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Let the Circle Be Unbroken: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Exemplary, Novice,

Elementary, African American Teachers

By

Morgan Zacheya-Jewel Faison

Doctor of Philosophy

Educational Studies

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Abstract

Let the Circle Be Unbroken: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Exemplary, Novice,
Elementary, African American Teachers
By Morgan Zacheya-Jewel Faison

Over the past thirty years, education policy groups, teacher education programs, and state education departments have galvanized efforts to recruit more African American teachers. Despite these efforts, recent data shows high rates of attrition among novice, African Americans entering the field (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2016). Foster (1997), Irvine (1991), and Ladson-Billings (1995) have noted relationships between the beliefs and practices of exemplary veteran, African American teachers and culturally responsive pedagogy. Yet, an analysis of the beliefs and practices of younger, novice African American teachers and culturally responsive pedagogy had not been fully undertaken.

This dissertation study examined the beliefs, practices, and socialization experiences of four, novice, African American teachers who worked in different elementary school settings in an urban school district in the U.S. South. Specifically, the following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the beliefs and practices of exemplary, novice African American teachers?
2. What are the family and community, early schooling, teacher education, and mentoring experiences that inform the beliefs and practices of exemplary, novice African American teachers?
3. What is the relationship between exemplary, novice African American teachers' family and community, early schooling, teacher education, and mentoring experiences and their beliefs and practices?
4. What other variables do exemplary, novice African American teachers describe as influential to their beliefs and practices?

The participants were sampled through a process of community nomination (Foster, 1997) and by varying their professional entry pathway. Through a blending of case study and narrative inquiry methodologies, the findings confirmed that participants had strikingly similar beliefs and practices when compared to their veteran, African American teacher predecessors. Furthermore, the participants drew from their shared beliefs, values, norms, and experiences to enact culturally responsive pedagogies. Likewise, the study revealed a continuity of intergenerational cultural transmission through various socialization experiences. The study concludes with several implications for teacher education research, policy, and practice.

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"Faith is the first factor in a life devoted to service. Without it, nothing is possible. With it, nothing is impossible." -Mary McLeod Bethune

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Introduction

The initiative will…ensure that all African American students have comparable access to

the resources necessary to obtain a high-quality education, in part, by supporting efforts

to improve the recruitment, preparation, development, and retention of successful African

American teachers (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2012, Section 2).

Over the past thirty years, education policy groups, teacher education programs, and state

education departments have galvanized efforts towards recruiting and preparing more African

Americans for the teaching profession. The above quote, taken from the White House Executive

Order on the Initiative for Excellence in Education for African Americans, acknowledges the

critical role that African American teachers play in enhancing equity for African American

students. Organizations and foundations like the American Association of Colleges of Teacher

Education, the Ford and DeWitt Wallace-Readers' Digest, and over thirty-five states have

written policy, introduced program initiatives, and incentivized teacher education programs,

schools and school districts to recruit and hire more African American teachers (Ingersoll &

May, 2011; Rogers-Ard, Knaus, Epstein, & Mayfield, 2013; Villegas & Irvine, 2010).

More recently, under President Obama's administration, the former U.S. Secretary of

Education, Arne Duncan, launched a national campaign, TEACH.gov, to recruit a new

generation of excellent teachers—especially emphasizing his agenda to recruit more teachers of

color (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2010). In his appeal to African American college students at

historically Black colleges like Morehouse College in Atlanta and Howard University in

Washington D.C., Duncan is quoted as saying, "I believe that education is the civil rights issue of

our generation. And if you care about promoting opportunity and reducing inequality, the

classroom is the place to start. Great teaching is about so much more than education; it is a daily fight for social justice" (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2010, para. 3).

The increased presence of African American teachers has often been tied to school climates that promote equity and educational access for African American students. The work trends of African American teachers point to more of a collective willingness than their White counterparts to teach and remain in high poverty school settings with large percentages of students of color (Bireda & Chait, 2011; Hill, Bacheler, Allen, & Coble, 2004; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Scafidia, Sjoquistb, & Stinebrickner, 2007). Meir, Stewart, and England (1989) found that African American students were less likely to drop out of school, be suspended from school, and to be referred to special education classes when in school settings with higher percentages of Black teachers. These researchers also found that as the rate of African American teachers increased in schools, the rate of African American students enrolled in advanced and gifted classes also increased. Figlio (2005) found that Black teachers held higher academic expectations and more favorable views of Black students with "unusual" ethnic-sounding names than their White teacher counterparts. Similarly, Klopfenstein (2005) found that as the percentage of Black mathematics teachers increased, the number of Black high school students seeking enrollment in advanced mathematics courses rose significantly.

Researchers have also examined associations between African American teachers and academic gains for African American students. In a well-cited study, Dee (2004) used secondary data from Tennessee's Project STAR (Student Teacher Achievement Ratio), to measure the achievement benefits (via student SAT scores) of small classes versus regular sized classes. Ancillary findings indicated that for both Black and White students, exposure to a same-race teacher was statistically significant to student achievement. Furthermore, both Black and White

students of both sexes saw statistically significant (4 to 5 percentile point) gains in math scores when paired with a same race teacher. White males, Black females, and Black males also saw statistically significant (3 to 6 percentile point) gains in reading scores.

Statement and Significance of the Problem

However, an overall lack of cultural diversity in the teaching workforce prohibits efforts to advance educational equity and access for African American students. Over the years, it has proven difficult to achieve African American teacher and student parity. Through a sociohistorical lens, the African American teacher workforce has struggled to recover its former numerical vitality since the mid-twentieth century era of school desegregation (Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Muraname et al., 1991). Prior to 1954, approximately 82,000 African American teachers taught two million African American children in mostly segregated schools in the South. Between 1954 and 1972, during the aftermath of the landmark case, *Brown vs. the Board of Education Topeka*, nearly 40,000 African American teachers and administrators were fired from their positions in seventeen southern states (Etheridge, 1979). In 1970, African American teachers made up about 12% percent of the total teacher workforce. Just one year later, their population decreased to 8.6% and by 1986 the national percentage of African American teachers had dwindled down to 6.9% (National Education Association, 1991).

Given these historical precedents, former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's plan to redress social injustices by ensuring there is a next generation of young, excellent African American teachers is timely. Currently, African American teachers make up only seven percent of the total teacher workforce while African American students comprise nearly eighteen percent of today's public school population (Boser, 2008). Additionally, recent reports on demographic trends in the teacher workforce show that the age distribution of teachers is almost bi-modal with

the two largest proportions of teacher groups being those nearing retirement and novice teachers (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014). Thus, novice teachers with three years of experience or less are entering the workforce as quickly as the second largest demographic, veteran teachers, are retiring.

But, should emphasis be placed on recruiting young, African American teachers or retaining them? If reducing inequality in the classroom through increasing the presence of African American teachers is the primary goal, the Secretary of Education's instructions to focus on recruiting novice teachers of color may be misguided. A recent report by Ingersoll, Merrill, and Stuckey (2014) underscores that recruitment efforts to increase the pool of teachers of color over the last few decades have been largely successful. Using national data from the Schools and Staffing Survey and the Teacher Follow-Up Survey (NCES, 2005), Ingersoll and his colleagues find that with the ballooning of the teaching force there are, numerically, far more teachers of color in the field than before. For instance, in 1987-1988, there were approximately 325,000 minority teachers. By 2011-2012, there were over 666,000. The researchers also note that the growth in minority teachers has outpaced the growth in minority students and is over twice the growth rate of White teachers. This pattern was also evident for African American teachers when the data was disaggregated among minority teachers (Connor, 2011).

If the latter argument is the case, the retention and not the recruitment of novice African American teachers will be essential to ensuring their continued presence in the workforce. Recent findings by Ingersoll and May (2011) confirm that the rate of minority teacher turnover increased by 28% from the late 1980's to 2009. They also contend that the high rate of minority teacher turnover is primarily due to the poor conditions that characterize the work settings of most minority teachers—that is, high minority and high poverty, urban schools. Over 63% of

minority teachers who moved to other schools in 2004-2005 reported dissatisfaction with their salaries, workplace conditions, and the lack of administrative support, professional autonomy, and professional development as the primary reason for their decision.

In addition, the empirical evidence that might be used to inform retention efforts with novice African American teachers is based on scholarship that draws mostly from veteran African American teachers. Previous research has confirmed that many veteran African American teachers' successful beliefs and practices concerning diverse student populations are situated within their shared cultural experiences and socialization (Delpit, 1988; Foster, 1997; Gay, 2000; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Walker, 1996). These educators came of age during the era of segregation and the Jim Crow South, the Civil Rights Movement, school desegregation, and the Black Power era. Moreover, the research profiling these teachers notes that their upbringings were characterized by shared experiences within predominantly Black families and communities, shared understandings of the African American community and its values, common experiences within predominantly Black schools for all or some portion of their early schooling, significant memories of Black teachers in segregated schools or in Historically Black College and University (HBCU) teacher preparation programs, and apprenticeships under veteran Black educators (Faison, 2013; 2014).

African Americans born during the 1980's and 1990's are often discussed using the monikers *hip-hop generation* or *millennials* (Alridge, 2005). In contrast to the era that characterizes veteran African American teachers' upbringing, the hip-hop and millennial generation came of age during one of the most conservative economic and political eras in recent U.S. history (Loder-Jackson, 2011; 2012). Though they witnessed the growth of an African American middle class, an increase in Black high school graduation rates and college attendance,

and the expansion of job opportunities, younger generations of African Americans have also experienced a "reversal of civil rights gains" in some areas (Kitwana, 2002, p. 147). For instance, younger generations of African Americans grapple with disproportionately high poverty rates (25.8%) when compared to their White (11.6%) and Asian ((11.7%) counterparts (Macartney, Bishaw, Fontenot, 2013). Gains made during the Civil Rights Movement have also been significantly undermined by policies of an unjust criminal justice system that has led to the mass incarceration of Black Americans in the and 21st century (Alexander, 2010).

To secure the next generation of excellent teachers of color, further investigation into the cultural socialization, experiences, beliefs, and practices of exemplary, novice African American teachers is warranted. Currently, there is scant empirical data that confirms similarities between these teachers and their veteran teacher predecessors. This gap in the empirical literature has halted deeper revelations about the cultural context of teaching in 21st century urban school settings. Elevating the narratives of a generation of teachers who have virtually been ignored in the research literature may help to inform more meaningful analyses of the current sociopolitical context of urban teaching.   Furthermore, an empirical examination of the conditions that these teachers face may help to buttress future efforts towards their successful recruitment and retention in the field.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the cultural socialization and prior experiences that inform the beliefs and practices of four exemplary, novice African American teachers. Specifically, this study sought to describe exemplary, novice African American teachers' cultural socialization and prior experiences with regard to their personal backgrounds, teacher education, and mentoring. The study also sought to address a gap in the research by amplifying the narratives of a generation of teachers whose upbringings and professional careers are far removed from *de jure* segregation. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the beliefs and practices of exemplary, novice African American teachers?

2. What are the family and community, early schooling, teacher education, and mentoring experiences that inform the beliefs and practices of exemplary, novice African American teachers?

3. What is the relationship between exemplary, novice African American teachers' family and community, early schooling, teacher education, and mentoring experiences and their beliefs and practices?

4. What other variables do exemplary, novice African American teachers describe as influential to their current beliefs and practices?

Definition of Key Terms

African American/Black: According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2011), the terms Black and African American are used to identify the race and ethnicity of those who have "origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa." Though the terms Black and Black American are also synonymous with Black Caribbeans, Black Latinos, and Black Canadians, the terms are generally used interchangeably to refer to all people of African descent. However, national data

indicates that Blacks who now reside in the U.S. but have emigrated from other places, such as West Africa or the Caribbean, have the highest rates of educational attainment than any other ethnic group in the U.S (JBHE, 1999). In contrast, U.S. born Blacks have one of the lowest levels of educational attainment (JBHE, 1999). Given this difference, I chose to sample African American teachers who were born and reared in the U.S. As such, all participants in this study are referred to as African Americans.

Novice Teacher: In this study, a novice teacher was defined as a teacher who was under thirty-four years of age (born after 1980) with no more than eight years of elementary classroom teaching experience.

