like [them]?" (Maylor, 2009). In an interview, Ms. Day, like many of the teachers from Foster's study (1991, 1997), self-reported that she felt a responsibility to the Black students in her classes. Indeed she described times in which she felt compelled to serve as an advocate for students, helping them "manipulate the school's culture, which is often contradictory and antithetical to their own" (Irvine, 1989, p. 53). By her account, in order to ensure her Black students were given access to opportunities for growth and advancement, she was willing to be the advocate Irvine (1989) called for, one "willing to question and defy rules and regulations that are not in the best interest of their students" (p. 54). Again, these positions and propensities were self-reported by the teacher in an interview. The excerpt noted above does not depict a teacher-student relationship that would support these claims. Rather, it more closely supports the more disconnected teacher-student relationship depicted in Fordham's (1996) and Lynn et al.'s (2010) studies, research

[6] Fordham (1996) uses the term book-Black Blacks to describe how educated African Americans who have achieved economic or professional success are perceived by the larger African American community as an "other" who has "passed over" (p. 347) from being an authentic Black person to being an outsider with no true sense of what it means to be Black.

that does not reflect the more dominant "Black teacher as savior" narrative in the Black teacher literature.

The general consensus in the published research on Black teachers is that Black teachers are more than teachers of content and that the saliency of their cultural background to their role as teacher is often a major part of their teaching success, particularly when teaching majority Black student populations. Black teachers have been described as saviors and othermothers (Foster, 1993), cultural translators and intercessors (Irvine, 1989), healers (Dixson & Dingus, 2008), activists (Dixson, 2003) and community workers (Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Foster, 1993). In all of these cases, teachers' cultural experiences as Black Americans and their ability to relate to and inspire Black children by employing an "ethic of caring" (Patterson et al., 2011; Walker, 1996; Ware, 2002) have been central to their practice. Recognizing both the dominant "culture-as-plus" narrative and the less-developed cultural-deficit literature, I designed this dissertation project to gain deeper insights into Black teachers' perceptions of how they impact Black student achievement.

In chapters three and four, I describe the theoretical framework and methodology that guided my approach to this research project.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

3.1: Critical Race Theory

My decision to centralize the significance of race by focusing my study singularly on African American English teachers stems first from my own personal and professional experiences with racial dilemmas as a former African American secondary-level English teacher. During my first few years teaching 7th grade language arts, I suffered from stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995), or a fear of conformity to a negative stereotype associated with my racial identity; more specifically, because of my race, I doubted my ability to teach the standard American English element of writing. Although I had attained a high school diploma and a college degree, I lacked confidence in my ability to speak and write properly. This lack of confidence stemmed from the implicit and explicit messages I received in my formative years about markers of intelligence, in particular that speaking like a White person denoted intelligence and speaking like a Black person suggested just the opposite. This linguistic part of my racial identity undermined my teaching confidence and competence, sending me to graduate school to learn about how the psychological effects of racialization and racism impact how teachers teach (and how students learn) in a race-conscious society. As a graduate student, I learned about the salience of race in people of color's lived experiences (e.g., Lopez, 2003; Perry, Steele & Hilliard, 2003), particularly how their racialized (Lopez, 2003) experiences (i.e., how they experience life as raced persons) influence not only their perceptions of themselves but also their perceptions of their ability to achieve academically and

professionally. My lived experiences with this reality as a Black student and teacher have caused me to embrace a Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) approach to studying educational issues, an approach that is rooted in the beliefs that race and racism are endemic to society, that ineffective civil rights laws should be revisited, and that voices of people of color are essential to the discussion.

Intersectionality theorists (see, for example, Collins, 2000 or Dill & Zambrana, 2009) object to isolating race from other elements of lived reality, such as gender, sexuality, or ability, arguing that all of these lived experiences are interconnected. I do not contest this assertion, but I argue that in a country whose leaders used the principle of Manifest Destiny[7] (Horsman,1981) to justify its expansion and development, a country led by people who colonized, imprisoned, and destroyed cultures of people – because they were not White – and a country in which people of color are grossly underrepresented in political, business, and educational leadership roles, that in such a country using race as the central framework for studying educational issues is logical and imperative. In the following section, I define CRT and describe its main tenets. Following that section, I describe how scholars have used CRT to prompt race-centered reflection amongst teachers; I then describe how I will use it in this study.

3.1.1: Defining Critical Race Theory

While Critical Race Theory's origin was in the legal field, for nearly 17 years it has been building an extended family in the field of education. So, in

[7] The belief in the God-given cultural and racial superiority of White settlers as justification for westward expansion and continental dominance and (Horsman, 1981; Spring, 1994).

acknowledging the strong foundation that has been laid in education, in this review, I will forgo the traditional extensive CRT legal review, and will instead provide a synthesis of the fundamental principles of the legal field's critical race theory that I have constructed from the explanations of education theorists. In most accounts (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn, 2002; Morris, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) Critical Race Theory,

- is grounded in a belief in the intersectionality of race with other forms of subordination
- is informed by and situated in an interdisciplinary context
- is grounded in a belief in the social construction of race
- privileges the narratives of people of color
- challenges dominant ideologies of colorblindness and neutrality
- is rooted in the belief that the historic nature of race and racism is an endemic and permanent part of society
- exposes and challenges White privilege.

This list will serve as a review of the foundational legal tenets of CRT, as well as an introduction to education's extension of the theory. Because Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) are credited with producing the seminal CRT work in education "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education," I use their conceptualization as the foundational definition of education's critical race theory.

3.1.2: Critical Race Theory in Education

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), recognizing the salience of race in American society and the failure of the reform movement of multicultural education to address the "growing tensions between and among various groups who gather under the umbrella of multiculturalism" (p.61), called for an analytic framework that put race front and center in educational scholarship, arguing that thus far, theorists had failed to theorize race in its relationship to education. Indeed, the call of 1995 was for real, substantive change in education, not just superficial, "can't we all just get along," colorblind, race-neutral paradigms that appease the social and political agendas of the dominant group. Like Tatum (2007), Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) wanted to talk about race. Their call was about "attempting to uncover or decipher the social-structural and cultural significance of race in education" (p.50) in an effort to eliminate the lingering educational inequities caused by racism. The basis of their call rested in the argument that racism was deeply ingrained in American life, that Whiteness, when viewed as property, has valuable rights and privileges that Blackness does not, and that class and gender-based explanations are not powerful enough to explain all of the differences in school experiences and performance for Black students. In their view, a critical race theory for education would require:

1. A belief that racism is endemic to society;
2. A reinterpretation of ineffective civil rights law;
3. The presence of voices of color.

These three tenets create a theoretical framework appropriate for studying Black teachers' perspectives of their impact on Black student achievement because they provide a framework that foregrounds Black teachers' voices and experiences,

assumes that the endemic nature of race and racism influence teachers' perspectives, and illuminates ineffective civil rights laws that have impacted their experiences.

3.1.3: Critical Race Theory: An Effective Framework for Studying Black Teachers

Provides Professional Space for Race Talk

Critical Race Theory (CRT) gives Black researchers and teachers an academic language and theoretical grounding for discussing what before may have only been discussed in the form of gripes and complaints about "the system" or "the man" or "White folks." Using CRT as a framework for research brings such conversations out into the open for discussion in a constructive context in which race-talk is allowed and valued. Researchers have found that when given the space and impetus to air thoughts and concerns about race, teachers of color have much to say. I provide a few examples of studies to illustrate.

Morris (2001) found that Black educators' reflections on a 1983 school desegregation ruling in St. Louis reflected CRT perspectives even though he did not intentionally apply the framework when he collected the data. During analysis, however, he realized his choice of qualitative methods and his decision to study Black teachers were in line with CRT's emphasis on valuing the voices of teachers of color and that Black teachers were eager to discuss how race and racism had affected the implementation of the St. Louis desegregation plan.

Given Morris's account of the racially-hostile time period in which the ruling took place and the knowledge that many Black teachers' jobs were threatened or terminated when schools were desegregated (Foster, 1993; Fultz, 2004), it is probably

accurate to say that prior to Morris, few researchers had probably approached Black teachers to discover their views on how racism was shaping the debates surrounding desegregation. According to Morris, most teachers experienced the "push-pull" syndrome (Smitherman, 1977, as cited in Zeigler & Osinubi, 2002) when it came to desegregation. He noted that, "on one hand, they were compelled to support efforts aimed at eradicating legalized segregation in public schools and the broader society," but on the other hand, "many realized that Black children would encounter modified and covert acts of racism in schools that were integrated in student populations only, but not in teacher personnel, curricula, and power arrangement" (p.579). Morris's race-centered focus on how the desegregation plan specifically impacted African American students caused teachers to take an enthusiastic and personal interest in the interviews and were eager to tell their stories, which revealed desegregation narratives counter to conventional wisdom's story of *Brown* as a positive development for all in American society. Dingus (2006), who also investigated the desegregation stories of Black teachers, discovered similar counter-stories.

Personal Voices

The element of CRT that most strongly encourages race reflection amongst teachers is its emphasis on the lived experiences and stories of teachers of color. This aspect is based on the belief that reality is socially constructed (Banks, 1995) and that "the voices of people of color are required for a complete analysis of the education system" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 58). As stated earlier, these CRT voices are found in the form of personal stories, often called counter-stories or narratives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). When researchers use voices of people of color as a

central part of their research design, there is greater opportunity for substantive discussions in which race is central to the conversation. Lynn's work (1999, 2002) illustrates this point.

Using CRT as a framework, Lynn (1999) studied the attitudes, beliefs and practices of Black teachers whom he viewed as embracing CRT principles in their teaching. Lynn chose teachers "who expressed a commitment to issues of social justice and had a fairly well-defined sense of political, social, and ethnic/racial identity" (p. 612). It is problematic, however, that Lynn's study is based on an assumption that teachers of color already possessed the knowledge, skills, and passion necessary to enact critical race pedagogy (Lynn, 1999). Instead of studying teachers to determine how CRT could help them, he studied the teachers to find out how their practices could help exemplify a critical race theory approach. Granted, Lynn chose his teachers based on their social justice interest and demonstrated involvement; still, assuming that these teachers are free from the psychological shackles of racism that critical race theory says permeates our society is a troubling assumption. My study does not rest on such an assumption; rather, my study is grounded in the belief that everyone – even (especially) African American people – have internalized – often unconsciously – the racist stereotypes, attitudes, and systems of behavior that are embedded in the fabric of the United States society. Like Tatum (2007), I argue for sincere race-reflection that "applies to all teachers. We cannot assume teachers of color are confident in their abilities to talk about these issues … none of us can teach what we haven't learned ourselves" (p. 38).

3.1.4: Critical Race Theory and This Study

The core elements of CRT in education (race as endemic to society; importance of including voices of color; ineffective civil rights law) provided the theoretical context that drove my methodological decisions and served as a backdrop for my study on Black English teachers. My focus on Black teachers' perceptions and self-reflections stems from the CRT principle that emphasizes the importance of including the voices of people of color in discussions of educational issues. CRT's challenge of dominant ideologies is reflected in my study's rejection of the traditional explanations for the minority achievement gap and its embracing of the alternate conceptualization of the "opportunity-to-learn" gap (Hilliard, 2003; Milner, 2010). Moreover, the underlying assumption embedded throughout my research design is that race and racism are endemic to American society and therefore endemic to discussions of educational achievement and underachievement – especially as it relates to marginalized groups such as African Americans. This assumption is evident in my choice to limit the participants to Black teachers and to limit the focus to their perspectives on the achievement of Black students. Additionally, although the study was not designed to interrogate Black student achievement directly, I constantly brought focus group discussions back to the topic at hand – the teacher's role in impacting *Black* student achievement. I privileged race as the most significant contextual aspect of the study.

CRT's emphasis on ineffective civil rights laws provided a vehicle for me to consider my study's findings in light of the negative unintended consequences of the country's most historic education-related civil rights ruling: *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954). In particular, this dissertation study considered

how that ruling impacts Black teachers' experiences with Black students in today's resegregated schools. I utilized the effects of the *Brown* decision as a central analytical lens in the discussion of this study's findings. Researchers and theorists have found that one of the most significant unintended consequences of the Brown decision was the loss of Black teachers and schools, a loss that led to the dismantling of a once closely-knit Black community (Fairclough, 2007; Foster, 1993; Fultz, 2004). Additionally, Black teachers who obtained positions in newly-integrated schools were no longer able to freely discuss issues of racial uplift and empowerment with Black students (Foster, 1993). In my analytical discussion and conclusions, I continue the discussion of the ways in which *Brown's implementation* may be continuing to negatively affecting Black students in today's resegregated schools.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Researcher as Artist-Bricoleur

"If the artist does not perfect a new vision in his process of doing, he acts mechanically and repeats some old model fixed like a blueprint in his mind"

- *John Dewey, Art as Experience, 1934, p. 50.*

The above quote precedes the introduction to the third edition of Corbin and Strauss's (2008) book on qualitative research. The authors argue that "qualitative researchers have a natural curiosity that leads them to study worlds that interest them" and that they "enjoy playing with words, making order out of seeming disorder, and thinking in terms of complex relationships" and that "for them, doing qualitative research is a challenge that brings the whole self into the process" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 13). Their description of the qualitative researcher identity and Dewey's claim about the artist's act of creating a new vision through the process resonate with my experiences conducting this dissertation research project.

When I designed this research project, I chose qualitative methods because I believed they would best answer my research question. Once I had developed the research plan, I began conducting the research "mechanically," trying my best to follow the steps of the research process with no deviation from the initial research plan. While I was open to being reflexive[8] within the already established research plan, I did not consider the possibility of changes to the *actual* plan. I had no plans of

[8] In this context, reflexive denotes an "in the moment" decision; not haphazard spontaneity, but, rather, the willingness to change and adjust as necessary. My research process exemplified this reflexive process.

charting a new vision methodologically. I saw myself only as a person conducting research using qualitative methods, not as a qualitative researcher. I did not recognize my qualitative researcher identity. As I now reflect on the journey I traveled in the research process, I understand on a deeper level and with more clarity that a qualitative researcher is not just one who uses qualitative data collection methods. I now understand, like Corbin & Strauss (2008) assert, that there are particular qualities that qualitative researchers embody:

- A humanistic bent
- Curiosity
- Creativity and imagination
- A sense of logic
- The ability to recognize diversity as well as regularity
- A willingness to take risks
- The ability to live with ambiguity
- The ability to work through problems in the field
- An acceptance of the self as a research instrument
- Trust in the self and the ability to see value in the work that is produced. (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 13)

Together, Corbin & Strauss's assertions about qualitative researchers and Dewey's statement about the artist as vision-creator depict the qualitative researcher as an artist-intellectual who is aware of and sensitive to herself as a researcher, drawn to the imaginative and creative, as well as the ordinary, in the research participants and in the research process; reflective and reflexive, bold and unafraid. These

characteristics reflect who I discovered myself to be through the course of this researcher project. I enacted a bricoleur, or quilt-making (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), type of methodological approach. Denzin and Lincoln (2008), referencing the ideas of Becker (1998), describe the bricoleur qualitative researcher as one who "uses the aesthetic and material tools of his or her craft, deploying whatever strategies, methods, and empirical materials are at hand. If the researcher needs to invent, or piece together new tools or techniques, he or she will do so. Choices regarding which interpretive practices to employ are not necessarily made in advance" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 5). Overall, my design decisions were made in advance; some, however, were unplanned, but necessary to overcome points of stall in the analysis process. For example, I struggled to represent research participants using prose, the traditional medium used to create portraits, so I reached for another literary technique and method of depicting research – poetry. I discuss this change in writing format in the discussion of my study's methodology.

For this dissertation project, I chose portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983) as the project's methodology. I was drawn particularly to the methodology's emphasis on context, voice, search for goodness, and the aesthetic whole (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). In the data analysis and representation stage, I extended the portraiture methodology to include poetic portraits (Childers, 2007; Hill, 2003, 2005; Schendel, 2009), a strategic choice employed to help me through a crisis of representation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) with regards to re-presenting the teachers in portraits[9]. These methodological choices resulted in my findings being represented in

[9] I discuss this crisis of representation and my process for overcoming it in the "Methods of Analysis" section of this chapter.

both poetry and prose, a montage of both composite poetic snap shots of teachers' perceptions and experiences and detailed elaborations of the data's emergent themes. Denzin & Lincoln (2008) capture the essence of my artist-bricoleur work:

> The product of the interpretive bricoleur's labor is a complex, quilt-like bricolage, a reflexive collage or montage – a set of fluid, interconnected images and representations. This interpretive structure is like a quilt, a performance text, a sequence of representations connecting the parts to the whole. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 8)

The portraiture methodology provided the freedom necessary to engage in this bricoleur work.

Portraiture

Featherstone (1989), as cited in Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005), referred to portraiture as a "people's" scholarship: "The power of portraiture lies in its explicitly humanistic impulse. It embraces both analytic rigor (a perspective that is distant, discerning, and skeptical) and community building (acts of intimacy and connection)" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 12). Research conducted using this methodology is not merely research conducted for research's sake; rather, it is research conducted with the humanity of the researcher, the research participants, and the associated community members in mind. It is a research tool designed to inspire individual *and* community reflection, introspection, and transformation. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005), the methodology's creator, argues that "the most powerful characteristic of portraiture is its ability to embrace contradictions, its ability to document the beautiful/ugly experiences that are so much a part of the texture of human development and social

relationships" (p. 9). When conducting research on the perspectives of marginalized groups of people (in the case of this study, African American English teachers) about problems (Black student underachievement), in their own community, a methodological framework such as portraiture, which attends to the diverse needs, complexities, and contradictions in the human experience, is fitting.

A uniquely humanistic and artistic methodology, portraiture embraces aesthetic representations of data, encourages a transformative, reciprocal research process; looks for the goodness in the data, provides a platform for marginalized voices (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), and has room for methodological extensions (Dixson, Chapman & Hill, 2005).

Appeal to the Aesthetic

Portraiture was created by sociologist Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983)[10] 30 years ago as a method of qualitative inquiry that would "combine systematic, empirical description with aesthetic expression" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 3). "The portraits are designed to capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences" (Lawerence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 3). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) argued that "because the subject being described is embodied in the descriptive writing, readers

[10] When Lawrence-Lightfoot first introduced the methodology with the publication of *The Good High School* (1983), there was much controversy in the social sciences research community surrounding whether or not portraiture was a true methodology that met high standards of scientific rigor (V.M. MacDonald, personal communication, October 23, 2012). Since then, Lawrence-Lightfoot has practiced and refined the methodology, and in 1997, with co-author Jessica Davis, she published a methodology volume that "describes the contours, scope, dimensions, and techniques of this genre as well as the limits, causalities, and constraints of this work" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 7). Numerous scholars, as noted in this manuscript, have embraced and utilized the methodology.

must attend to the aesthetic features of the narrative" (p. 28). Choosing to present the findings in an expressive, artistic way rather than only in a paradigmatic format opens the scholarship up to an audience beyond the academy and appeals to readers' intellect and emotions:

> The attempt is to move beyond [sic] academy's inner circle, to speak in a language that is not coded or exclusive, and to develop texts that will seduce the readers into thinking more deeply about issues that concern them. Portraitists write to inform and inspire readers." (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 10)

In creating an aesthetically whole text, the portraitist must attend heavily to context and voice (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Attending to historical, personal, and internal contexts[11] in the process of data collection and portrait creation facilitates the creation of a holistic and rich portrayal of the research subject. In portraiture, the historical context involves the journey, culture, and ideology of the actors, including the "subject's personal or institutional journey in which the action is situated among past objectives, current realizations, and visions of the future" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 70). For this study, the participants' historical context (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) was interrogated by inquiring about their educational life histories. The personal context involves "the researcher's perch and perspective"

[11] Internal context is the physical setting in which the action takes place. Internal context was not very salient for this study, because data collection did not occur in the participants' natural surroundings, with the exception of one interview. Conducting the research outside of the participants' natural surroundings minimized the importance of the physical setting's details with regards to portrait construction.

(Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 70), which I reveal in the poetic introductions of each teacher and in the dissertation's introduction.

Portraiture's emphasis on voice helped me create an aesthetically whole text (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The poetic portraits reflect portraiture's voice as witness, voice as preoccupation and interpretation, voice as autobiography, voice discerning other voices, and voice in dialogue (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Voice as Witness

Voice as witness involves the researcher stance as an outside observer. In my case, I was an indigenous outsider (Tillman, 2006) because I was an insider as an African American woman and former teacher who worked in the same school district as most of the research participants, but I was an outsider because of my status as a university researcher and no longer a practicing classroom teacher as were all of the participants. Thus, even as a participant observer, I witnessed the scene as if I were a distant third party, "sufficiently distanced from the action" and "far enough away to depict patterns that actors in the setting might not notice because of their involvement in the scene" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 87).

Voice as Autobiography

I also utilized portraiture's "voice as autobiography" element by incorporating my own historical context into the framing of the research project. In portraiture, "the researcher brings her own history - familial, cultural, ideological, and educational – to the inquiry. Her perspective, her questions, and her insights are inevitably shaped by these profound developmental and autobiographical experiences" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 95). I discuss how my own background and experiences

influenced my identification of the research problem and my conceptualization of the research project in this dissertation's introduction and conceptual framework.

Additionally, I naturally drew on my cultural knowledge and experiences as an African American as I engaged with the teachers, often using African American Vernacular English, as well as body language and expressions common in African American communities, such as incredulous stares, twisting of the lips, and call-and-response exchanges.

Voice as Interpretation

Portraiture's "voice as interpretation" denotes "the interpretive role of the portraitist," including "the researcher's attempts to make sense of the data" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 91). My voice of interpretation is present in the poetic portraits and in the emergent themes. In the portraits, I alternate between speaking in my third-person interpretive voice and the first-person voice of the teacher. The third-person voice is a window into my interpretive thinking about the data. My interpretive voice is more explicit in the emergent theme section as I explicitly make interpretive assertions about the data.

Voice as Preoccupation

The voice of preoccupation involves "the ways in which [the portraitist's] observations and her text are shaped by the assumptions she brings to the inquiry, reflecting her disciplinary background, theoretical perspectives, her intellectual interests, and her understanding of the relevant literature" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 93). I attended to the voice of preoccupation explicitly in the dissertation's introduction, where I discussed the scholarly literature and personal and professional experiences that occupied my thoughts prior to and during the research

process. This voice is also present in the conclusion, where I discuss the findings in relation to the literature I felt was most relevant. Additionally, my voice of preoccupation is also implicit in my creation of the teachers' portraits and in my emergent theme analysis, revealed in the points I chose to emphasize, highlight, and interrogate. Together, voice and context facilitated the development of aesthetically rich depictions of teachers' perceptions and experiences.

Voice Discerning Other Voices

Portraiture's "voice discerning other voices" is about how the portraitist listens *for* voice instead of just *to* voice: "When the portraitist listens for voice, she seeks it out, trying to capture its texture and cadence, exploring its meaning and transporting its sound and message into the text through carefully selected quotations" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 99). I attended carefully to voice in my creation of the poetic portraits, careful to illuminate repetitive refrains (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), statements that were repeated throughout the data collection process, and to include quotes that I felt best represented the meaning and tone present in the participants' delivery.

Voice in Dialogue

Voice in dialogue involves chronicling the relationship of researcher and research participant by making meaning of their voices in dialogue with each other (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Since the goal of my research process was to better understand the *teachers'* perceptions, I did not focus on emphasizing my voice in dialogue with their voices; however, I do depict the nature of our exchanges by including large excerpts from the transcripts and by highlighting moments of

significant dialogic meaning-making in some of the poetic portraits. For example, in Ms. Tan's poem, I describe the evolving nature of our researcher-researched relationship by pointing out when I started to address her as her first name. In Ms. X's poem, I point out how "she kept us laughing," which illustrates the communal, group-centered nature of our dialogue.

Transformative, Reciprocal Research Process

In addition to providing a structure for artistic display of research findings, portraiture also facilitates a transformative, reciprocal research process, in which both the researcher and the researched contribute to and benefit from the research process and results (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) describes this process and its benefits:

> Deepening the conversation and broadening the audience are not only acts of analysis and solidarity. They are also inevitably acts of intervention. In the process of creating portraits, we enter people's lives, build relationships, engage in discourse, make an imprint … and leave. We engage in acts (implicit and explicit) of social transformation, we create opportunities for dialogue, we pursue the silences, and in the process, we face ethical dilemmas and a great moral responsibility. This is provocative work that can disturb the natural rhythms of social reality and encounter. This is exciting work that can instigate positive and productive change. (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 12)

The focus group meetings became more than just meetings teachers attended as part of a research project. They became spaces the teachers came to, to vent, to listen, and to share (see Appendix M for a discussion of the changing nature of the focus group meetings). Their earnest engagement and enthusiasm suggested they had been longing for an opportunity to come together with other Black English teachers to discuss troubling issues and to share ideas that had worked for them. One of the teachers, Ms. Jocasta, wrote in her final journal entry that "perhaps there is a continuing need for Black teachers to interact more often." Another teacher, Ms. J, said, "I must say I have learned a lot about myself just going through the process. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of your project. I enjoyed the sessions and would love to work with you and the other ladies in the future" (Ms. J, personal communication, March 13, 2012). Ms. Kelly wrote in her final journal entry, "Thanks for the rich discussions!" The research process impacted another teacher, Ms. X, in such a way that she suggested another meeting in which I could share more about *my* personal experiences as a classroom teacher at Jefferson: "It was great to hang out with you, and maybe we can schedule another meeting in which you can tell me about your experience here at Jefferson" (Ms. X, personal communication, February 12, 2012). Ms. Tan once contacted me after all of the required meetings to tell me about how she had been reflecting on the nature of her relationships with both Black and White students. I, too, find myself feeling more empowered to carry out my research agenda because of the passion and sincerity these women brought to the project. I believe having a safe space to share their thoughts and feelings may have encouraged and strengthened these women to continue giving their all to their jobs as teachers.

Search for Goodness

I also chose portraiture because of its appeal to the "goodness" in the subjects and in the data (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). I must admit: disappointment, frustration, disbelief, confusion, and, in some ways, anger led me to investigate Black teachers' perceptions of their impact on Black student achievement. I was disturbed that so many Black students were underachieving, even when taught by Black teachers. I was perplexed as to why Black teachers were found not to be reflective about their own practice and instead blamed Black student underachievement on the students themselves, their parents, and their communities. I felt Black teachers needed to be rallied and reminded of the successes Black teachers often experienced with Black students before integration. I was not exactly poised to see the "good" in the data. Portraiture provided an analytical structure that helped modify my attitude toward my subject and my data, reminding me to look for the goodness while acknowledging that imperfections are always present – even in beauty (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Data were reflective of the goodness in the teachers' perceptions and experiences, goodness reflected both in their triumphs and struggles in their efforts to teach Black children.

Providing Space for Marginalized Voices

In addition to its embracing of the aesthetic and its emphasis on identifying goodness, portraiture, like Critical Race Theory (CRT), also involves giving voice to those whose voices are marginalized or overlooked. The voice of the African American English teacher from a discipline-centered perspective is missing in the English education literature. It is also scant in the Black teacher-literature as well,

especially at the secondary level. Additionally, the existing literature lacks discussions of Black English teachers' perceptions of their *personal* impact on Black student achievement, particularly as it relates to Black students who are underachieving. By pairing portraiture with CRT, I provided a context and space in which Black English teachers' voices could be privileged.

Portraiture in Practice

Sociologist Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) developed the portraiture methodology in response to her need for a "form of inquiry that might capture the complexity and aesthetic of human experience" (p. 5). Her first portrait captured the essence of school life for six high schools (1983). She continued to develop and refine the methodology, using it to unpack the stories of privileged middle class Black Americans (1994), to investigate how individuals manifest respect (2000), and to determine what was needed to help children succeed by studying the dynamics of parent teacher conferences (2003).

Educational researchers have embraced portraiture as a methodology useful for studying teachers' experiences and classroom life. Hill (2003, 2005) utilized portraiture to study the experiences of Black professors in positions at institutions of higher education. Dixson (2005), linking elements of jazz musicianship to the portrait development process, used portraiture to study the experiences of Black teachers in racially mixed educational settings. Chapman (2005) and Harding (2005) studied the instructional practices of White teachers in racially diverse urban classrooms, and Chapman (2007) examined success and failure in urban classrooms. Other researchers have used portraiture to determine the value of using self-reports to

elicit views of struggling readers and to illuminate the goodness in the struggling reader experience (Schendel, 2009), to investigate how teachers experienced the transition from learner to teacher (Childers, 2007), and to investigate what culturally-relevant science pedagogy could look like in urban middle school classrooms (Dodo Seriki, 2011).

Since this dissertation study pairs portraiture with Critical Race Theory, it is important to note that Chapman (2007) used portraiture *and* critical race theory in her study of urban school success and failure. Drawing on CRTs elements of counterstory, interdisciplinary methods, and researcher's role, and portraiture's search for goodness, she provided a counter story to how majoritarian narratives portray failure and success in urban classrooms. She concluded that a classroom that a majoritarian perspective would have probably portrayed as depicting *student* failure was actually more reflective of *teacher* failure and would have been a success story had the teacher used instructional strategies that were more culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Extending the Portraiture Methodology – Poetry

Hill (2003, 2005) extended the portraiture methodology to include poetry as a method of data representation. She used poetry to depict the experiences of Black women university professors. Since Hill (2003, 2005), only a few others have continued the extended poetic portraiture tradition, and mainly in unpublished dissertation studies. Childers (2007) used poetry to depict teachers' experiences transitioning from learner to teacher and Schendel (2009) used poetry to represent the essence of the struggling reader experience. So few examples of poetic portraiture

indicate that the *poetry* in portraiture is a fairly recent extension to the portraiture methodology. The use of poetry in qualitative research, however, is not new.

Poetry in Qualitative Research

Less than two decades ago, pioneers in arts-based methodologies (Richardson, 1994, 1997, 2000; Glesne, 1997) began to experiment with poetry in qualitative research, providing inspiration and examples for many other researchers (see, for example, Butley-Kisber, 2002; Furman, 2006; Hymes, 2006; Lahman, Rodriguez, Richard, Geist, Schendel & Graglia, 2011; Ohlen, 2003; Poindexter, 2002, 2006; Sullivan, 2000) who have since contributed scholarship to this growing body of literature, termed research poetry (Lahman, et al., 2011). Researchers have engaged in poetic transcription (Glesne, 1997; Jones, 2010) in which interview transcripts are pared down and translated into poems using only the participants' words; created data poems directly from the participants' words (Cahnmannn, 2003; Lahman et al., 2011) as well as from additional data sources from the field (Cahnmannn, 2003; Prendergast, 2003); field note poems (Cahnmannn, 2003); researcher-voiced and participant-voiced poems (Prendergast, 2009); poetic stories (Manning, 2008); found poetry (Butler-Kisber, 2002; Prendergast, 2003) which utilize words found in other texts (e.g., words from scholarly articles), and poetic scholarly memoir (Richardson, 2010).

Researchers have used poetry to research and write about a variety of topics. For example, poetry has been used to explore academic life in higher education institutions (Hill, 2003, 2005; Jones, 2010); to investigate how lecturers experience teaching in multicultural classrooms (Manning, 2008); to tell the stories of formerly

homeless people (Clarke, Febbraro, Hatzipantelis, & Nelson, 2005); to explore the graduate school experiences of international doctoral students (Lahman et al., 2011); to chronicle the life story of a senior academic (Glesne, 1997); and to depict the stages of one's personal journey in the academy (Richardson, 2010). I name only a few here, but the examples are vast.[12]

Researchers have used poetry to overcome crises of representation (Manning, 2008; Ward, 2011), to make sense of data during data analysis (Cahnmann, 2003; Richardson, 2000), to discover (Cahnmann, 2003), to re-see data (Furman, 2006) and to evoke readers to connect with participant experiences (Ward, 2011).

For this dissertation study, using poetry to depict the teachers' perceptions and experiences helped open up my writing process, giving me the freedom to "write it as I felt it," hoping that readers would experience the comfort needed to "feel it as they read it." In other words, the degree of license that comes with arts-oriented research (Eisner, 2005) gave me the freedom to add the subjectivity and preferences of my soul and heart to the brain work of analysis, while adhering to aesthetic standards of quality.

Aesthetic Standards of Quality in Qualitative Research

In his comparison of scientific and artistic approaches to qualitative research, Eisner (2005) describes what he believes are ten defining dimensions of artistic approaches to research, eight[13] of which I embraced as aesthetic standards of quality

[12] For a plethora of poetic research examples, see *Poetic Inquiry: Vibrant Voices in the Social Sciences* (Prendergast et al., 2009).