Exemplary: Novice teachers who are "exemplary" were defined as those who had been identified through a process of "community nomination" (Foster, 1991) by local school leaders (principals and assistant principals) and local parent teacher organization representatives. The community was asked to consider those teachers who demonstrate a personal ethos of excellence and integrity, have high moral and academic expectations for students, and demonstrate a commitment to their student's academic success.

Theoretical Considerations

This study was theoretically grounded in educational, sociological and anthropological theories that amplify the cultural and social contexts of teaching and learning. In the following section, I will give a definition of culture and will highlight the significance of socialization and intergenerational cultural transmission to the process of culture. I will then provide a conceptual overview of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) as well as a brief summary of the relationship between CRP and African American teachers' culturally mediated beliefs and practices.

Culture and Cultural Transmission

The varied definitions of culture used by noted scholars in the field of education research are key components to the theory of CRP. According to Nieto & Bode (1992), "culture consists of values, traditions, worldviews, and social and political relationships created, shared, and transformed by a group of people bound together by a common history, geographic location, language, social class, religion or other shared identity" (p. 158). Beyond tangible manifestations of culture, such as preferred traditional cuisine, dress, and holiday observances, culture is an often unconscious, "dynamic system of social values, cognitive codes, behavioral standards, and worldviews that determine how we think, believe, and behave" (Gay, 2000, p. 9). The definitions provided by Gay (2000) and Nieto & Bode (1992) emphasize that culture is a multifaceted and powerful variable in shaping the way that we construct, interpret, articulate, and act on knowledge.

Sociocultural theory, which is largely inspired by the seminal scholarship of Lev Vygotsky (1978), stresses the fundamental role of culture in mediating the learning and cognitive development of children. Vygotsky's theory is premised on the idea that learning and cognitive development occurs in historically situated experiences that are mediated by human social interactions within a specific cultural environment. In other words, children interact with the people, processes and products of their cultural environment in both formal and informal home, school and community contexts. This provides them with many opportunities to observe and participate in culturally meaningful skills and practices that shape their cognitive processes: including conceptualization, affect, and behaviors. The theory further suggests that children use the cultural skills and practices acquired through cultural socialization experiences to aid them in higher-level thinking, reasoning and problem solving.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory has served to ground the continued study of culture and its significance in the context of teaching and learning. Culturally based variation in preferred learning styles is often a commonly cited example of the importance of culture in the ethnically diverse classroom (Boykin, 1986, Hale-Benson, 1986; Hilliard, 1989; Irvine & York, 1995; Shade, 1989; Vazquez, 1991). For instance, Hale-Benson (1986) finds that as African American children are socialized in predominantly Black families and communities, many develop cognitive patterns and behaviors that are reflective of "core" African American cultural norms and values. Specifically, the researcher documents substantial evidence to suggest that many African American children have a preference for inferential reasoning, kinesthetic learning, collaborative work and other relational methods of instruction in classroom settings.

Intergenerational cultural transmission, that is the process through which culture is passed from one generation to the next, is a prominent concept in the field of anthropology. Noted anthropologist, Herskovits (1941), is among the first group of scholars to put forth a theory of intergenerational cultural transmission among Africans in the Americas. Specifically, Herskovits' studies were instrumental to debunking the commonly held myth that enslaved Africans had lost all vestiges of their West African culture during the period of chattel slavery. Along with his confirmation of African cultural retentions, or "New World" Africanisms, in the societal practices of Black populations in Brazil, Cuba, Dutch Guinea, Haiti, and Jamaica, Herskovits documents several Africanisms in the U.S. coastal areas of South Carolina and Georgia. More recently, scholars have continued this work and have documented deep-structural African cultural retentions in African American culture, even today (Gates, 1988; Hilliard, 1995; Holloway, 2005; Levine, 1977).

Although culture is a critical variable in the context of teaching and learning; it is neither static nor deterministic (Irvine, 2003). To be sure, culture is dynamic, dialectical, and embedded in time, location, and context. For instance, African Americans are not a monolithic cultural group. The expression of African American culture can be seen as a spectrum, which varies based on other factors like social class, age, gender, religious beliefs, political affiliation, geographic region, and language or dialect. Culture is not inherent at birth, but a product of socialization—since it is learned, it can also be unlearned (J.J. Irvine, personal communication, February 16, 2014). The ultimate purpose for preserving core elements of a particular culture is to provide useful survival strategies that correspond to one's social group positionality. Preserving culture is not only important to human survival, but is necessary for maintaining the overall integrity of the human story and its struggles, strivings, and resilience.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

The term, culturally responsive pedagogy, is often used interchangeably with other similar terms such as multicultural, culturally centered, congruent, mediated, relevant, sensitive, and synchronized. These terms refer to a theoretical concept that promotes the significance of culture to the context of teaching and learning in classroom settings. Teachers operating within this pedagogical framework understand that their students do not enter their classrooms as *tabula rasas* or blank slates. To the contrary, these teachers acknowledge that their students possess a plethora of culturally embedded experiences and understandings that can be used as learning resources within the classroom. Culturally responsive teachers employ certain pedagogical behaviors that cause student's cultural knowledge and background experiences to be used as a launch pad for the construction of new knowledge.

Cultural hegemony. The seminal scholarship of Ladson-Billings (1994) is most

commonly associated with the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. Ladson-Billings defines

culturally relevant teaching as a "pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially,

emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes"

(p. 20). As Ladson-Billings' definition implies, culturally relevant teaching requires that

teachers become knowledgeable about their students' experiences and cultural assets.

Additionally, culturally relevant teaching demands that teachers appropriately assess and adapt to

their students' particular interests, preferences, and needs.

Ladson-Billings' definition presupposes that educators understand the sociopolitical

nature of their work. As teachers of students whose culture has been marginalized socially,

politically, and historically, culturally responsive teachers must possess an awareness and

understanding of the interlocking system of oppression that works to maintain the status quo of

White, middle-class supremacy in most school settings. Culturally responsive teaching demands

that teachers come to grips with previously held biases and assumptions that invalidate or

diminish the cultures of marginalized, non-dominant groups while holding certain assumptions

that reinforce the superiority of the dominant culture.

Cultural hegemony, or the power exerted by societal structures to reinforce the

superiority of the dominant culture, is also a considerable factor in the theory of CRP. In the

U.S., the overwhelming majority of public school classrooms reflect a dominant White, middle-

class cultural ethos (Apple, 1979; Gay, 2000; Irvine, 1990; Nieto & Bode, 1992; Shujaa, 1995).

The privileging of White, middle-class values occurs through various means in schools including

the rigid emphasis and valuing of certain social norms, curricular content, course availability,

and teachers' pedagogical practices (Boykin, Tyler, & Miller, 2005).

Teachers who take a culture-neutral stance run the risk of normalizing White, middle-class culture and thus alienating marginalized students from full, democratic participation in the life of the classroom. A culture-neutral or "colorblind" perspective is often adopted when teachers believe that the acknowledgement of ethnically based cultural differences is counterproductive to equality (Howard, 2015). Even many well-meaning teachers who are ignorant to the cultural context of teaching and learning will have difficulty discerning the needs of their ethnically diverse students (Michie & Cisneros, 2009). More profoundly, teachers who employ a "colorblind" approach may often hold deficit perspectives that cause them to misinterpret their students' behaviors or interfere with their ability to assess students' intellectual capabilities (Irvine, 2003). The deficit perspectives of teachers often results in observable apathy—low expectations, lack of care, and classrooms that emphasize rote memorization and lower order thinking skills. This can lead to a host of negative outcomes for culturally marginalized students including school disengagement, school failure, and threatened life chances and opportunities.

White teachers, who currently make up 84% of the U.S. teacher workforce, have been most closely associated with "colorblind" perspectives (Howard, 2015). To be sure, several accounts suggest that White teachers can be successful teachers of African American students and other ethnically diverse student populations (Ladson-Billings, 1994; McIntyre, 1997). However, due to the social positions that they occupy, most White teachers grew up in culturally isolated enclaves of White, middle-class neighborhoods and schools. Moreover, their cultural isolation has resulted in an overreliance on stereotypes to inform their knowledge of diverse student populations as well as a diminished understanding of structural issues of inequality (King, 1991; McIntyre; 1997; Sleeter, 2001).

African American Teachers and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

The empirical literature suggests a close association between some African American teachers and culturally responsive pedagogy. Indeed, much of the seminal work on culturally responsive pedagogy as a theoretical concept draws from the research on African American teachers (Delpit, 1995; Foster, 1995, 1997; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Irvine (1990) surmises that many African American teachers are particularly successful with Black students because of "cultural synchronization" (p. 20). This term describes the correspondence between the shared culture and interpersonal context that exists between many African American teachers and students. African American teachers who are culturally in-sync with their students are more adept to recognize the distinctions between the culture of the school and the culture that Black students bring with them from their homes and communities. Moreover, their racial identity provides them with access to the cultural knowledge and resources of their students, while their skillful practices enable them to build upon what students already know.

Faison's (2013) recent review of the literature on veteran African American teachers supports earlier contentions about their culturally responsive pedagogies (Delpit, 1995; Foster, 1997; Hollins, 1996; Irvine & Fraser, 1998; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Specifically, findings from this review suggest that these educators share the following common set of beliefs and practices: 1) they envision their teaching as a deeply spiritual mission or spiritual calling, 2) possess a high level of self-efficacy, 3) believe that all of their students can learn, 4) express a sense of connectedness to their students and to the communities they serve, 5) act as surrogate parents and advocates for their students, 6) act as "cultural brokers" (Irvine, 2001) by drawing upon students' cultural resources to make relevant connections to new concepts, 7) help students challenge and resist racist messages in the broader society, and 8) create a no-nonsense

classroom environment that is conducive to learning and student achievement. For the sake of clarity in the following study, this framework was used to analyze the participants' beliefs and practices for themes of cultural responsiveness.

Review of the Literature

This comprehensive review examines the contemporary literature on younger, novice African American teachers with respect to their (a) personal backgrounds, (b) teacher education, (c) mentoring, (d) beliefs, and (e) practices. The section concludes with a discussion of the limitation of the literature.

Literature Search Strategy

A search for previously published research on novice African American teachers began by defining the following baseline criteria: a) published in a peer-reviewed journal, book, or edited volume, b) included at least one novice African American teacher as a study participant or discusses issues pertinent to this subgroup of public K-12 teachers, c) drew data from recently published empirical research that was conducted after 2002[1].

I then conducted an extensive search of several online databases, including Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), Education: A SAGE Full-Text Collection, EbscoHost, PsychLit, and PsycARTICLES. All of the following descriptors were used to browse the online databases—Black teachers, African American teachers, urban teachers, novice Black teachers, beginning Black teachers, urban teacher induction, mentoring, urban teacher socialization, teacher education, culturally responsive pedagogy, and culturally responsive teaching. My search of these databases yielded 129 studies. I reviewed the abstracts and scanned the content of each study to determine its eligibility based on my inclusion criteria. I also consulted the

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[1] This year was selected to capture research conducted on younger, novice teachers.
[2] Participants for the pilot study were selected via the process of community nomination (Foster, 1991).
[3] Participants were asked to share and/or create physical, cultural artifacts to discuss during the second interview.

reference sections of several studies as they often provided resources that did not generate in my search of the literature. A total of 22 empirical studies were selected.

Personal Backgrounds

To varying degrees, researchers studying novice African American teachers relayed demographic information about their study participants' personal backgrounds. These details sometimes included survey-type data such as age or approximate birth year, birthplace, the location where they attended school, and the amount of their classroom teaching experience. They also included descriptions of how biological parents, extended family members, and other community members took part in childcare and the socialization of children in the community.

Other researchers focused their attention on the influence of African American teachers' own K-12 school experiences as well as on the significant teachers that they encountered along their way. The provision of these details was due primarily to the notion that African American teachers' backgrounds and upbringings provided them with certain opportunities for socialization that are unique to their culture (Banks & Banks, 1995; Delpit, 1995; Foster, 1991, 1993, 1994; Irvine, 2003; King, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Walker, 1996). The following section examines the themes that emerged from the analysis of the literature on younger, novice African American teachers.

Teachers as mothers and family members. The influence of mothers, other women family members and friends of the family, especially those who are teachers, emerged in the limited scholarship on novice African American teachers. McCray et al. (2002) found that six pre-service African American teachers cite their mothers', aunts', and grandmothers' support and encouragement as critical to their decisions to pursue careers in teaching. Teachers in the study speak candidly about strict, education-focused home environments that were created by their

mothers, grandmothers, and other family members. Importantly, McCray et al.'s findings on younger, African American pre-service teachers extended the work of Case (1997) who observed the influence of biological mothers on socialization and professional entry for veteran African American teachers. Also of note, the work of McCray et al. (2002) demonstrated the usefulness of qualitative research designs capturing the biographical accounts of teachers. From this important aspects of cultural knowledge transmission during African American teachers' early family socialization can be extrapolated. Specifically, McCray et al. conducted a series of three open-ended life history interviews wherein participants were asked to describe their family and community in relation to their attitudes on teaching. This was to reconstruct influential events from their K-12 experience, and to provide an interpretation of their stories and experiences.

In a recent study, Mahwhinney (2014) reported on the educational life histories of ten Black prospective teachers matriculating at an HBCU in a rural area in the U.S. eastern coast. Mahwhinney conducted interviews with students enrolled in her education courses over a seven-year period. The researcher found that the Black prospective teachers in her study began to dwindle over time as many began to encounter education roadblocks in obtaining their teaching certification. Out of ten initial participants, only one student matriculated through all four years of college and graduated as an elementary education major with a teaching certification. The other participants, especially the male participants, encountered substantial difficulties when trying to pass the basic competency exams for pre-licensure. Additionally, the researcher found several common threads related to the participants' life histories including shared working-class backgrounds, a lack of resources, issues of inequity in their early public school experiences, and shared altruistic purposes for wanting to enter the field. Notably absent from Mahwhinney's

study, however, was a theoretical grounding to situate the findings of the study. Likewise, the study samples Black, pre-service teachers who have not successfully entered the classroom.

Expanding on the McCray et al. and Mahwhinney studies, Dingus (2006, 2008a, 2008b) used life history interviews to examine the socialization that occurs in three intergenerational women teaching families. The researcher found that for one novice African American teacher, the socialization provided via her teaching family provided affirmative messages that counteracted the notion of teaching as a low prestige career. Through continued dialogue, the teacher's family members (a mother and a grandmother) conveyed to their younger counterpart the reciprocal benefits of working within the community and the intrinsic rewards of teaching.

Cultural (dis)continuity in schooling and community. The scant literature on novice African American teachers' schooling and community activities suggests that at several points during their K-12 experience, some novice African American teachers felt disconnected from their school environments in profound ways (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011; Lynn, 2006a). Notably, a recent study by Lynn (2006a) provided a rich account of the early school experience of a novice African American male teacher in Compton, Los Angeles. According to Lynn's report, his study participants' early school success was due to the continuity of goals, values, and expectations that existed between his home, his private, religious elementary school, and his public middle school. Primarily, having an African American male teacher who provided the "right mix of discipline and encouragement" (p. 229) and who reinforced the high expectations and strict moral codes of the novice teachers' home was cited as the most important element to his initial success. On the other hand, his experiences in two predominantly African American, urban high schools were clouded with overcrowding, poor building facilities, drugs, violence and other effects that signal inequitable access to funding, resources, and opportunities.

In comparison to school experiences, the McCray et al. (2002) and Mahwhinney (2014) studies supported the contention that some novice African American teachers experienced cultural continuity in neighborhoods and community institutions, like African American churches and community organizations. This research elevated that some participants learned important skills for community leadership, such as public speaking and organizing, while participating in community activities. Other participants recalled learning that teachers' roles extend beyond the classroom by observing their schoolteachers as they worked in auxiliary church programs.

In summary, the literature is limited with regard to novice African American teachers' personal backgrounds. For example, McCray et al.'s study examined the socialization of pre-service, not in-service, teachers who were seeking certification at the time of the study. Though the McCray et al. study might provide a glimpse into the socialization of younger Black teachers, the study did not investigate the socialization of those teachers who actually entered the classroom as teachers. Dingus (2006, 2008a, 2008b) and Dixson and Dingus (2008) reported on only one younger, novice teacher who, through her mother and grandmother, was directly linked to the teaching profession. Further study is needed to clarify the family and community socialization experiences of other novice African American teachers—especially those with less direct ties to biological families of teachers. Though Lynn (2006a) and Achinstein and Ogawa (2011) provided insightful accounts of the early school experiences of two novice African American teachers, further study is warranted due to the limited sample size.

Teacher Education

Research shows that when compared with others, professionally trained, fully licensed teachers who have taken collegiate level coursework in a teacher preparation program have

significant, positive affects on student achievement (AACTE, 2009, 2012, 2013; Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Rockoff, & Wyckoff, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Helig, 2005). However, for many aspiring African American teachers, systemic issues in the educational system continue to make access to higher education, and ultimately a career in teaching, an elusive quest. The persistent under-education of African American students in K-12 schools is damaging to obtaining an education degree and poses a substantial initial barrier to higher education (Irvine, 1988; Madkins, 2011; Muraname et al., 1991; U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2016; Zeichner, 2003).

Further, state-mandated teacher licensure exams dissuade many African American college students from pursuing an education degree as African American teacher candidates have consistently had low passing rates on these exams (Albers, 2002; Gist & White, 2011; Gitomer, 2007; Goodman, Arbona, & deRamirez, 2008; McNeal & Lawrence, 2009; Muraname et al., 1991). The following section addresses other issues in the literature related to novice African American teachers' professional teacher training at HBCUs, predominantly White institutions, and in alternative certification programs.

Continued relation to HBCU teacher preparation. The most recent data collected on teacher preparation trends at HBCUs indicates that they have produced over half of the African American teacher workforce (Freeman, 2001; Irvine & Fenwick, 2011) and continue to produce proportionately more African American teachers than any other institution (AACTE, 2013, p. 15). However, limited funding at many HBCUs has negative affects on the preparation of African Americans considering careers in teaching. An overall lack of research about the curricular aspects of HBCUs, from the perspective of recent graduates who have successfully entered the field, limits the available data on the teacher preparation experiences of novice

African Americans teachers (Brown & Freeman, 2004). For instance, no such study was located

that provides data on the percentage of education degrees awarded by HBCUs since 1990. Data

that is disaggregated by "first-profession" education degrees awarded by HBCUs was also hard

to find at the time of the literature search.

Consequently, it is difficult to approximate the number of novice Black teachers entering

the field with education degrees conferred by traditional teacher preparation programs at HBCUs

as a separate subset of the 61% of all education degrees conferred to Black students via

traditional routes (Feistritzer, 2011). Noticeably absent from the available qualitative literature

on novice African American teachers is research that amplifies the perceptions of its recent

graduates who have entered the profession. Moreover, how might novice African American

teachers who are recent graduates of HBCUs evaluate their preparation programs?

Predominantly White Institutions. Several scholars have noted the difficulties that

some novice African American teachers recount from their experiences as pre-service teachers at

PWIs (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011; Agee, 2004). Agee (2004) conducted a longitudinal study

that followed one Black pre-service teacher through her senior year in a teacher preparation

program at a PWI into her first two years of classroom teaching. Agee noted that an early

concern of the pre-service teacher involved how she would negotiate a multicultural teaching

stance while teaching high school literature in a public school district that is test-driven and

embraces Eurocentric standards. Though the teacher shared her concerns during class

discussions and assigned written reflections, the course professor never directly addressed the

pre-service African American teacher's questions. The findings also suggested that the teacher's

concerns continued to surface throughout her first two years of teaching.

Other researchers have found that several PWIs have experienced a measure of success in

their preparation of African American teachers. More specifically, researchers have noted that education partnerships between university-based teacher education programs and local school districts with expressed missions to recruit, support, and retain teachers of color yield better rates of retention amongst minority teachers than PWI graduates without such arrangements (Clewell & Villegas, 2001; Lau, Dandy, & Hoffman, 2007). For instance, Lau, Dandy, and Hoffman (2007) examined the in-service retention rates of graduates of the Pathways Program, which is a partnership between Savannah-Chatham County Public School District and Armstrong Atlantic University that recruited paraprofessionals, substitute teachers, school clerks and secretaries of color to complete a traditional preparation program towards a bachelor's degree. The program provided several resources for support including tuition scholarships, academic advising, content refresher courses, and cultural activities. The researchers found that 85% of the 105 graduates were African American and the retention rate of the cohort after 10 years was 95%.

Alternative programs. Alternative certification programs have increasingly become a major pathway to certification for African American teachers. Over 12% of the Black teacher workforce reported having earned their credentials from alternative programs (Feistritzer, 2005). By 2011, four out of ten public school African American teachers reported their entry to teaching through alternative programs (39%) marking a rapid increase in the number of Black teachers entering through alternative programs (Feistritzer, 2011). Data that disaggregated by age offered that the largest percentage of students beginning alternative programs are 40-49 years olds (28%), followed by 18-29 years olds (26%), and 30-39 year olds (24%) (Feistritzer, 2005). While several scholars have observed the trend of African American mid-career changers in alternative programs (Feistritzer, 2005, 2011; Feistritzer & Haar, 2008; Madkins, 2011), these data also pointed to a potentially substantial trend of younger, novice African Americans who

gain professional entry via alternative programs. Given the substantial increase in African

American teachers who gain teaching credentials through alternative certification programs, it is

surprising to note the lack of available research in this area.

Despite being an ostensible option for African Americans seeking teaching certification,

several researchers have observed disturbing retention rates amongst those who earn teaching

certification via alternative programs (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, & Wyckoff, 2006; Kane,

Rockoff, & Staiger, 2006). While Shen's (1998) findings from a secondary analysis of the

Schools and Staffing Survey data from 1993-1994 supported the contention that minority

teachers are gaining unprecedented entry through alternative programs, the researcher also found

that alternatively certified teachers report short-term plans to remain in the profession as

compared to their traditionally certified counterparts. Additional findings from the Feistritzer

(2005) report suggested that teachers under the age of 30 who are certified through alternative

programs do not plan to remain in the field beyond their fifth year. In comparison, several others

have found that traditionally prepared candidates stay in teaching longer than those who are

alternatively prepared (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2006; Darling-Hammond,

Holtzman, Gaitlin, & Heilig, 2005; Kane, Rockoff, & Staiger, 2000).

To summarize, the research on the teacher education of African American teachers

suggests that given their smaller teacher education enrollment, HBCUs still produce

proportionately more Black teachers than any other institution (AACTE, 2013). In addition to

HBCUs, a growing percentage of the current African American teacher workforce is comprised

of graduates who entered through alternative certification programs (Feistritzer, 2011; Madkins,

2011). While alternative certification programs gain traction among African American teachers,

several researchers have brought attention to the disturbingly low retention rates of graduates of

alternative certification programs. They argue that the lack of required teaching practicums prior

to the first teaching assignments, among other issues, is a major issue in alternative certification

programs (AACTE, 2009, 2012; Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Rockoff, & Wyckoff, 2008; Darling-

Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005).

     Though not disaggregated by race, recently published data also indicates that most new

teachers continue to enter the field through traditional preparation programs (AACTE, 2013).

The percentage of Black teachers earning credentials in traditional preparation programs at PWIs

was difficult to ascertain from the available data. However, findings from one study (Agee,

2004) indicated that the particular needs of one Black teacher went unaddressed in her teacher

education programs at a PWI. Contrastingly, several studies intimate that programs at PWIs with

specific missions to recruit, support, and retain teachers of color and are formed from

partnerships between local school districts and education degree programs yield African

American graduates with high retention rates in the field (Clewell & Villegas, 2001; Lau, Dandy,

& Hoffman, 2007).

Mentoring

     The systems of support that are established for beginning teachers not only affects long

term retention rates, but also influences novice teachers' developing beliefs and practices via

professional socialization and acculturation (Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Ingersoll &

Smith, 2004; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). Despite their importance, however, scant attention

has been given to the specific induction experiences of novice African American teachers in

formal mentoring and professional development programs. The following section highlights the

few studies that elevate issues of mentoring and professional development among novice African

American teachers.