[13] I exclude two of Eisner's dimensions, "point of focus" and "interest in prediction and control" because Eisner's discussion of them did not resonate with my aesthetic and analytical processes. According to Eisner, art-oriented approaches to research "focus less on behavior than on the

for my project. These dimensions include the following: forms of representation employed, validity, the nature of generalization, the role of form, degree of license, the sources of data, the basis of knowing, and ultimate aims (Eisner, 2005). According to Esiner (2005), in artistic research, "what one seeks is not the creation of a code that abides to publicly codified rules, but the creation of an evocative form whose meaning is embodied in the shape of what is expressed" (Eisner, 2005, p. 69) as opposed to representing data using formal, didactic language. In arts-based research, experimenting with craft can help researchers "control representation and effect" (Cahnmann, 2003, p. 31). Standards of validity also differ for arts-based versus traditionally scientific-based research: "Validity in the arts is the product of the persuasiveness of a personal vision; its utility is determined by the extent to which it informs…the proof of the pudding is the way in which it shapes our conception of the world or some aspect of it" (p. 70) as opposed to its measure of its statistical significance. Additionally, standards for generalization in artistic research are not based on a "technically rigorous process of random selections," but rather on how the researcher makes "the particular vivid so that its qualities can be experienced" believing that "the particular has a contribution to make to the comprehension of what is general" (p. 70). With regards to form, arts-oriented researchers do not strive for standardization but rather for ways the form of the work can work to inform as a

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experiences the individuals are having and the meaning their actions have for others" (p. 70). My research did not only focus on the meaning the data would have for others, but it also focused on the meaning it would have for the participants. Additionally, while my aesthetic representations were strongly explicative and my research process did not include a "control" group and did not aim to use the data to make predictions, goals Eisner argues are contrary aims of arts-oriented researcher, I did purposefully select my project participants and I utilized their experiences to draw conclusions about future directions of research, practice, policy, and theory.

vehicle of content, utilizing artistic license that allows the researcher to selectively focus on what he or she thinks should be conveyed. Likewise, the most salient source of data in an artistic approach involves the researcher herself, with "the major sources of data emana[ting] from how the investigator experiences what it is he or she attends to" (p. 73). There are also broader modes of knowing in arts-oriented research; particularly, knowing through emotions is central in arts-based research. Lastly, as opposed to discovering an ultimate "truth," the ultimate aims of artistic research is meaning-making: "What art seeks is not the discovery of the laws of nature about which true statements or explanations can be given, but rather the creation of images that people will find meaningful and from which their fallible and tentative views of the world can be altered, rejected, or made more secure" (p. 74). In creating the poetic portraits, I relied on these dimensions as standards of aesthetic quality.

Poetic Portraits

We must assume an audience for our work, an audience that longs for fresh language to describe the indescribably emotional and intellectual experiences in and beyond classrooms" – (Cahnmann, 2003, p. 35)

Poetic portraits (Childers, 2007; Hill, 2003, 2005; Schendel, 2009) convey data and analysis using lyrical language that speaks to both the mind and the heart, language that uses figurative language and other literary devices to create images that appeal to readers' senses and intellect, and that triggers familiarity, connectivity, and empathy within the reader. Cahnmannn (2003) argues that,

> by reading and implementing poetic craft, researchers can enhance their abilities to listen and notice in the field during data collection, creatively play with metaphor and image during analysis, and communicate with more liveliness and accuracy when representing data to larger audiences. (Cahnmannn, 2003, p. 32)

In creating the poetic portraits for each teacher, I strove to depict each teacher in the way I perceived they presented themselves at the focus group meetings, in their writings, and in the interview, illuminating aspects of the data that revealed each teacher's deepest concerns, perspectives, and impactful experiences.

Choosing poetry as the form of presentation allowed me to use and arrange words in ways that I felt would be most penetrating for the reader. Eisner (2005) argues that "form is regarded as part of the content of what is expressed and bears significantly on the kinds of meanings people are likely to secure from the work" (Eisner, 2005, p. 72). Jones (2010) adds that "poetry, or poetic transcription allows for the emotional, ambiguous, contradictory and elusive as well as the analytical. It is at once intellectual and aesthetic. It opens up material for the readers that is powerful in its subjectivity, in a way that is at once subtle, concise, unique, powerful and new" (p. 594). Hill (2005), who used poetic portraits to describe the experiences of Black women teacher-educators, argued that portraiture, in its openness to blurring the boundaries of the scientific and aesthetic and its effort to capture the complexities and subtleties of human experience, "supports poetic documentation of educational research" (p. 95).

Using Hill's application of poetic portraiture as a guide, I crafted poetic portraits (Childers, 2007; Hill, 2003, 2005; Schendel, 2009) using my analysis of the interview and focus group transcripts, as well as teachers' answers to the online questionnaire and writing prompts. The poetic portraits combined researcher-voiced and participant-voiced poetic forms (Prendergast, 2009), as I used direct quotations from all of these sources, in addition to my own interpretation of teachers' comments and experiences in the poem. In the spirit of portraiture, my voice is intertwined with the teachers' voices. In essence, I presented their perceptions through the lens of my own, but, at the same time, I was careful to temper my voice enough for each teacher's unique voice and perspective to occupy the foreground of the poetic portrait. For example, consider my construction of parts of a poem for one of the teacher's portraits, Ms. Kelly's. As I did in the other poems, I included both my own analytical thoughts as well as direct quotations from Ms. Kelly. Though the analytical thought was my own, it was based on the data in the transcripts, writing prompts, and questionnaire answers. An excerpt from Ms. Kelly's portrait exemplifies how I included elements of both researcher-voiced and participant-voiced (Prendergast, 2009) poetry in the portraits. The first stanza below includes a direct quote from Ms. Kelly (participant-voiced poetry example). The second stanza is an example of my third-person voice (researcher-voice poetry example).

"Fast-forward to the year 2000:
my mother passed away
and I found myself depending on my teachers for everything.
Not resources and supplies,

but just conversations, college suggestions,

career tips, life lessons…I loved my teachers"

And so, after a B.A. in English

And an M.Ed., she became one.

All acquired at the same PWI[14]

The first stanza is a quotation taken directly from Ms. Kelly's educational life history writing prompt. The next stanza includes data from the same educational life history writing prompt (the B.A. in English and M.Ed) and the interview (her attendance at a PWI). In an effort to capture the essence of Ms. Kelly's message, I deduced the writing prompt and interview data down to the three line stanza. The following is the part of the writing prompt I drew from to write the above stanza:

> Fast-forward to the year 2000: my mother passed away and I found myself depending on my teachers for everything. Not resources and supplies, but just conversations, college suggestions, career tips, life lessons…I loved my teachers. I always associated teaching and education to my mom, so naturally I wanted to become a teacher. What would it take? A B.A. in English, Praxis I, Praxis II, completion of student teaching experiences and a master's in Education. FINALLY, after all of that, I'm here…my first teaching experience. (Ms. Kelly, Writing Prompt #1)

[14] Predominantly White Institution

In the two stanza's noted above, I strove to convey elements of Ms. Kelly's educational life history that would provide readers with a historical context within which to consider Ms. Kelly's perceptions and experiences. From the two stanzas, we learn what influenced Ms. Kelly's decision to become a teacher: her mom and the teachers she relied on after her mom's death; we also learn a little about the significant roles her teachers played in her life as mentors and caretakers; we learn of the level of education she had obtained and we also get a glimpse into the racial context of her higher education experience. "All acquired at the same PWI," information I learned in the follow-up interview, were my own words (i.e., researcher-voiced), depicting my synthesis of contextual information that I felt was relevant to Ms. Kelly's portrait development.

Like Ward (2011), I turned to poetry in an effort to "bring the message forward" (Eisner, 2008, p. 9, as referenced in Ward, 2011); that is, I wanted to convey to the readers the essence of what teachers shared in interviews and focus groups. For me, "bringing the message forward" meant ensuring the time teachers spent participating in discussions was not spent in vain; rather, their messages would make it beyond the confines of the meetings. Ward (2011) argues that poetic representations of data enable the researcher to foreground the participants' stories; create verisimilitude; focus on the "essence" of the experiences; create coherent story-lines, and create evocative text. All of these assertions were true for me in my experience writing the poetic portraits, most strongly the writing of evocative texts. The traditional emergent theme section could have stood alone as the data analysis chapter, but as one of the Lahman et al. (2011) authors expressed, "I see value in each

representation. I am wondering if each form of representation doesn't serve a purpose; that is, we need them all – a crystallization perspective – the representations could stand alone, paired up, or as a whole package" (p. 893). In other words, while both traditional and non-traditional research methodologies could stand alone, there is value in pairing them up to "bring the message forward" in its most authentic and penetrating form. I embraced this bricoleur perspective for this dissertation project.

4.1: The Research Project

I recruited five Black female English teachers, all Black women ranging in age from 25 to 63 years old and with years of experience from 2-15 years, to participate in a month-long focus group, which met for two hours once a week for a total of four consecutive weeks. I conducted the focus group in the format of a writing workshop, with each meeting lasting for two hours (see Appendix D for details of each group meeting). Prior to the first meeting, I sent each teacher an electronic "Teachers' Beliefs, Attitudes, and Practices" questionnaire (Appendix G) to complete. I used the results of the questionnaire to begin creating a profile of each teacher's current perspective of their practice and to formulate interview follow-up questions for one-on-one interviews (Appendix H) that took place after the focus group meetings. At each meeting, teachers completed a reflective writing task that they shared and discussed with the group. In addition to the questionnaire answers, I used the writing artifacts, focus groups, and transcripts to formulate questions for the individual follow-up interviews.

4.1.1: Participant Selection

Purposeful selection (Maxwell, 2005) ensured only teachers who met criteria I thought would help answer my research questions participated in the study. Purposeful selection, "a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can't be gotten as well from other choices" (Maxwell, p. 88), facilitated my achieving "representativeness or typicality" and "heterogeneity in the population" (p. 89). Since Black teachers are diverse in their backgrounds and experiences but homogeneous in their race, it was important that I chose my participants strategically. The participant population I was striving for was one that included secondary-level English teachers, some who teach on predominantly White departments and others who teach on a predominantly Black faculty, but all of whom teach Black students. I wanted to represent perspectives from both of these populations in my study in an effort to achieve typicality for both groups. Given my experience as a Black teacher in a predominantly White English department, the reported deficit perspectives of the teachers on predominantly Black staffs (Fordham, 1996; Lynn et al., 2010), and the drastically different experiences Black teachers had in pre-*Brown* all-Black schools and post-*Brown* integrated schools (Fairclough, 2004; Horsford, 2011; Walker, 2009), including the perspectives of teachers from both populations in my study was essential.

In addition to typicality, diversity of experience was equally important in my participant population. While all teachers shared the same race and secondary school teaching level, some were veteran teachers while others were novices; some seasoned adults and others young adults. These distinguishing factors helped ensure data that would reflect diverse voices from varying teaching and life experience levels.

While I recognize the importance of studying male teacher perspectives, I chose to exclude them from this study. As a female teacher-researcher, I believed I would more effectively be able to negotiate productive relationships with female teachers because of our shared cultural knowledge and experiences as Black women. Furthermore, I recognized the personal nature of the writing and reflecting I would be asking teachers to do and I did not want to add any element, such as a male "other," to the research environment that might hinder or disrupt the uninhibited communal atmosphere I felt was necessary to yield authentic data. This omission of the Black male teacher voice could be seen as a limitation; however, a body of research that focuses on Black male teachers is increasing (see, for example, Bridges, 2009; Brown, 2009; Lynn, 2002).

4.1.2: Negotiating Research Relationships

> *"All the processes of portraiture require that we build productive and benign relationships. It is through relationships between the portraitist and the actors that access is sought and given, connections made, contracts of reciprocity and responsibility (both formal and informal) developed, trust built, intimacy negotiated, data collected, and knowledge constructed."*
>
> (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 35)

At a general level, I had something in common with all of the teachers in my study. We all had taught or were currently teaching in the same school district, a large, urban district in the mid-Atlantic part of the United States. This commonality gave the participants and me a shared reality and vocabulary, but it may have also caused some inhibitions because participants may have felt uncomfortable disclosing

information that could get back to a district source without their knowledge or approval. To lessen the possibility of this occurring, I stressed the confidential nature of the research process. In addition to possible participant resistance, I had to be sure my knowledge about and experiences with the school district did not cause me to make unwarranted assumptions in my analysis of the teachers' perspectives.

At a more specific level, I already had established relationships with three of the participants, Ms. Tan, Ms. X, and Ms. Kelly. Ms. Tan, Ms. X[15], and I taught at the same school for four years. We were three of five Black English teachers in a department of about 20 teachers. We were not close friends, but we shared a collective "Black English teacher" experience that we rarely – but sometimes – discussed with one another. We have never spoken about why we rarely spoke about our feelings and issues collectively, even since meeting in the focus groups. Our past professional relationship influenced how we related to each other during the focus group meetings and interviews. On one hand, I felt we had a level of comfort because of our familiarity with one another and our shared institutional knowledge. On the other hand, I felt silences and lack of full disclosure between us may have remained in some instances[16]. I had to work at moving the relationship to a new, more

[15] Teachers chose their own pseudonyms. Ms. Tan initially chose British Tan, but I decided to only use last names in reference to the teachers. Ms. X chose the symbol of a smiley face to accompany her name. For simplicity and word processing purposes, I eliminated the smiley face from her name. For consistency, I added the prefix Ms. to all of the teachers' chosen pseudonyms.

[16] It is important to note that I am only able to report on my perception of the relationship the three of us shared. I do not know whether or not they perceive the relationship in the same way. The way this assumption influences my approach to negotiating a research relationship with them could affect the nature of the research relationship and the data it yields. As it did when I conducted the pilot study with one of the mentioned teachers, this issue continues to be a methodological dilemma.

transparent space. The confidential norms of the research process helped facilitate this adjustment.

I had a more substantive relationship with one of the teachers mentioned in the above paragraph, Ms. Tan. She was the teacher in the pilot study I conducted, the findings of which were part of the impetus for this current project proposal, as I mentioned in Chapter 2. While I was aware the results of the pilot study would certainly contribute to my analysis of the teacher in this current study, I was careful not to allow them to overshadow new data and insights that emerged in the new study. In addition to having a former research relationship with this teacher, I also have an existing – but inconsistent – friendship with her. I say inconsistent because our personal interaction with one another is sporadic; therefore, I believe her motivation to take part in this research project was mostly likely primarily motivated by her interest in talking about issues that African American English teachers deal with in their practice.

Ms. Kelly, the third teacher with whom I have an existing relationship is one of my former pre-service students and student-teaching mentees. She student-taught at the same high school I worked at with Ms. Tan and Ms. X. As Ms. Kelly's University Supervisor, I supervised her student teaching experience; prior to that I was her instructor for a required university diversity course. The remaining two participants, Ms. J and Ms. Jocasta, I had no previously established relationship. Both joined the group after the initial first meeting, one on the recommendation of another focus group member and one through an invitation I extended at the workplace.

Where They Worked

County Contexts

All five participants worked in public schools located in a large southeastern metropolitan area in two neighboring counties, Wesley and Prudence. Prudence County is known as having a notable contingent of affluent and educated African Americans. Wesley is known as an affordable alternative to the predominantly African American Prudence. Neither school district met Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP)[17] for the 2010-2011 school year. Only one participant, Ms. Kelly, worked in Wesley County. However, she completed her student teaching internship in Prudence. The other four teachers all worked in Prudence County, but in different schools.

School-Level

The five teachers worked in four high schools: Jefferson, Langston, Andrews, and Eastlake. All of the schools had a majority Black population, with the exception of Andrews, which, by a margin of five percent, had more Latino than Black students.

Table 1: Student Racial Demographics at Jefferson High School

Ethnicity	Number	Percent

[17] Adequate Yearly Progress was designed to measure the school's continuous improvement each year toward the No Child Left Behind goal of 100% proficiency in 2014. In order to meet AYP, schools were required to meet state-determined annual measurable objectives, which means a specified percentage of the entire student population (including students of all races, students for whom English is a second language, and student receiving special education services) must pass the high school assessment exams in English, biology, and algebra. Schools who fail to meet AYP targets enter a school improvement process in which they are designated as developing or priority schools by the state. Such schools must implement interventions based on their designations to improve student performance (for more information on AYP, see (For more information on AYP, see (http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/secletter/020724.html).

Black	1644	62
White	436	16
Latino	281	10.5
Asian	278	10.4
Two or more races	17	.6
American Indian	10	.4
Total Enrollment	2669	

Table 2: Student Racial Demographics at Langston High School

Ethnicity	Number	Percent
Black	1229	75
White	21	1
Latino	280	17
Asian	36	2
Two or more races	n/a	n/a
American Indian	n/a	n/a
Total Enrollment	1644	

Table 3: Student Racial Demographics at Andrews High School

Ethnicity	Number	Percent
Black	1084	44
White	74	3
Latino	1210	49
Asian	69	3
Two or more races	n/a	
American	10	.4

Indian		
Total Enrollment	2457	

Table 4: Student Racial Demographics at Eastlake High School

Ethnicity	Number	Percent
Black	1165	78
White	167	11
Latino	67	4
Asian	45	3
Two or more races	42	3
American Indian	n/a	
Total Enrollment	1495	

Ms. Tan and Ms. X both worked at Jefferson High School, which had a total enrollment of approximately 2,700 students, 1,644 (75%) of whom were African American. This school had the largest White population of all the participants' schools, with 436 in attendance, and a growing Latino population totaling 10% of the student population (State[18] Report Card, 2011-2012). They were one of three racial minority teachers in the English department and the only two African Americans.

At the second school, Langston, where Ms. Jocasta worked, there was less diversity. Out of an enrollment of 1644 students, the majority were African American. White students make up only 1% of the student population and Latinos

[18] To protect the identities of the research participants, I have omitted the name of the state throughout the document. However, I retrieved all demographic information from the official state report card site for the state in which the teachers worked.

17%. The fourth school's demographics, Eastlake, the school in the neighboring county and where Ms. Kelly worked, were similar to Jefferson's. Out of a total enrollment of 1,574, the majority of the student population was African American, but there was a substantial White population (16%). Latino students, however, made up only 4% of the population. Eastlake met AYP in 2011. The three schools in Prudence County -- Jefferson, Langston, Andrews -- all failed to meet AYP in 2011. Jefferson failed because not enough members of its special education population passed the math assessment. Langston failed because not enough members of its special education and English language learner populations passed the reading and math exams. Andrew failed because not enough members of its free and reduced lunch and limited English proficiency populations passed the reading exam and not enough of its special education and limited English proficiency populations passed the math exam.

Ms. X, Ms. Tan, and Ms. Jocasta all had African American male building leaders, or principals, and they all criticized aspects of their respective principal's leadership. An African American female leads Eastlake. Ms. Kelly emphasized how her principal "runs" her building, meaning there is no question about who is in charge and that operations run efficiently and smoothly. A man who is not Black or White leads Ms. J's school, Andrews. Ms. J, who was unsure about his ethnicity, described him as possibly Native American. Based on the picture of him on the school's site, I would describe him as Latino or Native American. Ms. J did not comment on his leadership.

Department-Level

Table 5: Departmental Racial Make-Up and Tracks Taught for Each Teacher

Teacher	School	Departmental Racial Make-up of Teachers	Tracks Taught
Ms. Tan	Jefferson High	Majority White	Comprehensive and Honors
Ms. X	Jefferson High	Majority White	Comprehensive
Ms. Jocasta	Langston High	Majority Black	Comprehensive
Ms. Kelly	Eastlake High	Majority White	Comprehensive and Honors
Ms. J	Andrews High	Equally mixed, Black and White	Comprehensive

Ms. Tan, Ms. X, and Ms. Kelly all worked in predominantly White departments in which they were each one of only two Black teachers. Ms. Jocasta's department was comprised of majority Black teachers. The White teachers taught most of the Advanced Placement, honors, and specialty courses like yearbook or journalism. Most of the Black teachers taught the required grade-level English courses. Only one White teacher taught a tested course and she was a Special Education teacher. Ms. Tan, Ms. X, and Ms. Jocasta perceived the environment of their English departments to be competitive and divided. Ms. Tan and Ms. X saw the division among racial lines, but Ms. Tan said she did not think race was always a factor, but that sometimes there were divisions and schisms due to personality differences. Ms. J, whose department had nearly an equal number of Black and White teachers, said she sometimes – but rarely – saw race as problematic within her

department. Ms. Kelly's description of her department suggested it was united, with a spirit of sharing amongst the teachers.

Ms. X chose not to teach any honors classes and she feels the environment in her department is one in which the minority students who are not in honors class – and even some of those who are – are labeled the "lesser able" students. She also said she felt the department lacked unity and that the chair of the department was secretly trying to prevent the hiring of any more Black teachers. Ms. Tan, who taught in the same department, did not believe race was the undergirding reason for the lack of unity in the department. She said sometimes it boiled down to just personality differences. Ms. Jocasta taught all regular-level and special education courses, many of which were filled with students who were repeating the course due to previous failure. Ms. Kelly taught both honors and regular level courses, as did Ms. Tan. Ms. J taught regular-level classes, but in the previous years had taught specialty classes such as SAT[19] prep, speech, and drama.

4.1.3: Nurturing Community Amongst Participants

To nurture community, comfort, and non-coerced participation for all participants, I emphasized the voluntary nature of the research project by stating in writing, through the Signed Consent Form (Appendix L), and verbally, at each meeting and interview, that they could withdraw from the study at any time with no explanation. I also encouraged participants to ask me to clarify anything they did not understand and to ask me at any time any questions they may have about the study. I also stressed the confidential nature of all data collected and that all resulting reports

[19] Scholastic Aptitude Test

or publications, pseudonyms would be used for names of all teachers, schools, districts, and any other potential identifiable place, person, or organization. I also told participants that only I, the Principal Investigator, and transcribers would have access to the data. Participant journals and artifacts were kept in my locked home office and, when in electronic format, on my password protected personal computer. All data will be destroyed and/or returned to the participants no later than five years after the conclusion of the entire dissertation project.

To encourage full and consistent participation, I provided free meals at each focus group meeting and offered to construct a proposal in relation to the project for the entire group to present at a National Council of Teachers of English Conference. In addition to these tangible incentives, the opportunity to reflect upon and discuss their practice with other colleagues, as well as the real possibility for fresh perspectives and inspiration for teaching, I believed, were the strongest motivating factors for participating in the study.

4.1.4: Research Site

The focus groups were originally scheduled to take place in a conference room on the campus of a local university; however, after the first meeting at this site, the research participants decided meeting for breakfast at a local diner would not only be more convenient geographically but that it would also provide a more comfortable and relaxed environment for conversation. I agreed, believing that meeting in a more informal "unofficial" place would facilitate the comfort needed for the women to speak freely (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2008) and that the open group format would create the safety and distance that make sharing less daunting (McClelland & Fine,

2008). I amended the IRB to reflect this change. There was the option for one-on-one follow-up interview sites to vary from teachers' classrooms, to neighborhood parks, to coffee shops, based on each individual teacher's preference and comfort. All teachers agreed to meet at their schools, but one teacher, Ms. X, asked that we meet during one of her planning periods instead of after the school day. I suggested this might seem rushed and asked that if we did not finish that she would grant a continuation interview with me at another time. She agreed, but we ended up meeting off-site after she needed to cancel the original meeting scheduled to take place in her classroom due to a family emergency. We eventually met at a hamburger restaurant near her home. Only one of the follow-up interviews (Ms. J's) took place in a teacher's classroom. Ms. Tan's interview took place on a leisurely stroll around the grounds of her school. It was originally scheduled for her classroom, but after meeting her there I suggested we take our talk outside as a way to enjoy the uncharacteristically warm weather we were having in mid-January. She jumped at the opportunity. Ms. Kelly's interview took place at Panera® over meals that appeared to be comfort food for us both. We could not find a mutually convenient time to meet in her classroom.

4.1.5: Critical Methodological Dilemma and Release Point Theory

While the challenge of negotiating relationships occurs throughout the entire research process (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), there is a particular aspect of my study that presented another significant methodological dilemma (Gallagher, 2008): the nature of my research question. The nature of the research question is problematic because, at the core, the question seeks answers to a topic that is sensitive

and controversial in the Black community: personal responsibility and accountability for the advancement and success of the race. The comedian and actor Bill Cosby (2004) has been criticized for suggesting Black Americans look in the mirror for the answer to their social and economic challenges. Prominent scholars such as Michael Eric Dyson (2005) criticized Cosby for ignoring the structural systems and forces that contribute to economic and social distress in the Black community and instead emphasizing the actions of the African American people themselves as the problem (Dyson, 2005). Similarly, studies of Black teachers indicate that teachers have recognized the class gulf that exists between many of them and their Black students, but are reluctant to admit it publicly (Fordham, 1996). Additionally, studies show that Black teachers have failed to consider their teaching practices as a possible culprit in the problem of Black student underachievement (Lynn et al., 2010) and that they have also displayed resistance to talking about race and its impact on their perception of their teaching (Harper Lee, 2002).

In essence, these collective claims, reports, and views suggest that the answer to Beverly Daniel Tatum's (2007) question "*Can* We Talk About Race? Do we know *how*?" (p. xiii) is "no" or "it depends on the message." The silence, resistance, and omission reported in the Black teacher literature, as it relates to issues of race, class and Black teacher effectiveness all indicate the answer is "no." The outrage over Bill Cosby's comments suggests the answer is "no." And, while Tatum's question was meant for the education community at-large, I suggest her conclusion is directly relevant to this discussion of Black English teachers. Tatum argued that living in a society "that does not encourage – indeed actively *discourages* – talk about race" (p.

xiii), prevents us from having meaningful conversations about race and sustains the silent dialogue (Delpit,1988) that has become the norm in our institutions of education. I was concerned about encountering a similar silence in my study as I asked teachers to reflect on their own practice in relation to Black student achievement.

To address this difficult methodological dilemma, I drew from the feminist literature the idea of methodological release points (McClelland & Fine, 2008), which the authors define as "ways of making potential openings in the 'assumed' and the 'common sense'" (p. 242). These "methodological release points" were designed to help McClelland and Fine (2008) deal with the challenge of what they called "writing and researching on cellophane" (p. 243), a challenge they encountered when studying teen women's sexual desires. Consider their explanation:

> Our title [*Writing on Cellophane: Studying teen women's sexual desires, inventing methodological release points*] stems from a concern that young women's desires come to be laminated in cellophane. We see layers of cellophane being produced by: a market economy that rushes to commodify young female bodies; sociopolitical, moral, and heteronormative panics that obsess over young women's sexualities; racist imagery and institutional practices that vilify the sexualities of women of color; and by schools increasingly kidnapped by the policy of teaching abstinence-only-until-marriage curricula in place of serious sexuality education…Wrapped in a kind of *collective discursive cellophane*, we believe it may be difficult for them to speak as their tongues are weighed down with dominant assumptions and

> panics; and, similarly, our ears may be clogged with our own dominant (feminist) discourses for *their* desires. (McClelland & Fine, 2008, p. 232, emphasis in original)

Borrowing their term and idea of cellophane, I put forth the notion that Black women English teachers, too, are "wrapped in a collective discursive cellophane." This cellophane is constructed of a socio-political-educational context that sustains hegemonic racial stratification systems, privileges White middle class behaviors, habits, ways of thinking, and life-styles; silences and/or ignores the voices of educators of color, embraces the cultural deficit theory as a means to explain Black student underachievement, and uses White student achievement as the standard for success. Furthermore, this socially-constructed cellophane consists of unhealed, unaddressed racial wounds from past systems of legalized segregation and slavery, and re-segregated unequal schools that continue to under-serve – outright fail – Black and Brown students. Thus, as McClelland and Fine found that the true desires of the young women they studied were "laminated" or hidden and embedded in society's cellophane, I posit that such cellophane has also caused the silence, resistance, and omission in the ability and willingness of Black teachers to talk about the disconnect that may exist between themselves and their Black students or to self-reflect on how their own practices and beliefs may be implicated in the problem of Black student underachievement.

To research and write on this cellophane, I took an approach like McClelland and Fine's in which I "play[ed] out the possibility that the silence is not an absence, but perhaps something else: an absence [I] know to be present," prompting me to

adjust my researcher lens to view "missingness …. [as] present but laminated in political and cultural cellophane" (p. 233). This approach required methods that employ methodological release-point theory (McClelland & Fine, 2008). The elements of release-point theory I employed in this study included asking obvious questions, using focus groups for collective interrogations, and using theory as method. I will discuss each of these strategies in more detail in the methods section.

4.1.6: Methods

Teachers' Attitudes, Beliefs, and Practices Questionnaire

This questionnaire, which utilized Hilliard's (2003) "gap closers" criteria (Appendix F) as a source for the questions (Appendix G), is the tool I used to begin to understand how the teachers viewed their practice in relationship to what Hilliard conceptualized as the qualities and practices of gap-closing teachers. The questionnaire answers also served as data used to begin a profile for each teacher that was used during the data analysis period. In the questionnaire, teachers were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements about their attitudes, beliefs, and practices, as it relates to Black students; they also had the option to select "unable to answer." However, "theory and design as method" says "unable to answer" may *be* an answer that is trapped within the metaphorical cellophane, an answer that the teacher may be afraid to submit due to how she has internalized society's expectations, requirements, and limits for her as a Black person, and more specifically as a Black English teacher. "Theory and design as method" takes this fear into account in the design of the questions, enabling the researcher and research environment to give teachers *permission* to give honest, heartfelt responses

to questions that beg for a politically correct answer, simply by asking obvious questions and then giving teachers an opportunity to elaborate upon their answers. Furthermore, in the event that teachers declined permission to speak their truth, theory and design as method allowed me to still recognize its existence and give voice to it in the analysis. I talk more about analyzing "missingness" in the interview portion of this chapter.

Focus Groups

Using a focus group in which writing prompts began the discussion allowed me to collect data in a way that utilized English teachers' presumed major strengths and interests: writing, interpretation, and discussion. Moreover, conducting these writing workshops in the form of consciousness-raising focus groups (CRG) (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2008) not only provided useful data for me, but it was also a constructive reflective activity for the teachers, one that I hoped would help them reflect on their practices and their educational world views. Focus groups provide freedom for the participants to be more involved in the research process, making the researcher less of an authoritative presence (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2008). Additionally, "the interaction occurring within the group accentuates empathy and commonality of experiences and fosters self-disclosure and self-validation" (Madriz, 2003, p. 375), gestures that are necessary when discussing sensitive and personal subject matter such as race, teacher self-efficacy, and Black student achievement. "These groups constitute spaces for generating collective "testimonies," and these testimonies help both individual women and groups of women to find or produce their own unique and powerful "voices" (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2008, p.

384). All of the women expressed gratitude for having the opportunity to come together to discuss their experiences as Black teachers, one of them leaving as their final comment that "perhaps there is a continuing need for Black teachers to interact more often" (Jocasta, Final Journal Thoughts).

Ultimately, I chose to have teachers talk as a group, in a setting in which talking about race was encouraged, because of my desire to discuss core issues related to Black achievement, from a Black perspective. The following quote explains my intent:

> We were interested in getting to the roots of problems in society … we wanted to pull up weeds in the garden by their roots of roots, not just pick off the leaves at the top to make things look good momentarily.
>
> (Sarchild, as cited in Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2008, p. 144)

Similarly, my hope was to get to the root of problems with Black student achievement and how Black teachers see their impact on it. While the groups were initially conceptualized simply to gain teachers' perceptions, the voices of the women themselves changed the meetings into spaces where they could give voice to the mistreatment they felt by the students themselves and the districts in which they worked. Thus, as CRGs were originally established within the second-wave of feminism to be not only a place to share but a place for women to organize for social change in the struggle for equal rights (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2008), these focus groups became places where teachers discussed educational problems they felt needed addressing.

Focus groups are also noted as a methodological release point method (McClelland & Fine, 2008), a type of method this project required because of the sensitive and controversial nature of the subject under study. Prior research has shown that some Black teachers resist speaking about how race influences their practice (Harper Lee, 2002) or they offer responses that reflect conventional, deficit views about Black student underachievement (Fordham, 1996; Foster, 1993; Lynn et al., 2010) or they say what socially-conscious Black people would expect them to say: that they feel a special sense of responsibility to Black students because of their shared racial identity (Dickar, 2008; Madsen & Hollins, 2000) and that they embrace an emancipatory teaching philosophy with regard to Black students (Foster, 1990; Irvine, 2002; Lynn, Johnson, & Hassan, 1999). The group environment of focus groups offers a safe place to discuss difficult, emotional subject matters, because "in groups, anxiety is allowed to float, whereas in one-one-one data-collection processes, the anxiety …often has no room to drift" (McClelland & Fine, 2008, p. 248). These focus groups met weekly for an entire month in order to build community and a sense of openness and trust within the group, with the hopes of yielding authentic data. The location of the meetings changed from a university classroom to a breakfast diner near most of the participants' homes. This location change initiated a change in the research group's identity from a focus group meeting to a breakfast gathering for Black teachers.[20] All meetings were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. When I was not writing with the teachers, I took field notes about what I saw and how I felt as teachers were involved in their own writing.

[20] See appendix M for a more detailed description of the evolution of the morning meetings.

The focus groups resembled African American women's book club meetings – the setting was comfortable, personable, and engaging. Other researchers (Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Florio-Ruane, 2001; Motha, 2006) have structured their teacher inquiry studies this way and found the setting conducive to producing rich data. I, too, have seen the benefits of such a setting first-hand when, for a graduate class project, I hosted a one-time "Teacher Talk" focus group at my home. I invited African American teachers from two neighboring districts to talk about their perspectives on teaching writing, and particularly their views of African American Vernacular English. I provided dinner, but also left the option for pot-luck contributions. Teachers were happy to attend and they engaged in vigorous discussion throughout the evening. I wrote topics on sheets of paper and I invited participants to write down anything they, too, wanted to discuss. We then randomly picked the papers from a cup and discussed whichever topic we drew. This method was not as effective as I had hoped. We did not get to all of the topics I wanted to discuss because no one picked the topics. I had to "force" the topics into the discussion, which disrupted the democratic process I was trying to facilitate. For this current study, I took a less restrictive but more deliberate approach by incorporating researcher-designed writing prompts into the focus group sessions.

At each meeting, I first asked participants to complete a writing prompt in order to facilitate the type of reflective thinking teachers would need to engage in throughout each session. I allocated 30-35 minutes of each meeting for writing. I hoped the writing prompts would focus teachers' attention on themselves – the practice of the teacher – rather than on the student outcomes. I wanted to make it

clear that we were there primarily to think and talk about ourselves as teachers. I purposely chose expressive and transactional writing prompts that would require focused, critical thinking on the teaching "self," which was critical since "we teach who we are" (Palmer, 1998, p. 1).

The focus group questions were designed to spark conversation that would reveal answers to my research question, "What are Black English teachers' perceptions of how they impact Black student achievement?" In the first session, I wanted to get background information on the teachers. The session topic was "Who are we as African American English teachers? What are our similarities and differences?" I chose this as the introductory topic because I recognize that context must be included in analysis and I also wanted the teachers to begin to know and feel comfortable with each other. In the first meeting, all participants already had some familiarity, as two of them worked at the same school and the other was a former student teacher at the same school. This is also the school where I formerly worked.

The writing prompt was an education-focused life history and asked teachers to tell the story of their involvement in education – as students and as teachers. Teachers had the freedom to touch on any or all of the following in their narrative**:**

- Education in the home
- Primary and Secondary Schooling
- College and Beyond
- First Few Years of Teaching & Learning
- Teaching & Learning Experiences – Past and Present

I believed that learning about their educational history would provide insight into the development of their current perspectives on education. I wanted to know about how their racial identity was shaped in the home, what values their parents and other elders instilled in them about education, and how they experienced learning in primary and secondary school and in college. I believed learning about these teachers' educational histories would help me begin to understand their perceptions of how they impacted Black student achievement.

The topic for the second session was: "What are my responsibilities as they relate to Black students?" The writing prompt was entitled: Teaching Philosophy/Style. Teachers were invited to choose one of the following prompts to complete:

1. Describe your teaching philosophy as it relates to Black students. Include anecdotes from your teaching experiences to illustrate your philosophy in practice.
2. Write a metaphorical poem in which you depict your teaching style by comparing it to something (maybe an animal or a medical procedure/experience).

This topic and exercise were designed to generate information and prompt discussion about the teachers' self-described philosophy or belief about teaching Black students. Such information, I had hoped, would be windows into their beliefs about their impact on Black student achievement. This prompt asked for teachers to be explicit about how they approached teaching Black students. Their approach would help me to know how they perceive their role in impacting Black student achievement and how they strive to impact student success. I initially titled this session topic in the

form of a question, “What are my responsibilities as they relate to Black students?” All teachers were given copies of the session topics at the first meeting and they were all phrased as questions. I phrased them this way because I felt questions would more directly prompt reflection than just topic statements. I also used the word “my” in each question-phrased session topic, in an effort to make it personal for each teacher. I wanted them to think about themselves personally, not teachers in general. However, as our meetings evolved from “just meetings” to a breakfast club for Black teachers, I phrased the meeting topics differently in my reminders. This second meeting is when this shift first occurred.

The subsequent meetings continued in this vein, with the topic for the third meeting, “Walking in the Students' Shoes - Black Teachers' Quality of Service,” as opposed to the original “How would students describe my ‘quality of service’ as it relates to teaching? How do I describe it?” Even though I framed the meetings slightly differently, I always began each meeting by stating the topic as it was originally written. So, as I introduced “Walking in the Students’ Shoes – Black Teachers’ Quality of Service,” I elaborated by inviting teachers to think about how students would describe their quality of service as it relates to teaching and how they themselves describe it. I felt their answers to these questions would help me see how they think they are perceived, which would provide insight into what they are doing in the classroom.

The writing prompt for the third meeting was a perspective-taking activity. Teachers were invited to write a letter to themselves from one of their current or former students. They were to choose a student who falls into *one* of the following

types: High-achieving, amicable, or cooperative, or failing, defiant, and/or disagreeable. Their choice of student and letter content would help me understand their view of themselves. It is sometimes easier to discuss how one thinks others view him or her than it is to discuss how one views him or herself. We create in our minds others' perceptions of us, but those creations can sometimes be based on how we view ourselves. Through this exercise and the resulting discussion, I could begin to draw conclusions about how these teachers perceived they were impacting Black student achievement.

The fourth and final meeting was "Reflections & Revelations*:* Connecting My Practice to Black Student Achievement." The topic was expressed this way in the original group meeting schedule. Not as a question, but as a statement. I left it the same in my reminder to the teachers. I felt this would be an appropriate final topic because it would prompt teachers to think reflectively about all that had been discussed over the course of the meetings and perhaps experience some revelations about how their practice might contribute to Black student success or underachievement. I wanted them to think explicitly about how their practice was connected to Black student achievement. The writing prompt was a retirement letter focused on reflections and final words. Teachers were invited to write a "retirement" letter to past, present, and future Black students and teachers. They were given the option to consider touching on any of the following in their letters:

- Reflections on Teaching Career (challenges and triumphs)
- Message to Students
- Message to Black Community & Community at-large
- Message to Remaining and Future Black Teachers

I chose this writing prompt because I felt writing a "final words" to past and present Black students might reveal a retrospective reflection of their teaching and learning experiences with students. Writing to future Black students might reveal new ways in which teachers hoped their practice would impact Black students. Writing to current and future Black teachers and the Black community at large would inspire frank talk about what they think needs to be done for Black students and whether they had been doing it or not. Asking teachers to reflect on their challenges and triumphs would prompt honest, heartfelt accounts of how they perceived their impact was felt.

I asked teachers to write these personal reflections because as English teachers I assumed they would be comfortable and find joy in this activity. I also recognize that such expressive – or personal – writing is the mode of writing that is considered "close to the self" (Britton, 1972, p. 96). I was looking to gain teachers' perspectives of themselves as teachers of African American students after they have taken time to self-reflect. In other words, writing was the means for teachers to *know* and begin to bring clarity to their roles as teachers. I also used writing as a research tool, believing that "writing is also a way of knowing – a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it" (Richardson, 2000, p. 923, as cited in Park, 2005). Park (2005) posits that "through the use of language, especially writing, experience is clarified and finally understood, and the self conceptualized" (p. 24). Participants shared their work with the group in an effort to construct collaborative meaning from the dialogue. They also submitted all work to me for artifact analysis. I also included an opportunity for teachers to keep a reflective journal of their thoughts and experiences as members of

the focus group, which they were invited to complete at the end of each meeting and leave with me for artifact analysis. Similar writing-as-method approaches have been employed in studies of National Writing Project teachers, yielding results useful at both the academic theory-building and school community levels (see Lieberman & Friedrich, 2007). With the exception of the first meeting, teachers chose not to reflect in writing at the end of each meeting; instead, teachers continued to chat with each other (and me) about the day's topic.

Semi-structured Interviews

I used the results of the writing workshop artifacts, focus group transcriptions, and questionnaire responses to formulate questions for individual follow-up interviews with each participant. These interviews, which lasted for 1-1.5 hours, provided opportunities for me to follow up on, unpack, and clarify ideas born during the focus group sessions. I used the interview-as-conversation approach (Kvale, 1996), with the goal of setting an environment in which a blending of "everyday conversation" and "philosophical dialogue" can occur. Framing it as an everyday philosophical conversation set a tone that encouraged mutual exchange. I intentionally sought to minimize the perception of the meeting as an official "professional interview" in which the researcher is in charge (Kvale, 1996); still, it was a professional research interview, one with the goal of obtaining knowledge about how the informants perceived their role in impacting Black student achievement. Drawing on McClelland and Fine's (2008) methodological release point theory, I asked obvious questions, "questions [s] that appear [ed] naïve but [were] quite provocative" (p. 249). For example, I asked Ms. Tan, "What constitutes

an achievement and how do you know if students have achieved it?" One might assume there would be an obvious answer such as the student earns a good grade or the student performs well on a text. A deeper look at the question reveals its provocativeness in that what constitutes an achievement for one teacher may not constitute an achievement for another; the answer would reveal something about the teacher's philosophy on achievement. This obvious question would prompt the teacher to think about the answer to a question that would be presumed to have an obvious answer.

4.1.7: Methods of Analysis

The use of a non-conventional methodological approach warrants the use of non-traditional tools of analysis (Appendix I). Thus, as I analyzed data, I sought to distance myself from literature or experiences that might inhibit my ability to see new possibilities in the data, to avoid standard ways of thinking about Black teachers, and to not take any parts of the data for granted. I strove to debunk my assumptions about Black teachers' roles in impacting Black student achievement, and to not rush past "diamonds in the rough" within the data (Strauss & Corbin, 2008, p. 67). I also "questioned" the data and considered various meanings of words as two main analytic tools (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). I also looked for what appeared to be "missing" in the data, and then gave it presence through my analysis (McClelland & Fine, 2008).

In the spirit of Cordova's (2004) reflexive[21] research process, with the above strategies in mind, I used the focus group transcripts as my primary way of

[21] In this context, reflexive denotes an "in the moment" decision; not haphazard spontaneity, but, rather, the willingness to change and adjust as necessary. My research process exemplified this reflexive process.

identifying theoretical codes that would eventually lead me to the study's emergent themes (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Using NVivo 9 qualitative analysis software, I utilized open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 2008) to identify emic and etic substantive categories, categories taken directly from the participants' words and those that I created based on my own observations and interpretations (See Appendix J).

Preliminary analysis started at each focus group meeting. As teachers completed their writing prompts, I either completed the same writing prompt or took field notes on my observations of their writing processes as well as my feelings during the writing prompt time. I also sometimes took notes during the actual focus group discussions, capturing moments of silence or striking statements, or jotting down questions that I wanted to be sure to address.

Analysis also occurred through the writing of poetic portraits. Shifting my writing from didactic prose to evocative poetry helped me to "re-see" the data (Lahman et al., 2011), allowing me to overcome the crisis of representation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) I was experiencing with representing the teachers' perspectives and experiences.

After the first focus group meeting, my analytic process included 11 stages:

1. Transcription began after the first focus group meeting. I transcribed three of the four focus group meetings. The other meeting was transcribed by a professional transcription service. I read the professionally-transcribed transcripts while listening to the digital recording to clarify responses and to confirm the accuracy of the transcription. Using the open-coding

process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), I coded[22] the focus group transcripts by looking for frequency of words and ideas. Based on the frequency of words and ideas, I developed emic and etic code categories (Appendix J). These codes, known as emergent themes in the portraiture methodology, became my initial analytical categories and were used as baseline bins for continuing analysis of the focus groups and the interview and questionnaire data. I was open to additional codes emerging throughout analysis, and while the initial codes remained true throughout the analysis process, a few new codes emerged from the interview data and writing prompts, including teachers' definitions of achievement and their more-than-content teaching philosophies. I discuss these codes and my process for determining which would become the study's emergent themes in stages 8 and 9 of my analytic process description.

2. I transferred the writing prompts from teachers' journals to the computer by typing them into a Microsoft Word Document. I then analyzed them by applying nontraditional analysis methods such as questioning the data, not taking anything for granted and not looking past "diamonds in the rough" (Strauss & Corbin, 2008, p. 67). I did the same for the questionnaire data, and I also looked for how the responses connected to the analytical categories identified in the focus group transcripts.
3. The focus group transcripts, the writing prompt, and the questionnaire were all also used to generate follow-up questions to ask at the interview.

[22] In portraiture, looking for emergent themes is the same process captured in the term "coding" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

I read the writing prompts and the questionnaire with my research question and methodological and theoretical perspectives in mind. Where I felt I needed more contextualizing background information, I developed relevant questions. Where I felt the notion of race and/or racialized experiences was not considered in the prompt or in the focus group, I generated follow-up questions (Appendix H) that I felt would better help me understand how these contextualizing factors may have influenced their perspectives.

4. After generating follow-up questions, I scheduled one-on-one interviews with each participant. The interview sessions were semi-structured, following an interview-as-conversation (Kvale, 1996) format. I allowed my follow-up questions to guide the conversations, but I allowed participants to talk freely, letting the conversation go where participants took them unless they got far off topic, at which point I would bring the interview back to focus by repeating or asking a new question. I made sure to have a chance to ask the questions I had designated as definitely needing answering in order for me to answer the research question.
5. I transcribed the interviews following each session, focusing only on those portions of the interviews relevant to my research question. I did not transcribe unrelated, tangential interview portions.
6. Following interviews, based on what I felt the moment dictated, I sometimes wrote analytic memos to capture my thoughts about the meetings and to think about how the interview data could move me closer

to answering my research question; other times, I immediately re-listened to the interview, focusing on parts that I felt were key to answering my research question. I transcribed those portions after listening. I also recorded verbal analytic memos to myself to capture my evolving thoughts about the data in relation to my research question and goals. Some of these audio memos eventually served as the inspiration for actual written portions of the dissertation.

7. Next, I triangulated the data by performing a constant comparison (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) process, which entailed looking for points of confirmation and difference between the interview data, the focus groups, the writing prompts and the questionnaire answers. I often found points of confirmation but I also discovered some points of contradiction, which highlighted the duality and complexity present in the teachers' perceptions. For example, during the first focus group meeting, one of the teachers, Ms. X, expressed resentment toward her school and English department for expecting the Black teachers to teach all of the non-honors students, Black students she said were the school's main discipline problems. In her writing prompt for the same session, however, Ms. X expressed strong affinity for her school, saying "I love it there. I love the kids, and the fact that on most days I am allowed to teach and not expected to be a baby sitter" (Writing Prompt #1).
8. To determine the overarching emergent theme, I determined which codes were the most dominant by using the NVivo software to produce a visual

diagram of the words that were coded most frequently (Appendix K). "Disrespect," "culture as problem," "teacher emotion," and "race issues" were determined to be the most dominant themes based on the number of focus group references linked to these codes and based on the results of triangulating with the questionnaire, interview, and writing prompt data. I then reviewed the most dominant theoretical codes to determine which ones were most strongly present across all teachers. Teacher emotion emerged as the choice. I looked at the data holistically and recalled the tone, tempo, and content of conversations at the focus group meetings and in the interviews to determine which emotion was most present for all teachers and concluded that it was "frustration." Frustration was present in moments of extended silences in focus groups, when I asked teachers challenging questions about hope for Black student achievement and in moments of exasperation or dumbfoundedness in interviews when I asked teachers to share specific ways their instructional strategies translated into achievement for students. Moreover, when looking back over the transcripts I noticed that teachers not only implicitly *expressed* a feeling of frustration, but that both Ms. Tan and Ms. J used the term explicitly to describe feelings about teaching efforts and relationships with Black students, respectively. "Race issues," "disrespect," "culture as problem," "student ability," "student as problem," and "teachers' upbringings," were also strongly present in the data. Data under all of these codes connected

to the frustration teachers expressed; therefore, I considered them all heavily in my emergent theme discussion.

   a. I determined the categories of frustration by first looking at the data portions that were coded to the frustration theme. I organized the frustrations into two groups, "individual frustrations" and "collective frustrations," frustrations expressed by individual teachers and those expressed by the teachers collectively. I then shared my categories with a critical friend (Merriam & Simpson, 1995) for feedback on my designations. Based on my critical friend feedback, I further broke the categories down according to the specific types of frustration the data reflected. Resulting categories included institutional frustration, pedagogical frustration, relational frustration, positional frustration, and cultural frustration.

9. While "frustration" emerged as the study's most dominant theme, my analysis did not stop there. With the principles of portraiture in mind, it was necessary for me to continue combing the data for the "goodness" and to ensure I represented the teachers' views holistically and completely (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). I asked myself and the data, "Is being frustrated the teachers' only message? Is it a complete answer to the research question?" Rereading and reflecting on the writing prompts and transcripts and looking over less-referenced focus group codes in light of my research question revealed additional, less dominant, but pertinent

themes pertaining to teachers' definitions of achievement and their pedagogical philosophies. I describe these themes as less-dominant because when compared to the frustration teachers expressed about various aspects of their teaching experiences, they did not compare. While teachers articulated their views of achievement and their perceptions of the ways they helped students achieve, they did not *emphasize* these views – neither qualitatively nor quantitatively – in our discussions. I had to probe for these views, because teachers chose to focus more on the disturbing situations they felt interfered with their efforts to impact Black student achievement; therefore, I spend the bulk of my emergent theme analysis describing the types of frustrations each teacher articulated.

10. Creating the teacher poetic portraits was not a straight forward activity. I initially struggled with how to depict them in portraits. In the design of my study, I had not intended for internal context[23] (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) to be particularly salient for this study because the majority of the research would take place outside of the participants' natural surroundings, but because of the focus group location change to a neighborhood diner, I thought considering the internal context might make for a richer portrait. In an attempt to attend to internal context, I initially tried to reconstruct the scene of the focus group meetings at the breakfast table, but I soon realized that the background noises of plates clattering, waiters and waitresses taking orders, and customers engaged in chatter

[23] Internal context is the physical space in which the action takes place (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997.)

provided little contextual relevance for the topics we were discussing at our meetings. I then considered the physical spaces in which the interviews took place: around Jefferson's school grounds, at restaurants, and in a teacher's classroom. Might there have been details in those scenes that would provide contextual information that would help bring the teachers' messages forward (Ward, 2011)? My writing suffered at this point. The details of the physical spaces were not significant. I decided to return to my initial plan to base my portraits on my many conversations with teachers and on the biographical and historical contextualizing information that I had learned about them. Still, my writing did not flow. I felt that the perceptions and experiences the teachers shared were so powerful and rich that I was not quite sure how to convey them in a way that would capture the essence of how the teachers presented herself. At this point, I revisited examples of how others who had used portraiture had represented their participants, which is when I became drawn to Hill's (2005) work with poetic portraits. Hill (2003, 2005) extended the portraiture methodology to include poetry in order to meet her research needs, using portraiture's two defining features – context and voice – to create poetic portraits of each participant. Following Hill's (2003, 2005) example helped me through my crisis of representation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) and resulted in rich poetic portrayals of my study's research participants. Because "poetry is a form of evocative writing that can create emotional and cognitive responses" (Ward, 2011, p. 358), using

it as a medium to construct the teachers' portraits enabled me to convey not only their *views* on impacting Black student achievement, but the defining experiences and emotions that accompanied – and in some cases shaped them – them as well. I strategically wrote to evoke both cognitive and emotional reader responses. I recognized that poetic re-presentation is a deliberate form of evocative text" (Ward, 2011, p. 358), so I gave myself artistic license (Eisner, 2005) to experiment creatively with form and layout to convey the teachers' voices, experiences, and perspectives. I utilized the braided time (Clark et al., 2005) model of depiction to capture a composite snapshot of the perspectives and experiences the teachers shared throughout the study. "In braided time, the beginning, the middle, and the end are wound around and circle back onto one another the way that braided hair does. The first becomes the last becomes the middle strand of time just as is the case in braided hair" (Clark et al., 2005, p. 924). The resulting poems were similar to those in Clark et al.'s (2005) study in that "the poems were based on the pared down chronology and logic-in-use of the participants. They included what seemed to be salient events in the words of the respondents" (p. 918).

11. To construct the portraits, I reviewed the codes and themes I had already identified and then combed through, meditated upon, and reflected upon the interview and focus group transcripts, the questionnaire answers, and the journal writings. I also brought to mind visual and auditory memories of the time I spent with all of the teachers in an effort to depict the

demeanor, mood, and voice they projected. I thought about what message the teachers seemed to be sending about their experiences and perceptions and how their backgrounds and upbringings may have influenced their perspectives. For example, I considered Ms. X's northern upbringing and the stories she told about racial conflicts with teachers and students as I conveyed the strong resistance she had to being labeled a Black teacher. I brought to mind Ms. Tan's early love for books as I articulated the frustration she felt about novels being eliminated from the English education curriculum. As I considered these types of contextualizing examples for each teacher, I looked for confirmation of perspectives and feelings across all data sources.

Presentation of Findings

The study's findings are presented in two separate chapters. The first includes the poetic portraits and serve as introductions to the teachers' voices, experiences, and perceptions. The portraits are written to evoke the tone and style of the individual study participants in an effort to engage the audience as if they were actually present in the meetings with the teachers. As Cahnmann (2003) explains, "taking in the many different visual layouts of poems on the page offers researchers new ways to represent interview data that respect the tone and movement of the original conversation in ways that may not yet have been imagined in education research before" (Cahnmann, 2003, p. 31). As I created my poetic portraits, I wanted readers to feel the teachers' emotions, and to develop a vicarious relationship with them through the poems' words, form, and layout (Richardson, 2000). The second

findings chapter depicts the teachers' perceptions and experiences in the more traditional emergent theme format.

Subjectivity, Representation, and Validity

"The message expressed in a painting or a research portrait is the vision of the artist or researcher" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 34).

I was not seeking to "represent" a mirror image of these teachers' lives and experiences; rather**,** I was looking to analyze their verbal, nonverbal, and written contributions in an effort to develop portraits that reflected their perceptions and experiences. I aimed to produce "evocative" rather than "representational" portraits (Park, 2005, p. 41), making an effort to balance evoking my voice over the participants' voices, recognizing that in portraiture, the *researcher* is the primary research tool (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The researcher negotiates how the portrait will be represented. I recognized my subjective role in representation, as "the element of self is at play in all parts of the implementation of the methodology – forging relationships, determining context, searching for coherence, defining expression, and balancing a unified representation" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 35). Throughout the research process, I was constantly aware of how my personal context, as well as my voices of interpretation, autobiography, and preoccupation influenced the questions I asked and the resulting analysis.[24]

[24] I discussed the roles of context and voice earlier in this chapter.

In addition to considering and being mindful of issues of representation, I also considered my own subjectivity as I analyzed data, how my values and expectations influenced how I conducted the study and my conclusions (Maxwell, 2005). Because "what the informant says is always influenced by the interviewer and the interview situation" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 109), I had to be intentional about how I positioned myself to my informants. I entered the project with a position: I believed some Black teachers might have been complicit – although they may not have realized it – in the problem of Black student underachievement. I did not believe, though, that they were the root cause or the blame. They were simply products of their experiences as raced people in a historically racist society. I had to be careful about how I communicated this personal opinion, for I assumed such an opinion might offend some of the teachers. Thus, I never explicitly stated this belief. As I have discussed, research indicates that some Black teachers adopt mainstream society's deficit view of explaining Black student underachievement (Delpit, 2006; Fordham, 1996; Lynn et al., 2010), a view that does not encourage teachers to self-reflect on their own practice and how *it* might be contributing to student underachievement. I had to be careful, however, not to be or appear judgmental or accusatory, as if I were simply a researcher interested in "the exotic, the bizarre, the violent" (Weis & Fine, 2000, p. 50). I wanted my research process to reflect compassion and mindfulness (Conklin, 2009), but without sacrificing honesty (North, 2009). To remain true to my intentions, I intentionally looked for the goodness (Conklin, 2009) in the research and, in particular, in the research participants, recognizing and embracing the fact that even "goodness" has imperfections (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

In addition to my personal opinions and positions, the subjectivity I brought to the research process as a doctoral candidate in education well versed in issues surrounding education for minorities, and experienced, pedagogically, as a former secondary-level classroom teacher, certainly impacted the contributions I made to focus group discussions as a participant observer. As a result, I forced myself to limit my contributions as an active participant and I strove to be more of a third party observer, and to, as much as possible, allowing my subjectivity entrance into the data only as a contextualized analytical element (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

4.1.8: Methodological Limitations

Throughout this chapter, I have addressed methodological limitations that existed in the form of validity threats. I discussed the validity threats that emerged as I negotiated relationships with participants with whom I had varying levels and depths of relationships, as well as the challenges I expected to face as I tried to elicit sensitive, controversial information from teachers laminated in the cellophane (McClelland & Fine, 2008) of society's social and political constructions of racism, privilege, and hegemony. Additionally, I have described the limitations I, as the primary tool of research, brought to the study in the form of my personal and professional subjectivities. In addition to these intangible, but important, limitations, I recognize that more general, tangible limitations also exist, such as the study's limited number of participants, its absence of field observations, its short duration, and its focus only on female teachers.

While I agree that increasing the longevity of the study could lead to a more complete picture (Becker & Geer, 1957, as referenced in Maxwell, 2005) of Black

English teachers' perceptions, I do not believe increasing the number of participants would make the results any more valuable simply by virtue of studying more teachers. Focusing on just five teachers allowed for stronger research relationships, which led to more authentic, detailed data. Furthermore, including too many participants would have limited the time each participant would have had to make contributions to focus group discussions and may have resulted in data saturation (Morgan, 1996). Another possible limitation is the absence of observations of teachers teaching. Although classroom observations would have provided for greater contextualizing of each teacher's portrait, I was interested in teachers' *perceptions* (i.e., self-reported data), and thus, observations were not necessary in the design of this study. Lastly, my decision to focus only on women could be viewed as a limitation because of the exclusion of the male voice. The male voice is certainly important to the conversation on Black teachers and Black student achievement and other scholars (e.g. Bridges, 2009; Brown, 2009; Lynn, 2002) are actively engaged in research agendas focusing on their experiences and views. The design of this study, however, aimed to create a space where Black women English teachers' voices would be privileged in an environment of emotional and professional safety.

Chapter 5: Teacher Introductions – Poetic Portraits

The poetic portraits in this chapter depict the perceptions and experiences of the study participants at the time of the study, highlighting the paths that brought them to teaching, their teaching philosophies, the influences of their upbringings, educational histories, and the frustrating challenges they faced in their teaching careers. Portraiture's emphasis on context, voice, and search for goodness helped me create aesthetically whole and analytically powerful portraits. I strove to paint pictures that emphasized the perceptions and experiences most salient for each teacher during the course of the research project. I aimed to evoke the presence, attitude, and perceptions each teacher brought to the study. I included details and anecdotes from the teachers' educational life histories to contextualize the viewpoints they shared in the discussions and interviews. I used the teachers' historical contexts as analytical shaping mechanisms for the poetic portraits. My voice as well is also present in the poems through my analytical insights into the perceptions, experiences, and persona of each teacher. My third person omniscient voice is intertwined with the voices of each teacher, conveying my analytical insights in concert with the views teachers expressed explicitly. I provide direct quotations from the teachers to support my analysis. These composite portraits serve as introductions of the teachers, artful glimpses into their educational experiences and thoughts about their work with Black students.

Ms. Tan

I

Five-foot, honey brown skin, the flash of her soft,
but broad and vibrant grin says beauty
Ms. Tan, will-you-be-my-prom-date-beauty

Almond eyes
Transparent.
Curious.
Full.
Bright.
Sincere.

She desires to improve.
She is open to growth.
Collegiality is her middle name.

One of only two African Americans in her otherwise all White department,
Her efforts at collaboration are not always reciprocated.

"There are many frustrating aspects
of what I'm trying to do as an English teacher
that I think are you know held back,
my efforts are shot down."

Resilience empowers her.

"It's just not academic enough.
I'm definitely disappointed
coming from the university
to teaching
to not find
a more scholarly atmosphere."

Professionalism sustains and strengthens.

II

When Ms. Tan was born she had a book in her hand.
"So, my mother put books in my crib. Mind you,
that was before they came up with books that toddlers can't rip up.
Consequently, my mother did a lot of taping."

Mom was advised by Aunt Elma who was the Dean of a Georgia HBCU
Mom was one of many in a long line of college educated kin
Dad, a Panamanian American, was college-educated, too.

"So, there was never a question that at the very least,
I'd get my bachelor's degree. It was unspoken."

She earned her master's degree and is working on National Board Certification,
carrying on the family legacy of choosing education.
She teaches 9th and 10th grade English
She sponsors the National Honor Society
She is not idle, but she is not satisfied.

Still gobbling up books
Living to read, striving to write a book (20 minutes a day!)
A member of two book clubs
Literature circles abound in her classroom
Afraid books are going bye-bye
She wonders what her future lessons will be

"When they close Borders and Barnes and Nobles
and everybody thinks it's cool to read on a piece of metal,
books are going to go the way of the video store – the rental store."

"I feel disillusioned with what I'm doing in general. Like, what is my objective to teach kids? What am I really preparing them for? Seriously."

III

"Yes, Summer.
No, Summer."
Hearing her call me Summer became more normal as I started to call her by
her first name
We were deepening our teacher-friend relationship
A strong, intangible connection, but present
We wanted the same things that all the teachers wanted:
to be heard, to share, to be understood, to engage, to connect
to trust
Her participation was earnest; she was always fully present.

In the late 1980s, went to a PWI[25]
wanted to forge genuine cross-racial relationships with White people.
She sat next to them in class, but they did not see her.

Tried again with White colleagues on the job
and in graduate school

Unsuccessful.

[25] Predominantly White Institution

Why, she wonders?

Even her White students leave the relationship at door at the end of the year
Why can't she develop White friendships that work?
Not that she is yearning for them, but she's open to them
She attributes the lack to way back when
The only little boys and girls she sat next to were
Black.

"My whole world was Black."

"Only in junior high school did I realize that my whole world wasn't Black.
My history teacher had to tell me that.
The whole time before that, I was like,
what is the big deal about White people – they only on T.V. and at the mall."

Teaching was good at the all-Black school, her first teaching assignment
"I remember, like we did these paintings things,
I'd say like, in college you'll take an art class
they'll put up a painting
you'll just say what you think"
Her students said, "What?!"
"And then by the third or fourth one,
they were excited to do it."

Racial uplift, advocacy – motivating her teaching philosophy
She could talk about race with those kids.

Teaching was draining at her second and longest teaching assignment,
the integrated, magnet school where most of the Black kids were tracked into the regular (low) classes. These Black kids were different.
"I think they've had too much
so they always expect to get what they want.
It's more of a privileged mentality."

These Black kids did not buy in
to her "I'm preparing you for life" teaching philosophy.
They, like their parents, felt they were already prepared.
What did Ms. Tan have to offer them?

These Black kids were different.
"I do have trouble relating to kids that don't do their work,
cause I was never in any classroom as a student like that."

She didn't talk about race with these kids.

Inhibited by integration's freedoms.
"I've had bad experiences
with things I was too candid with
coming back to me from a parent complaining"

"We're just like fighting a losing battle in the classroom,
trying to fight this big, huge culture."

Culture of Society
American culture
Values
Morals
Ways of being
Work habits

"I know growing up,
we had more positive public declarations
of those types of expectations,
teachers were allowed to say, it's not cool to litter
they could tell us some values.
So I really feel like the culture
is not supporting
the values that we are trying to instill."

IV

Fifteen years in and looking for a way out.

"There's no joy left in teaching."
If the culture of kids were different,
If expectations for teachers were realistic,
she would welcome staying
at least till the 20-year mark
The teaching she knew and loved is,
in her eyes,
a hazy dream of the past

Work (teaching Black students) has become a chore.

"There's no joy left in teaching."

Ms. Jocasta

"Put this in your book. I want this in your book."

Sixty-three-year-old Ms. Jocasta, the fairy godmother of education,

leading students down the yellow brick road,
a road full of surprises, challenges, and obstacles.