Relationship with urban school leaders. According to the literature, some novice African American teachers' formal mentoring experiences appear to be less than positive and their relationships with school leaders and mentor teachers appear to be contentious. For instance, Tillman (2005) found that a lack of effective instructional support from the school principal and mentor teacher impeded one novice African American teachers' sense of success as a first-year teacher. Williams and Johnson (2011) found that some novice Black teachers persist despite the poor collegial, haphazard and unsupportive nature of their relationships with school administrators. These authors noted that participants perceived the behaviors of their respective school principals as particularly antagonistic towards new teachers. For instance, the study participants reported being on constant alert in fear of their school principals' "punitive or 'gotcha' approaches" to instructional supervision (p. 194).

Indeed, much of the broader literature on the work conditions of African American schoolteachers suggests that the experiences of Tillman's (2005) and Williams and Johnson's (2011) study participants may not be uncommon. An impressive study by Achinstein, Ogawa, and Speiglman (2004) suggested that variances in the type of professional socialization that is provided by a majority minority (District A) and majority White (District B) school district accounts for the development of two different types or "tracks" of teachers. With regard to mentoring, District A administrators believed that novice teachers' socialization should emphasize their understanding of pre-established school procedures, learning to implement the district-mandated scripted reading curriculum, and learning to keep up with pacing guidelines. Collaboration with teacher mentors and literacy coaches entailed ensuring consistency of practices to make sure that teachers "were doing everything the same way" (p. 579). School administrators in District B, by comparison, emphasized the development of new

teachers' "creativity, professional autonomy, thinking, and capacity building" (p. 579). Further, District B's professional development offerings emphasized teacher inquiry, dialogue, and the co-construction of teachers' professional knowledge.

Informal, culturally relevant mentoring. In contrast to the formal mentoring arrangements that often characterize mentoring models, Dingus (2006, 2008a, 2008b) highlighted the resiliency of informal, culturally relevant mentoring among African American teachers. Further, Dingus argued that African American teachers provide cultural socialization to new teachers by developing and sustaining informal, mentoring networks that are created via the relationships between families of teachers and across their co-workers/colleagues. The researcher found that within these networks, African American teachers privilege, affirm, and reinforce cultural norms and values amongst novices and veterans alike. Dingus found that one younger, novice teacher relied on her mother, grandmother and "surrogate aunties," all teachers, to be her sounding board as she voiced criticisms of the unfair tracking policies that overwhelmingly placed Black students in special education classes at her school (p. 373). Moreover, the dialogic nature of the novice teacher's relationship with other teachers in her mentoring network allowed her to engage in reflective, honest dialogue that aided in her induction into a "community of teachers" (p. 373).

In summary, the work of Tillman (2005) and Williams and Johnson (2011) indicated that some novice Black teachers report less than adequate mentoring opportunities that color their overall induction and early socialization into the profession. These reports also provide important details that describe deficiencies in the professional culture of urban schools, especially with regard to the lack of administrative support. Moreover, this work confirms the findings from Ingersoll and May's (2011) study that the reasons for minority teacher turnover are

due to work conditions that characterize urban schools. This includes job dissatisfaction, a lack of professional autonomy and decision-making opportunities, as well as a lack of mentoring and professional development.

Achinstein, Ogawa, and Speiglman's (2004) findings, in particular, encapsulated the mentoring experiences of many novice Black teachers who teach in high minority and high poverty districts. Taken together, their arguments support the notion that the overall ethos regarding novice teacher induction, mentoring, and development in urban school districts reinforces urban students' low achievement scores as well as urban teachers' higher rates of attrition. Contrastingly, Dingus (2008a, 2008b) presented evidence that advances the effectiveness of culturally responsive models for mentoring novice Black women teachers. Furthermore, Dingus finds that networks of Black women teachers provide novice teachers with cultural/professional socialization that reinforce the cultural knowledge that these teachers need in order to be successful teachers of African American students.

Beliefs

As discussed previously, the worldviews and beliefs of many African American teachers are informed by their shared backgrounds, experiences, and racial identities (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999, 2002l; Collins, 1990; Foster, 1991, 1993, 1997; Irvine, 2003). Yet, the extent to which novice African American teachers' beliefs are situated within their backgrounds, experiences, and racial identities is currently unclear in the literature. Notably, researchers who have written about African American teachers' culturally informed beliefs rely heavily on teacher interview data and often employ life history and narrative methods to generate rich accounts of teachers' emic perspectives. The analysis from the literature revealed three major themes related to novice African American teachers' beliefs. They are beliefs about the purposes

of education, beliefs about their roles as educators, and beliefs about their students, parents, and the community.

Beliefs about the purposes of education. As it pertains to younger, novice African American teachers, several researchers have begun to uncover their beliefs about the purposes of education (Brown, 2011; Esposito, Davis, and Swain, 2012; Norton, 2011). Brown found that one younger African American male teacher draws from his connection to hip hop culture and specifically, hip-hop music, to shape his beliefs about the purposes of education. The teacher contended that hip-hop music gave him "a text to read the world" (p. 370) and allowed him to develop a racialized worldview in order to understand his experiences as a young African American male. Furthermore, the teacher viewed his teaching as an opportunity to share cultural knowledge with his students as they develop their worldviews. Similar to Brown (2011), Norton (2011) found that cultural artifacts, like socially conscious hip-hop music, often contain embedded messages that inform novice African American teachers' beliefs about education. Using narrative inquiry methods, Norton surmised that one novice African American male teacher believed that socially conscious hip-hop music should be used in the spiritual development of his African American students; that is, their ability to use music to access altered states of conscious wherein they can receive cultural knowledge, culturally affirming messages, and work towards an unseen reality of equity and justice.

Beliefs about their roles as educators. Some novice African American teachers emphasized that spirituality, a capacity for personal sacrifice, and cultural pride are needed qualities that good African American teachers ought to possess (Brown, 2011; Dingus, 2008a; Esposito, Davis, & Swain, 2012; Norton, 2011). Moreover, novice teachers in two previously mentioned studies by Brown (2011) and Norton (2011) pulled from their cultural and spiritual

knowledge base to determine the messages that need to be relayed to their students. To add, Esposito, Davis, and Swain (2012) found that the six novice teachers in their study acknowledge a personal and moral responsibility to meet the needs of their students. These teachers' commitment to meeting students' needs oftentimes required that they make personal and financial sacrifices when materials needed to be bought for the classrooms or when supplementing the curriculum or taking the extra time to adapt standardized, Eurocentric curriculums. Dingus' (2008a) study of a novice teacher underscored some novice African American teachers' belief that they should have a strong sense of cultural identity and an understanding and appreciation for African American culture and history. This teacher recounted that she learned from her mother and grandmother that effective teaching emanates from the inside out and is rooted in "self-love, cultural pride, and acceptance of self" (p. 370).

Contrary to Dingus (2008a) and Esposito, Davis, and Swain (2012), Cozart (2010) contended that some novice Black teachers lack an understanding that connects their professional success with their cultural identity. In her study, Cozart shared her own scholarly personal narrative in a letter format and reflects on the experiences of her early teaching years that ultimately lead to her cultural transformation. Specifically, Cozart recalled that as a novice teacher she failed to question the consequences for being "tied to the social order" (p. 29) of the mandated curriculum that alienated her African American students. As a graduate student, Cozart began reading scholarship by and about African Americans. She soon realized that she had received "more schooling than education" (Shujaa in Cozart, 2009, p. 29) and needed to address her distorted understanding of African culture and history. Calling this process "re-Africanization" (p. 29), Cozart remarked that her transformation allowed her to clarify her

cultural worldview and to acquire the cultural knowledge that she needed in to order to educate Black children.

Beliefs about students, parents, and the community. Similar themes around issues of connectedness emerged in the analysis of the literature on novice African American teachers. Specifically several studies proposed that some novice African American teachers convey a sense of connectedness to their students based on their calling up of experiences common to African Americans (Dingus, 2008b; Norton, 2011). However, major findings from Loder-Jackson's study revealed that some younger, African American teachers felt disconnected from their students and parents. According to these teachers, the challenges that African Americans faced before and during the Civil Rights Movement were a result of external factors like racism. Contemporary challenges like gangs, drugs, and teen pregnancy, they argue, are the result of internal issues within the Black community. Loder-Jackson's findings amplified class tensions that sometimes exist for middle-class, African American teachers who pathologize the behaviors of their African American students.

In summary, Brown (2011), Norton (2008), and Esposito, Davis, and Swain (2012) found evidence to suggest that novice, African American teachers believe that education should serve their students by providing them with the cultural knowledge that can enable them to resist oppression. Building on Aldridge's (2005) theory, Brown (2011) and Norton's (2008) studies illustrated the ways in which novice Black teachers' cultural beliefs are often embedded in their interpretations of cultural artifacts, like socially conscious hip-hop music. Accordingly, Norton's unique methods might inform further research that seeks to unpack the culturally embedded understandings of novice Black teachers. Though unexamined in Brown and Norton's work, Dingus (2008) and Esposito, Davis, and Swain (2012) elevated novice African American

teachers' beliefs about the importance of teachers' capacities for personal sacrifice and cultural identity development and pride. Cozart (2010) noted that not all novice Black teachers espouse these beliefs when they first enter the field. She supported the notion that some novice Black teachers may need to be "re-Africanized" (p. 29) in order for them to be able to know, understand, access, and translate their cultural knowledge to students.

Further, while Dingus (2008) and Norton (2008) found that some novice Black teachers convey a sense of connectedness to their students and to the communities where they teach, Loder-Jackson (2011, 2012) observed a disconnect between Black youth and younger generations of Black teachers, especially along social class lines. Though the cohort design for Loder-Jackson's study does not include novice African American teachers born after 1984, her findings suggest an important area for continued research with regard to middle-class novice Black teachers' sense of connectedness to poor and diverse groups of students. Moreover, the overall lack of research on novice Black teachers' beliefs about students, parents, and the communities where they teach signifies a ripe area for extended scholarly inquiry.

Practices

The available scholarship on the classroom practices of African American teachers are those that include data from participants' actual classroom teaching   Taken together, the analysis of this literature revealed three themes of practice that are evident in the accounts on novice African American teachers. This includes their practices as cultural brokers, culturally responsive pedagogues, and classroom managers.

Cultural brokers. Novice African American teachers' emphasis on relaying school norms and expectations to students was documented in the work of Johnson, Nyamekye, Chazan, and Rosenthal (2013). The researchers conducted an in-depth qualitative case study of a 23-year

old second year high school mathematics teacher. Major findings from the study revealed that

the teacher attributed his students' lack of success on state and end-of-course exams to their

difficulty adapting the needed dispositions for academic success, rather than an inherent

difficulty with the content. To address this gap, the teacher interspersed non-math related

lessons into his teaching to convey to students an exact purpose for their work. For example, in

one lesson, the teacher used African American Vernacular English and cultural referents to

admonish students about test taking, study skills, and how to best prepare for their upcoming

state exams.

Culturally responsive pedagogues. Novice African American teachers' culturally

responsive teaching appears to emphasize making academic content relevant to students' real

lives. Lynn's (2006b) novice African American male teacher participant used the phrase "2000

relevant" to describe the contemporary literature that he chose for his high school special

education class, arguing that students are better able to relate to contemporary themes and issues.

In one example, the teacher read aloud a poem with a contemporary issue and, afterwards,

guided his students in sharing their personal connections to the poem. Using the poem and their

class discussion as models, the teacher supported his students in writing their own poems.

Similarly, Norton (2008) illustrated how a novice African American male teacher chose music

composed by African Americans to reflect the culture and musical preferences of his students.

Moreover, the teacher's decision to play socially conscious hip-hop music in his classroom was

an intentional decision that was made to provide affirmative cultural messages to his students.

Another recent study by Xu, Coates, and Davidson (2012) found that some novice

African American male teachers had their students' needs and interests in mind when they were

planning for instruction. For example, since noting that some of his students had limited prior

school experiences with science, the teacher provided multiple opportunities for his students to be exposed to new and fun school science, like playing with robots. His intention was to both build up students' prior knowledge and encourage students' interest for learning about other science topics. In one example, the teacher allowed his students to decide a plan for how to complete their study of a new unit on natural resources. They researched and studied the content that appealed to them, created songs and raps about what they learned, and prepared a presentation for an audience of their peers.

Classroom managers. Irvine (1990) asserted that issues of discipline threaten African American students' opportunities to advance in educational settings. Thus, the literature that shows African American teachers as effective classroom managers provides important, useful data to inform the ways in which African American students can experience improved school success. In the literature, some novice African American teachers also appeared to emphasize classroom management that relies on teachers' ability to be "culturally in-sync" with their students (Johnson, Nyamekye, Chazan, and Rosenthal, 2013; Ware, 2006).

Ware (2006) confirmed that some younger, novice African American teachers exhibit the behaviors of "warm demanders" (Irvine & Fraser, 1998; Kleinfeld, 1975) because they act in authority and take a tough, no-nonsense approach to establishing a classroom culture focused on learning and instruction. The researcher found that the novice African American teacher study participant acted in authority by first, establishing caring relationships with her students where she listened to their concerns and tried to meet their needs. The novice teachers' caring eventually gave way to the development of mutual trust between herself and her students— students began to trust that her discipline and guidance was given with their best interests in mind. Ware argues that the teachers' classroom management style enabled her ability to have

high expectations of her students and to demand their best. Moreover, Ware notes the teachers' awareness that her practices replicate the style of discipline that many of her African American students are accustomed to.

Johnson, Nyamekye, Chazan, and Rosenthal (2013) found evidence to suggest that some novice African American male teachers also exhibit warm demanding behaviors. The researchers reported that their study participant, a 23-year old novice African American male teacher, often admonished his students with speeches that were meant to provide them with a sense of purpose for their continued engagement with mathematics. The teachers' speeches conveyed varied messages to students. Sometimes his speeches were meant to address student misbehavior and to develop students' academic dispositions and other times his speeches were more light-hearted and were meant to provide "life lessons" on a variety topics ranging from financial literacy to how to choose friends wisely. Of note, many of Mr. Lee's speeches were informed by his understanding of African American cultural modes of speech patterns and African American Vernacular English. During his more serious speeches, his tone often reflected the style of the traditional African American preaching found in many African American churches.

In summary, the literature that investigates how novice Black teachers' enact cultural practices in their classrooms is still in an emerging stage, as the paucity of this research indicates. However, the work of Ware (2006) and Johnson et al. (2013) advanced the notion that novice Black teachers act as warm demanders by establishing a no-nonsense classroom climate with clear expectations, rules, and routines. Additionally, Johnson et al.'s (2013) study extended that warm demanders admonish their students in culturally responsive ways in order to promote the development of dispositions for academic success. Johnson et al. (2013) also illustrated how

some novice Black teachers act as cultural brokers when they ensure that students acquire what they need to succeed in the "culture of power" (Delpit, 1988). Similarly, Lynn (2006a) found that some novice teachers broker culture by connecting academic content to students' personal lives.

Notably, while other researchers found evidence to suggest that novice Black teachers believe that they should be cultural brokers (Brown, 2011; Dingus, 2008a; Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Loder-Jackson, 2011, 2012; McCray et al., 2002), only two studies reported that novice teachers demonstrate behaviors consistent with their beliefs (Johnson et al., 2013; Lynn, 2006a). Relevant future research should probe the ways in which novice Black teachers' beliefs manifest in their classroom practices, particularly regarding their behaviors as cultural brokers. Finally, studies by Lynn (2006a), Norton (2008), and Xu, Coats, and Davidson (2012) offered similar findings that situated some novice Black teachers' practices in the culturally responsive traditions of their veteran teacher predecessors. However, more research is needed in order for researchers to be able to fully compare similarities and differences in the classroom practices of veteran and novice Black teachers.

Limitations of the Literature Review

It must be noted that the comprehensive review of the literature was based on a total of twenty-one empirical research studies and identifies twenty-two novice African American teachers in the literature. The lack of a larger database from which to draw on for this review reflects the paucity of in-depth studies that have been conducted on this particular subgroup. Though the database is limited, the reviewed studies represent a developing knowledge base with reports that include discussions on novice teachers' family and community experiences, early schooling, teacher education and mentoring, and beliefs and practices that have been published

as recently as 2013. However, none of the reviewed studies focused specifically on the conditions that inform novice, African American teachers' beliefs and practices.

Since there had not been a broad study conducted on novice Black teachers' backgrounds, theories about the cultural knowledge transmitted via family and community socialization of African American males, as well as those who are less connected to educator families, was underdeveloped at the time of this review. Additionally, the lack of empirical research to investigate the early school experiences of novice Black teachers hindered further speculation about how their schooling affected their professional beliefs and practices. Likewise, the bulk of the statistical data that reported teacher certification trends and program retentions rates at HBCUs, PWIs, and alternative certification programs were either outdated or not disaggregated by race and age.

An overall lack of qualitative data to describe the actual preparation experiences of novice Black teachers in their teacher education coursework, field observation, and student teaching was severely lacking. Lastly, the mentoring and cultural beliefs research on novice Black teachers seems garnered the most attention in relation to the other topics covered in this review, however, very few researchers published extensive examinations of the practices of novice Black teachers by reporting their analysis of classroom observational data.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study research design, while integrating certain elements of narrative inquiry, in order to describe and interpret the beliefs and practices of four, exemplary novice African American teachers. A case study is defined as a bounded empirical inquiry that examines a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 1994). The central aim of case study research is to help distinguish between the contemporary phenomenon under study and the context in which the phenomenon exists or occurs. In so doing, case studies seek to illuminate a choice or set of choices made by the unit under study (an individual or organization), why certain choices were made, how they were interpreted and acted upon, and with what results (Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1980; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003).

Since this study sought to answer questions related to how and why the participants' narratives indicated beliefs and practices associated with culturally responsive pedagogy, case study research strategies were deemed most appropriate. Further, case study research methods were employed in order to extend theoretical propositions related to African American teachers' beliefs and practices, more broadly, and culturally responsive pedagogy, specifically. Given the purposes of this study, I decided to use a theoretical sample comprised of four participants, which yielded four, individual narratives that represented each case. Narratives can be especially useful to cross-case analysis because they help to facilitate the comparison of storylines across multiple cases (Yin, 2003).

Elements of narrative inquiry were used to inform the data collection and analysis of this study. Narrative inquiry methodology seeks to collect the stories of individuals as representations of their lived experiences. According to Clandinin (2013), individuals lived experiences are "constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted by the cultural, familial, linguistic,

and institutional narratives that they encounter in social milieu" (p. 18). Narrative inquiry

researchers, therefore, seek to elevate participants' voices in a certain time, place, and setting of

their life. In this study, narrative inquiry served as a means to unpack the narrative threads and

themes that emerged as participants' recalled stories related to their family and community, early

schooling, teacher education, and mentoring socialization experiences during our research

conversations.

Notably, narrative inquiry is becoming more prevalent in teacher education research and

has been used to examine the experiences of both veteran (Stanford, 1998) and novice African

American teachers' (Norton, 2008) culturally informed beliefs and practices. Likewise, other

culturally responsive methodological approaches that emphasize the relational aspects between

the researcher and the research participants and that privilege "ethnicity and position culture as

central to the research process" has a long history in research conducted about African American

education (Tillman, 2002). In this study, the blending of case study and narrative inquiry

research methodology was intended to build upon the legacy of prior research that has sought to

"recognize the explicit cultural knowledge and norms that exist within a [cultural] group"

(Tillman, 2002, p. 3). Again, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the beliefs and practices of exemplary, novice African American teachers?

2. What are the family and community, early schooling, teacher education, and mentoring

experiences that inform the beliefs and practices of exemplary novice African American

teachers?

3. What is the relationship between exemplary, novice African American teachers' family

and community, early schooling, teacher education, and mentoring experiences and their

beliefs and practices?

4. What other variables do exemplary, novice African American teachers describe as
    influential to their beliefs and practices?

Pilot Study

Pilot studies can be helpful for case study researchers when preparing for data collection (Yin, 2003). The purpose of the pilot study is to assist the researcher in refining the research design as well as the field procedures. A pilot study involving conversations with two, exemplary[2], novice African American teachers from a neighboring school district with similar student demographics was conducted in the spring of 2014 to inform this study. A blending of interview methods discussed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Merriam (1988), and Patton (2015) were used to guide the construction of a three-part, semi-structured interview guide.

While conducting the preliminary study, several potential methodological issues became more apparent and are worth noting. First, the feedback that was received from the two participants, two peer doctoral students of color, and one of the major advisors for the study, aided in the development of relevant lines of questions for my interview protocol. Specifically, their feedback suggested that several of the initial lines of inquiry about experiences (e.g. Describe your elementary, middle, and high school experiences) were too broad and did not provide enough structure for participants' direct responses. Per their suggestions, interview questions were constructed as they aligned with the four research questions.   Rather than focusing on the sequencing of specific questions, general topics were constructed and questions were generated conversationally and in a manner that allowed participants to tell open-ended stories without a clear beginning and end.

The structure of the guide was further refined after I conducted two pilot conversations with two younger African American teachers who were conveniently sampled via a personal

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[2] Participants for the pilot study were selected via the process of community nomination (Foster, 1991).

contact with the schools' Curriculum Support Specialist. Moreover, while the topics that were covered proceeded sequentially and logically, specific questions were posed in an organic fashion. This led to a myriad of other questions being asked, besides the items on the interview protocol, and assisted in deepening the complexities and nuance of the individual conversations. Additionally, the conversational approach seemed to help establish a high level of comfort and rapport. Although the pilot participants were strangers to me, their willingness to share personal stories that were not directly related to their work as well as the high incidence of humor, laughter, and familiar colloquialisms that appeared throughout the transcripts, suggested that the conversational exchange was most appropriate.

Second, the "community nomination" (Foster, 1997) conducted during the piloting process provided useful background information for the dissertation study. Specifically, the pilot process illustrated that in-person communication, as well as email correspondence, would be critical to securing qualified participants for the study. For instance, while piloting the communication nomination process, a formal, face-to-face meeting with the school's Curriculum Support Specialist was required before she would consent to providing her recommendations for qualified participants. The meeting served several important purposes. For instance, I was able to provide more details about my current study including my research questions and some background on the literature that I have reviewed. The discussion that ensued during the meeting allowed the Curriculum Support Specialist to get to know more about the purposes and goals of the study. Furthermore, I believe that the meeting greatly assisted the Curriculum Support Specialist in nominating qualified teachers.

Participant Selection

Qualitative case studies typically employ a non-probability sampling strategy called "purposeful sampling" (Patton, 2015) or "criterion-based sampling" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). These strategies allow for the deliberate selection of participants with special experiences, competencies, or unique insights that can facilitate the aims of the research. The criteria for a qualified participant in this study was as follows: a) self identified as African American, b) born after 1980, c) taught at the elementary school level at the time of the study, d) taught for no more than 8 years at the time of the study, e) and worked in a public school in the major metropolitan district that was sampled for the study. Once permission was granted from both Emory University and the school districts' Institutional Review Board, respectively, elementary school principals and assistant principals in the district were contacted via email and/or in person and asked to engage in a process of "community nomination" (Foster, 1991). The "community nomination" method of sampling is "an attempt to gain an emic perspective, an insider's view" of what is valued by a particular school or community (Foster, 1991, p. 239).

Administrators who responded to the initial request were asked to nominate a novice African American teacher at their school that they described as "exemplary." They were also asked to provide correspondence information for a representative of the Parent Teacher Association. The PTA representatives indicated their acceptance of the nominee after the administrator selected one teacher. Once nominations were secured, the administrators provided the direct contact information of the nominated teacher.

The first four teachers who were nominated were contacted via email to request a time and date for an initial face-to-face meeting (See Appendix B: Participant Table). The initial meeting served three purposes: (1) to provide the prospective participants with more information

about the study, (2) to allow prospective participants time to ask specific questions about the study, and (3) to establish rapport. In accordance with Institutional Review Board policies and procedures, all participants were assured of the confidentiality of their participation and responses during our initial meeting. Each participant selected pseudonyms to replace their names and any of their affiliated institutions (e.g. school, teacher preparation site) to ensure their anonymity. As the primary researcher for this study, I was solely responsible for all data collection and analysis and maintained the research data and all coded materials in both electronic and hard copy formats in a secure physical location at my place of residence.