In the teaching world she imagined, Ms. Jocasta would be
Guiding her students to literary discoveries,
global revelations and pure witty word fun.
She would use her intellectual wand
to tap into hearts and minds
turning the world into a learning play land
With her wand she would
repair deficiencies
restore pride
build bridges to opportunity.
She would help close the minority achievement gap.

But the students would not follow.

"The administration and the kids.
They see me as the outlier. I talk funny.
They don't know this is just me.
I'm not putting on anything.
Sometimes the only think I can think of is a big word.
I'm sorry."

II

Ms. Jocasta
disenchanted
constantly rejected
growing more weary every day
hope and enthusiasm zapped
she sits over in the corner
hands on head, buried in paperwork and criticism

Five years into her teaching career
"I question my decision to become a teacher.
I love the language and the literary marvels
that exist in English,
but I am not a good teacher"

"So I started cussing a lot and I started smoking again. And I started eating again. I've gained, how much? I think I've gained close to 30 lbs in 5 years."

Armed with cherished childhood weapons –
Reading and Writing – she is powerless in her classroom.
A living critique of Alternative Certification Programs

A pre-med turned English-major
teaching was a third career.
Former titles include
Law-school student
copy-editor
legal assistant
director of legal services
corporate worker

Many lives that led her down the path to teaching

"I'm going to take some of my savings
and put myself on a plan to find a job
that is something I really, really want to do,
and I came up with teaching,
cause I loved the language,
I loved the reading and writing, I did it well,
and I had encountered
so many young Black people
when I was hiring who were
painfully, always, always, always
less well-educated
than my other employees,
so much so that when I hired them,
invariably they turned out to be poorer employees as well."

"I deliberately was looking for African American people
and I didn't find too many.
Out of all of them, I ended up with only six
and um, they liked to talk on the phone,
they called in a lot sick,
they came in late a lot,
all the, stereotypes,
well that was a lot of the reason why I wanted to be a teacher."

And "that's why I'm getting out of it."
"Put this in your book. I want this in your book."

III

But there is power in her wand
Funny, she never mentioned it.
I couldn't wait to bring it up…

"Room 102, 102…there it is…
What?!!
It's Ms. Jocasta's room!
I open the door and can barely get in for the crowd –
wall to wall, board to board, Ms. Jocasta's room was bumping!
Music blasting
student disc jockies
Wii dance action going in the corner
boxes and boxes and boxes of
pizza
home baked goods
sodas
and a smiling Ms. Jocasta at the helm."
Had she forgotten about these kids?

Not her focus – former honors students
Present focus: her current hell – non-honors repeaters
In all of her classes!

"Put this in your book. I want this in your book."

"You racist pigs!"
she screamed at her Black students
who ate candy from the hands of Whitey teacher but
ignored Ms. Jocasta's brown hands and what they offered.
"You racist pigs!"

An upbringing in the North
Living and learning with Whites, Blacks, and Jews
did not prepare her for schooling in Jim Crow Maryland
And neither did her parents, religious zealots who
encouraged proselytizing instead of post-secondary school
"I was an abused child."
And an abused teacher
Plopped into a classroom two weeks
into her resident teacher coursework
because the predominantly Black district
desperately needed teachers
She'd be given support, so she agreed.
" I didn't know what I was doing!"

"Put this in your book. I want this in your book."

"Perhaps there's an ongoing need for Black teachers to continue meeting."

"Put this in your book. I want this in your book."

Ms. X

"*My first sentences were in standard English."*

labels
limits
long burgundy locks
moved and meant
to resist
to object
Ms. X.

"I am the great granddaughter of a man who was a teacher."

comfortable in blue jeans, sneakers
and Jefferson High School staff shirt
15 years at the same school and
"not to sound vain,
but I am at the point where
I am pretty sure that my practices are effective."

"My great grandfather was the heart and soul of a one room school house in North Carolina. He ran his school with an iron fist, and a heart of gold."

After 10 days on earth, moved north to New York
Became *one of the only*
in predominantly White Catholic school classrooms

"So the White kids were calling me nigger
and the Black kids were calling me White
or whatever, you talk White, you do this, blah, blah, blah,
and I quickly realized
that they had unfortunately assigned success or standard English
a color and that color excluded them.
I quickly realized how sad that was
and how sad it was for them that they believed it.
Insights inspired by parents who 'would not let me go there'"

But parents who insisted where
she go to college be an HBCU
It was a family tradition.

A tradition she broke after 1 year
"I HATED IT!
It was as if all the stereotypes of Black folk
convened upon the student body of that institution.
I was on the dean's list and earned good grades,
but because I was a "northerner"
who spoke standard English and had diverse interests,
I was 'suspect.'"

"He did not put up with any crap, and he was admired
by the community, and his family adored him."

"I don't want to pull myself into any pigeon hole
and I'm not gonna pull my kids into any pigeon hole
especially if it is a negative or a narrow one."
"I'm tired of trying to fit into everybody's role, screw em."
Resist. Reject.
"when I was (ahumph) consenting
to teach TAG[26] classes,
and I was really good at teaching tag classes …
I had a couple (of parents) tell me,
well how long have you been out of college,
how well do you know this material?"

And now she doesn't teach any tag classes.

A natural comedian
"You always laughed with us, and made each of us feel special."
Spontaneous breaks
Into Madea[27] impersonations
at any moment

She kept us laughing

II

A world traveler and teacher
Lived in Europe and Africa
"I hope I am able to bring my students
my authentic self,
to share my knowledge and love of English,
but also infuse it with the life lessons
I've learned through living and working outside of the USA."

[26] Talented and Gifted (TAG)

[27] Madea is a popular movie personality created and played by actor Tyler Perry. Madea is known for being loud and using foul, comical language.

She knew there had to be more to the world
more ways to live
than by racism and colorism

"He was a Renaissance man, an artist and musician as well as an intellectual."

Sensitive to and affected by race-based experiences
She dismisses and defies the fact that
Race matters

"I don't just teach the African American students"
"I don't want to get to a point
where this is a Black school and this is a White school
this Black teacher can only teach Black students
this White teacher can only teach White students"

She can teach them all, but only consents to teach some

"Why should I be expected to teach Black students, Latino students
and everyone else is only being expected to teach the White kids?
That's unfair, so if you really want to be a teacher,
you need to know how to deal with all types of students
just as we know how to deal with all types of students"

III

Enough about her. She has no more to say.
She wants to know about *my* experiences at Jefferson High School?

labels

limits

long burgundy locks (way down her back)

moved, meant

to resist

to object

Ms. X.

"I am positive that he has been reborn in me; in who I am authentically, and who I aspire to be."

Ms. Kelly

"The Gap – it drives me crazy."

A mirror of myself ten years ago

When I was a first-year teacher, but smarter

And more confident

Optimistic

Mature

Youthful

Stylish

Humble

Deep, chocolate brown skin

that says I'm a sista

Almond eyes that see

Eyes that speak

People will listen

Students hear her

Raised by a single mother on welfare

With grandma's help

Her upbringing was not middle class, in her eyes

But she was on the talented tenth track from the beginning

All the junior honor society students would go into honors

II

Only 5:30 p.m. but dark

As she enters Panera®

Black tights and heels

Black belt to match

White blouse

Long, straight Black hair

Young Black professional

Making her debut – year two

Voice

Barely there in focus groups

Strong and natural in writing prompts

Loquacious in one-on-one interview

Always crisply articulate

Message unmistakable:

"As a teacher my focus is success and growth for ALL students."

"The Gap – it drives me crazy."

Casual mentions of "my mom" live

and move throughout her conversations and

in her silences

"Education was always at the forefront of everything. My mom was an educator."

The source and inspiration for her quiet confidence.

III

"Fast-forward to the year 2000:

my mother passed away

and I found myself depending on my teachers for everything.

Not resources and supplies,

but just conversations, college suggestions,

career tips, life lessons…I loved my teachers"

And so, after a B.A. in English

And an M.Ed., she became one.

All acquired at the same PWI[28]

One of only few Blacks since high school,

She has always been comfortable in her skin as she

traversed the predominantly White

environments of honors classes

and college classrooms

but

she is most comfortable hanging with

[28] Predominantly White Institution

her girls from the neighborhood – her Black friends

her best friend from childhood, though, was White

Ms. Kelly, though, wasn't welcomed to play at her house

no animosity, just awareness and action

in the classroom.

Ms. J

Planted
in rich soil
to dad, the degreed intellectual
to mom, the technically-trained
to grandma, the inspiration

and to Black teachers, the early cultivators of
Ms. J's self pride and awareness

"All of my teachers were African American teachers,
so basically that was my experience,
so we had that sense of pride and unity and understanding ourselves,
and every morning we sang the negro national anthem,
that was my growing up."

Growing pains
Growing gains
Ms. J. embraced
Education as a cycle:

"The cycle was watered both day and night.
It continued on like a boxer who refused to lose the fight.
It was filled with many doubts, trials, and tears.
But when I look back it was worth all the years"

Change.

All Black elementary school would not cut it for mom

"My mom didn't want me to go to my neighborhood school"
"My neighborhood school was a little rough.

The kids, again, they were predominantly Black schools,
the students were…um, a handful
(laughter),
so, she didn't want me to be in that kind of environment.
She wanted me to be in a more diverse environment."

In the new, more diverse environment
the Talented and Gifted Track of
Ms. J excelled in during her primary years
was no longer her home
Enthusiasm and ambition for school waned
Until college

Ms. J attended an HBCU.

While her Blackness had always been significant –
"I was feeling my Blackness" –
Profound experiences with race (ism) were absent
Or perhaps just not discussed with me

"Nothing really profound stands out in my mind
when I think about being in high school and dealing with race.
In terms of my peers, I think the thinking in high school was that White people were smart and I can remember, I don't know if it was junior or high,
because I was going to a more diverse school, feeling a little bit of pressure,
because I was not use to being around that many [White people],
so I guess I experienced a little bit of culture shock"

In college, her most memorable and impactful teacher was a White man.

II

Growth.

"My first few years as a teacher, of course,
I believed I could and would change the world.
Then unbeknownst to me my desire would change.
I believed I could change my school,
then my classroom,
then maybe one student.
With this reality I felt the need to reinvent myself
because I became disillusioned

with the status quo and the
disappointments
of the educational system."

From first-year teacher to nationally-board certified (after two tries)
Ms. J not only challenged the status quo
In her students
But in herself as well

"I wanted to be the teacher to be liked, to just be the most popular teacher,
but as I went through teaching,
I had a situation with one of my colleagues
that kind of transformed the way I thought about teaching
and I started to I move from wanting to be
the teacher who was being liked and loved by my students
to the teacher who 'you're actually learning something in my class!'"

Her pedagogical thinking changed when her environment changed.

"It seems that when I taught in a school that was predominantly Black
my focus was to instill a sense of pride, determination, and fortitude in them
[Black students]"
"Now that I teach at a more diverse school,
sometimes I find
the Black students may get lost in the process"

Dissipating emphasis on Blackness disturbing

"I believe I can and should do more
as it pertains to Black students,
partly because I am Black and understand
the challenges they will face as they enter society"

"It seemed like our teachers, Black teachers,
gave us a sense of self pride and self hope
and (sic) who we were as individuals
…it seems like a lot of students, Black students
today,
they don't have that same sense of pride and self
worth"

Disconnect between Black student and Black teacher disheartening

"I felt a lot of the African American students
were not treating me as they should
and I said something to them
in front of the other students
because I didn't appreciate it as a teacher"

"I was just so frustrated because I'm like,
you would think that being – having a Black teacher,
somebody that looks like you, you know,
that you would be able to get the learning that you need,
you'd be able to relate, you know,
have some type of commonality,
but you treating me like I'm some daggone piece of junk off the street,
really?"

Tension, Suspicion
between this Black teacher and her Black pupils palpable
and perplexing.
Should she teach the beauty and value of Blackness?
Should students learn it?

"Because I work under the premise of being "fair" to all students,
realizing that fairness may look different
for the types of students I teach,
I believe that I may have lost
to a degree
the fervor for the "fight" for Black students."

Dissipating emphasis on Blackness disturbing

The poems presented in this chapter are composite snapshots of the teachers, each depicting the voice and presence each teacher brought to the study and illustrating the personal and professional experiences that were salient to their feelings and perspectives on teaching Black students. The poems also illuminate aspects of the teachers' efforts to impart more than content-knowledge to Black students. Even more, the poems draw attention to the frustrating circumstances the

teachers felt interfered with their ability to help Black students achieve. In the next chapter, I discuss each teacher's more-than-content teaching approach and I define and elaborate upon the frustrations alluded to in the poetic portraits: institutional frustrations, pedagogical frustrations, relational frustrations, positional frustrations, and cultural frustrations.

Chapter 6: Emergent Themes

Unpacking & Responding to the Research Question

I set out to answer the following research question: What are Black English teachers' perceptions of how they impact Black student achievement? Achievement, from my perspective, entailed evidence of academic engagement and proficiency as measured by traditional assessments, such as homework, quizzes, tests, projects, and presentations. I conceptualized achievement this way for this dissertation project because these are the traditional markers of achievement in school settings. To allow for organic responses, however, I did not share this conceptualization of achievement with the study participants, and instead left the definition of achievement open to teacher interpretation.

Defining Achievement: Evidence of Growth and Independent Thinking Denote Achievement

The teachers measured achievement by evidence of student growth and the development of students' independent thinking skills. Ms. Tan spoke particularly about how when measuring student achievement, she looked for signs of independent thinking:

> Summer: How do you define achievement and how do you measure it in your students? What constitutes an achievement and how do you know if they have achieved it?
>
> Ms. Tan: Well, one way is if they think of something I didn't think about; those times they're like,"Ms. Tan, I kept reading, you know I'm up to" – seeing them take initiative, seeing them find a way to take something out of

the material for themselves, maybe that's it – when I see independence and self-motivation. (Interview, January 31, 2012)

Ms. J looked for similar evidence of independence in students' self-initiated use of academic language and their personal efforts at engaging in intellectual challenges with their peers.

Summer: How do you know if your teaching strategies have worked, if your students have understood the lessons? How do you measure? How do you know?

Ms. J: Well, there are a couple of ways to measure. You could measure in terms of grades. I measure in terms of their ability to communicate and use the language they should use, just seeing them challenge each other.

(Interview, March 27, 2012)

In addition to intellectual independence, Ms. J also looked for *growth* as a sign of achievement:

Ms. J: I measure when they look at their papers and they're taking my suggestions on how to make their papers work; I measure when I see a student who on the first day doesn't say two sentences who is participating on their own. (Interview, March 27, 2012)

Ms. X, too, looked for growth to denote achievement. She described how using moments of student recognition of their own growth helped her to know she had taught them effectively:

Ms. X: If my kids are struggling, but I'm getting them to certain benchmarks, certain places along the way, then I'm like wow, if I can – [as if she is talking

to a student] “You know what, when we first started this year, if I had had this conversation with you about writing an essay, and you know what a sub-thesis is and a structure sentence and what analysis is and how you have to support that, I can talk to you about that. Can you imagine if you all walked in the first day and I'm talking to you about this and how crazy .you would have been? – [in student’s voice} "Yeah, you're right." So that is how I also base my effectiveness. (Interview, February 2, 2012)

Like the other teachers, Ms. Jocasta and Ms. Kelly identified signs of achievement in students’ contributions to discussions. Ms. Jocasta said she could mark achievement in her honors students by almost any assessment measure:

Summer: So, how did you measure their achievement, like, how did you know whether or not they were getting what you were trying to teach them - the ones that worked well for you?

Ms. Jocasta: The way that they responded to questioning. The way they handled discussions. Almost every way of doing an evaluation or assessment, it was clear who was getting it and who wasn't. (Interview, February 3, 2012)

Ms. Kelly noted general participation as one measure of student growth, but she shared several other specific, more traditional methods of assessment:

Summer: Is it their excitement that lets you know they got it. How do you know that they get the objective?

Ms. Kelly: From first to second quarter, their assessment grades went up an average of 20 %. They were really low first quarter. The participation rate in

that class has gone up tremendously, because they didn't know very much, or they didn't know what they knew.

Summer: This is you're A-Level[29]?

Ms. Kelly: Yes, this is my A-Level. So participation. and I do these warm-up contests now. First one done, they raise their hands and come around and I have these little prizes, so that's been showing mastery. And like I said, we take a grammar quiz every Friday, all tenth graders, the same DGP[30] quiz, from my resource teachers, and we can add and change it. And then just like dialogue and conversation. (Interview, February 6, 2012)

Overall, teachers agreed that growth and independence were markers of achievement. However, their conversations did not focus heavily on these cognitive measures of achievement. They emphasized more their desire to see students develop strong work habits and acquire skills that would benefit them beyond the walls of the schoolhouse, for at the core of their teaching philosophies was the goal of helping students develop the life skills they would need in the real world. They found it difficult, however, to impact students' achievement in these ways because of the challenges they faced in their efforts, challenges that frustrated the teachers so much that some of them contemplated leaving the profession. In the next section, I first discuss the teachers' more-than-content teaching approach. I then describe the frustrating circumstances that teachers felt interfered with their ability to put their pedagogical philosophies into practice.

[29] A-Level is the same as comprehensive or regular-level class.

[30] Daily Grammar Practice

6.1: More than Teachers of Content

The teachers in my study saw themselves as impacting Black student achievement in more ways than just as teachers of content. The teachers believed they were also preparing students for life in the real world by encouraging productive life skills such as punctuality, good work habits, independent thinking, and providing exposure to cultural capital that would be valuable in their lives after school; capital such as knowledge of diverse careers, the canonical literary "classics," and life beyond the United States borders. For example, Ms. X drew on her experiences living and working abroad to inform her pedagogy. She said, "I hope I am able to bring my students my authentic self, to share my knowledge and love of English, but also infuse it with the life lessons I've learned through living and working outside of the U.S.A." (Ms. X, Writing Prompt #1). Her childhood experiences with racism led her to want to see what life was like beyond the U.S. borders, because she felt, "there's gotta be more than this" (Interview, February 2, 2012), referring to the racist and discriminatory treatment she had experienced in her youth. Through her teaching, Ms. X tried to expose her students to this larger world and to provide them "with a forum to bring their realities to light" (Ms. X, Writing Prompt #2). She said she did this by giving "them as much of a dose of 'the real world' as possible," which she said was "done of course with love, compassion, and a kick up the backside that they [would] probably not find in arenas outside of school" (Ms. X, Writing Prompt #2).

Ms. Kelly strove to be a role model for Black students, not so they would look up to her but so that they would see her as evidence that they could defy stereotypes and achieve success - despite the stereotypes and expectations associated with the color of their skin. She said, "With my Black students especially, I really just strive

to be a role model. Not that I want them to look up to me, but just to know, 'hey, it can happen. If all my other English teachers were older, White women, sometimes men, and Ms. Kelly is my first Black English teacher, then I, too, can bypass stereotypes and expectations" (Ms. Kelly, Writing Prompt #2). Ms. Kelly even viewed her students as more than just students to her: "As a teacher, my focus is success and growth for ALL students. But as a Black English teacher, I feel especially responsible for my Black students – my little sisters, brothers, cousins, neighbors, friends" (Ms. Kelly, Writing Prompt #2). Ms. Kelly saw her Black students as family members, children she had a vested interest in beyond one that is just about teaching academic skills.

Even Ms. Jocasta, who struggled miserably to be successful with many of her Black students, hoped to prepare students for the reality of life post-high school. She stated,

> I believed I could and would be a guide for Black students into a world of experiences and discoveries that would prepare them for the 'slings and arrows of outrageous fortune' that awaited them after graduation. I wanted to emphasize that the thousand shocks that flesh is heir to when one is in high school are nothing compared to the realizations (hopefully) that arise from just being an adult in the under-world. (Ms. Jocasta, Writing Prompt #2)

Additionally, Ms. Jocasta's message to students in her retirement letter was about issues of character and successful living:

> My message to students is brief. Value yourselves more dearly, children. The world, though vast and infinitely interesting, can devour you and digest your

> essence more quickly than a bubble can burst if you are ignorant and prideful. I have learned that pride does indeed come before a fall. Humility and thankfulness, along with a constant craving to know more, and more, and still more, may ensure your success and a modicum of joy … Stop trying to bend yourselves into appreciable shapes for your friends. Configure yourselves around your bliss, that which brings you the deepest most enduring satisfaction. And don't worry about being seen. Everybody is looking and judging just as you look and judge. (Ms. Jocasta, Writing Prompt #4)

Ms. Jocasta's philosophy as an English teacher extended beyond teaching grammar and literary terminology to preparing students for personal contentment and success in life.

Ms. Tan, too, focused her teaching on more than academics. At the crux of her goal as an educator of Black students was to help students develop the life and work skills that would not only help students be successful, but also competitive, in college or in the workforce and in a "cold, hard" world. In her "letter of retirement" writing prompt, she wrote:

> You have already learned that the world can be a cold, hard, unforgiving and often prejudiced place outside of the school's walls. As an educator, it has been one of my main objectives to prepare you for the reality of post-secondary academia and/or the workforce. I've tried my best to hold you to guidelines, deadlines, and rules to help you form strong habits to use in any situation. I've exposed you to a variety of texts to enrich your literary

experiences so that you can converse about the recognized literary canon with the best of them." (Ms. Tan, Writing Prompt #4)

Ms. Tan believed necessary life and work skills included being punctual, demonstrating appropriate manners, systematically approaching difficult tasks, and having knowledge of people, events, and ideas that are deemed valuable in mainstream society. She articulated this goal in her teaching philosophy writing prompt:

> My teaching philosophy, particularly as it relates to Black students is that I am preparing them for life, not just teaching literature or helping them pass a class. The habits that they form, or continue in my classroom will serve them throughout their lifetimes, so maybe I can teach them the importance of punctuality, manners, or systematically approaching a seemingly difficult task. I try very hard to stick to the due date guidelines I have in place, taking off points for late papers, not allowing library computer lab visits during class on the day a paper is due to print it out, etc…In my lessons, I build in assignments or exposure to ideas or people that will prepare them for life after school. (Ms. Tan, Writing Prompt #2)

Ms. Tan's approach to teaching Black students was also grounded in her understanding of the challenges African Americans face in society and the need for students to be prepared for real-world challenges. In her "letter of retirement" writing prompt, she told students,

> Americans of African descent are often stereotyped and therefore must acquire airtight credentials and persevere in order to get the chances that come

more readily to others. I hope you've heard me or realized that I was trying to prepare you. (Writing Prompt #4)

When Ms. J taught classes that were predominantly Black, she strove to "instill a sense of pride, determination, and fortitude in [Black students]" because she felt that "many of them did not understand the magnitude of the challenges that they would face in the 'real world' (Ms. J, Questionnaire). In her more integrated settings, Ms. J still aimed to help students develop esteem in themselves. One of the ways she said she did this was by creating a mantra she invited students to say everyday: "I am smart. I am successful. My brain works. I will pass English 10 and the state test in May" (Ms. J, Interview, March 31, 2012). She said her students embraced this mantra and chanted it every day. Ultimately, she felt what made enduring the challenges of teaching worth it was "when [she could] help a child to understand his or her value" (Ms. J, Writing Prompt #2).

These anecdotes resonate with the way many other Black teachers are portrayed in the literature as mentors, cultural translators (Irvine, 1989), "othermothers" (Foster, 1993; Irvine, 2002), and emancipatory pedagogues (Foster, 1990; Irvine, 2002; Lynn, Johnson, and Hassan, 1999). In this dissertation study, however, such experiences and perspectives did not dominate the conversations, writing prompts, and questionnaire answers; rather, data were more reflective of teachers' *frustrations* with the challenging situations they faced in their efforts to impact Black student achievement.

6.2: Teachers' Frustrations

The teachers' frustrations can be organized into five categories: institutional frustration, pedagogical frustration, relational frustration, positional frustration, and cultural frustration. Institutional frustration is associated with the systems and processes of educational institutions and/or the effects the institutional processes and systems have on teachers' work life or on student learning opportunities and achievement. These institutions may be at the national, state, district or school-level. Pedagogical frustration includes frustration with the process and product of teaching, including teachers' feelings of angst or discomfort with their ability to translate their content knowledge into lessons that students understand and enjoy. Relational frustration involves teachers' difficulty with sustaining mutually amicable and productive relationships with Black students. Teachers experiencing this type of frustration may feel their pedagogical efforts may result in flat out rejection from Black students or indifference. Rejection and indifference are troubling for such teachers because they feel Black students should be particularly drawn to them because of their shared racial background. Positional frustration involves teachers' push-back against the "racial uplift" teaching philosophy that has historically informed Black education as well as, contrarily, teachers' sense of guilt about not living up to the "racial uplift" standard set by Black teachers from previous generations. Lastly, cultural frustration includes annoyance and disappointment with the attitudes, values, and work habits of Black students – attitudes, values, and work habits that teachers felt did not support school success and that were different from the values, attitudes, and work habits the teachers held when they were students and that they believe students should hold today.

These categories of frustration do not represent frustrations *all* teachers experienced. The discussion of frustration is organized according to the types of frustration salient for *particular* teachers. Thus, Ms. Tan and Ms. Kelly most experienced institutional frustration. Ms. Tan was frustrated with what she perceived as a weakening system of public education that required teachers to teach students *what* to think instead of *how*. She felt the teaching expectations of such of philosophy inhibited her ability to teach students the skills she felt they needed to acquire. Ms. Kelly's frustration was with the system of tracking that she felt created a skills and preparation gap between students in her honors and comprehensive-level classes. Ms. Tan and Ms. Jocasta most experienced pedagogical frustration. Ms. Tan was disturbed by what she perceived as students' inability to think for themselves and with her struggle to deliver lessons that resulted in students demonstrating independent thinking and application of learning. Ms. Jocasta experienced pedagogical frustration with her teaching effectiveness. She felt her lessons did not meet student or district expectations. Ms. J and Ms. Jocasta experienced relational frustration. Ms. J's frustration was with what she perceived as a lack of respect Black students showed for her and for Black teachers in general. Ms. Jocasta's frustration was with feeling rejected by Black students. Ms. X and Ms. J expressed positional frustration. Ms. X was frustrated with what she perceived as her school's and department's improper focus on "race" – the race of the students and the race of the teacher as it pertained to her practice and to Black student achievement. Ms. J was troubled by her declining focus on the African American struggle in her own practice and in contemporary schools in general. Cultural frustration was salient for all

teachers. They believed many Black students embodied an "empty" culture, one that they felt did not promote school and life success. In the next section, I present findings that show how each teacher manifested one or more of these types of frustrations.

6.2.1: Institutional Frustration – Ms. Tan & Ms. Kelly

Ms. Tan

Ms. Tan was frustrated with the current goals of education as enacted by her school's English department and her larger school district, goals that she believed were not "academic enough" (Ms. Tan, Focus Group #1, October 22, 2011) and that she felt did not teach students to think independently and to embrace learning for learning's sake. In Ms. Tan's opinion, these improper goals were resulting in disengaged, skill-deficient students. At the school level, Ms. Tan was frustrated with her school's English department because she felt her colleagues did not value her professional ideas and did not value academic professionalism in general. The following exchange illustrates Ms. Tan's institutional frustration.

> Ms. Tan: So, for me, there are many frustrating aspects of what I'm trying to do as an English teacher or as a teacher that I think are you know held back, my efforts are shot down, I don't always think I'm very effective.
>
> Ms. X: Your goals are shot down by whom? The parents? Everybody?
>
> Ms. Tan: All kinds of people everywhere from everywhere, different years, sometimes it's a different set of people, depends on the set of kids, depends on the set of parents, menopausal trends of the times, but it's not always exactly the same, but there is a lot of frustration and as far as our department is

concerned, I don't always see the problems as the Black and White thing; sometimes I don't even think we're academic enough. I get frustrated that our focus isn't really on the academics. I feel like it's more on the statistics or the data -

Ms. X: - Data-driven definitely

All: um hm

Ms. Tan: - that as a department we shouldn't just be going over an agenda that is just about taking care of business, technicalities, administrative things. What about talking about our educational backgrounds? People are writing about different things in education, different ways to reach the kids, different things to try -

Summer**:** - like best practices.

Ms. Tan**:** We never talk about any of that. We never do any kind of ummm -

Summer: - except those little writing - do y'all still do the little inservices?

Ms. X: We don't have money for that anymore so that has been X'd out.

Ms. Tan: And even those were rushed and just to me, it's just not scholarly enough, and that frustrates me more than even the Black and White thing, and I have tried various things to interject on a pure, this is an English department, we should be doing certain things level. I think I try every other year to do something. and nobody's interested in that, and that is very and it's not even just that they, and I could be wrong, it could be some kind of reaction to me, I'm not gonna discount that, but I don't feel like there is an interest in those things, just working with other departments, like working with the history

department so that when we do certain historical texts we can kind of line them up together. That would be great. That would make our job easier. (Focus Group #1, October 22, 2011)

As one of only two Black teachers in the English department, on the surface, the root of Ms. Tan's frustration with her department may appear to be racial, based on her repeated reference to the "Black-White" thing, but as she explains, she is more frustrated with what she perceives as a rejection of her efforts at collegiality and professional growth. She is more agitated by her assessment that the department is "just not scholarly enough" than she is about whether or not they are rejecting her because she is Black. She was frustrated with the push back she was getting "from all kinds of people from everywhere" just for trying to be an effective English teacher; that is, for trying to be innovative, reflective, and collaborative by working with other departments or sharing educational interests and backgrounds.

Not only did Ms. Tan express frustration with the non-academic focus of her English department, but she also criticized her district's move to the Common Core[31] curriculum, a curriculum she felt did not encourage independent thinking or a love for learning for learning's sake:

Ms. Tan: I'm doing this workshop. The workshop is to try to prepare to mesh the county's curriculum guide with the common core. So, when looking at the Common Core, and their almost eliminating novels – or fiction. There is a huge, huge, huge push for nonfiction and short informative texts, right, so

[31] The Common Core is a set of academic standards adopted by 45 states and three United States territories to reflect the knowledge and skills all students in the United States are expected to acquire in their K-12 educational careers and that they will need for success in post-high school college or workforce training programs (http://www.corestandards.org/).

> that's not fiction; they say literary nonfiction, but I'm thinking, when they close Borders and Barnes and Nobles and everybody thinks it's cool to read on a piece of metal, books are going to go the way of the video store – the rental store. I see that. Definitely, no question. People are not reading as much for pleasure. They are reading short texts for information only. The newspaper industry has learned that with FaceBook, Twitter, blazzie blah, all of that. (Interview, January 31, 2012)

Ms. Tan's critique of the push for nonfiction texts shows her frustration with the field moving away from the part of teaching English that she loves the best: reading literature. She worries that this move will mean a continued decrease in the amount of reading students are doing – especially self-selected reading. She definitely feels the direction curriculum has taken has had a negative effect on her Black students:

> Ms. Tan: I look at my students in the comp classes: they ain't reading nothing. In the comp classes, there are one or two that let it be known, well it's known to me, that they are reading outside of the classes. And then they are *shocked* if they read outside of school. "Ms. Tan, I kept reading last night!" What is that? They actually keep reading past what was required?

In addition to Ms. Tan's disappointment with her department and district, she was also quite exasperated by the negligible amount of reading in which her students engaged. She is annoyed that her students "ain't reading nothing" and that students feel like they have done something special if they read outside of class time. As one who gnawed on books in her crib, the new move away from reading just does not sit well with Ms. Tan.

She continued:

> In comp classes, out of 35 kids, it's only about five of them who are really avid readers where I have to be like put your book away. And that has gone down since I've been teaching. The whole point is that people are not reading, Summer; they are not reading. And I think the novel is gonna die.
>
> (Interview, January 31, 2012)

Ms. Tan spent at least 10 minutes of our interview discussing her frustration with the decreasing amount of reading she noticed students doing and with the district's move away from reading full novels to only reading nonfiction texts. These changes in student behavior and in district mandates caused her to question what she should even strive to teach students, underscoring another area of frustration for her: pedagogical frustration, which I will discuss in the pedagogical frustration section.

Ms. Kelly

The effects of institutional tracking on Black students troubled Ms. Kelly greatly. She was frustrated with the skills and opportunity gap between her honors and comprehensive-level classes, a gap she believed was a result of drastically different educational experiences of students in honors and regular, comprehensive-level classes. In her educational life history journal entry, she tells the story of two students, one who is tracked into honors classes and the other who is tracked into regular comprehensive-level courses. The honors students approached Ms. Kelly for help getting into a summer journalism camp. Ms. Kelly delighted in helping her and succeeded in helping her. The other student did not approach Ms. Kelly with such a request, and Ms. Kelly felt troubled about not knowing how to help her. An excerpt

from Ms. Kelly's first writing prompt illustrates the frustration Ms. Kelly felt about the gap between the students' skills and learning opportunities:

> Changing a child's life, making some kid fall in love with reading and writing. Editing an essay that would be the golden ticket for college admission. Saving a student from dropping out. Oh, I had so many ambitions, hopes, and dreams. ENORMOUS GOALS, paramount expectations.
>
> And sometimes, just sometimes, I see a glimpse of those things. Ah! I remember the day Darla Hayes told me she wanted to go away for the summer, that she hated babysitting her brother and she refused to do it another summer. She'd rather be writing a new script or chapters for her book. I got on that computer and found a journalism camp at Brown University. Immediately printed the application and Darla and I read through it. She was happy but said her mom didn't have or wouldn't pay thousands of dollars for her to go "write" for the summer. I thought about my mom, 'what would she do here?' I didn't have thousands to lend – not on this school teacher's budget, but there were ways. It had to happen. Over the next six months we did bake sales, cookies, brownies, cupcakes, banana pudding, etc…that was another one of Darla's hobbies. She enjoyed baking. We made greeting cards for Christmas. We sold candy-grams for Valentine's Day. Bottom line, on June 17th, Darla packed all her things and headed to Brown for the summer to become a better writer.

> But what about the non-Darlas? What about Allison Williams, who unlike Darla did not have a 3.8 GPA, is not enrolled in AP Lang, AP Bio, AP Psych, and AP World History? Allison still confuses nouns and verbs. Allison never brings a pencil to class and usually sleeps during 1st period. What can I do for Allison besides yell at her for not reading the assigned chapters for homework and having her outline ready for class?
>
> (Writing Prompt #1)

Ms. Kelly's story about Darla and Allison reveals the inner dilemma that grips Ms. Kelly's heart and mind as she thinks about helping Black students achieve. She recognizes and laments the gap in skills and learning opportunities that exists between students like Darla and Allison, the gap between students in her honors and comprehensive-level classes. She does not understand how students like Allison can reach the 10th grade and still confuse nouns and verbs. In our follow-up interview, she elaborated on her frustration with the comprehensive-level skills deficiency, exclaiming, "How did they get to this point? Who thought it was a good idea?" (Interview, February 6, 2012). She also said in the interview that she could not believe that one of her students seriously thought "dog" was a verb. Ms. Kelly was in earnest pursuit of a solution to this gap she described as "gross":

> Brings me to my greatest feat. I have three honors classes of 10th graders – kids are scoring 97, 94, and 91% on their county benchmark. Then I have an on-level (A-level comp class) and kids are scoring 34, 21, and 17% on the same test. This is gross. My "STARS"/honors kids have a "special"

curriculum – Springboard. College Board created a Pre-AP curriculum and supposedly it helps increase HSA scores and the number of AP-ready students in our schools. So why don't my A-level kids get this curriculum ? Aren't they the kids who need it? The Gap – it drives me crazy. There are no White kids in my a-level class and I don't even think that's the issue because our school is 85% Black. Then there's the AVID program: Achievement Via Individual Determination, my other 10th grade class. What's the criteria? Average kid – not too many, if any, college graduates in your family, but we're promising that we will help you get to college. I love my AVID kids, but again, what about my comp class, A-level babies – they aren't smart enough for honors/Stars, not average enough for AVID, not low enough for Special Ed, so there's no one paying attention to them. (Writing Prompt #1)

Ms. Kelly paid attention to these students, challenging them as if they were in honors classes, drawing inspiration from her late mother, also an educator, who she had been told loved her students and did everything for them:

> My expectations for them can't change – because in May, they'll take the same HSA as my STARS/Honors kids. Talk about differentiation…what do I do?? I think back to my mom (as usual); all of my educational thoughts involve her. What would she do? Home visits, parent conferences, additional loving, supplies, etc…? (Writing Prompt #1)

Since the gap "drove her crazy," Ms. Kelly went out of her way to help bridge the opportunity-to-learn gap between the levels. In her third writing prompt in which she

was invited to describe her teaching philosophy as it related to Black students, Ms. Kelly said,

> With my Black students, especially, and not all, but some, especially my a-level/comp kids, I want to make their learning experience as enriching and carefree as possible. Providing them with extra resources to achieve success. That's just it. So many of them have never experienced success, so I make it a point to celebrate their success. I make it a point to value their learning! They don't see this at home. (Writing Prompt #3)

Her frustration with the gap has led her to action. In her second writing prompt in which she was invited to reflect on her teaching by stepping into the students' shoes and writing a letter to herself from the perspective of one of her students, she chose to write from the perspective of a student who was not achieving at high levels and who struggled to understand the material, but who expressed a desire to learn. This is the type of student Ms. Kelly was working hardest to help achieve. Consider Ms. Kelly's perspective-taking prompt:

> **Hey Ms. Kelly,**
>
> **I'ont know why you want me to write this letter, but I'm trying to do better this semester, so I'm getting all my work done. I don't know what it is. I'ont really think English is THAT hard, but kinda like you said, it's hard for me to focus at times. Especially with Kayla always yelling at me and stuff. And I**

guess cause it's 8th period, and the day almost over, so I'm ready to go home. I mean, at first it got on my nerves when you would sit down beside me and pull up a desk next to me when we're working on our own, but I guess what you told my mom about me getting my work done and getting stuff right when u do that is true. No teacher really spent as much time with me as you do for real for real. And I know I said u always riding me, like when u see me posted up against the lockers between classes and you always be like "David, you should be heading to class so you won't be late" at first it was embarrassing in front of my boys, but now it's like I wait for you to come by and say that. And I think my boys get a little jealous because no one checks up on them like that. And remember when u heard that a bunch of my friends were fighting over the weekend and as soon as u saw me u asked if I was involved and if I was good. Well I really was telling the truth when I said I wasn't fighting, but it kinda made me feel good that you even asked. Most

teachers woulda probably judged me or looked at me in a funny way because I hang out with a rough crowd. I'm gonna start coming to the tutoring sessions that you invited me too more often so I can pass this test u always talking about. And ms. Kelly, u know how u always say I play like I'm hard core, but I'm really soft on the inside…you know what, u might be right. I'ma try to get better @ grammar stuff and do more work on our group research project. I'm bring my F up, watch me! You see I got an 80% on that quiz last Friday.

Alright holla at ya boy,

Lil' Tutu…aka Fat Boy…aka David

(Writing Prompt #3, font in original)

The soft, caring, understanding tone of Ms. Kelly's letter suggests she empathizes with the struggling student and does not blame him for his low academic performance or poor work habits. Rather, she faults the insufficient opportunities for learning the student has had, pointing out that the student may not have received the attention he needed from previous teachers:

> I mean, at first it got on my nerves when you would sit down beside me and pull up a desk next to me when we're working on our own, but I guess what you told my mom about me getting my work done and getting stuff right when

> u do that is true. No teacher really spent as much time with me as you do for real for real. (Writing Prompt #3)

Highlighting the lack of teacher attention this student may have had in the past shows Ms. Kelly is aware that this gap in opportunity is probably part of why Black students like David may be underachieving. She continues to emphasize that part of the problem with David's achievement may be due in part to how teachers judged and interacted with him:

> Well I really was telling the truth when I said I wasn't fighting, but it kinda made me feel good that you even asked. Most teachers woulda probably judged me or looked at me in a funny way because I hang out with a rough crowd. (Writing Prompt #3)

Including these examples of inadequate teacher expectations reflects Ms. Kelly's view of the opportunity-to-learn gap as problematic with regards to helping students like David achieve. Her choice to write her perspective-taking prompt from the perspective of a non-honors, low-achieving student reveals the core of her heart as she strives to impact Black students, moving students like David from the losing to the winning side of the gap. She strives to close this gap not only by providing individualized support and special learning opportunities for the students but also by delivering consistent teacher-directed but learner-centered instruction. The sense of urgency she sees in closing the gap is evident in her description of her approach to teaching the non-honors, A-level students:

> They wear me out. I do a lot of teaching, cause I mean, I want them to do that group work and partners, but it's just not, I mean I can do it for like 10 or 15

> minutes, you know, but I'm just teaching, like I mean they work, I mean, I'm up there, I'm just going, just doing everything I can to help them get it, whereas with my honors, I have a little more, I can give them more of the responsibility, whereas with them, and I've tried it, and I see that when I'm up there, they're getting it and they're learning, and the classroom is just such a different environment, versus when I try to let them do, so, I'm like, it's tiring, but I have to. It's like they have to have somebody at the front of the room.
>
> (Ms. Kelly, Interview, February 6, 2012)

Based on her letter, pedagogically, Ms. Kelly finds teaching Black students performing at low levels extremely challenging and "tiring" but something she must do: "They wear me out. I mean, I'm up there, I'm just going, just doing everything I can to help them get it. It's tiring but, I have to" (Ms. Kelly, Interview, February 6, 2012). Ms. Kelly's institutional frustration with the gap in skills and opportunities between her honors and comprehensive classes fuels her determination to close the gap by ensuring struggling students get the instruction they need to achieve at higher levels.

Ms. Tan and Ms. Kelly both experienced frustration with institutional aspects of the education system. Ms. Tan felt most disturbed by the curricular aspects of the district and school in which she worked. She felt the district and systemic curricular foci did not encourage students to think independently and to read diversely. Ms. Kelly's most significant problem was with the skills and opportunity gap that she felt systems of tracking perpetuated between Black students in honors and comprehensive

level classes. From their perspectives, institutional processes and systems grossly interfered with their ability to positively impact Black students' achievement.

6.2.2: Pedagogical Frustration – Ms. Tan and Ms. Jocasta

Ms. Tan

> *"So, you know it's frustrating. I just feel like, I don't know, I feel disillusioned with what I'm doing in general. Like, what is my objective to teach kids? What am I really preparing them for? Seriously" (Ms. Tan, Interview, January 31, 2012).*

Ms. Tan's disillusionment with what her teaching goals should be is due to what she perceived as a decrease in students' skill levels and independent thinking skills – even in honors-level courses:

> And especially when you have kids that have so many problems that you can't address, or, you're trying to do too many levels. Even in my honors class, I'm really at a C level, so I'm kind of watering it down to them, but they have been told they are at an A –level, so their parents expect all A's all the time, so really it's a low-level honors class. (Interview, January 31, 2012)

Students and parents' expectations of "As" for "C" work troubles Ms. Tan. She feels she has to "water down" the lessons for students, even students who have been designated as working at an honors level. Even when Ms. Tan delivered what she perceived as deliberate, strategic, easy-to-follow instructions, she found that 12th grade students could not produce a thoughtful research paper:

> Ms. Tan: Oh, ok, research papers. We went through every step through every process, the whole process. I let them pick the topic; we talked about the

> topic until they made a thesis statement. Then we go to the library and we had talked about techniques for research. We were going to the library for two weeks to gather information. I gave them note cards and we talked about how to write it, but they were all so bad that I ended up giving them 50 points on meeting the page requirements and 50 points on a citation page. And see those were things that I can't tell you what the problem was.
>
> (Ms. Tan, Interview, January 31, 2012)

Ms. Tan felt her instructional methods should have resulted in success. She helped students talk through their topics until they arrived at a thesis statement. She taught them research techniques and provided in-class time for information-gathering and gave direct instructions on the writing process, "but they were all so bad" that Ms. Tan decided not to evaluate them and to instead just award points for their effort. After such painstaking efforts to instruct students, she concluded that the students' inability to produce the expected result revealed a problem that she could not explain. Ms. Tan's frustration was amplified when she discussed a particular student's final research paper. She could not understand what more she could have done to help the student achieve at a higher level:

> Ms. Tan: I said to him, how about, "Let's think about chicken's nutritional value or the difference between organic and nonorganic." When I'm talking to him saying this, it does not register, he cannot process, something is not happening, so what am I supposed to do? What could I have done? And I'm just asking you 'cause I have no idea.

Summer: Well, without having been there, it's about meeting students where they are –

Ms. Tan: - but he doesn't know; he says yes and nods but doesn't do it.

Summer: Well, we all know we cannot accept "yes I understand" as an answer. We have to have them demonstrate their understanding -

Ms. Tan: - And then I get, "you said, think about organic vs. inorganic"

Summer: And what does organic mean?

Ms. Tan: I'll look that up.

Summer: Ok, I'll be waiting for the answer.

Ms. Tan: And that's fine, but there are 30 other people who have the same problem! And then it's the next day. So 10 of 'em got it and 20 didn't .

Summer: That's when you have to become that magician they are not paying us to be.

Ms. Tan: No, then you give 50 pts, and that's with ten people turning it in out of 30. And when I looked at it, I was like what happened?! Oh, that was so disheartening. (Ms. Tan, Interview, January 31, 2012)

Ms. Tan simply has "no idea" what to do with students who just do not seem to be able to think for themselves. Frustrated and paralyzed by confusion and lack of a solution, Ms. Tan resorted to *giving* students points just for meeting the page requirement – not for meeting the assignment requirements. She was not happy to do this, but felt she had no choice, saying "Oh, that was so disheartening."

Ms. Tan's frustration with student work habits and skills is also evident in one of her writing prompts. Teachers were invited to reflect on their teaching from

students' perspectives by stepping into the students' shoes and writing a letter to themselves from the perspective of one of their students. Ms. Tan chose to write from the perspective of a low-achieving student who, based on the letter, she felt was underachieving because of poor work habits and failure to take personal agency for his or her performance in Ms. Tan's class. The letter has a slight sarcastic, mocking tone, suggesting Ms. Tan does not take the student's concerns seriously because, perhaps, she sees them as just more evidence of students' irresponsibility and sub-par skills:

> Dear Ms. Tan,
>
> I have problems with your teaching methods. I don't understand why I got 10 out of 100 on my last homework assignment because you didn't write anything on it but the score! You asked us to write a paradox from common language and I wrote, "It's cold as a mug." A paradox is something that is seemingly impossible and it's impossible to be as cold as a mug! When I asked you about it during class in the middle of a discussion about maxims, you said you couldn't write a full explanation on so many papers and that you'd be glad to tell me and I said I'd talk to you after class. I forgot to talk to you after class, but still!
>
> Also, about that email I sent you. I had my supplies and you said that you would come around to check supplies of everyone who was absent. You never checked mine so I got a zero. I know that was in august, and I didn't check school max until last week, but still! And

I KNOW I turned in that other thing that you gave me a zero on! I don't have it (because I know you said you gave them all back), but I know I turned it in.

I don't know why I'm still getting such a low grade in this class. I'm smart. I really should be in the honors class. I think it's you. I don't think you like me and that's why I'm getting such a low grade!

Your student in your period six class. (Writing Prompt #3, emphasis in original)

The last sentence of Ms. Tan's letter, "I don't think you like me and that's why I'm getting such a low grade!" sums up what I think is a major reason for Ms. Tan's frustration: students are failing to take responsibility for their own achievement and are instead putting the responsibility into her hands. "I think it's you" indicates that Ms. Tan feels her student thinks she is the reason for his/her lack of achievement, and based on the sarcastic tone of the letter, Ms. Tan finds this accusation baffling and troubling. This letter is more evidence of Ms. Tan's perception of students' inability to think independently and at sophisticated levels. For example, from Ms. Tan's perspective, the student in her letter either did not take seriously or obviously missed the point of the lesson on paradoxes, evidenced in their "slang" response, "It's cold as a mug," which is a slang term in the African American community that means it's very, very cold. In this example, Ms. Tan was highlighting the student's either obliviousness to the point of the lesson on maxims or the student's unwillingness to take the lesson seriously. Ms. Tan emphasized that the student did not understand

why he received a "10 out of 100" on the maxim assignment and faulted Ms Tan's "teaching methods" rather than the student's own faulty answer.

Ms. Tan's mention of the student noting that Ms. Tan "couldn't write a full explanation on so many papers" draws attention to Ms. Tan's frustration with what she feels are student expectations for teachers to do all the thinking for students. In her letter, Ms. Tan depicts the student as one who is irresponsible and unreasonable. When complaining about the maxim assignment, the student said he or she would talk to Ms. Tan after class but admittedly forgot, "but still" expected Ms. Tan to stop her current lesson on maxims to discuss the student's grade on the paradox assignment. In another example of irresponsibility and lack of agency for achievement, the student questions Ms. Tan about a "zero" he received for not having his supplies over two months after the grade was recorded in the SchoolHouse[32], the school online grade book. Ms. Tan also highlights the student's irresponsibility by having the student question a zero he received on an assignment that he had no proof he had turned in: "And I KNOW I turned in that other thing that you gave me a zero on! I don't have it (because I know you said you gave them all back), but I know I turned it in." In sum, Ms. Tan's letter suggests a frustration with feeling like students have put the full responsibility of their learning on her, refusing to exercise any independent thought or action.

Ms. Jocasta

Ms. Jocosta's pedagogical frustration was evident on two levels – with herself for not being able to deliver effective lessons and with her students for rejecting her

[32] SchoolHouse is a pseudonym.

teaching efforts. At one point, her anger and frustration caused her to nearly give up on teaching:

> I spend all my time trying to modify lessons. Trying to get them to the point where they will work, somehow. I'm gonna stop that shit. I'm not gonna do it. Really. I'm thinking of not doing any more lesson plans at all. I really am. After the week I've had. It's not worth it. I mean, unless I can find some way to get unangry. (Focus Group #3, November 5, 2011)

Ms. Jocasta tired of her efforts to adapt her lessons, "trying to get them to the point where they will work," so much so that she planned to simply stop trying. In our interview, she said she did not think she had gotten through an entire lesson the entire year. She could not think of one successful lesson. Her frustration and failure seemed to lead her to mock the district's professional expectations of her. She laughed while imitating administrators and district officials who would come to evaluate her teaching, saying in a sing-song nursery school rhyme type of way:

> "I'm going to scaffold now. See me scaffold!"
> "Are you scaffolding, Ms. Jocasta?"
> "As hard as I can." (Interview, February 9, 2011)

Ms. Jocasta's repeated failures began to impact her physical and mental health:

> Ms. Jocasta: So I started cussing a lot and I started smoking again.
>
> Summer: Wow. The classroom done drove you –
>
> Ms. Jocasta: And I started eating again. I've gained, how much? I think I've gained close to 30 lbs in 5 years.
> (Focus Group #3, November 5, 2011)

In addition to her disappointment and frustration with her own teaching efficacy, Ms. Jocasta's was also distressed with the feeling of rejection she felt from students. The letter she wrote to herself from the perspective of one of her students reflects this distress:

> Dear Ms. Jocasta,
>
> I think you go too hard on me and don't show me respeck (sic). You always putting us down and saying things that makes up stuff that make me fell (sic) like no good and failure. How you expect us to pay attention in your class when it is so boring. Other teachers show us movies and play games and I always do my work when I listen to my music you're the only teacher don't let me use it that why I talk your class is boring boring boring.
>
> You don't respect me so I don't respect you 12 grad suppose to be easy. We tired of worken and you make us write and then talk about how bad we write and put red notes in we can't understand.
>
> Sometimes you try to be nice but that's joke cause somebody don't do nothing and you go hard. When you base on me i not going 2 just cause i think in my self that i had another English teacher so I can have some peace.
>
> Andre (Writing Prompt #3)

If one took Ms. Jocasta's letter to be representative of how she perceived most of her students viewed her teaching, it would suggest that she thinks students see her as a teacher who is "boring" and too "hard," one who shows no "respect" to her students. Ms Jocasta was troubled by these perceived students' perceptions of her, so much so that she describes herself as struggling to get "unangry" and to "find another route"

other than teaching because she's "tired of fighting with these kids who don't want to learn." In her final writing prompt in which she was invited to write a letter to past, present, and future Black teachers, students, and parents, she reflected on her experiences as a teacher sorrowfully, reiterating her feeling of being an ill-prepared and ineffective teacher:

> The time has come to retire and I look back on my career with a mixture of regret and joy. The challenges have been many. I must admit that most of them I have not mastered, only went around them instead. The biggest challenge was not having a proper student teaching experience or a demonstrative mentoring experience. For three years, I floundered through the system, following the curriculum, but striving to enrich the student experience with information not in the curriculum. The final years were spent in deep contemplation. (Writing Prompt #4)

Due to her lack of sufficient preparation, Ms. Jocasta felt she had "floundered" through her teaching experiences, failing to successfully meet nearly any of the challenges of teaching. Her teaching shortcomings have caused her to enter a state of "deep contemplation," contemplating the experiences that led her to feel both joy and sorrow as she imagined herself retiring from teaching. Feelings of anguish and pain seem to have overcome fleeting moments of joy and hope. The joy she must have felt in her efforts to "enrich the student experience with information not in the curriculum" seemed lost in her feelings of regret and defeat.

Both Ms. Tan and Ms. Jocasta were troubled by the shortcomings of their efforts to help Black students achieve. Ms. Tan found it difficult to effectively teach

students who seemed unable to think and act independently, to make connections between the lessons and their school work, or to apply what they have learned, and who put the bulk of the responsibility for their learning on the teacher. Ms. Jocasta's feelings of inadequate teaching self efficacy caused her anguish and stress. This pedagogical frustration caused both teachers to contemplate leaving the teaching profession.

6.2.3: Relational Frustration – Ms. J and Ms. Jocasta

Ms. J

Ms. J was frustrated with what she perceived as the lack of respect Black students showed for Black teachers. She felt that because of their shared racial background that they would connect to her more and treat her with respect. She was so disturbed by her Black students' seemingly impartiality toward her that she shared her feelings with them:

> Ms. J: I told them [Black students] that I found that a lot of the Hispanic, especially the young ladies, that they treat me better than you, the Black females. How does that happen?
>
> Summer: You said that to the students?
>
> Ms. J: I did.
>
> Summer: What did they say?
>
> Ms. J: They just looked at me. They just looked at me. Because that's the way I felt at that moment. And I'm thinking, "You all -," not – and I can't remember how I said it to them, but I do remember it's been these past 7 years 'cause I was at

> Andrews 'cause they have a larger population of Hispanic kids. But, they just looked and I – you know I think it was this day I was just so frustrated because I'm like, you would think that being – having a Black teacher, somebody that looks like you, you know, that you would be able to get the learning that you need, you'd be able to relate, you know. Have some type of commonality, but you treating me like I'm some daggone piece of junk off the street, really? You know, the disrespect –
>
> Summer: Yeah.
>
> Ms. J: The cussing, the rolling of the eyes –
>
> Ms. Tan: Teeth sucking.
>
> Summer: You're the third teacher that has said that 'cause you mentioned that too, right? [to Ms. Jocasta]
>
> Ms. Jocasta: That's why I'm getting out of it.
>
> Summer: Another teacher said that.
>
> (Focus Group # 3, November 5, 2011)

Ms. J indicates an expectation of racial solidarity and the desire to be ethnic comrades with Black students. She felt sharing a racial background meant more than just sharing skin color, it meant sharing a cultural connection grounded in trust, respect, and a shared sense of personal responsibility for one another. She was looking for that connection, wanting to be an "othermother," but she felt rejected, like "some daggone piece of junk off the street." Her feelings are affirmed by Ms. Tan and Ms. Jocasta who express agreement by commenting on the "teeth-sucking," and saying, "I'm tired

of being called a bitch" and "that's why I'm getting out of it." During this same meeting, Ms. J chose to write her journal entry from the perspective of a Black male student she felt had not only been disrespectful to her but who had done so by blatantly disregarding her position of authority in the classroom. Her frustration in dealing with this student is evident in her attempt to make sense of his disrespectful behavior. It took her a while to articulate her feelings, resulting in her journal entry being only ¼ of a page:

> Dear Ms. J,
>
> I really wish you could see me! I am not just a repeat 9th grader. I am not just what my file says that I am. I can really learn. I just want someone to hear me and see me. No one seems to understand. (Writing Prompt, #3)

Indeed, Ms. J struggled to understand the student's behavior toward her. She had difficulty writing down her thoughts, but she articulated her struggle in a very emotionally-charged description of what had recently transpired between her and the student:

> Ms. J: And I know this child and I are, we have a little bit of friction and it's kind of intense and I don't want it to be that way. But you just challenged my authority in the classroom. How dare you, you know. You just disrespected me. And to them that's not disrespect. Okay I asked you to move. I asked you to change your seat. It wasn't like I yelled it in the class. But what he got upset with was when he stretched I said, "You have one more time." "What? I didn't do anything." "You have one more time. This is in reference to the conversation that we had earlier today that you didn't want to –." I didn't get

in to it. So that made him mad because I called him out in the school – in the, well, in the classroom. But you, I'm mad because I told you to do something and you didn't do it. So I'm watching everything that you do. You breathe wrong, you need to move. You know and I mean that's–

Summer: [Laughter] Right.

Ms. J: - That's probably wrong but –

Ms. Tan: That's how you feel.

Ms. J: Yeah. It's how I feel. You disrespected me. How dare you.

(Focus Group #3, November 5, 2011)

Ms. J repeatedly emphasizes that the student "disrespected" her and that disrespecting her was something the student should not "dare" do. At this point, Ms. J did not suggest that the student disrespected her because she was Black, suggesting that she would expect any student – no matter the race – to demonstrate the respect she was demanding, but at times in her discussion of this student, she indicated that being a Black female teacher might be part of the reason for the student's disrespect:

Summer: What's going on with the student?

Ms. J: I think he thinks I don't like him. And I think he thinks, like she was saying, I'm hard on him. But, we have a challenge of the wills. What I've come to find out is that he really has issues going on at home, and with his mom. And his mom is Black, and I'm Black, so – to him I could be just another – you actin' like my mom. I don't know.

She extends this "I might remind him of his Black mother" theory to include the idea that his disrespect for her might be a reflection of the disrespect she perceives Black students at large have for Black teachers in genera:

Ms. J: I don't know how he responds to the White teachers, but now you're making me think about it. I'm like, oh okay. Let me think about how it is that he really acts with other teachers. And I notice that a lot of the African American students, they tend to treat the Black teachers as, um -. Like they can say anything, like they can say or do anything –

Ms. Jocasta: Thank you. And that we're dumb. And that White teachers are better. And that they're gonna show them how well they can behave.

Ms. J: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. And I had one student actually get out of my class, this was a couple years ago. I think he was Hispanic 'cause his name was Joaquin. I guess that's Hispanic. And he got transferred out of my class to go to another teacher's class because, well I'm saying because I'm Black, but she was Black too. But he was just lazy as heck. He really didn't want to do any work. But, something came out in the pipes of, that I wasn't a good teacher. So, and it wasn't worded that way, but really, that's what the bottom line, this is what you're saying. So his mama had him removed from the class.

(Focus Group #3, November 5, 2011)

Ms. J was so convinced that the mis-treatment she endured from students was because she was Black that even when the student's parent had him switched from Ms. J's class to another Black teacher's class, she attributed the reason to her being a Black teacher. This skewed perception may be symptomatic of the frustration she feels with what she sees as a disconnected relationship between herself and Black students. Her first inclination was that the student was moved to another teacher's classroom because of Ms. J's race. Furthermore, she reported observing that Black students treated Black teachers with less respect than they treated White teachers: "And I notice that a lot of the African American students, they tend to treat the Black teachers as, um -. like they can say anything, like they can say or do anything [to Black teachers]" (Interview, March 27, 2012). This observation disturbed Ms. J because she felt that instead of being disrespectful to Black teachers that Black students would want to try to connect with them because of their shared race. She assumed that students would "try to find people they can relate to and connect to" (Interview, March 27, 2012), but she did not find that to be the case for her current Black students, as, from Ms. J's perspective, Black students resisted making any special connection with her. Part of Ms. J's frustration may stem from her nostalgic memories of the dynamics between Black students and Black teachers when she was in school:

> Summer: Ok, I understand your experiences with Black teachers. If you had a White teacher, it seems like that person did not stand out.
>
> Ms. J.: Not really. The African American teachers I had when I was younger, they were disciplinarians, you know, there was a lot of yelling and screaming

going on. I don't know if that was just the cultural thing, but that was just the way they disciplined me. I mean I went to school where you could get spanked, you know, and the teachers would pull your ears, and they'd spank you, and they'd call your parents. So, a lot of what I see in today's schools -

Summer: It's ridiculous.

Ms. J: Yeah, the kids, they have no respect for authority and we did. The teachers could look at you a certain way and you knew that you needed to get your act together, so they, I think because they had the right to discipline us, not just calling home, but physically, you know, they could spank us, so, it was different. The teachers could look at you a certain way and you knew that you needed to get your act together, so they, I think because they had the right to discipline us, not just calling home, but physically, you know, they could spank us, so, it was different.

(Interview, March 27, 2012)

Ms. J saw the relationship between Black students and teachers of today as "different" than the relationship between Black teachers and students when she was growing up because of the difference in the type of authority Black teachers exerted during her time and the type of respect students gave in return. Today's kids, she feels "have no respect for authority" as she and her peers did for their Black teachers. These statements suggest that Ms. J sees respect as a requirement for a productive relationship between Black teachers and Black students to take place. Ms. J's frustration is captured in a poem she wrote for the Writing Prompt #3, which invited teachers to describe their teaching philosophy as it relates to Black students. While

she does not directly state Black students in her poem, one can conclude she is writing with Black students in mind because that was an essential part of the prompt's instructions. Below I share the poem and then point out the words that I believe allude to the difficulty Ms. J experienced as she strove to impact Black student achievement.

The Growth Cycle of Education
By Ms. J

The cycle of education began as a seed
With mother and father pulling out the weeds.
The weeds of despair, anxiety, and fear.
The weeds that could squeeze the promises so near.

The cycle was watered both day and night.
It continued on like a boxer who refused to lose the fight.
It was filled with many doubts, trials, and tears.
But when I look back it was worth all the years

To witness the growth of the most challenging child.
The one who seemed never to know but insisted a smiled.
In spite of his understanding he drudged past the games
In hopes that his education would solidify his name.

In the beginning of the teaching experience I said all students can learn.
But little did I know it would take power, passion, and perseverance to help them to yearn

For the little mysteries in life that sometimes go unnoticed
Or the intricacies in the classroom that are crying out for some focus.

My teaching style has evolved like a growing plant.
Many of my experiences I would not take back.
Because through it all the **success** and the **pain**
I realize that I have more to gain
When I can help a child to understand his or her value
The world will be a better place
Like a beautiful flower.

(Writing Prompt #2, emphasis and spacing in original)

Although Ms. J compares her teaching philosophy to a plant that grows into a beautiful flower, her most dominant word choice for this poem creates a mood of struggle. In her reflection on her teaching style, she emphasized words like "pain," "power," "perseverance," "doubt," "fight," "trials," and "tears." This diction suggests multiple stages of anguish and pain have been present in her personal cycle of teaching and learning. A close reading of the following lines: "in the beginning of the teaching experience I said all students can learn. /But little did I know it would take power, passion, and perseverance to help them to yearn," reveals an undercurrent of difficulty and frustration in her teaching journey. Perhaps she needs the "power," "passion," and "perseverance," to deal with what she sees as a very disturbing and perplexing problem: the disconnected relationship between Black students and Black teachers and Black students' lack of respect for Black teachers.

Ms. Jocasta

Ms. Jocasta, who joined the profession with the goal of helping Black kids, was frustrated with being rejected by Black students. She experienced more than one classroom uprising in which students revolted against her teaching and left her class because they were angry about "not learning" or being called "racist pigs." Ms. Jocasta described how she felt when students walked out of her class because they felt she was not a good teacher:

Ms. Jocasta: I mean I haven't had a riot since [laughter from group] oh yesterday was sort of a riot. Cause all the good kids got up and walked out.

Ms. J: The good kids? They got out and protested?

Summer: Cause they were frustrated?

Ms. Jocasta Yeah, they weren't learning anything.

Ms. Tan: Oh.

Ms. Jocasta: And I felt so – I felt like – you could have just – I was just blown. I mean, that was just the worst feeling in the world.

(Focus Group #3, November 5, 2011)

The feeling of being rejected by the people one so desperately wanted to help led her to seek ways to leave the profession:

Ms. J: How long did you say you've been teaching?

Ms. Jocasta: This is my 5th year.

Ms. J: Fifth year? Oh, okay.

Ms. Jocasta: Yeah, and I'm not gone take it.

Summer: Mm-hmm.

Ms. Jocasta: I – you know, sat down and thought about it. You know, if I go for a PhD it's gonna take me 5 years [inaudible]. So maybe that's not the route. But I've got to find another route. I'm tired of being called a bitch.

Ms. J: Mm-hmm.

Ms. Jocasta: I'm tired of fighting with these kids who don't want to learn. They have no –

Summer: – you guys are saying they act like they want to learn when there's not the Black female teacher in front of them.

Ms. Jocasta: No they don't, really. They want to look good.

Ms. J: I think across the board it's like that. 'Cause I'm not the only – well, she's a Black teacher too.