Data Collection

This study used three sources of evidence as field texts to help inform the construction of participants' narrative stories including conversations, fieldnotes, and documentation. Specifically, field texts obtained from three conversational interviews served as the primary source of data. Researcher fieldnotes from the interviews and documentation served as secondary data sources.

Conversations. Three in-depth conversations were conducted with each participant and were guided by the use of a three-part, semi-structured conservation guide (see Appendix C: Conservation Guide). The setting for each of the conversations varied based upon the participants' preferences and availability. Accordingly, conversations were conducted in some participants' homes, in some of their classrooms immediately after school, and at a local coffee shop. During the first conversation, participants were asked to discuss their family and childhood upbringing, their early school experiences, and some of their favorite stories about teaching their students. They were also asked to share any stories about moments of triumph and struggle as exemplary, novice teachers.

During the second conversation, participants were asked to share a favorite lesson that they recently taught and to share other artifacts[3] and stories describing their varied influences. Before our third and final meeting, participants were emailed a draft of their respective narrative accounts and were asked to read the narrative to provide critical feedback about its accuracy or to determine places within the narrative that needed to be altered or extended. I also developed follow-up questions for our third meeting that helped to extend certain stories or answer some of the questions that emerged as I constructed each participant's narratives. Each conversation was digitally recorded and transcribed into typed text. Case study databases were created for each participant and all corresponding data was collated into their individual files.

Fieldnotes. Handwritten fieldnotes served as a secondary source of data that accounted for what I observed and experienced throughout the data collection process. Specifically, the fieldnotes attended to details about the interview setting, whether at the home of the participant or after school in the participants' classroom. They also included descriptions of the participants' appearance and manner, interactions with me and within the setting, body language, and nonverbal communication. All fieldnotes were dated, transcribed into typed text, and collated with corresponding interview transcripts and documents.

Documentation. Documentation was collected from each participant in order to help triangulate the data. Collected documents included photocopies of lesson plans and school/community event flyers. Printed pages from the school and district website were also used to obtain school demographic data such as the percentage of free and reduced price lunches, recent standardized test scores, and student race/ethnicity breakdowns. A summary clarifying the significance of each collected document was constructed, typed up, dated, and attached to

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[3] Participants were asked to share and/or create physical, cultural artifacts to discuss during the second interview. These artifacts included photographs of significant people, places, or events, mementos, and "memory boxes" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

each document (see Appendix D: Document Summary Form). Documents and document summary forms were collated with corresponding interview transcripts and fieldnotes so that all data sources were organized into a separate file for each participant.

Data Coding and Analysis

The data collected from interviews, fieldnotes, and documents were coded and analyzed in order to shed light on the complexities of each individual case and to address the research questions. The coding and analysis of the data from this study was informed by a blending of approaches outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994), Clandinin (2013), and Clandinin and Connelly (2000) (please see Appendix E: Diagram of Qualitative Data Analysis). During the first level of analysis, "emergent threads" were noted during the transcription of the data. During the second level of analysis, topic codes were assigned to chunks of the data in order to summarize the topic of participants' responses about their beliefs, practices, and experiences and then repeated codes were collapsed. In a second step, each code was assigned coding that attended to the "three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry" (Clandinin, 2013). Specifically, this coding attended to how participants' responses were related to sociality (in personal interaction with self and in social interaction with others), temporality (the past, present, and future), and place (location and environment). These codes were clustered into three emerging themes: beliefs, practices, and socialization experiences.

During the third stage of analysis, the themes were used to create a chronological timeline of the participants' stories. The timeline served as the outline that was used to create individual narrative accounts for each participant. The purpose of the narrative account was to re-present "narrative threads and tensions" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 113) that were appearing as I

thought narratively by looking backwards, forwards, inward, outward, and across each participants' individual story.

The fourth and final level of analysis entailed a thematic analysis of resonant threads, patterns, and "plotlines" (Clandinin, 2013) across the multiple narrative accounts as they related to the research questions. During this stage of analysis, the initial codes of participants' beliefs and practices were used to recode the beliefs and practices across the final narratives. These codes were collapsed and defined in order to answer research question one. A matrix was also created to illustrate these findings (please see Appendix F: Cross-Case Analysis Matrices, Matrix 1: Beliefs and Practices). Another matrix was created to crystallize the relationships between variables and across the cases in order to answer the second, third, and fourth research questions (see Appendix F: Cross-Case Analysis Matrices, Matrix 2: Socialization Experiences and Relationships).

Authenticity and Trustworthiness

The notion of authenticity and trustworthiness of collected field texts in this case study is heavily informed by narrative inquiry. In contrast to more positivistic paradigms, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that narrative inquirers establish the authenticity of their findings by being transparent about their positionality to the study and by being reflective about the quality of their relationships and interactions with the participants. Narrative inquirers begin their projects by creating a "narrative beginning" or an autobiographical account that outlines the intersections of their personal narrative and their research inquiry. Throughout the duration of the study, narrative inquirers continue to engage with their autobiographical account in order to understand "who [they] are becoming, in relation with potential participants and particular phenomena" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 43).

During the spring of 2013, in the first beginning stages of this project, I wrote an autobiographical account that highlights some of my childhood experiences in a family of African American women educators, my early school experiences in predominantly Black public schools and predominantly White private schools, and my experience in a teacher education program at an HBCU (please see Appendix G: Autobiographical Account). To establish the authenticity and trustworthiness of my field texts, I expanded on my autobiographical narrative account. More specifically, I expanded my autobiographical account at two transitional points in the study—after I had conducted all of my interviews with my participants and again after I had completed my analysis.

To address issues of the authenticity of the field texts, I allowed my participants to refine their narratives in three important ways. Firstly, the protocol that I used to guide the conversational interviews were constructed to provide multiple opportunities for participants to review, reflect, and restate their current beliefs, practices, and influential experiences. In several instances, participants were also asked to recall specific stories or to share documents that illustrated the beliefs and/or practices that they articulated. As a means of further triangulation, all of the participants were asked to share cultural artifacts to confirm and extend their responses. Secondly, a copy of each transcribed interview was e-mailed to participants once all of the interviews had been conducted. During this member check, each participant was asked to review the transcripts and share any comments or make additions or modifications to their responses, if needed. A third major aspect of this study that addresses the authenticity and trustworthiness of the data entailed the collaboration that took place between me and each study participant in order to construct their final narrative accounts.

In case study research, a chain of evidence refers to the documentation of all of the research activities that led to the research findings (Yin, 2003). Specifically, the chain of evidence should be able to assist the researcher, and outside researchers, in tracing the findings of a study. Research memos about data sources, data collection, coding derivatives and analysis, and other decisions in the researcher's journal created the chain of evidence for this dissertation study.

Findings

The purpose of this dissertation study was to examine the beliefs and practices of novice African American elementary school teachers in an urban school district in the South. Specifically, this study sought to examine the ways in which the teachers' beliefs and practices were mediated by their family and community, early schooling, teacher education, and mentoring experiences. Especially in light of previous research on veteran African American teachers, this study sought to understand the rationale for novice African American teachers' beliefs and practices by providing insights about their cultural socialization experiences, the function of intergenerational cultural transmission, and teachers' conceptions of culturally responsive teaching practices.

Findings are presented in six sections. The first section presents details about the urban school district where the study took place. The next four sections reflect the four cases and the final section reflects a cross-case analysis. Each case has two subsections; the first, places each teachers' story in the context of their school by providing findings collected from documentation and field note data about school demographics, culture, and curriculum. The next subsection provides the narrative account that was constructed from the stories of the teachers. The

narratives draw from data collected from transcriptions of conversations, documentation, and field note data.

The District

This study took place with four elementary school teachers working in different public school settings in one inner-city school district that is located in a major metropolitan city in the Urban South. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2014), there were approximately fifty thousand students enrolled in the district at the time of this study. Over half of the students enrolled in the district were in early childhood and were dispersed by district zoning to fifty elementary schools. African Americans comprised the largest percentage of the student racial demographic at seventy-six percent, followed by Caucasian students (14%), Hispanic students (7%), multiracial students (2%), and students from Asian/Pacific Islander backgrounds (1%).

Like many other inner-city school districts in the U.S., the school district surveyed for this study primarily serves areas characterized by densely concentrated areas where residents live below the poverty line. A map illustrating neighborhood economic patterns within the district shows that the average income of residents living in the northern part of the district is $80,000 or more (GOSA, 2015). Residents living in the central most regions, where all of the schools in this study were located, as well as those living in the southeastern most region of the district, earn incomes of less than $30,000 per year. Specifically, the data indicates that seventy-seven percent of the students enrolled in the district qualify for free and/or reduced price lunches (GOSA, 2015). Three of the four elementary schools that took part in this study have been labeled "Title I" schools.

The district sampled for this study is quite unique in terms of teacher ethnicity demographics when nationally compared with other high poverty, urban school districts. Historically, Black teachers have played a significant role in staffing a majority of the administrative and teaching positions in the districts' schools. Likewise, data from the Georgia Office of Student Achievement (2014) indicates that Black teachers have comprised approximately 74% of the district's K-12 teachers at a fairly consistent rate for the last five years. The percentage of White teachers in the district has also held constant at approximately 23% of the total number of classroom teachers in the district for the past five years. Teachers from Hispanic and Asian backgrounds comprise the smallest percentage of teachers represented in the district at approximately 2% and 1%, respectively.

Notably, at the time of this study, the school district had just announced the hiring of a new district superintendent. By the 2015-2016 school year, less than one year after her appointment, the new superintendent ushered in major reform initiatives meant to revitalize the district's local and national reputation, address lagging college and career readiness performance scores at the poorest schools, and avoid the possibility of these schools being taken over by the State Department of Education.

Case 1: Nia's Story

When we met, Nia was a 32-year old kindergarten teacher who was beginning the spring term of her third year as a classroom teacher in the district. Nia agreed that we would use her downtown apartment, located about 15 minutes away from her school, as our meeting space. Nia welcomed me at her door on the first evening with a teeming smile. Her long, thick black hair was pulled back into a neat ponytail that hung down her back. Dressed comfortably in sweatpants and seeming quite relaxed, Nia had enjoyed a surprise day off from work due to

inclement weather. We sat side by side on her couch for a while until I transitioned to sprawling out on the carpet with my digital recorder and my notebook. Our conversations, each of which lasted approximately 90 minutes, proceeded naturally and were often punctuated with smiles and laughter. I found Nia to be especially open and reflective and she provided a great many details about her life and experiences.

While perusing Nia's school website before our first meeting, I was surprised to find several picture slideshows of student programs held throughout the year. For instance, the Black History Program slideshow showed pictures of Black students dressed as historical Black figures and making presentations on the school cafeteria's stage in front of the school. Pictures of a choreographed dance group and a choral ensemble in action are also displayed in the Black History Program slideshow. Additionally, several videos were displayed on the school's homepage. One of them included a guided tour of the school facilities by the school principal, a young looking Black man proudly dressed in a suit and bowtie. Another video showed three young looking Black women teachers who were giving a presentation about the test score data they had gathered as a part of a Professional Learning Community assignment.

During the 2014-2015 school year, Nia's school served a total of 403 students from preschool through fifth grade and employed 36 full-time teachers, all of which were Black (GOSA, 2015). The school was comprised of a student body that was 98% African American and almost all of the students (99.3%) qualified for free or reduced price meals. In terms of achievement scores on standardized tests, the school has faired poorly, one of the lowest in the district for several years.

Growing up in a unique family. During our first meeting I began to learn about Nia's family. Nia was the only child born to her mother and father in a middle-class home in the Deep

South. When she was four years old, Nia and her mother were faced with the death of the family

patriarch, but developed a close bond as a result. Four years later, Nia's mother remarried a man

who was a recent widower. Along with her stepfather, Nia's new blended family included an

older stepbrother and older stepsister. Nia talked about the difficulties that the family

experienced early on as they grieved the loss of their respective loved ones and struggled to

negotiate new household rules and routines.