Instead of "othermother," students called Ms. Jocasta "bitch." Getting students to be receptive to her teaching was a battle and she was "tired of fighting with these kids" who she felt did not want to learn from her because she was Black. Ms. J confirmed Ms. Jocasta's assertion, saying "I think across the board it's like that," in reference to Black students not wanting to learn from Black teachers. To emphasize her point even more, Ms. Jocasta told a story about how her Black students welcomed the chastisement and encouragement of a White teacher while rejecting Ms. Jocasta's:

Ms. Jocasta: Now, wait a minute now. I, I'll give you an example of what happened two years ago.

Summer: Mm-hmm.

Ms. Jocasta: A young White teacher who basically allowed kids to do – listen to their iPods in class, eat in class, do whatever they wanted in class as long as they were orderly. Who – that everybody was clamoring to get to her. And that was just the opposite of me. And so what happened was they basically rioted one day and the White teacher said, "Let me come in there and, you know, set them straight. I know these kids from, a lot of these kids from journalism." And she came in there with a bag of candy and sweet talked them and, "Oh you kids-," you know. "I know you guys can do it. Why are you doing this? You wouldn't do this to your grandmother, would you?" And

I'm standing there going, "Oh my fucking god." And I just couldn't believe. And then when she left I said, "You racist pigs." I called them.

Summer: The kids?

Ms. Jocasta: Yes I did. I told them that they were racist pigs. And they said, "You can't call us -." They jumped up and the whole class went to the office to tell the principal I called them racist. And I sat right down in there and waited for the principal to show up.

Summer: Did he come?

Ms. Jocasta: He never did.

Summer: The kids come back? Come back and sit -

Ms. Jocasta: Yeah. They were told to come back. And they continued to hoot, "I'm telling my mama, I'm telling my mama. I'ma see you [sic]. You don't have a job.

Summer: This is crazy! Black on Black!

Ms. Jocasta: And then I said, you know, I said, "I'm willing to talk to you about it if you're willing to listen, but what you did was totally racist." And every single one of them, "You can't be racist if you're Black," you know. And, "You're Black," you know.

(Focus Group #3, November 5, 2011)

Ms. Jocasta seeing the students as "racist pigs" is problematic and highlights the intra-racial distrust that is surely an impediment to teaching and learning in Ms. Jocasta's classroom. Based on her story, there appeared to be a distrust from both Ms. Jocasta's and the students' points of views. Ms. Jocasta resented the White

teacher coming in to "mediate" the situation between her and her Black students and was shocked at the students' acquiescence: "Oh my fucking God." She was so upset and dumbfounded that she called the students "racist pigs," demonstrating her frustration with the students' lack of understanding about the racial solidarity that she felt should exist between them because of their shared racial backgrounds. Ms. Jocasta was disappointed that students would not let her explain how what the students did was "totally racist." The students, on the other hand, felt Ms. Jocasta had betrayed them by accusing them of being racist. The barrier between Ms. Jocasta and her students is palpable. From Ms. Jocasta's story, it appeared as if the students felt Ms. Jocasta was not in racial solidarity them and she felt they did not support her as a Black teacher, perspectives that a critical race theorist would attribute to evidence of how deeply engrained race and racism are in society and how such permanence is interfering with Black student achievement by causing intra-racial divisions and distrust between Black students and Black teachers.

Ms. J and Ms. Jocasta both had the same source of relational frustration: they were not satisfied with the relationships between themselves and Black students. Ms. J expected there to be a sense of racial solidarity between herself and her Black students because of their shared racial identity. Ms. J found students' indifference and sometimes defiance toward her perplexing and troubling. Ms. Jocasta felt outright rejected by her Black students, a reality that often made her feel low and depressed. They both desired mutually amicable relationships with their Black students, relationships in which students respected them as Black teachers and recognized their desire to help Black students achieve. Both teachers found it

difficult to accept and tolerate teaching situations that did not reflect such a relationship.

6.3.4: Positional Frustration – Ms. X and Ms. J

Ms. X

Ms. X was frustrated with the categories and labels she perceived reflected the education field's improper focus on "race" – the race of the students and the race of the teacher as it pertained to her teaching and to Black student achievement. Ms. X rejected categories and labels categorically – for herself and for her students, and she especially resisted the idea of being labeled a "Black teacher," insisting instead that she was simply a "teacher"; In her statements, she often emphasized that she was not *only* a Black teacher and that she did not *only* teach Black students. She did not want students to see her through the lens of race. She wanted them to see her as unique teacher, saying, "I hope I am able to bring my students my authentic self, to share my knowledge and love of English, but also infuse it with the life lessons I've learned through living and working outside of the USA" (Writing Prompt #1). Ms. X's desire to bring students her "authentic self" suggests she defines herself in a unique way, a way that cannot be captured in a racial label. Being authentic means being original or true to one's self. Ms. X does not see herself as a Black teacher or a teacher of Black students; thus, she strives to put forward a teaching self that is not confined to those prescribed identities. She asserted, "I am a teacher AND an advocate for ALL of my students who need my advocacy. I do not ONLY teach Black students. I am a teacher, not strictly a Black teacher" (questionnaire, emphasis in original). Ms. X's choice to emphasize her advocacy for "ALL" students and not

"ONLY" Black students suggests a frustration with color-consciousness and an embracing of a colorblind approach to her practice. This attitude is also articulated in Ms. X's teaching philosophy. In her second writing prompt, which invited teachers to describe their teaching philosophy as it relates to Black students, she wrote:

> I feel as if I owe my Black students the same thing that I owe all of my students: a quality education. My philosophy of teaching my students of color includes providing them with a forum to bring their realities to light. If I do not listen to them, why in the world would they want to listen to me? I am proud to say that I have a pretty steady stream of former students coming back to see me, some Black, some White, some Asian, some scientists, teachers, Marines, doctors, firemen, and yes, some who are between jobs. The one thing they all seem to have in common is that they enter my classroom, and walk directly to the seat that they used to have while they were students in my class. One of the most cherished feathers in my cap came from a student (now very grown up, and out of college), who told me the following, "You always laughed with us, and made each of us feel so special."
>
> (Ms. X, Writing Prompt #2)

Two aspects of this entry support the claim that Ms. X resists any distinctions that put her or her students in a race-centered category: the first statement, "I feel as if I owe my Black students the same thing that I owe all of my students: a quality education" and the subsequent statement about her success stories:

> I am proud to say that I have a pretty steady stream of former students coming back to see me, some Black, some White, some Asian, some scientists,

> teachers, Marines, doctors, firemen, and yes, some who are between jobs. The one thing they all seem to have in common is that they enter my classroom, and walk directly to the seat that they used to have while they were students in my class.

Even though the prompt asked her to focus specifically on her Black students, she chose to discuss how "some Black, some White, some Asian" students have related to her in the same way, despite their different races. She talks about "the one thing they all seem to have in common," an emphasis that clearly rejects any focus on intra-racial connections or distinctions and embraces colorblindness.

Ms. X also rejected the notion that activities designed for racial uplift in schools pre-Brown and during the Civil Rights Movement have no place in contemporary classrooms, activities such as singing the Black National Anthem

Ms. X refused to reflect upon her experiences through a purely African American lens. In nearly all of her responses, she makes it a point to broaden the discussion beyond an African American scope. Consider, for example, how she sums up her response to a question about whether she thinks some Black students underachieve because they lack cultural and linguistic codes that are privileged in mainstream academic settings:

> When teachers of some of these students do not speak in Standard English to their classes, they are doing a grave disservice. The students may not be exposed to Standard English in the home, so the school environment may be the last bastion of hope for these students to develop language proficiency. As far as codes are concerned, when some teachers and parents swear at the

students, and exhibit bad behavior themselves, I do not think that the student stands a real chance to learn these codes. I also believe this to be true about Latino and Caucasian students as well." (Ms. X, Questionnaire)

Ms. X sees the problem African American students face if they do not have the opportunity to learn standard codes, but she also "believe[s] this to be true about Latino and Caucasian students as well." In other words, she sees no reason to limit the focus singularly on African American standards – there should be no distinction:

> It is a struggle, but I often share with ALL of my students that intelligence, and the ability to speak standard English "has NO COLOR." By mid to end of the year, most of them actually start to believe it." (Questionnaire)

Ultimately, Ms. X's frustration was with the detrimental role she had witnessed race playing in her school. For example, in a discussion of the racial demographics of each respective teacher's department, Ms. X expressed discontentment with what she perceived as the department chair's concerted effort to keep the number of Black teachers in the department to a minimum:

> Ms. X: Uh yeah, and if the current head of the department has his way, I'm sure it will be completely White soon.
>
> Ms. Tan: What you mean? They trying to get rid of us?
>
> Ms. X: Let me put it this way, and of course, this is not to go outside this room, but, uh, in some conversations with people in the know, closer up in the admin, it has been told to me that the head of the department is very racist, and had the chance to hire some African American teachers who had been at

Jefferson before and wanted to come back, but he said no in favor of University graduates who had done student teaching at Jefferson.

(short silence)

Summer: Hmmm, umm, sooo, with that knowledge, who are we as Black teachers in environments like that?

(Extended silence)

Ms. X: I come to work, I work hard, I get there early, I love my kids, I do my job, I go home, don't ask me for sh - else because I've given sh - else before and a lot of sh- else, and have found that no good deed goes unpunished, so that's who I am. I love my kids, I'm always going to give them my best, but in an environment like that, where you are teaching the "lesser abled" kids or the "non-tag" kids or our "struggling" kids, or whatever - I see where you're coming from with that, and you know, I don't need to confront you on it, cause you've shown me where you are, and even in a situation where the principal is African American, that is still going on.

(Focus Group #1, October 22, 2011)

In the previous exchange, Ms. X is expressing her frustration with the label-centered culture of her school, a culture that categorizes the Black and Latino students as "lesser-abled," "non-tag," and "struggling" and expects Ms. X to be able to "deal" with these students because she is Black and assertive. Ms. X rejects this racial-labeling:

I am known as the disciplinarian, the go to teacher. Oh Ms. X will handle you. Oh, you have an attitude, Ms. X will - and all these kids are Black and

> everybody else in the department - except Ms. Tan - is White, so why should I be the receptacle of all of the "quote" behavioral problems and this and that and the other? Why should I be expected to teach Black students, Latino students, etc… but these White teachers are only being expected to teach the White kids? That, to me, is unfair. So if you really want to be a teacher, you need to know how to deal with all types of students, just as we know how to deal with all types of students. (Focus Group #4, November 12, 2011)

The crux of Ms. X's statement is that she should not be expected to teach all of the Black students just because she is a Black teacher, that instead she should be held to the same expectations that all teachers are held to, whether Black or White, and White teachers should also be held to the same expectations. She is frustrated on two levels – with the environment in which Black students are labeled as "lesser able" and with the expectation that she, the Black teacher, be expected to teach the Black students. She does not want to be labeled and she does not like how Black children have been labeled. Ms. X's last words at the final focus group meeting sum up to root of her frustration with race-centered categories: "I'm tired of tryin to fit into everybody's role, screw em" (Focus Group #4, November 12, 2011).

There is a contradiction, however, in Ms. X's perspective. On one hand, she rejected any notion of race-matching; on the other hand, she was upset that her department chair might have been discriminating against Black teachers with relation to hiring. Additionally, while she resisted any expectations of her to be the Black teacher for Black students, she seemed to have special expectations of her African American principal that he would not allow Black children to be labeled and

mistreated, evident in her claim that "even in a situation where the principal is African American, that [labeling Black students] is still going on." Her statement suggests that the African American principal should have taken special care to ensure positive outcomes for Black students – because he is an African American principal. This contradiction suggests even more the inner positional dissonance Ms. X seemed to be experiencing.

Ms. J

Ms. J struggled with positional frustration in a different way than Ms. X. She was disappointed in herself for not emphasizing racial uplift in her practice and she struggled with how to enact such a philosophy in diverse classrooms. She felt she should have dedicated more classroom time to Black issues:

> I just started thinking about myself as an African American teacher, and the curriculum that we teach. I started thinking about Black history month. As I went through my years as a teacher, how it seemed like I kind of got away from my own Blackness, if I can say that, and I didn't really focus a lot on African American issues or single out African American issues to really look and see the struggle until a little bit later in my teaching career … I didn't say this to kids, but I thought to myself, I'm an African American teacher and I'm not doing my part, as it was, as an African American teacher to make sure that they understand the African American struggle.
>
> (Focus Group #4, November 12, 2011)

Ms. J's recognition of this omission caused her to identify something missing in the Black teacher pedagogy, something that was very present for her when she was a student – an instilling of a sense of pride:

> Ms. J: I started thinking about when I went to school, I went to a Black school, that's how I grew up…junior high and high school were a mix, but when I was in elementary school, it seemed like we had a greater sense of self of ourselves as a people. I went to all Black schools and the teachers were Black, and it seemed like our teachers, Black teachers, gave us a sense of self pride and self hope and who we were as individuals. It seems like a lot of students, Black students today, they don't have that same sense of pride and self worth. Their worth comes in the things that they wear.
>
> Ms. X: How much basketball they can watch.
>
> Summer: Where should they get their worth from?
>
> Ms. J: I think it's two-fold. I think because we are teachers we have a responsibility to help instill [pride], but it's also the parents, because we are a product of not only our parents but the experiences that we go through, we're a product of all of these things, and they help make us and shape us, and when I look back at those African American teachers I had, they gave me a different vision. (Focus Group #4, November 12, 2011)

I found it striking that Ms. J said she felt like her Black teachers "gave" students a sense of pride and hope, but then says that Black students today do not "have" the same sense of pride. She did not say teachers today do not "give" Black students the same sense of pride; however, that is what is suggested by the previous statement.

Seeing students as "not having" as opposed to teachers "not giving" takes ownership away from the teacher. The question we might ask is, are contemporary Black teachers instilling the same sense of racial pride? Can Black teachers of today be expected to exhibit and transfer such pride in the same way as teachers who taught in segregated schools did? I continued to probe this issue:

> Summer: So where was that pride lost, if you say your teacher gave it to you.
>
> Ms. Jocasta: And how did they give it to you?
>
> Ms. J: This might seem like nothing, but every morning, the way our school was set up, it was an open space school, so we sat in a commons area and we said the pledge of allegiance, we sang the national anthem (negro); you ask the kids about the negro national anthem now and they are like, "what?!"
>
> Everybody: What?!
>
> Summer: Did someone decide that we don't want to do that in the school anymore?
>
> Ms. X: Well, hold on one second. I totally get your experiences … [but] I don't want to get to a point where this is a Black school and this is a White school. This Black teacher can only teach Black students and this White teacher can only teach White students and at Jefferson I think that is what they are systematically trying to do and I am fighting it left, right, and center, and I'm not going for it, and every time they try to bring it back to that, I push it right back to their face. I'm not gonna do that. I'm not gonna be labeled, so, why do we get away from singing the Black negro anthem or whatever,

because in my personal school, we don't sing a White anthem, so we don't sing a Black anthem.

The simple matter of whether or not to embed "knowledge of the African American struggle" in their teaching – a matter never warranting discussing in de jure segregated schools – has become a debate for these teachers. They did not all agree on the position racial uplift should hold in their practice.

There is also the ambiguity and mixed emotions surrounding where the pride Black students need should come from. Ms. J acknowledged that Black students were not getting it, but she only alluded to the possibility that Black teachers were not giving it. Her regret at having not passed down knowledge of the struggle could suggest that she equates teaching the knowledge of the African American struggle to instilling pride. Ms. Jocasta's question, "How did they give it to you?" suggests she had never experienced giving or relieving Black pride and therefore did not even know where to start with her instilling it into her current students. Ms. X objected completely to the idea of implementing any race-based practices in contemporary schools. She held a post-racial mainstream integrationist perspective in which anything race-centered should have been dissolved when schools were integrated. This confusion and resistance is problematic.

Ms. X and Ms. J experienced positional frustration in opposing ways. Ms. X was frustrated with what she perceived as society's expectation for her to do something different or special for Black students just because she was a Black teacher. She insisted that she was a teacher of all students and that neither she nor her students should be thought of in terms of racial labels. Ms. J's frustration was with

the opposite: she felt she and other Black teachers were failing to meet what she felt *was* their responsibility to do more than just teach content to Black students. She felt guilt about her own failure to pass on self pride and knowledge of the African American struggle to Black students. Ultimately, Ms. X's and Ms. J's frustrations reflect conflicting views about the role, or position, their racial identity should play in their practice.

6.3.4: Cultural Frustration – All Teachers

The teachers in my study all viewed themselves not only as teachers of content but also as teachers of life skills and knowledge that would benefit students beyond the classroom. Teachers felt, however, that enacting their more-than-content teaching philosophy was difficult because of students' attitudes, values and work habits, attitudes, values, and work habits teachers felt were shaped by an instant-gratification-driven societal culture that Ms. Tan described as privileging non-middle class values. Ms. Tan suggested that it was the African American "*popular culture*" that was in the spotlight in society, not necessarily African American *middle class culture*. As reflected in the teachers' statements, the African American popular culture consists of non-middle class values, nonstandard/slang linguistic culture, thuggish dress, glorified teen pregnancy, lack of exposure to things of significance, uninvolved parents, and a focus on expensive material goods. The following conversation illustrates these perspectives:

> Ms. Tan: I think the culture more than anything influences the problems that we see and I think that (pause) I don't know it's kind of hurt us to be in the

spot light, you know, our fashion, our hair, our music, our sports, all those things being so prominent, I think that that has hurt us in moral ways and our values and things that we value and ways like that, because it's sort of whatever we do is right, and that's the right way, and *certain* groups are the right way and everybody can aspire to that, and they were not necessarily middle class values that are being pushed to the forefront, and it hasn't just influenced Black kids, it's influenced a lot -

Ms. Jocasta: - a lot of White kids -

Ms. Tan: Right, and I mean it seems like, and I don't know if it's because we're looking at it, but it seems like we're the only ones who cringe at it and think that it's just us. But I've heard some, here and there, I've seen on television, like the Kardashians, I've seen them use verbs incorrectly, but it's not looked at the same, it's not viewed as -

Ms. Jocasta: What it is, I've talked to lots of White teachers who find it appalling that there's, well that they feel that there's a large number of the White students who are losing it, who are having the same problems we are talking about.

Ms. Kelly and Ms. Tan: Culture, it's the culture.

Ms. Jocasta: Their watching the same shows. The White kids are wearing their pants down. In *Israel*, I heard that.

Ms. Tan: But that is, that's us, that's our influence. It's not like all Americans were doing that, we were doing that, so we got pushed to the spot light, so now everybody -

Ms. Jocasta: that's cool

Ms. Tan: but that's a small segment of our community, that's not -

Ms. Jocasta: - but that's the one that's promoted -

Ms. Tan: - exactly and, I think, we're just like fighting a losing battle in the classroom, trying to fight this big, huge culture and if we're, to me if you don't get it at home, at least you can get it at school and some place else, or that one thing is missing, but not everything, and then the classroom teacher is the only person you know who is speaking properly? That's crazy! How do you fight that? Because what is gonna make them want to be like you and everybody else -

Summer: - and the only time I have to speak proper English is at school -

Ms. Tan: - and not even at school, because you're - how are we gonna fight that, that is what I want to know?

Ms. Jocasta: You know, I agree with you one hundred percent. You are just so on, with all the same issues with the problem I view. It is so big, and it is so pervasive now. It's like the pregnancy thing too, it's like, do you know I have two or three pregnant girls in every senior class? (pause) And they have a regular - the nurse holds a class for parenting.

Ms. Tan: And you know what, I think that's great, cause I think that's the other problem, cause nobody knows what the hell they're doing, so people just having babies, so if the nurse is giving some parenting advice, thank God for her, at least they won't be so uneducated about what to do with children; cause they don't know what they're doing; they are not systematically reading

to the kids. Their trips are going to the mall. They are not going to any of the monuments, not doing anything educational.

Ms. Jocasta: Never been to the Smithsonian

Ms. Tan: No exposure to anything, no, "how you doing in school, you doing ok, good?"

Ms. Jocasta: The teacher can't do *everything*.

(Focus Group #2, October 29, 2011)

While the frustration with the culture students have embraced is evident, a paradox also exists in the above exchange. The teachers are complaining about a culture that Ms. Tan describes as "ours," meaning Black people's. Her argument, though, is that the culture represents a "small segment of our community," but her statement suggests that she is labeling the culture a "Black culture," an assertion she said was false when I asked her to clarify in another meeting. Instead, she called it the culture of *society*, but that "it seems like we're [Black people] the only ones who cringe at it and think that it's just us," a point Ms. Jocasta affirmed above, saying "they're [White kids] watching the same shows. It's the same thing." Like the other teachers, Ms. Tan did not want to give the ownership for this "culture" to Black people, but she recognized that the behaviors Black students exhibited were those adopted by society, even if she sees the behaviors as belonging only to a small segment of the Black population. I conclude that because she – and other Black teachers – see themselves as a part of Black culture, they "cringe" when they see Black students behaving in ways that the teachers feel do not reflect who they are as Black people. In essence, the teachers were disturbed by their association with what they perceived as the

unproductive, anti-school culture of many of their Black students. Even though they knew some White children embrace similar cultural preferences in entertainment, dress, and overall deportment, they felt more offended by – and felt society looked more negatively upon – Black students' behavior, as reflected in Ms. Tan's statement that she has "seen them [White students] use verbs incorrectly, but it's not looked at the same."

This theme of "culture as problem" was prevalent throughout all of the focus group meetings. Ms. Jocasta put forth a striking image of this culture for the group to consider, that of Black students embracing "a balloon that is completely empty" – meaning a balloon that has nothing of value or worth in it, but rather is filled with life's vanities. Ms. X took the image further, saying the students had inherited an *existence* that was empty, that was merely just a show:

> Ms. Jocasta: Yes, I've been assaulted; I've been hurt and more denigrated by the Black community than I have by any other community, primarily because of my speech and my world view. My world view is that the vast majority of [Black] students that I have encountered have embraced a balloon that is completely empty -
>
> Ms. X: - and inherited an existence that is pretty much like that. It's a show.
>
> Ms. Jocasta: And it's a show and it's a great deal of, it's painful to watch; it's painful to be around for me -

Cultural acceptance is not evident in Ms. Jocasta's description of Black students embracing "a balloon that is completely empty." Cultural conflict (Depit, 2010) better characterizes her view. Ms. Jocasta's perception that the Black

community has criticized her for pointing out problems she sees in Black student culture seems to trouble her as much as the cultural problems she sees in her Black students, problems she describes as "painful to watch." Ms. Jocasta attributed this empty balloon culture to "the vast majority of [Black] students that [she had] encountered," which suggests that in her eyes, most Black students are headed toward nowhere. Ms. X's depiction of the students inheriting an existence that is also empty affirms Ms. Jocasta's perspective. Ms. X's choice to use the word "inherited" suggests she may think Black students acquired this empty existence from a previous generation, a perspective she alluded to in the same discussion, in which she criticized what she perceived as an African American legacy of "children having children" and failing to acquire a solid education to pass on to their offspring:

> Ms. X: Put it this way, when children are having children and that culture gets [*sic*], and that is your legacy to your child, when you were only 10, 15, 16 years older than your offspring, and you don't even have a firm grip on education or the real world and that is the legacy you pass on to your children? I think they stand a very slim chance. And a lot of these parents that I've seen and I'm not saying all of them have no value for education. "I send my child to school because if I don't, I can go to jail."
>
> Summer: People have actually said that?
>
> Ms. X, Ms. Jocasta, Ms. J (in unison): Yes, yes.
>
> Ms. X: Yesterday they came to me, "uh, Ms. X, can you give me some parenting skills?" (pause) You brought em in the world. You shouldn't be afraid to take him out, and as soon as he realizes you're not afraid to take him

out, you've lost the battle. But that's me (chuckle), that's me, so you may not want my advice. Learn how to say no, learn how to not buy them all of these expensive things for a reward for something they haven't even done.

Ms. Jocasta: And set up some cameras at their houses, do you know how many sex parties they're having?

Ms. Kelly: A junior had a tattoo party, and her mother was there.

Ms. Jocasta: And in Larkwood[33], when the bus comes by for the kids who are slow, other kids throw bottles at it

Summer: And are we standing by and watching? I think the U.S. has created a society where we stand by and watch.

Ms. X: Especially, speaking of the Black community, snitches get stitches, that's the mentality, so you shut your mouth and that's the mentality, goes back to slavery. (Focus Group #4, November 12, 2011)

In essence, these teachers' comments suggest that they believe the Black community (including parents and teachers) cannot seem to penetrate the empty shell of an existence they believe many Black students inhabit, an existence they see as occupied by an entertainment culture that does not promote school success. Moreover, the possibility that the Black community is "standing by and watching," choosing to "shut [their] mouths" so as not to cause any trouble, to them is not far-fetched, but is actually quite plausible.

When I prodded the group for more of their thoughts surrounding the idea of Black students embracing an empty shell of an existence and what they thought

[33] Larkwood is a neighborhood near Langston and Jefferson high schools in Prudence County.

should be Black teachers' responsibility for dealing with this emptiness, Ms. X responded in a tone that suggested slight irritation:

> I think the responsibility needs to be shared, and you know, it's not us [Black teachers] that created all of these issues and it's not us selling $200 and $300 dollar pair of sneakers on T.V. and making our kids think they're somebody if they wear those sneakers on their feet or wearing somebody's name across your ass and you have no identity of your own, but you want to identify with what's across your ass. We didn't create all of that. (Focus Group #4, November 12, 2011)

Ms. X did not embrace the idea of personal "teacher" responsibility. She felt that responsibility needed to be shared, but she emphasized that Black teachers had not "created all of these issues" and therefore should not be responsible for dealing with them. Ms. Jocasta responded by saying the Black community may not have created the problem, but that the community is allowing the problem to persist:

> Ms. Jocasta: the Black community, we the Black community are allowing our children to eat it wholesale. They go out and buy 600 dollar I-pods and -
>
> Ms. X: and can't bring a pen to class
>
> Ms. Jocasta: can't read and they have a 600 dollar phone
>
> Ms. X: can't write an essay but can text
>
> Ms. Jocasta: right, can text at sixty words a minute
>
> Group: Laughter

Here, teachers were critiquing the problems that they see as impeding their ability to positively impact their students' achievement. Two important grievances were

expressed: Black teachers did not create the problem, why should they be tasked with fixing it; and, why is the Black community allowing the problem to exist – two divergent views toward the problem. Ms. X feels it is not her responsibility. Ms. Jocasta feels there is a responsibility for adults – including teachers – who are a part of the Black community. The other teachers were noticeably quiet during this exchange, to the point that I had to inquire about their thinking. Their silence, though, is present in its non-verbal state. They were, in Ms. J's words, "taking it all in" and considering their positions on the issue. Though Ms. Kelly was quiet during this session, in the writing prompt for this session, she admonished the Black community to "do better":

> To the community, we have to do better. We have to be present in the lives of our kids. In order to hold them accountable for our future, we have to hold ourselves accountable NOW. We can't expect for our babies to uphold values we don't practice or mirror. Volunteer in your schools. Tutor a child in math. Come in the school, go in the classroom and read book to some kids. Discuss a novel with a group. Share your profession and the path you traveled to get there. Mentor a teen. Use your degrees for something more than your own benefit. Don't simply congratulate teachers, get in there and assist. Working together, we can make major accomplishments.
>
> (Ms. Kelly, Writing Prompt #4)

Ms. Kelly stressed the need for personal responsibility in the Black community – adult and student responsibility. Her admonition to members of the Black community to "use your degrees for something more than your own benefit" suggests she

believes the Black community has a responsibility to promote the uplift of the race in schools.

Troubling Sub-Culture: Non-Honors Students

Teachers expressed having particular difficulty working with students who were not in honors classes. They had trouble relating to these types of students because the students displayed attitudes and work habits that seemed foreign to the teachers, all of whom had been in honors classes when they were in secondary school, and who were accustomed to being in classes with students who consistently did their work and had positive attitudes toward the classroom environment. The teachers first described the disconnect they felt with their non-honors students in the focus group meeting dedicated to discussing teachers' educational life histories. They indicated that their background as former honors students inhibited their ability to understand and work successfully with students in the comprehensive-level track:

> Summer: You mentioned that you sometimes feel, because you were in honors classes, it's sometimes hard for you relate to the students who were not in those classes. How do you guys feel - you guys teach a lot of middle class students, but not all are middle class. How do you all feel, I mean what do you do with that feeling of lack of connection or not knowing how to reach and do you all feel the same thing or whatever - a gap between -
>
> Ms. Kelly: I mean my gap for me is the motivation; it is not the "class." I mean we listen to a lot of the same music, T.V. shows, stuff like that, but as far as being in a class with people who goof off and don't do their work - that is the disconnect. I can have a conversation with them as people. But when it

comes to me having to beat you over the head to get you to do your work, I'm not use to that.

Ms. X: I'll escort mine out. You will not put your head down; you will not sleep in my classroom. We do not do that here. So it's modeling behavior that they don't have at home …

Ms. Tan: I do have trouble relating to kids who don't do their work, cause I was never in any classroom as a student like that, and I don't really associate with people who don't do whatever they need to do to get what they want. So, I can't understand that mindset and I don't know how to reach that mindset: that you pick and choose what you want to do, but you're still supposed to get what you want to get out of it. You want to pass, you minimally want to pass, but you only want to do the things that you want to do or that are interesting to you or that maybe at the last minute, [sic] or you're supposed to get credit for showing up or for doing something, just a little something, I should get credit for that -

Summer: I wrote my name!

Ms. Tan: Right, "I *did* it!" Yes, but it's all wrong.

Ms. Tan and Ms. Kelly simply do not understand the "mindsets" of students who "goof off and don't do their work." Ms. Tan feels the students want to get something for nothing, expecting high marks for little effort. She describes a culture of entitlement in which students "pick and choose what [they] want to do" when it comes to their school work. Ms. X "escorts" such student out of her classroom, refusing to accept such negative attitudes and poor work habits. Ms. Tan described

this defiant and disinterested mindset as "the biggest problem with the [comprehensive] kids":

> Ms. Tan: I think that is the biggest problem with the comp kids. Anything that frustrates them or is hard or seems challenging, somehow they have gotten the message that they don't have to do it, and I think that it is the most horrible thing, whereas even to this day "words with friends" this phone game, I'm horrible with that, but I keep, like, if somebody's gonna play me, I'm gonna play, like god dangit, but I am gonna get better at this thing; but their attitude is completely like they are going to give up if I am not doing well and I should automatically do well because I am me. Not because I'm practiced. Not because I've studied. Just because I'm me and everything should be automatically given to me. (Focus Group #1, October 22, 2011)

Ms. Tan's comments suggest that she sees students in the non-honors track as selfish, vein, and weak-minded, making no efforts to work at "anything that frustrates them or is hard or seems challenging."

The year of this study Ms. Jocasta only taught non-honors classes, a situation that depressed her sorely. Ms. Jocasta felt her class assignments were unfair, even though her department chair and administrators told her the reason she got all of the challenging classes was because she was such a good teacher. Ms. Jocasta felt having to teach students who appeared so resistant to learning was setting her up for failure. Ms. Tan affirmed Ms. Jocasta's feelings in a way that suggests even more frustration with working with this non-honors population of students:

Ms. Tan: So you're not alone. But it is harder when you have a whole – like you need to have one bright spot. And you need to say to the principal or your department chair, "This is fine. I can take all this. Loading up my classes. But you need to give me at least one honors class."

Ms. J: Right.

Ms. Tan: "I need one class who will do the work. I mean one class where I can say, okay they're going to do they're work. You can't just leave me like that." You've been there long enough that you have some ability to say that.

Ms. Jocasta: I know, right. If they would give me some – I paid for the AP[34] course. Can I take – can I just go ahead and get my AP syllabus approved without having an AP class waiting for me.

Ms. Tan: You can tell them that you need at least one. Okay if you want to give them to this person, that person. But you need to give me at least one. I need a break. This is crazy. You're not going to drive me crazy. And it's not fair. What is the problem? (Focus Group #3, November 5, 2011)

A full course load of comprehensive students is not "fair," drives one "crazy," - is not a "bright spot." Ms. J affirmed these statements. Even more, Ms. Tan's statement, "you have been there long enough that you should have some ability to say that"

[34] Advanced Placement

suggests that seniority should relieve teachers from the duty of teaching multiple non-honors classes. Lastly, the perception some teachers have of students in comprehensive-level classes is spelled out in Ms. Tan's statement: "I need one class who will do the work. You can't just leave me like that." In her eyes, students in comprehensive-level classes do not do their work and having to teach too many of them is like giving a teacher the short end of the stick or "leaving [the teacher] like that. Ms. Tan also explicitly expressed her own frustration with working with this population of students:

> Summer: What about you all in your regular level classes? Do you all try to do some of the same things you do in honors classes? Are you able to?
>
> Ms. Tan**:** Well, it makes me very stressed and upset and unhappy - (Group laughter)
>
> Ms. Tan: But, I just, that's why, I'm probably gonna die early -
>
> Ms. Jocasta: Chuckles
>
> Ms. Tan: but I do it, I do it, and eventually, it gets better, they catch on. Um, I can't do a full unveiling of it, but I expose them, just in smaller measures. (Focus Group #2, October 29, 2012)

Teaching students in this track made her "stressed," "upset," and "unhappy" and in her eyes, could send her to an early grave. She feels she cannot give them the full lessons but instead must do a small "unveiling" of them.

While Ms. Kelly did not express opposition to teaching comprehensive-level classes, she certainly expressed her frustration with their skill level and poor work

habits, saying "How did they get to this point?" She also admitted that she struggled to understand and relate to their attitudes toward school:

> On the one hand, I have a hard time relating to these kids because I never had class with them when I was in school. I was always in honors classes. I never taught them during my student teaching experience. But I understand they need me more than anything. (Ms. Kelly, Writing Prompt #1)

Ms. Kelly recognized, however, that her disconnect from these non-honors students was mostly related to their work habits not their cultural preferences or interests:

> Ms. Kelly: I mean my gap for me is the motivation; it is not the "class." I mean we listen to a lot of the same music TV shows etc., but as far as being in a class with people who don't do their work and who goof off; that is the disconnect. I can have a conversation with them as people. But when it comes to me having to beat you over the head to get you to do your work, I'm not use to that. (Focus Group #1, October 22, 2011)

Ms. J and Ms. X spoke less explicitly about their challenges with this subgroup, but that they found this group problematic was still evident. Ms. X said that at her school the comprehensive students were typically made up of the "discipline problems" and were mainly the Black and Latino students and that she felt it was not fair that only the Black teachers were expected to teach students in these classes (Focus Group #4). Ms. J did not teach any honors classes, so by default the students about whom she discussed having problems with were students in comprehensive-level classes.

All of the teachers found the culture students displayed in schools to be problematic. They felt the culture reflected an African American *popular* culture that

privileged material goods over school success, instead of a Black *middle class* culture that emphasized productive work habits and school success. All of the teachers also found teaching non-honors level students to be particularly challenging because of their poor work habits, sense of entitlement, and low skills, which the teachers felt reflected cultural values that did not support school success. These cultural elements made helping Black students achieve emotionally and pedagogically taxing and challenging for teachers.

Conclusion

The teachers in my study felt they helped Black students achieve by not only teaching English content but by also teaching life skills that would benefit students beyond high school, skills such as punctuality, productive work habits, and independent thinking skills. Teachers found implementing their more-than-content approach difficult, however, because of frustrating circumstances and situations they faced in their efforts. Ms. Tan and Ms. Kelly felt frustration with the systems and processes of educational institutions that they thought impeded their instructional efforts and negatively affected Black students' chances to achieve at high levels. Ms. Tan and Ms. Jocasta were frustrated with what they perceived as the ineffectiveness of their instructional strategies. Ms. J and Ms. Jocasta were troubled by what they felt were disconnected relationships with Black students, students whom they felt should share a connection with them because of their shared racial identity. Ms. J and Ms. X both struggled with how they were expected to enact their position as Black teachers, but in diametrically opposing ways: Ms. X did not appreciate the expectation of her to

do anything different for her Black students than she did for other students, just because she was a Black teacher. Ms. J felt *because* she was a Black teacher, she should have been doing more to ensure students gained a sense of pride and knowledge of the African American struggle for freedom and rights. Collectively, teachers felt the anti-school culture students' depicted, especially students who were not in honors classes, to be extremely troubling because it was counter to the middle class school habits and attitudes they held as students and that they expected their students to display.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Scholars of the past two decades have written about the positive role that Black teachers played as role models and mentors for Black students in pre-*Brown* segregated schools and in post-*Brown* newly integrated schools. Historically, Black teachers have been noted for their ability to work successfully with Black students (Fairclough, 2004; Foster, 1997; Irvine, 2002; Patterson, Mickelson, Hester, & Wyrick, 2011; Walker, 2001, 2009). Considering these accounts of Black teachers' positive experiences with Black students alongside the knowledge of persistent widespread Black student underachievement made me wonder why the majority of Black students continue to underachieve – even when they are taught by Black teachers. Moreover, I found perplexing and disturbing the recent studies which indicate that some Black teachers of Black students see the students, community, and parents as the reasons for students' underachievement (Delpit, 2006; Fordham, 1996; Lynn et al., 2010) and do not consider their own practice as possible causes (Lynn et al., 2010). These contradicting reports of Black teachers' experiences with Black students, while separated by two historical eras, prompted me to investigate contemporary Black teachers' perceptions of their impact on Black student achievement. I set out to answer one over-arching research question: What are Black English teachers' perceptions of how they impact Black student achievement?

To answer my research question, I recruited five Black English teachers to participate in four focus group discussions that occurred over a month's time. I also conducted one-on-one follow-up interviews with each teacher and asked them to

complete an online questionnaire about their beliefs, attitudes, and practices. Additionally, at each focus group session, I engaged teachers in reflective writing activities related to the focus group session topics. The prompts consisted of writing an education-focused life-history narrative, a philosophy statement on teaching Black students, a letter to themselves from the perspectives of their Black students, and a retirement letter to current and future Black teachers, students, and community members.

The culturally-sensitive (Tillman, 2002) nature of this study's research problem led me to conceptualize this project through a Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens. CRT, a theoretical framework that centralizes race and privileges the voices of people of color, allowed me to emphasize race in all elements of the study, from the identification of the problem, to the selection of participants, the content of my questions, and my analytic foci. CRT in education says that race is an endemic and permanent part of society that must be considered in the field's quest to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2005 & Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT in education also involves the re-examination of ineffective civil rights laws. I paired CRT with the alternative arts-based methodology of portraiture, a methodology that, like CRT, emphasizes the importance of providing a platform where voices of people from marginalized groups can be heard. Additionally, both CRT (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and portraiture encourage presenting study findings in nontraditional ways that would speak to diverse audiences beyond the academy (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). In this spirit, I extended the portraiture methodology to include poetry, specifically, creating

poetic portraits (Childers, 2007; Hill, 2003, 2005; Schendel, 2009) as introductions for the teachers. Following the poetic portraits, I also presented the findings in the more traditional emergent theme format.

Revisiting the Research Question

I designed this dissertation project to answer the following question: What are Black English teachers' perceptions of how they impact Black student achievement? The teachers felt they helped Black students achieve by teaching them more than English content. Teachers' teaching philosophies included teaching students life skills that would benefit students beyond their high school years. Teachers found it difficult, however, to enact their more-than-content teaching philosophies because of frustrating challenges they encountered in the process. I discuss each of these findings in the subsequent sections.

More than Teachers of Content

The teachers in my study felt they impacted Black student achievement by helping instill in them skills, values, and knowledge beyond what is measured on a quiz or test. Teachers measured achievement by students' display of growth and of independent thinking. They strove to help students develop life skills and knowledge that would benefit them beyond high school. Ms. X, who prided herself in holding high expectations for students, aimed to use her international living and working experiences to help her students learn valuable lessons about life. She shared stories about former students of hers who had eventually achieved professional success and she tied their success, in part, to the "tough love" she gave them. Ms. Tan spoke about a student who attributed his choice to attend college to the guest speaker who visited him in Ms. Tan's class. Like Ms. Tan, Ms. Jocasta wanted to make sure

students were prepared for the difficulties and challenges they would face in life as African American adults. Ms. J wanted to instill a sense of pride and esteem in her students because she recognized the challenges they would face in the real world. Ms. Kelly said she viewed her students as sisters, brothers, and cousins and she strove to be a role model for them. These types of anecdotes were sprinkled about throughout the study and are reflective of how most scholars have portrayed Black teachers in the literature as othermothers (Foster, 1993; Irvine, 2002) and as holding emancipatory teaching philosophies (Foster, 1990; Irvine, 2002; Lynn, Johnson, and Hassan, 1999). Such anecdotes, however, did not dominate the conversations. While all of the teachers articulated a more-than-content philosophy as reflective of their efforts to impact Black student achievement; findings indicate that teachers found it difficult to enact their more-than-content philosophies because of frustrating situations they faced in their efforts. I organized these frustrating situations into five categories of Teacher Frustrations.

Teacher Frustrations

Findings indicate that the teachers in my study were frustrated with the challenges they faced in their efforts to impact Black student achievement. I organized their frustrations into five categories: institutional frustration, frustration with educational systems and processes; pedagogical frustration, frustration with one's ability to translate content knowledge into effective lessons; relational frustration, frustration with one's ability to build mutually satisfying relationships with Black students; positional frustration, frustration with the role racial uplift and solidarity is expected to play in one's practice; and cultural frustration, frustration with the attitudes, values, and work habits of Black students. Collectively, the data

that illustrate these frustrations have led me to two main conclusions. First, that there is an emerging narrative that complicates the academic literature's dominant narrative during the last two decades of the Black teacher as one connected to and successful with Black students. The second conclusion I arrive to is that contemporary Black teachers' pedagogy is centered less on racial uplift today than it was pre-*Brown* and in *Brown's* immediate aftermath, shedding more light on the unintended consequences the *Brown* decision had for Black teachers and Black students.

7.1: Complicating the Black Teacher Narrative: Black Teachers' Difficulties with Black Students

7.1.1: Cultural & Relational Frustration: Dissonance Between Black Teachers and Black Students

The dominant narrative in the current literature on Black teachers post-*Brown* depicts them as being culturally-connected to (Irvine, 1990, 2002) and successful with Black students (Fairclough, 2004); they are othermothers (Foster, 1993; Irvine, 2002), saviors (Foster, 1993), mentors, role models (Irvine, 1989), and in racial solidarity with Black students (Fairclough, 2004; Foster, 1993; Walker, 2009). Scholars have also described Black teachers as effective with Black students because of their culturally-specific practices (Irvine, 2002) and cultural synchronization (Irvine, 1990, 2002) with Black students. The less-discussed narrative in the post-*Brown* era involves Black teachers who are not experiencing success with Black students and who see Black students and their parents through deficit lenses (Delpit, 2006; Fordham, 1996; Lynn et al., 2010), and feel disconnected from them due to class (Fordham, 1996) or cultural (Maylor, 2009) differences. The results of my study

build upon this less-dominant narrative, for the teachers in my study did not all work productively and pleasantly with Black students and the teachers all described feeling a cultural disconnect with some of their Black students. Ultimately, teachers in my study were frustrated by the challenges they faced teaching Black students. While Black teachers have reported cultural difficulties in their new roles in integrated schools (Milner & Howard, 2004) in which they received no guidance on how to get along with the White child (Foster, 1997), the reporting of feeling cultural frustration with how to teach *Black* children is a salient finding in this study.

While the teachers in this study spoke about Black children in general, the students the teachers expressed most difficulty teaching and relating to were students who were not in honors classes. They complained that these regular-education students appeared unenthused about – and often defiant toward – classroom learning, habitually failed to complete assignments or participate constructively in classroom activities, and showed disrespect or disregard for teachers, school officials, and the school environment. The teachers, Ms. Tan and Ms. Jocasta specifically, complained that having a full course load of comprehensive students was not fair. Teachers said they struggled to teach this population of students not only because of their low academic skills but because of the students' lazy – and sometimes non-existent work habits. The teachers perceived these Black students as having negative attitudes toward schooling. *Not* doing class and homework and *not* genuinely showing an interest in and excitement about learning seemed to be student habits that most perplexed and frustrated the teachers. Ogbu (2003) found the attitudes and work habits teachers in this study reported in his study of African American students in a

northeast Ohio high school. His investigation revealed that Black students suffered from "low-effort syndrome," which means that they invested little time and effort into both homework and class work. The perspectives of the teachers in this dissertation study resonate strongly with Ogbu's findings.

Not only did teachers complain about student work habits, but they also expressed aversion toward students' values and beliefs, describing students as having "embraced a balloon that is completely empty" and as having "inherited an existence that is empty." In other words, the teachers did not see value in the entertainment-driven and material-centered value system they felt their Black students embraced. They did not value the students' "home" cultures and instead looked at Black students through a deficit lens (Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2000). Generally, Black teachers are known as viewing student culture as a *strength* and drawing upon it in their teaching (Irvine, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1996; Lee, 2006). In addition to Fordham (1996) and Lynn et al. (2010), a few other scholars have reported Black teachers having deficit views toward Black students (Delpit, 2006; Foster, 1997; T. Adkins-Coleman, personal communication, April 23, 2011;). Delpit (2006) noted that in her observations of contemporary predominantly Black schools, that: "[teachers] judge their [minority students'] actions, words, intellects, families, and communities as inadequate at best, as collections of pathologies at worst. … These views are not limited to White adults. In my experience in predominantly Black school districts, the middle-class African American teachers who do not identify with the poor African-American students they teach may hold similarly damaging stereotypes" (p. xxiv). Additionally, in the early years of integration, Foster (1993) found that some

Black teachers embraced dominant cultural values that privileged a White middle class way of life and held low expectations for Black students. None of these scholars, however, have pursued a research agenda interrogating these findings. In fact, Adkins-Coleman stated that her knowledge of African American teachers' deficit-thinking is one of the reasons why she did not strive to recruit only African American teachers for her study (Adkins, 2006) on effective English teachers of Black students (T. Adkins-Coleman, personal communication, April 23, 2011). Adkins (2006, 2010) utilized a variation of the community nomination (Foster, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994) selection process to identify teachers for her study. She sought nominations from the students and the principal. If a teacher's name appeared on both the students' and the principal's list, the teacher was invited to participate in the study. Though not by design, the teachers selected for her study were Black.

As was the case with cultural frustration, relational frustration also runs counter to the idea of Black teachers experiencing cultural synchronization (Irvine, 1990, 2002) with Black students. Cultural synchronization theory says Black students and Black teachers experience synchronization in the classroom because of a shared African American culture that includes "identifiable norms, language, behaviors, and attitudes" (Irvine, 1990, p. 23) and that because of the shared cultural understanding teachers can relate to students personally and therefore, operationalize their practice more effectively. In this dissertation study, Black teachers described experiencing cultural *dissonance* rather than synchronization with Black students. Ms. J and Ms. Jocasta felt the cultural understanding described in the cultural synchronization theory was missing in their relationships with students. Both teachers described feeling

rejected and dismissed by Black students. Ms. Tan also reported that in her more culturally-diverse teaching setting Black students did not connect with her as they did in her predominantly Black teaching assignment.

Black teachers feeling a disconnection between themselves and the Black students they teach is not widely discussed in educational communities of practice or research. When Fordham (1996) first put forward the idea, her thinking was considered controversial at the time (V.M. MacDonald, personal communication, October 22, 2012) and resulted in no studies that I know of that strove to unpack this disconnect between African American teachers and African American students. A study conducted in London, England, however, revealed that Black teachers and Black students rejected the notion of race-matching because some Black teachers did not want to be role models for Black students and because some Black students did not relate to their Black teachers (Maylor, 2009). The population in that study, however, consisted of British ethnic minorities, not American, but the logic is applicable to American school settings. The reality that Black teachers have articulated feeling undesired by Black students – and that they are bothered by it – is a reality that warrants further exploration. Fairclough (2007) explains how there were signs of this intra-racial dissonance when schools were first integrated:

> Although Black students directed most of their animus toward White teachers, Black teachers discovered that their own ability to enforce discipline and teach effectively also suffered. In segregated schools, teachers had relied upon a structure of Black authority, usually reinforced by a stern principal, to back them up. Desegregation not only removed Black principals but also

> displaced other symbols of Black authority such as counselors, coaches, and band directors. (p. 399)

If there is cultural dissonance between Black students and Black teachers, as indicated in the results of this study, perhaps the assumption that Black teachers are, by default of their race, adept at helping Black students achieve, should be interrogated more deeply.

Institutional & Cultural Frustration: Difficulties with Non-Honors Students Illuminates Teachers' Problems with Tracking and Social Class Differences

The detrimental impact systems of tracking have on minority students has been well-documented in the literature (Ansalone, 2006; Oakes, 1985; Oakes & Lipton, 2007; Tyson, 2011). Black teachers' perspectives on tracking, however, have not been discussed in depth in the literature. Ms. Kelly gives us a window into how disproportionate tracking may affect Black teachers. She described her students (as I often have) as cousins, sisters, brothers, nephews and nieces - as family members. For me, and I posit that for other teachers like Ms. Kelly, the knowledge that children whom one perceives as family are not receiving the best learning experiences and opportunities is very disturbing. Ms. Kelly dealt with her frustration by raising the bar for these non-honors students and giving them honors-level learning standards and experiences. Nevertheless, she was still bothered by the negative impact institutional tracking had on teacher experiences and student learning. This frustration is an emotional reaction to teaching that is much different than the typical frustration and exhaustion teachers – particularly new teachers – often experience (Ayers, 2001). The nature of this frustration involves the internal – often

emotional – pain and agitation that one feels as a result of seeing the struggle and failure of one's own ethnic group. Since most Black teachers teach Black students (Berry, 2005), repeatedly seeing Black students struggle because of inequitable access to high-quality learning opportunities can become emotionally and mentally taxing and professionally frustrating, as was the case in this study.

Generally, Black teachers discuss the methods they use to motivate and liberate students by providing them with diverse, culturally-relevant opportunities to learn (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Irvine, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lee, 2006, 2007; Lynn et al., 1999; Morrell, 2004). Scholars have not provided much discussion about how Black teachers have dealt with the emotional ramifications that come with knowing Black students are systematically being denied high-quality learning opportunities. A related exception includes Madsen and Hollins (2000), who found that teachers used spirituality, consistent interaction with the Black community, and isolation from the White community as defense mechanisms when faced with battle fatigue and discouragement in predominantly *White* school settings. Their focus on predominantly White settings provides only a modicum of insight into how Black teachers might deal with these internal emotional stresses when the student body is entirely Black. In general, discussion of how contemporary Black teachers deal with battle fatigue and discouragement in predominantly Black settings is lacking in the literature.

Fairclough (2004), referencing the work of Charles S. Johnson, E. Franklin Frazier, John Dollard, and Allison Davis, notes that before *Brown* (1954), there were some reports that "African American teachers often favored middle-class children

and discriminated against those of darker complexion" (p. 46). Middle class children would perhaps be those children in the honors classes that the teachers in my study preferred. In my study, the teachers' preferences did not appear to be based on skin color or class status but rather on work ethic and skill level. Still, the thread of preference for certain "types" of students was evident.

Ms. Tan distinguished between Black middle class values and the values projected in the culture of Black students. She said that Black popular culture is what gets spotlighted in society, a culture that she feels is not representative of Black middle class culture, which is the culture with which she identifies. Her views resonate with the intra-race class distinctions scholars have found within the Black middle class (Lacy, 2007; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). Lacy (2007) found that "class-based identities reflect the tension between hip hop culture and the middle-class culture parents hope to socialize their children into" (p. 15). This middle class culture is one that the teachers in my study seemed to embrace. These intra-race class distinctions are not a new phenomenon in public schools. In newly integrated schools, some Black teachers encountered resistance from Black children in relation to what teachers felt was acceptable deportment:

> Black teachers found that an increasing number of their Black students openly scorned the model of middle-class respectability that they personified and promoted. … Teachers' efforts to encourage academic achievement encountered more resistance than in the past. Their ideas of what constituted appropriate behavior and deportment were often greeted with derision.
>
> (Fairclough, 2007, p. 400)

As Fairclough (2007) illustrates, teachers' preferences to teach certain "types" of students can be problematic for Black students. In this dissertation study, teachers' proclivity toward Black students tracked into honors classes and difficulty working with students in comprehensive-level classes sheds light on how systems of tracking might negatively impact Black teachers' ability to be successful with Black students from diverse social and class backgrounds.

7.1.2: Positional Frustration: *Brown's* Unintended Impact on the Racial Uplift Component of Black Teachers' Pedagogy

"Have we accomplished the original intent? If the answer is no, and I would say it is, then we have a lot of work to do. We must return to the original intent and interrogate ourselves." - (Walker, 2012)

The results of this study extend the discussion about the unintended negative consequences school desegregation had for Black teachers, Black students, and the Black community at large (Fairclough, 2004, 2007; Foster, 1993; Fultz, 2004; Milner & Howard, 2004; Walker, 2009, 2012). The way school integration was implemented suggested that schools with White people were better than Black schools (Hudson & Holmes, 1994), and therefore, Black schools could be eliminated, hence the closing of hundreds of Black schools (Cecelski, 1994; Foster, 1993; Fultz, 2004). According to teachers in my study, part of their reason for neglecting to teach for racial up lift was because they did not feel comfortable doing so in racially integrated environments. If we accept that part of what made Black teachers successful with Black students pre-*Brown* was their ability to talk frankly with students about race and the need to gain education in order to compete with White people and uplift the race (Foster, 1990),

then we might question whether the expectations of colorblindness that came along with *Brown* were good for Black students. Scholars and researchers have already reported that the way *Brown* was implemented negatively affected the Black teacher's relationship with Black students, parents, and the community (Fairclough, 2004; Foster, 1993; Milner & Howard, 2004). I posit that the disconnect and disrespect teachers in my study reported experiencing are still ramifications of the way *Brown* was implemented.

In today's resegregated schools, Black teachers are experiencing the opposite of what scholars reported many Black teachers experienced pre-*Brown*. *Pre-Brown,* according to scholars, Black teachers were honored and revered (Foster, 1993; Milner & Howard, 2004; Walker, 1996, 2001, 2004). Today, the teachers in my study report feeling disrespected and dismissed. In segregated schools, racial uplift was embedded throughout the curriculum (Fairclough, 2004; Irvine, 1989; Walker, 2009, 2012). In today's de facto resegregated schools, the belief in teaching racial uplift may not be shared by all teachers. The teachers in my study grappled with how – and in the case of Ms. X, whether – they should enact a racial uplift teaching philosophy. Both Ms. J and Ms. Tan said they spoke more openly about issues of race and schooling when they taught in schools in which all of their students were Black. Ms. J expressed a strong desire to enact a racial uplift philosophy, but she was uncertain about how to do so. Ms. J admitted feeling uncomfortable talking in racial terms in her new integrated school because all of her students were not Black. Ms. Tan was afraid her words might come back to haunt her by parents or administrators and felt the Black students in her second school were not as receptive to the racial uplift

teaching philosophy she had hoped to share. Ms. X outright felt it would be unfair to do anything special for Black students because she did not only teach Black students. Ms. Jocasta expressed confusion about *how* a teacher would go about giving students a sense of pride. Has the "I'm Black and I'm Proud"[35] message gotten lost in the eras of colorblindness and post-racial America? Is the lack of reverence from Black students affecting teachers' interest in and motivation to be "racial uplift" teachers?

While many of the teachers in my study taught classes that were predominantly Black, they still felt as if they could not talk about these issues of race. I posit that their reluctance to talk explicitly about issues of racial uplift in the classroom is due to the post-*Brown*, post-civil rights environment of colorblindness (Monahan, 2006) that permeates our society. Talking about issues of race is considered inappropriate in public spaces and sometimes irrelevant to educational achievement. The widely-held meritocratic belief that everyone is equal and has equal opportunities to achieve causes educators and society members at-large to steer away from talking about race in relation to student achievement. This conflict presents a conundrum for Black teachers: How can a teacher be colorblind and embrace a philosophy of racial uplift for educational achievement? Teachers in my study grappled with this conundrum, a conundrum most likely faced by many of our nation's Black teachers. They are "caught in the crossfire" (Dickar, 2008) in that they must navigate a pedagogical double-consciousness (Dubois, 1903) in which they must meet the Black community's expectation that they be advocates for Black children while also meeting mainstream society's expectation that they show no racial

[35] "Say it Loud! I'm Black and I'm Proud," by James Brown, is a song that was popular during the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements.

preference or partiality in their teaching practices. This dilemma echoes the frustrating situation in which many southern Black educators found themselves when they chose to collaborate with White organizations like the National Education Association (NEA) as part of the *Brown* desegregation agenda.

When Black educators elected to merge their all-Black organizations with White organizations, they forfeited their focus on racial uplift (Walker, 2009). Walker (2009) depicts this situation by sharing from an interview she conducted with H.E. Tate, a former director of the Georgia State Teacher's Association, in which he described the consequences of Black-White collaboration:

> In 1959, they still held the hope that the merger of Black and White teacher associations would honor the needs and interests of both groups as equal professionals. However, the expectation for similar visions for integration was short-lived. White teachers' associations removed the restrictive membership clauses they held and invited Blacks to become members, but when Black teachers' organizations accepted the invitations of White teachers' associations, they compromised their capacity to represent the interests of Black children. (Walker, 2009, p. 276)

This early compromise that Black educators made – not only in their choice to merge with the all White NEA, but also in their decision to support school desegregation efforts – affected future generations of Black teachers and students. As Walker (2009) found, merging meant sacrificing the advocacy agenda that Black educators had employed in support of Black children. As a result of this broader compromise,

the teachers in my study struggled with the positional expectations of them as Black teachers.

Ms. X did not appreciate being expected to do something special for Black students. She felt that just because she is Black does not mean she should automatically teach Black students. She emphasized that she is a teacher of *all* students and that *all* teachers should be able to teach *all* students. She did not want the "Black teacher" position that she felt her school, department, and society wanted her to take. Ms. X's very strong opposition to being labeled the "Black" teacher runs counter to the reports of Black teachers feeling a sense of duty and pride in their advocacy roles for Black students both pre-*Brown* and its aftermath (Dixson, 2003; Foster, 1993; Irvine, 1989; Walker, 2009, 2012). Moreover, while researchers have reported Black teachers feeling annoyed by the expectation that they be the "Black experts" in predominantly White schools but not do anything extra special for Black children (Madsen & Hollins, 2000), discussions of Black teachers objecting to the idea that they *should* do something special for Black children are rare in the literature on educational experiences in American schools.

Ms. J, on the other hand, felt like she had not done all that she should do for Black students and that *because* she was a Black teacher she had a responsibility to do for her students what Black teachers had done for her: help them develop a sense of pride about themselves and to understand the struggle that Black people have endured because of their race. Ms. J was confused and frustrated about how she should teach for racial uplift in her classroom filled with both Black and Latino students. Walker (2012) might argue that Ms. J does not know how to "uplift the

race" through education because the Black advocacy pedagogical agenda that benefitted Black students in the immediate aftermath of *Brown*, from which "Black pedagogy was not far removed," has been lost. Of contemporary generations of educators and activists, Walker said, "We have forgotten the [Black educator] pedagogical agenda. We are ignoring the botched implementation [of the *Brown* decision] … Black children are supposed to have everything we gave to them and more." In essence, she was saying that Ms. J struggles to enact a racial uplift teaching philosophy because the way *Brown* was implemented has caused the "racial uplift" component that has historically governed Black teachers' pedagogy to be compromised. Similarly, while Ms. Jocasta supported racial uplift in the classroom, she admitted that she had failed to enact it. Ms. Tan, too, found it difficult to implement a racial uplift philosophy due to what she felt was push-back from the children that she felt stemmed from a sense of entitlement and a poor work ethic.

The challenge of enacting a racial uplift agenda in post-*Brown* classrooms is not a new articulation. Teachers in Foster's (1990) study complained that in newly integrated classrooms they could not talk frankly and openly with Black students about the value and political consequences of choosing academic achievement. Walker (2009) also found that the inter-racial organizational collaboration between Black teachers' unions and the all White NEA, integrated collaboration Black activists had fought for, resulted in the Whitewashing of educational plans, programs, and facilities and the elimination of any pedagogical strategies or educational philosophies that were designed to specifically help Black students.

The experiences and perspectives of teachers in this study provide more evidence that the Black teacher-Black student narrative is more complex than how it is currently depicted in the literature. Their experiences also suggest that the call to revisit the original intent of *Brown* deserves high priority for research and policy agendas. Revisiting the original intent of Brown and reviewing how it was actually implemented could lead to new ideas for creating equitable learning opportunities for Black children, which could ultimately result in widespread increased achievement for Black students.

7.2: Toward a Contemporary Plan for Increasing Black Student Achievement

Is "racial uplift" what is missing in today's resegregated schools? Is its dissipating presence part of why there continues to be persistent wide-spread Black student underachievement? "We are the only generation since reconstruction who has no plan," says Walker (2012), regarding the state of Black education in contemporary times. Researchers have looked at segregated schools and pre-*Brown* pedagogies for models of literacy and instructional strategies that might be implemented in modern-day schools, believing contemporary teachers and reformers can learn something positive from the Black teachers who taught in segregated schools (Murray, 2012; Patterson et al., 2011; Tompkins, 2005; Walker, 2009). In her dissertation research, Murray (2012) describes how early Black female educators orchestrated an alternative Black history curriculum that supported the intellectual growth and success of Black children, a curriculum she feels should inform today's social studies classrooms; Patterson et al. (2011) show how African American

teachers in the segregated schools employed an ethic of care that they think would make a difference if applied in today's schools; Tompkins (2005) gives voice to the pedagogies of African American reading teachers in segregated schools and suggests contemporary educators consider their examples; Walker (2012) argues that contemporary educators might learn something from the equity agenda pre-*Brown* Black educators orchestrated and delivered in segregated schools in preparation for the implementation of *Brown*. In general, there is agreement among these educational researchers and scholars that examining pre-*Brown* methodologies may provide help for researchers looking to make sense of modern-day education dilemmas (Patterson et al, 2011; Tompkins, 2005), taking into account, of course, the vast social and economic change Black communities have undergone since then. Pre-*Brown*, theories like Du Bois's (1903b) Talented Tenth Plan for Black education carried substantial weight in educational thought communities. The Talented Tenth plan involved steering the brightest Black students – only a tenth of the race – into institutions of higher education so that they could obtain education that they would then use to uplift the "masses" in the Black community. Such a plan fit the social and economic environment of the Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras, but today, Du Bois's later theory of "The Guiding One Hundreth" (Du Bois, 1948, as cited in Alridge, 2008) is more fitting. This plan involves including all components of the Black community in the efforts to uplift the race, which means all would be worthy of higher education opportunities. Perhaps a blending of both old and new theories, or "looking back to go forward" (Edwards et al., 2010, p.ix) in discussions of Black education reform efforts.

President Barack Obama recently issued an Executive Order (July 26, 2012) on Educational Excellence for African Americans, the first ever Executive Order targeting Black education in the pre-K – 12 levels, signaling the administration's recognition of the significance of isolating Black student achievement as an issue that needs strategic, dedicated focus at all levels. The administration argued that "significantly improving the educational outcomes of African Americans will provide substantial benefits for our country by, among other things, increasing college completion rates, productivity, employment rates, and the number of African American teachers" (Obama, Executive Order, 2012). These desired outcomes are important reasons to work strategically at improving Black student achievement, but the last goal of increasing the number of African American teachers appears to be based on the belief that African American teachers are somehow the best fit for African American students. This dissertation questions this taken-for-granted assumption; its findings ask scholars to re-inspect the relationship between the Black student and the Black teacher, to unpack the present but less-acknowledged data that suggests there is a disconnect between Black students and their Black teachers, to re-examine and re-theorize the element of racial uplift that has been at the root of the plans for Black educational development since slavery (Perry, 2003; Williams, 2005). I ask the educators and the scholarly community, "How might this element be revived? Replaced? Re-theorized?"

The perspectives presented in this dissertation study problematize the commonly-held view of the Black teacher as the mentor, savior, and othermother for Black students, a view that was initially articulated two decades ago (Foster, 1993;

Irvine, 1989, 2002). The mentor, savior, and othermother depictions of Black teachers are most relevant for teachers who taught in dejure segregated or newly integrated schools in the aftermath of the *Brown* decision. The teachers in my study represent a different generation of Black teachers, teachers who teach in a new era of school resegregation, an era in which most predominantly Black schools are failing (Orfield & Lee, 2006). Additionally, the teachers in my study live in a different era in which the structure of the Black family has changed to one in which the "mother" often serves as both the maternal and paternal figure (Barton & Coley, 2010), redefining the role of the mother and, perhaps, redefining what it may mean to be an "othermother" in the classroom. Such a complex milieu highlights the relevancy of the intersections of family roles, race, and gender to the discussion of Black student achievement. Furthermore, the teachers' conflicted feelings and perspectives about the role they play in the education of Black students provides an additional, admittedly troubling, lens through which to analyze the experiences and perspectives of Black teachers. Without piercing through the silence of this dilemma, however, we cannot move forward to educationally assist contemporary Black students, particularly from impoverished circumstances.