Despite the initial discomfort, Nia's family eventually fell into a comfortable rhythm.

She recalled participating in many different activities with her family: including attending

church, traveling for family reunions and summer vacations, and visiting extended family on

holidays. She also recalled that attending her older stepbrothers' sporting events were a

particularly fun family activity for everyone. She stated, "My brother was in a lot of sports, so I

remember going to a lot of sporting events when I was younger. We would always travel for his

games…away games, home games. We were all there for all of them."

A few years after her mother remarried, Nia's family decided to add more members to

their family by adopting a child—Nia's little sister. In subsequent years, Nia and her family

experienced the excitement of adding new family members several more times while serving as a

host family for foster children. The growth of the family required Nia to make many

adjustments. However, Nia disclosed that her core family unit had close bonds that grew even

tighter following the birth of several nieces and nephews. Despite having relocated for a job, Nia

and her family maintain close ties by meeting up regularly to spend time together. Nia also

maintains close ties and visits frequently with extended family members who live in the

metropolitan area where she now resides.

As Nia relayed information about the ways in which her family functioned, I began to realize the crucial role that her mother played in creating inclusion within a large, non-traditional family. An engineer by trade, Nia's mother retired early to become a full-time, stay-at-home mom. According to Nia, this enabled her mother to closely manage matters pertaining to the care of their large family. When Nia reflected on the role that her mother played within the family during her upbringing, she pointed out her mother's high involvement. She stated, "She [my mother] was always there for me growing up. She was always very present…very involved with all of my activities." Nia observed that her mother was highly involved in the caretaking of many other family members. Describing her mother, Nia noted:

She just had that caring spirit. And I always admired her for having that tug to take care of children. Having foster kids and stuff…she was doing a lot of caretaking. And that's kind of her nature…she's kind of a natural caretaker. I grew up with all of that.

Nia's mother was also a strong person of faith. Nia told me that her mother has served as an adult Sunday school teacher since she was a child. Nia's mother passed on the values of her faith to Nia. During our conversations, Nia would sometimes interject with brief anecdotes about times when her mother would draw on their shared faith to encourage Nia. As we continued, I would come to understand more about the role of Nia's personal faith in her professional life.

As Nia and I talked more about what her family means to her, I learned that Nia is especially proud of what she describes as her "unique family." Growing up in a blended family with adopted and foster siblings was a significant experience for Nia—she seemed greatly enhanced by belonging to a large and unique family. As we proceeded, she would continue to show her fondness and affection for her family by showing me several beloved family

photographs and sharing funny family stories. While Nia described what it was like to grow up in her family, I also thought more about the challenges of integrating a non-biological family, in particular. Nia's reflections implied that although her family continued to grow and change over the years, she rarely felt lost or invisible. As I listened closely to Nia, I learned that her mother played a prominent role in creating family cohesion in a manner that allowed Nia to feel a sense of love, care, and belonging.

Being the only little Black girl. The intensity that Nia's mother displayed in taking care of their large family was also evident in her dedication to Nia's education. As Nia recalled, her mother sought to provide the "very best education" for her daughter.   The predominantly White suburb where Nia's family resided was not well known for its schools. Thus, Nia was enrolled in the kindergarten of a nearby parochial school. While reflecting on her early school experiences, Nia described the inherent difficulty of being the "only little Black girl" in her classes at the parochial school. Nia confessed that her differences were sometimes constructed as personal deficits. To illustrate this point, Nia recounted an occasion when her second grade teacher attempted to explain the scientific reasons behind human skin pigmentation variations. She said,

> I remember in second grade I had this teacher and she was a bad teacher. I don't know how we got on this conversation but we started talking about Black and White…she told us that White kids and Black kids are made by putting them into an oven. And the White kids are cooked just right and the Black kids are cooked too long. And that's why I [Nia] was darker than the other kids.

Nia stated that after she revealed what had happened to her parents, her stepfather reacted furiously. She recalls that both of her parents were visibly upset. Nia described the teacher as a

younger White woman who was often sarcastic towards her and sometimes critical of her developing body. Nia felt rejected by this teacher. She expressed feelings of rejection saying, "I don't know if she didn't like kids, but she didn't like me."

These issues necessitated a change of schools for Nia. After second grade, Nia's parents enrolled her into the local, predominantly White public school district. Though Nia continued to recount memorable teachers from this time period in her life, she described her public school teachers in a more positive light. She described one of her favorite teachers, her fifth grade teacher Ms. Yarborough, vividly:

> She was all over the place. Her hair was always a mess, she never wore makeup, and she dressed so different, but she really loved kids and she was really interested in us. I could tell she was one of those teachers who went against the grain. You know how they want you to walk a certain way when you're in the hall? Well, I remember one day she just had enough of that and she was just like, 'you see that class over there? We're about to race them!' And she just took off running!

Nia was impressed by Ms. Yarborough's spontaneity and willingness to be set apart from the norm. Nia also sensed that Ms. Yarborough loved children. Nia remembers that Ms. Yarborough would often initiate informal conversations with students and enjoyed observing students at play. Like majority of the teachers in Nia's public school district, Ms. Yarborough was White.

Making friends in secondary school. As Nia began to describe her experiences in middle school, her stories shifted from detailing her relationships with teachers to defining her relationships with peers. While the middle school was still predominantly White, Nia encountered more racial diversity amongst the student body than she ever had before. Since she was no longer the "only little Black girl" in her classes, Nia began to make friends and have

social connections with other African American students. Nia expressed that she had long wished to cultivate friendships with other African American children and was ecstatic about the opportunities that her new setting presented. While developing these new bonds, Nia slowly drifted away from her former all-White peer group from elementary school. Nia recalled her feelings about breaking away from her old friends saying, "…in the back of my mind I felt guilty but I was like, 'I want some Black friends…I want to be with them now.' It was just kind of this mixed sense of feeling guilty, but then also wanting to be around people who look like you."

Nia made a smooth transition into high school. As an above average pupil, she took several honors classes and maintained a high grade point average. Nia explained that her favorite teacher in high school, Ms. Towns, was an English teacher who noticed Nia's knack for writing during her first year. Ms. Towns, who was White, encouraged Nia to pursue and develop her gift for writing. She reflected, "In high school I really started thinking about what I wanted to do. And I was kind of on that journalism track because Ms. Towns really encouraged me to develop my writing and to be a part of the newspaper staff." Along with writing for the newspaper, Nia was a member of the flag team and a contributor for the yearbook staff during her first two years of high school.

During Nia's junior year, she disclosed that she opted out of all of her extracurricular activities. Instead, as Nia shared, her priorities shifted to being accepted by a peer group of about four other African American girls. While expressing a sense of regret about her choice of friends during this time period, she expounded by describing some of her peers' poor reputations and behaviors. As a result of her associations, Nia stated that her "foundational values were tested." She regretted succumbing to certain peer pressures. Nia also anguished over abandoning her passion for writing during this period.

Overall, the stories that Nia conveyed about her school experiences helped to establish my understanding about the importance of Nia's sense of belonging at school. As I listened to Nia, I learned that her teachers' disposition towards her affected her sense of belonging in elementary school. As the "only little Black girl" in a class of White students, Nia looked to her teachers to affirm her status and role within the classroom and to be her ally. Moreover, in her elementary school setting it was important to Nia that her teachers display positive interest and high regard towards her. These actions enabled Nia to feel a sense of belonging in a classroom where she was a visible minority.

Whereas close connections to teachers provided her with a sense of belonging in elementary school, peer relationships figured more prominently for Nia as she grew into adolescence and young adulthood. Nia sought a peer group that reflected her own racial identity. However, she often felt conflicted about this need. Albeit detrimental to her extracurricular pursuits, Nia's social peer group became very important to her as a high school junior and senior. Later, when Nia shared about her journey into the teaching profession, I would learn more about what she felt she gained by her social interactions with other African Americans and what she felt was sometimes lacking in predominantly White settings.

Feeling disconnected. The summer after her high school graduation, Nia attended a college residential program for recent high school graduates interested in the field of journalism. Upon completing the program, Nia was reinvigorated to pursue her interests in news reporting and writing, according to her recollections. Nia decided to matriculate at the large, public research university where the summer program had been offered. She declared her major in journalism and creative writing during her first year, but soon changed her mind about becoming a journalist stating, "…when I started taking my journalism courses I realized how restrictive

journalism writing is and the style…it was very mechanical." She settled on the public relations major because it still enabled her to pursue a general interest in communications.

Meanwhile, throughout college, Nia maintained employment as a childcare provider. Since the university she attended was an hour away from her hometown, Nia commuted daily from home to school. Commuting allowed Nia to work part-time in summer day camps and child daycare centers in her hometown. She stated, "I remember always having a job working with kids…it was kind of like this thing that kept happening. It was always an easy job to get and it was one of those things that carried me through college."

After graduation, Nia spent approximately two years considering the career path that she truly desired. She tried several different jobs before deciding to pursue teaching. First, she worked in a local, non-profit organization for several months, but quickly decided it was not the proper fit. She returned to working with young children. Nia highlighted the time she spent as a childcare provider in two predominantly White daycare centers in her hometown. She related that the children from one of the daycares came from lower middle class backgrounds, while the second daycare served families from upper middle class backgrounds. Nia felt socially excluded by some of the White parents and staff members at the first school. She recalled an incident that illustrates subtle differences in treatment towards her:

> We used to have this candy jar behind the desk. And it was really for the kids when you
> wanted to give them a treat, but sometimes the teachers would sneak a little piece for
> themselves. And I just remember I got my head chewed off by one of the staff members
> when I tried to get some candy. I distinctly remember the same staff member
> encouraging her friends to get candy. The minute that I wanted to be a part of the social

interaction that was taking place, it was a problem. They were determined that I would

not be a part of their inner thing.

Nia enjoyed the diverse childcare staff at the elite, private daycare where she worked

with children from upper middle class backgrounds. According to Nia, the compensation,

benefits, and environment also made this daycare a great place to work. In this setting, however,

Nia still felt out of place. Nia referred to a "vibe in the air" to describe her impression of the

superiority that characterized the attitudes of some of the upper-middle class, White parents.

More generally, Nia found it difficult to find common interests with the parents. She

commented, "…I felt this sense of disconnect from the families. Like I really didn't relate to

them. I even babysat for a few of them, like I went to there homes, and they welcomed me in,

but I was never really comfortable."

The details and stories that Nia provided helped me to consider the type of work

environment that Nia desired. In contrast to the daycare centers where she had been employed,

Nia sought a work environment characterized by mutual respect, camaraderie, and cooperation

amongst her work colleagues. Her experience of being unfairly treated by some of her White

colleagues left an indelible impression on Nia. She sometimes felt socially excluded by these

colleagues and likened the experience to the exclusion she felt as the "only little Black girl" in

school. I also learned that Nia sought to relate to her parents and students. In spite of this desire,

Nia often struggled to find common interests and develop a comfortable rapport with some of the

parents that she served.

Becoming a teacher. While working as a childcare provider, Nia began to long for the

classroom teaching experience. She decided to apply to Teach for America, a non-profit,

alternative teacher certification program that had been widely advertised on her college campus.

Once accepted, the program would assign Nia a classroom teaching position in an urban school setting and would provide student loan forgiveness in exchange for a two-year teaching commitment. On the second round of the interview process, however, Nia's application was rejected. Nia began to look for jobs in the field that combined her many interests while intersecting with education. She applied and was hired as a public relations and advertising consultant for a small supplementary tutoring business in the large metropolitan city where she resided during the time of our interview. The business served schools that had not met adequate yearly progress and were mandated by district policy to provide independent supplemental tutoring to their students.

To Nia's surprise, the district underwent many policy changes soon after she relocated for the job and the demand for supplemental tutoring waned. The tutoring business eventually folded and Nia was out of a job for almost a full year. Nia described the period when she was out of work as a hopeless time. She relied heavily on the emotional and financial support of her family and local relatives, who allowed her to live with them. In the midst of her despair, and with her mother's encouragement, she decided to re-apply to Teach for America. On the second attempt, Nia was accepted into the program and agreed to attend a mandatory summer training program that lasted for five weeks.