Scholars and researchers must more deeply investigate the cultural and social issues that seem to undermine Black teachers' attempts to help Black students achieve. The gulf that Fordham (1996) identified between the Black teachers in her study and the majority of the Black students they taught and the deficit thinking other scholars (Delpit, 2006; Lynn et al., 2010) have found in Black teachers' perspectives resonate strongly with the perspectives of the participants in my study. The teachers'

objections to the behavior and seemingly anti-school culture some of their Black students exhibit are evident again in the perspectives of the teachers in this dissertation study. With this massive gulf on teachers' minds, a gulf they are very-much resistant to crossing, it was difficult, in this dissertation study, to focus discussions on teachers' roles in impacting *academic* achievement and proficiency. In this dissertation study, teachers preferred, instead, to discuss gaps in student engagement and in their behavior, values, and work habits. Rothstein (2004) identified these types of gaps as social class gaps in non-cognitive skills and asserted that "schools that truly narrow the Black-White gap are those where students of both races gain academic proficiency as well as productive and socially responsible behavior" (p. 101). He argued that researchers should pay more attention to examining these gaps in behavior and social skills. The results of my study suggest that Black teachers, such as the ones in my study, would agree. I, too, agree. However, what we all must not lose sight of is the role adults other than educators play in shaping these behaviors. Parents and extended family members can help prepare students to go to school with the social skills to operate successfully in a school environment. Media and society play a large part, too. All in the equation must combat the urge to walk right past them [academically-disengaged Black students] without saying a word.

7.3: Implications

There are four key implications I believe this study has for practice, research, policy, and theory in this new era of school resegregation. For practice, I call for intra-racial professional development and teacher education opportunities for Black

teachers. Implications for research include an argument for more research on Black teachers and their experiences with Black students in resegregated schools, and particularly their experiences with students in different academic tracks. The policy implication includes moving toward a *Brown* agenda for contemporary times. Lastly, the theoretical implication includes a call for theorizing about how the notion of racial uplift might be re-envisioned for implementation in today's defacto resegregated school environments.

7.3.1: Practice: Intra-racial Professional Development & Teacher Education

We must rethink the notion that Black teachers, by nature of their race, experience cultural synchronization (Irvine, 1990) with Black students, and, therefore are able to teach them effectively (Irvine, 1989, 2002)[36]. This cultural-based assertion is based on the experiences of teachers and scholars who taught in de jure segregated and newly integrated schools of the 20th century, when racial uplift and advocacy were central to Black teachers' philosophies. In contemporary schools, we must take heed to Tatum's (2007) call to talk about race and how its socializing impact has shaped our personal and professional outlooks. We must also realize that "we cannot assume that teachers of color are confident in their abilities to talk about

[36] While the results of this research project and others indicate that some Black teachers are not culturally compatible with some Black students, I find it necessary to note that I believe many Black teachers do possess race-based cultural knowledge that could resonate with most Black students if presented through a class-appropriate lens. Specifically, Black teachers have the knowledge of the Black struggle for equality and equity in a racist society that has historically cast the African American as inferior to all other groups of people. The teachers in my study all possessed this knowledge and recognized its importance, but because their students possessed attitudes, values, and ways of being that were different than their own, the teachers found it difficult to connect with them in a way that would allow for successful teaching and learning.

these issues … none of us can teach what we haven't learned ourselves" (p. 38). A critical race reading of this situation reminds us that all parties have been impacted and influenced by our race-centered society – no matter the race – and, furthermore, that intra-racial class diversity warrants the need for professional development and teacher education initiatives that are grounded in the awareness of the significance of intersectionality to discussions of Black education. Understanding how *Black* teachers – not just White teachers – navigate and manage the tensions they experience teaching students with whom they do not relate or connect due to class differences will hopefully shed light on strategies scholars can put forth to increase Black student achievement. Professional development and teacher education opportunities focused on issues of intra-racial relationships will possibly help Black teachers have a greater impact on Black student achievement. I posit that this type of intra-race-focused professional development could prompt some Black teachers to reflect upon their own middle class privilege and cultural ways of knowing, as well as on what they need to do to be more effective teachers of Black students from backgrounds different than their own. This type of professional development would differ from current cross-cultural and cultural competency courses and workshops that focus on examining White privilege or embracing multiple cultures in the classroom, in that it will focus on *intra-racial* cultural issues, something other scholars have suggested are necessary for both White teachers and teachers of color (Milner, 2010; Tatum, 2007).

7.3.2: Research: Ethnographic Study on Black Teachers and Students in Resegregated Schools

This study suggests an imperative for more research on Black teachers and their experiences teaching Black-students in resegregated schools, especially students

whose social and educational background differ from the teachers. I put forward the idea of a long-term ethnographic study that would allow the researcher to identify and make sense of the cultural atmosphere present between Black teachers and students, including how Black teachers' pedagogy impact Black students' non-cognitive skills. This research should include inquiry into the perspectives Black students have of their Black teachers and of themselves. My study has shown that Black teachers' find teaching students in general education classes more difficult than teaching students in honors-level classes. More research on the dynamic that exists between Black teachers and these two distinct groups is needed. Such research might provide ideas for the type of intra-racial professional development I proposed for Black teachers.

7.3.3: Policy: *A Brown v. Board of Education* Agenda for Contemporary Times

This study emphasizes more of the unintended consequences of the *Brown* decision for Black teachers and students. How might policy-makers and activists use the findings of this study and other related studies to make an argument for *Brown* 3, a court order that would accomplish *Brown's* intended goal: equitable, first-class, educational experiences for all students? This time, however, policy-makers and district officials might place more emphasis on strategies for creating equitable learning environments for all students than on strategies aimed simply at achieving racial balance through integration. Recent scholarship asserts that "the dilemma moving forward for policy makers and scholars concerned with the educational advancement of students of color is not to develop new ways to integrate America's public schools or reconcile the gaps in the Supreme Court's logic, but rather to craft

programs and policies for students of color around the human development and workforce needs of the global economy" (Donnor, 2011, p. 735). While I embrace this argument of focusing on crafting career programs for students of color, I do not think defacto racial segregation should be accepted as appropriate and natural, but I do believe that achieving racial balance does not necessarily need to be the central motivating factor of any contemporary reform efforts. Other recent scholarship asserts that despite repeated court rulings eliminating race-based assignment criteria, that "demand for integrated education is far from dormant" (McDermott, Debray, & Frankenberg, 2012, p. 31). Ultimately, the possible components of a *Brown* 3 decision are many and are left up for discussion between policy makers. What is not debatable, however, is that the results of this dissertation study, alongside the negative consequences related research has shown that the *Brown* decision has had for Black teachers and Black students, indicate – unequivocally – that *Brown* and its implementation process must be revisited and revised.

7.3.4: Theory: Reconceptualization of "Racial Uplift" for Contemporary Resegregated Schools

Racial uplift, once the core and foundation of Black teachers' pedagogy, seems to have dissipated over the decades since the *Brown* desegregation decision. While most of the teachers in my study believed in the principle of racial uplift, when it came to enacting it, they either did not know how, or found it difficult, to do so because of the racial diversity in their classrooms or due to Black students' resistance. The contemporary resegregated school environments in which these teachers taught differ from the dejure segregated and newly-integrated schools of their Black teacher predecessors. The differences in these teachers' experiences cause me to posit that

there may be a need for a transformed racial uplift pedagogy for contemporary school environments. Thus, I call on scholars to re-envision and reconceptualize the role of "racial uplift" in Black education for today's resegregated schools. A reconceptualized theory would include discussion of how racial uplift could be operationalized in 21st century public schools.

Appendices

Appendix A: Research Question & Methodological Dilemmas

Research Question: What are Black English teachers' perceptions of how they impact Black student achievement?

Methodological Dilemmas

What kinds of data will answer the question?	What are the barriers, if any, to accessing this data?	Methodological Release Point Methods I will use to penetrate barriers
• Focus Group Discussions • Responses to Questionnaire • Writing Prompts • Interviews	• Denial • Defensiveness • Lack of full disclosure • Lack of self reflection • Colorblindness • Lack of fully-developed answers • Lack of awareness/acknowledgement of racial	• See absence as presence • Interrogate the obvious • Explicitly & repeatedly centralize race in discussions

	influences on their practice and perceptions • Teachers may provide cliché answers based on what they think is politically correct	

Appendix B: Data Collection & Analysis Timeline

Total Data Collection & Analysis Time: 53 Weeks

Week	Research Task(s)
1	• Administration of Electronic Questionnaire • Focus Group Meeting
2	• Focus Group Meeting • Data Analysis
3	• Focus Group Meeting • Data Analysis
4	• Focus Group Meeting • Data Analysis
5-12	Focus Group Transcription & Data Analysis
13-14	• Follow-up Interviews • Data Analysis
15-19	• Data Analysis • Writing
20-53	• Data Analysis • Writing

Appendix C: Focus Group Conversation Topics

Conversation Topic	Purpose	Data Collection Goals
Who are we as African American English teachers? What are our similarities and differences?	• To build relationships amongst group members • To foreground race as central contextualizing element of study • To personalize the experience by initiating reflection and introspection • To generate meaningful, personal discussion	• To collect data on each teacher's local and historical contexts • To collect inferential data on teachers' dispositions and attitudes toward research topic • To collect data on teachers' developing insights into the research topic
What are my responsibilities to Black students?	• To continue emphasis on race as study's central contextualizing element • To include a focus on the Black student in teacher reflection and introspection • To begin unpacking the beliefs attitudes, and strategies that influence teaching practices • To prompt self-evaluation of teaching • To generate meaningful discussion	• To collect data on how teachers approach teaching Black students • To collect data on teachers' beliefs about teaching Black students • To collect data on teachers' perceptions of their teaching • To collect data on teachers' developing insights into the research topic
How would students describe my "quality of service"? How do I describe it?	• To continue reflective focus on teacher's practice in relation to Black students • To consider teacher's "quality of service" from the student perspective • To generate meaningful discussion • To clarify understandings, thoughts, and beliefs	• To collect data on teachers' perceptions of how Black students view them • To collect data on teacher's perceptions of the "quality of service" they deliver • To collect data on teachers' developing and summative insights into the research topic
Reflections & Revelations: Connecting My Practice to Black Student Achievement	• To continue reflective focus on teacher's practice in relation to Black students • To have teachers consider their "quality of service" from the student perspective • To prompt thoughtful responses to/explanations for students' perceptions of teacher's practice • To gain insight into relationship between Black teachers' practice and student achievement/underachievement • To generate meaningful discussion • To clarify understandings, thoughts, and beliefs	• To collect data on the connections teachers make between their pedagogy and Black student achievement • To collect non-inferential data on how teachers view their impact on Black student achievement • To collect data on any new insights teachers have developed about their impact on Black student achievement throughout the course of the meetings • To collect data on teachers' developing and summative insights into the research topic

Appendix D: Focus Group Meeting Agenda

All meetings occurred during the morning.

8:00-8:10 – Introduction of Conversation Topic

8:10-8:35 – Independent Writing Time

8:35-9:55– Participant Sharing and Discussion

9:55-10:00 – Concluding Reflections

Appendix E: Writing Prompts

Writing Prompt #1: Education-Focused Life History

Please tell the story of your involvement in education – as a student and a teacher.

Consider touching on the following in your narrative:

- Education in the home
- Primary and Secondary Schooling
- College and Beyond
- First Few Years of Teaching & Learning
- Teaching & Learning Experiences – Past and Present

Writing Prompt #2: Teaching Philosophy/Style

Please choose one of the following prompts to complete:

a. Describe your teaching philosophy as it relates to Black students. Include anecdotes from your teaching experiences to illustrate your philosophy in practice.
b. Write a metaphorical poem in which you depict your teaching style by comparing it to something (maybe an animal or a medical procedure/experience).

Writing Prompt #3: Perspective-Taking

Write a letter to yourself from one of your current or former students. Choose a student who falls into one of the following types:

- High-achieving/Amicable/Cooperative

or

- Failing/Defiant/Disagreeable

Writing Prompt #4: Retirement Letter: Reflections and Final Words

Write a "retirement" letter to past, present, and future Black students and teachers. Consider touching on the following in your letter:

- Reflections on Your Teaching Career (challenges and triumphs)
- Message to Students
- Message to Black Community & Community at-large
- Message to Remaining and Future Black Teachers

End-of-Session Journaling

Please jot down any closing reflections, questions, or comments. I will be the only person to read what you write.

Appendix F: Hilliard's Gap-closing Qualities

According to Hilliard (2003), gap-closing teachers are teachers who:

1. do not question students' intelligence
2. question students' opportunities to learn
3. question their own teaching
4. do not believe IQ scores predict achievement
5. reject cultural deprivation as a means to explain Black student underachievement
6. do not consider socioeconomic status as a measure of students' capacity to learn
7. believe students can achieve no matter the contextual circumstances
8. are personally committed to students
9. maintain a "whatever it takes" attitude toward teaching
10. serves as an advocate and a teacher
11. does not see children through classifications or labels
12. respects students' prior knowledge
13. respects students, parents, and communities
14. have deep knowledge of their content
15. develop a socially supportive classroom environment
16. use techniques to generate "meaningful moment to moment participation" (p. 150).
17. focus on student reasoning rather than just on the "right" answer
18. overcome "oppositional attitudes" (acting White/peer pressure) with inspired teaching

Appendix G: Online Questionnaire: Teachers' Beliefs, Attitudes, and Practices

Reflect on your teaching experiences with African American students. For each question, select the option that best describes how you feel or what you believe. In the next question field, explain the reason (s) for your answer.

Name * Please indicate your first name.

Preferred Pseudonym (Do you have a preference for the pseudonym used to describe you in the dissertation or other publications? If so, please indicate the name. If not, you may skip this question.)

Question 1 * I sometimes question a student's intelligence. Strongly Agree/Agree/ Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Unable to Answer

Explanation for Question 1 * Explain your thinking for question 1.

Question 2 * I question my own teaching strategies and decisions.

Strongly Agree/Agree/ Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Unable to Answer

Explanation for Question 2 * Explain your thinking for question 2.

Question 3 * I believe IQ scores predict achievement.

Strongly Agree/Agree/ Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Unable to Answer

Explanation for Question 3 * Explain your thinking for question 3.

Question 4 * I believe some Black students underachieve because they are culturally deprived.

Strongly Agree/Agree/ Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Unable to Answer

Explanation for Question 4 * Explain your thinking for question 4.

Question 5 * I believe a student's socioeconomic status is an indicator of the student's capacity to learn.

Strongly Agree/Agree/ Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Unable to Answer

Explanation for Question 5 * Explain your thinking for question 5.

Question 6 * My teaching causes students to reject negative peer pressure (such as the pressure not to "act White") and choose to learn.

Strongly Agree/Agree/ Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Unable to Answer

Explanation for Question 6 * Explain your thinking for question 6.

Question 7 * I believe students can achieve no matter their circumstances.

Strongly Agree/Agree/ Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Unable to Answer

Explanation for Question 7 * Explain your thinking for question 7.

Question 8 * I have deep knowledge of English/Language Arts content.

Strongly Agree/Agree/ Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Unable to Answer

Explanation for Question 8 * Explain your thinking for question 8.

Question 9 * I create socially supportive classroom environments.

Strongly Agree/Agree/ Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Unable to Answer

Explanation for Question 9 * Explain your thinking for question 9.

Question 10 * I use teaching techniques that result in meaningful moment-to-moment student participation and/or engagement.

Strongly Agree/Agree/ Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Unable to Answer

Explanation for Question 10 * Explain your thinking for question 10.

Question 11 * My teaching techniques focus on student reasoning rather than just on the right answer.

Strongly Agree/Agree/ Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Unable to Answer

Explanation for Question 11 * Explain your thinking for question 11.

Question 12 * I am personally committed to ensuring Black students experience academic success.

Strongly Agree/Agree/ Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Unable to Answer

Explanation for Question 12 * Explain your thinking for question 12.

Question 13 * I have a "whatever it takes" attitude toward teaching.

Strongly Agree/Agree/ Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Unable to Answer

Explanation for Question 13 * Explain your thinking for question 13.

Question 14 * I am a teacher AND an advocate for Black students.

Strongly Agree/Agree/ Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Unable to Answer

Explanation for Question 14 * Explain your thinking for question 14.

Question 15 * My teaching and attitude toward students is influenced by their academic track, their reputation with other teachers, and their personal appearance or behaviors.

Strongly Agree/Agree/ Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Unable to Answer

Explanation for Question 15 * Explain your thinking for question 15.

Question 16 * I demonstrate respect for the prior knowledge students bring into the classroom.

Strongly Agree/Agree/ Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Unable to Answer

Explanation for Question 16 * Explain your thinking for question 16.

Question 17 * I demonstrate respect for students, their parents, and the community's from which they come.

Strongly Agree/Agree/ Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Unable to Answer

Explanation for Question 17 * Explain your thinking for question 17.

Appendix H: Examples of Follow-up Interview Questions

Ms. Tan

1. Where did you go to college?
2. How would you describe your college experience?
3. Think of your different classes? What do you see as your role in impacting Black student achievement? What do you do or don't do that you think has a direct impact on whether students achieve or underachieve?

Ms. Jocasta

1. Describe your resident teacher program.
2. Where did you go to college?
3. How old were you when you moved to D.C.?
4. What types of challenges do you feel you haven't (or will not have when you retire) mastered?
5. Think of your different classes? What do you see as your role (duty, responsibility) in impacting Black student achievement? What do you do or not do that you think has a direct impact on whether students achieve or underachieve?

Ms. Kelly

1. Where were you born and raised?
2. What was your primary and secondary schooling like?
3. Where did you go to undergraduate?
4. What do you attribute the gap you mentioned to?
5. Think of your different classes? What do you see as your role in impacting Black student achievement? What do you do or don't do that you think has a direct impact on whether students achieve or underachieve?
6. Is there anything you want to add to your teaching philosophy for Black students?
7. Other than previous English teacher examples, what shapes your teaching philosophy?

Ms. X

1. Did you father have a degree?
2. What HBCU did you and your family members attend? Were the professors Black? Was it the student body and/or the faculty you did not like? Did you deal with racism?
3. Were there professors at the predominantly White state school that you had problems with Black or White? How was the teaching similar or different at this university than at the HBCU?
4. Talk more about your overseas experience overseas and its implications for your teaching.
5. Think of your different classes? What do you see as your role in impacting Black student achievement? What do you do or don't do that you think has a direct impact on whether students achieve or underachieve?
6. You have dealt a lot with racism as a child. How have your experiences with racism in your own education shaped or not shaped your current practice?
7. How old were you when you moved to New York? Do you know why your parents moved? What town in North Carolina is your family from? Did you ever have a Black teacher in primary, secondary school, or college?

8. Did you spend much time with your grandfather? Describe the times you spent with him.
9. Did any other teachers inspire you to become a teacher? Any other Black teachers? Talk about them.
10. Do you always speak in standard English in your classroom? Do you correct students who do not use standard English?
11. Do you think the application of your educational philosophy has been effective with all Black students? Discuss.
12. How do you think one knows if teaching is their true calling? Can it be a true calling for a teacher whose students are underachieving? Explain.

Ms. J

1. Describe the racial make-up of your school.
2. Did your family talk about race at all at home when you were growing up?
3. Do you think about race professionally as it pertains to your professional experience. Not necessarily your Black kids, you Black students, but just professionally.
4. You mentioned that your change in school, going from a predominantly Black school to one with more diversity, changed the way you related to Black students and some how you feel that at the predominantly Black school you worked on instilling more pride in them and at your current school you feel like you kind of lost touch with that? Why do you think the setting changed the way you related to them?
5. How do you know if your teaching strategies have worked? If your students have understood the lessons. How do you measure? How do you know?

Appendix I: Methods of Analysis

Spirit of Analysis – Systematic, Unassuming, Adventurous

1. Distance myself from literature and experiences that may prevent me from seeing new possibilities in the data

2. Avoid standard ways of thinking about the teachers, teaching, and Black student achievement

3. Question the data

4. Consider various meanings of words

5. Use analytical memos

7. Code data using emic and etic substantive categories

Appendix J: Codes

These codes emerged as the most dominant (referenced the most) and led to the identification of emergent themes.

Emic Codes – Participant Words/Views

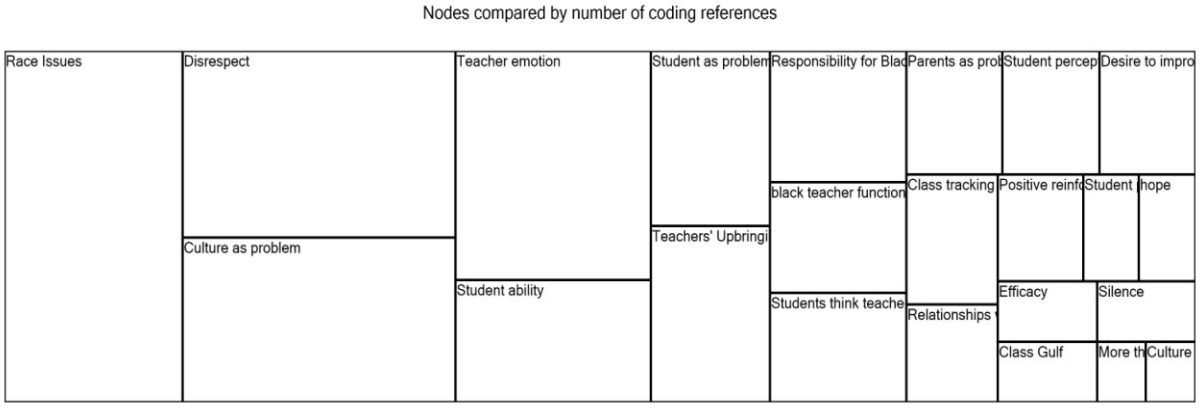
- Culture as problem
- Disrespect
- Student ability

- Student dislike of teacher
- More than teachers of content

Etic Codes – Research-developed

- Teacher Emotion
    - Frustration
    - Resentment
    - Defeat
    - Anger
    - Insecurity
    - Spitefulness
    - Sorrow
- Race Issues
- Teachers' Upbringing
- Achievement measured by growth
- Achievement measured by student independence

Appendix K: Graphic Representation of Categories Compared by Number of Coding References



Appendix L: Teacher Consent Form

Project Title	Black English Teacher's Perspectives and Reflections on Their Role in Impacting Black Student Achievement
Purpose of the Study	*This research is being conducted by **Dr. Victoria Maria MacDonald and Doctoral Candidate Summer Carrol** at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are an African American teacher who teaches or who has taught English to African American students, and you have expressed an interest in participating in this study. The purpose of this research project is to investigate African American English teachers' perspectives on their role in impacting Black student achievement. I am seeking this information because current research does not reflect Black English teachers' perspectives on this matter and I believe the results of this research project will provide important insights that may ultimately help improve education for Black students and increase Black students' educational achievement.*
Procedures	*The procedures involve the following:* 1. *Completion of a 17-question online questionnaire about your beliefs on student intelligence, your beliefs on Black student underachievement, and the relationship between your teaching and Black student achievement, as well as your perspectives and reflections on your practice in general.* 2. *Participation in a focus group that will meet for 2.5 hours four times in one month on Saturday mornings. This focus group will involve you writing in response to prompts about teaching and identity, and sharing your writing with focus group members as a way to generate discussion. Examples of writing activities you may be asked to do include writing a metaphorical poem about your teaching style or a letter to yourself from the perspective of your students. Focus group discussion topics include the following: "Who are we as African American teachers?"; "What are my responsibilities to Black students?; "How do I view my quality of service?"; "Revelations: Connecting my practice to Black student achievement/underachievement."* 3. *Participation in one follow-up one-on-one interview with the researcher within the two weeks following the last focus group interview. Interview questions you may be asked include: What does your metaphorical poem suggest about your teaching? How does being Black influence how you teach Black students? Why do you think there is Black student underachievement in U.S. schools?* 4. *Focus groups and one-on-one interviews will be held at a local college campus or at diners or coffee shops selected by participant.* *Overall, this research project will require approximately 11.5 hours of your time (10 hours for the focus group; one hour for the interview; thirty minutes for the online questionnaire)*
Potential Risks and	*There may be some risks from participating in this research study.* You may need to take emotional risks because of the sensitive nature of race-talk and the request to self-reflect and reveal personal feelings and experiences. To address these

Discomforts	emotional risks, you will be encouraged to ask the researcher questions throughout the duration of the study and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. There remains, however, the potential for the breach of confidentiality.
Potential Benefits	There are no direct benefits for participants in this study; however, the possible benefits to you include the opportunity to reflect upon and discuss your practice with other colleagues, as well as the possibility that you may gain fresh perspectives and inspiration for teaching African American students. Additionally, we hope that in the future, other people might benefit from this study through the improved understanding of the experiences of Black English teachers and their views on their role in educating Black students.
Confidentiality	*Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by the following:* All audio recordings and notebooks will be kept in a locked file cabinet located in the researcher's office. All transcripts will be stored on the researcher's external hard drive, which will be stored in the researcher's locked file cabinet in her office. Answers to the "Teacher's Beliefs" questionnaire and the contents of the profile the researcher develops will not be shared with anyone except the teacher who completed it and only during the one-on-one interview time. Results of the questionnaire will not be shared publicly during the focus group meetings. Results of questionnaire will be stored on the researcher's external hard drive, which will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office. *If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.*
Right to Withdraw and Questions	*Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.* *If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator, Victoria Maria MacDonald at: 2311 Benjamin Building, College Park, MD, 20742; vmacdona@umd.edu, 301-405-7109 or Summer Carrol at 2311 Benjamin Building, College Park, MD, 20742; 301-404-8304 smclin@umd.edu.*
Participant Rights	*If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:*

	University of Maryland College Park **Institutional Review Board Office** **1204 Marie Mount** **College Park, Maryland, 20742** **E-mail: irb@umd.edu** **Telephone: 301-405-0678** *This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.*	
Statement of Consent	*Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.* *If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.*	
Signature and Date	**PARTICIPANT NAME** **[Please Print]**	
	PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE	
	DATE	

Appendix M: Evolution of Focus Group Meetings

The Morning Meetings

I remember the first meeting. It was a cool October day. I had gotten confirmation that three out of the four expected teachers would attend, but had not heard from them that morning or the day prior. The fourth teacher confirmed non-attendance the morning of. I got to the university early, posted "focus group meeting in 45a" throughout the building, prepared the room with folders, agendas, composition books, and pens for each participant. Set out a small buffet of fruit and mini spiral sandwiches, water and soda, tested the microphone, and waited. The meeting was to start at 10 a.m. and it was already just minutes till and I had no calls from anyone asking me to open the door. I decided to go down to the door to make sure the teachers could gain entrance. Since it was a Saturday, an authorized identification card was needed to gain access to the building. I was definitely nervous. More than nervous, I was worried, worried the teachers would not come and that if they did come, they might not come to all meetings. I was also worried about what would happen at the meetings. The three teachers I was expecting at the first meeting were the teachers who had all worked at the same school for a period of time. I worried if this would cause inhibitions in their sharing. I also worried that they did not all know who would be in attendance. What if they did not expect to see only teachers from their school? My nervous thoughts were interrupted by the sight of the first participant walking up the sidewalk to the building. Ms. Kelly is the teacher who was a pre-service student I taught in a diversity class; she was also one of the student-teachers I supervised in the field. We smiled and embraced and started to do a little catching up, when the next teacher came into view on the sidewalk, Ms. Tan.

Ms. Tan is the teacher with whom I have the personal and professional relationship. She is also the teacher I studied for a previous pilot study and the teacher who participated in a previous one-time focus group meeting I held for a class assignment. She knew Ms. Kelly because she worked at the same school where Ms. Kelly did her student teaching. We were all chit-chatting when I got a call from the third teacher, Ms. X, saying she was on campus grounds and just needed a little help finding the building. Moments later, she emerged on the same stretch of sidewalk.

Although we did not all have intimate relationships, the four of us were not strangers to one another. I believe the experiences we had at the school where we all worked has a lot to do with what caused us to be interested in getting together to talk about our perspectives as Black English teachers. After exchanging pleasantries, we mounted the stairs to the second floor, had somewhat awkward small talk as we walked halfway down the hall to the meeting room, and started the first meeting of what would become fondly known as Breakfast for Black Teachers, a space where Black English teachers not only broke bread, but where they also broke professional and personal silences.

Breaking the Fast: Black Teachers at the Breakfast Table

{I} relished every moment that I sat at the "Black Table" in the cafeteria. Why were we sitting together then? It was an affirmation – a time to relax – a creation of community based on a shared experience of being one of few in an environment unaccustomed to our presence. Did all Black students share in it? No. Were White students intentionally excluded from it? Not in any active way. They were not usually the focus of our attention. We were primarily interested in ourselves and the experiences we were having as what W.E.B. DuBois would have called the talented tenth, exploring our dual consciousnesses as young Black men and women in a predominantly White college setting. (Tatum, 2007, p. 8)

And so the Black teachers sat together at the breakfast table for an entire month, every Saturday morning. We became, for those few weeks, a breakfast club for Black teachers. I believe the experience was similar to the one Tatum describes about all of the Black kids sitting together at the cafeteria. Somehow, coming together to share with other Black English teachers felt empowering and affirming. The teachers came – usually promptly – at 8:30 a.m. on their own accord to talk about their experiences and views on Black student achievement. The conversations would probably have been different had White teachers been members of the group. Teachers often discussed "White teachers" in a way that positioned them as the "other." Indeed, the breakfast meetings were times when Black teachers could discuss their perspectives from the frame of their "dual consciousness" as Black women in a predominantly White career field. All except two of the participants were one of few Black teachers in their respective English department. The difference, though, is that while White teachers were not the focus of our discussions, they did emerge in significant ways, confirming that using the critical race theory framing allowed the space and opportunity for sincere "race talk" amongst the Black teachers. During the discussions, when it seemed as if teachers were discussing students in general, I reminded them we are focusing on Black students. My critical race theory lens allowed me to make this reminder without compromising the integrity of the research; still, I allowed conversations to proceed naturally. Consequently, the focus group meetings evolved into more than research; they became times for Black English teachers to voice their thoughts, feelings, beliefs and the challenges and triumphs of their teaching lives.

Glossary

Achievement:
Researcher Conceptualization: Evidence of academic engagement and proficiency as measured by traditional assessments, such as homework, quizzes, tests, projects, and presentations

Teacher Conceptualization: Evidence of student growth and independent thinking skills

Comprehensive-level Classes: Classes consisting of students who are tracked at or below grade-level. The terms comprehensive-level and regular-level are used interchangeably.

Culture: In this study, culture was used in two ways:

- To describe attitudes, values, and ways of being reflected in modern-day society at large
- To describe attitudes, values, and ways of being embraced by different segments of the Black racial group (e.g., Black middle class culture vs. Black popular culture)

Frustration: Feelings of angst, annoyance, and sometimes anger due to circumstances and situations associated with teaching

- **Institutional Frustration:** Frustration associated with the systems and processes of educational institutions and/or the effects the institutional processes and systems have on teachers' work life or on student learning opportunities and achievement.
- **Pedagogical Frustration:** Frustration with the process and product of teaching, including teachers' feelings of angst or discomfort with their ability to translate their content knowledge into lessons that students understand and enjoy.
- **Relational Frustration:** Frustration emerging from teachers' difficulty with sustaining mutually amicable and productive relationships with Black students. Teachers experiencing this type of frustration may feel their pedagogical efforts may result in flat out rejection from Black students or indifference. Rejection and indifference are troubling for such teachers because they feel Black students should be particularly drawn to them because of their shared racial identity.
- **Positional Frustration:** Frustration exhibited through teachers' push-back against the "racial uplift" teaching philosophy that has historically informed Black education as well as with teachers' sense of guilt about not living up to the "racial uplift" standard set by Black teachers from previous generations.

- **Cultural Frustration:** Annoyance and disappointment with the attitudes, values, and work habits of Black students – attitudes, values, and work habits that teachers felt did not support school success and that were different from the work habits, behaviors, attitudes, and values teachers held when they were students and that they believe students should hold today.

HBCU: Historically Black College or University

Honors Classes: Classes for students deemed as talented and gifted or advanced

More-than-Content Teaching Philosophy: A philosophy that emphasizes the teaching of life skills and knowledge such as productive work habits, self-initiative, and real-world awareness

PWI: Predominantly White Institution of Higher Learning

Racial Uplift: An advocacy agenda that centers on taking special care to use one's education and position to improve the life chances and opportunities for, in the case of this study, Black students

Talented Tenth: College-educated African American adults W.E.B. Du Bois (1903b) envisioned would use their education and professional experiences to uplift the Black race

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