The summer training that Nia received to prepare her for her first year in the classroom took place primarily at a non-profit, early childhood education center. According to their website, the non-profit organization had received national acclaim for providing affordable, high quality childcare, early childhood education, and comprehensive support services to working families. For the first four hours of the day, Nia and two other peers would assist a lead pre-k teacher in a classroom together. Afterwards, Nia and her cohort, along with two instructors from

the alternative certification program, would convene to discuss fundamentals in teaching. With the help of the instructor, Nia and her small cohort worked to envision academic goals for their students. They created and administered a pre-test to approximately ten to twelve pre-k students in their class. The group followed by designing activities for reading instruction, which they enacted as clinical, co-teaching exercises. They also created and administered post-tests.

Nia alluded to the deficiencies of the preparation that was provided to her by the program. Nia felt that her preparation experiences were not comparable to the actual experiences of a teacher in a regular, public school classroom setting. Specifically, she talked about the gap in class size between the public school classroom and the pre-k classroom setting. Nia felt inadequately prepared for a regular sized classroom. She also criticized the brief duration of the training and the programs' overall narrow focus on data informed instruction and test scores. Nia also voiced her concerns about the effects of the preparation on others in her cohort, some of whom went on to receive their assignments in high school settings where they had no prior experience.

To add to her frustration, there was a delay to Nia's first teaching assignment because of confusion about her placement. Nia had hoped to be assigned to a kindergarten classroom so that she could be placed on an elementary school teacher's pay scale. Having been out of work, Nia felt desperate to recoup her finances. However, the placement she was likely to receive would be in a pre-kindergarten classroom. Her mother encouraged her by stating; "God has a plan for you. Whether it's pre-K or kindergarten, God has entrusted you with whatever you get so just accept the fact… they're all His children and He's trusting you to teach them."

Nia was assigned to a pre-kindergarten classroom about two months after the first day of school. Once Nia arrived to her assignment, she received a chilly reception from the school

principal who had only recently been made aware of Nia's placement and had already filled her

position. Accordingly, Nia's first year was full of challenges and awkward moments. She found

it difficult to establish her own rhythm of consistency and order in the classroom. She asserted,

"It was the timing of it and the way we were brought in that kind of threw me off. It was a rocky

foundation and I was never completely stable in my classroom. It wasn't solid like the way I

wanted it throughout the year."

        Learning how to teach in graduate school. During her first year as a teacher, Nia was

assigned a mentor from the alternative program. Nia's mentor provided her with direct feedback

and support throughout the duration of her two-year commitment. The alternative program

mentor visited Nia's classroom once every few months. When she met with her mentor, they

discussed Nia's "vision for the classroom" and the practical steps that she would take to reach

measurable achievement outcomes for each one of her students. Meetings with the alternative

program mentor focused explicitly on mapping out the scope and sequence of the curriculum and

tracking scoring benchmarks to determine students' mastery of the curriculum.

        Nia began a Master of Arts in Teaching program at a nearby large, public state university

during the summer before her second year of teaching. The program was created as a pathway to

certification for Nia and others like her who had been accepted into the alternative program.

Members of the alternative program were entitled to receive a scholarship that covered half of

the cost of the university tuition. Given these offerings, Nia felt the masters program would be a

good opportunity to advance her pedagogical knowledge and advance her career as a teacher.

Citing Freire's (2000) classical text on critical pedagogy, Nia declared, "It was rigorous, but it

was important because they really opened [our] eyes to everything…like we had to read

Pedagogy of the Oppressed…they exposed us to *everything* that we would need to know,

working in urban schools." When describing the framework of the program, Nia emphasized the focus on "whatever is best for the child" and "the whole child."

Nia informed me of a particular course that she found useful entitled, "The Descriptive Review of the Child." During the course, Nia participated in ongoing dialogue with a small group of peers for regularly scheduled, independent meetings. She explained that each member of the group took turns providing an in-depth description of a student in their respective classes. In so doing, they laid out the selected student's physical presence and body language, disposition and temperament, social connections with others, interests and preferences, preferred modes of thinking and learning, and a target area for support (Himley & Carrini, 2000). After the presentation, the group provided supportive feedback related to the target area. The group would continue to receive updates on the student and collaborate on supportive measures. According to Nia, the meetings required the use of protocols for discussion as well as the selection of a chairperson for the group. Nia found that the course enabled her to focus on acquiring needed information about all of her students—especially those who are easily misunderstood or who go unnoticed.

During her second year in the classroom, Nia was reassigned to teach third grade. As a third grade teacher, Nia encountered many new challenges with classroom and behavioral management. She was often overwhelmed with working and being a full-time student, simultaneously. According to Nia, the assistance of two additional mentor teachers—a university mentor and a district mentor—who regularly visited her classroom during her second year, made a significant positive difference. Nia's master's program provided her with an assigned mentor who visited Nia monthly, as did the school district where Nia was employed. Both mentors helped Nia to feel less self-conscious about her shortcomings as a new teacher by

reassuring her about their intentions to provide support. They observed her classroom but provided encouragement to her by listening intently and engaging in meaningful dialogue about a plethora of issues including classroom management, behavior management, and instructional strategies. They also helped Nia with planning and finding needed resources for instruction.

Based on the experiences that she shared, Nia seemed well supported as a novice classroom teacher. She was thankful for the encouragement and care that was provided to her by her university and district mentors. Nia expressed some resentment about the shortcomings of her teacher preparation experience, however. She mentioned that at the time, she was well aware of the limitations of a five-week training period. She felt ill-prepared to take over the challenge of leading a classroom at the conclusion of the training. Still, Nia felt the program offered her an unprecedented opportunity to gain immediate employment and entry into a field she had long pursued. She noted the program's success in opening the field to those who have decided on a career in education.

Feeling responsible for African American students. The city where Nia grew up is well-known in the history of the American Civil Rights Movement. As a child, Nia's mother often told stories about her personal ties to the movement—mainly through the family's membership to one of several local Black churches. As we reflected on this aspect of her experience, Nia concluded that she took the historical significance of her birthplace for granted when she was younger. However, over time, Nia grew to develop a profound sense of respect for those in the movement who worked tirelessly to redress social inequalities for African Americans.

Moreover, as we continued, I learned that Nia felt a personal duty to build upon this legacy. Like those from the Civil Rights era, Nia felt responsible for the personhood and well

being of African American children. She insisted that her sense of responsibility came from an

urgency to act. Nia asserted:

> People are always talking about an issue but never asking, what is my contribution to
>
> solving this issue? Am I doing anything to change it? A part of why I got into this
>
> industry was because I just realized [I was] doing all this talking about education and
>
> children but [I was] not really doing anything. Now I feel like I'm doing something.

Here, Nia illustrates a strong commitment to follow up her analysis of the issues in education

with actionable steps. Becoming an exemplary teacher to African American students is Nia's

best response to seeking a solution to the problems that she sees in urban school settings.

According to Nia, African American students in urban school settings are sometimes

poorly regarded by the broader public—especially for reasons associated with their low

socioeconomic status. During our conversations, Nia explained her perspective about the

correlation between negative assumptions and low expectations for low income, African

American students and their disparate academic performance. While Nia does not deny that some

of her students are adversely affected by poverty, she observed that all of her students bring

practical knowledge and skills that are useful to classroom learning endeavors. Nia spoke

extensively about her kindergarten students' aptitude for independent problem-solving and

"common sense;" citing specific examples about how some of them navigate their way home

from school by themselves, secure and entertain themselves at home during afterschool hours,

and prepare snacks or meals for themselves when they get hungry. Since many of her students

display strength in these areas, Nia concludes that they are bright and capable learners.

Nia sees herself and other African American teachers at her school as capable role

models to African American students. She explained that she tries to pass on certain cultural

values such as historical knowledge, cultural pride, collectivity, and hard work ethics. Nia feels

confident that other teachers at her school have similar goals. While we conversed, Nia

expressed warm feelings about her colleagues and the collegial work environment at her school.

She described the sense of comfort that characterized her predominantly African American

school. Further, Nia described her feeling of being a "member of a team" along with

administrators, staff, and parents who are working to ensure each student reaches their highest

potential.

Since Nia believes that African Americans should take the lead in educating African

American students, she expressed some concerns about the paucity of younger African

Americans entering the field. However, Nia noted that some African American teachers rely too

heavily on their shared racial identity with students instead of truly getting to know them. She

recalled a conversation she once had with an African American parent who felt that sometimes

White teachers tried harder than Black teachers to get to know her child. Thus, Nia stresses the

importance of building individual relationships with her students in order to learn how to best

meet their needs.

Creating opportunities for success. Nia avoids presuming to know everything about her

African American students. Many of Nia's stories about her students and her classroom imply

that she takes great care to learn as much as she can regarding their learning preferences,

interests, and backgrounds. In one example, Nia told me a story about her students' reaction to a

class discussion about the leadership of Martin Luther King Jr. During the discussion, Nia

recalled that her students probed her for more details about the harsh conditions that African

Americans faced in the past. In response to her students' curiosity and enthusiasm, Nia began to

engage her students in a broader discussion about historical moments when African Americans

rallied together and worked hard to achieve their goals. When the discussion concluded and Nia turned her back for a moment, one student broke out into a gospel rendition. Nia described the moment when the whole class joined in unison:

> They just started singing [a gospel song] like they were in church. Turned out, they learned the song in music class. It was a gospel song that was just so appropriate for the moment since we had just talked about working towards your goals, MLK, and Civil Rights…they made this connection between this song we're learning in music, and the lyrics of the song, and what we were learning about.

Nia felt proud about the personal connection that her students eventually made between their discussion and the gospel song they had learned in music class. Her story suggests that her students feel comfortable sharing their personal connections to content matter in the classroom. As the lesson unfolded, Nia said that she encouraged discussion by soliciting her students' personal responses and allowing space for their questions. By paying attention to her students' responses, Nia was able to glean more information about her students' interests and learning preferences—in this case, their yearning for historical knowledge about African Americans and their love for music and song. She would later provide me with a lesson plan that integrates music and song to engage student's higher order thinking skills. Nia was also able to assess her students' understanding throughout the discussion and to guide them as they constructed personal meaning.

As mentioned previously, Nia is keenly aware of the working class backgrounds of her students. Nia considers her students' economic backgrounds when distinguishing between important aspects of their identity and experiences—notably, the work related obligations that she said prevents some of her students' parents from being at home after school. She recalled a

story about a girl in her class who regularly cited the absence of adult assistance at home as the reason for her incomplete homework. While some teachers might be overwhelmed with pity for this student's circumstance, Nia sees an opportunity to empower this student with practical life skills by building her independence. To offset these challenges, Nia provides instructions and leads the class in beginning their homework at the end of every school day so that they can complete it independently at home. She reaches out to her students' older siblings at the elementary school for their assistance as well. The particular student from this example is not consistent about completing her homework. However, Nia persists in assigning homework to all of her students and celebrates those who submit their work.

In the classroom, Nia emphasizes developing her students' love for learning so that they might become lifelong learners. She cultivates this quality by promoting active learning via hands-on activities and by helping her students make practical connections between school and home. Nia described a writing unit on sequencing that lasted several weeks. To introduce the unit, Nia taught her students a song about the process of getting ready for school. Nia guided her students in drawing picture sequences to represent their own morning routines and slowly adding the written, step-by-step details. For further guided practice, Nia extended the lesson by leading her class in following a recipe to make apple butter. Students culminated the unit by completing at-home projects where they wrote about the steps for making a favorite family recipe with a relative.

While talking about her classroom practices, sharing a learning unit, and describing class events, I thought more about the ways that Nia searched for and created opportunities for her students to experience academic success.   Nia takes her cues from her students. She makes space for students' questions and commentary by observing and listening intently for information

regarding their backgrounds, interests, and learning preferences. She responds accordingly by meeting the apparent needs of her students and by promoting a love for learning.

Becoming a disciplinarian. Several conversations about behavior and classroom management arose between Nia and I. Specifically, Nia voiced some concerns about the militaristic environment that sometimes characterized her school. She worried that certain school procedures, including daily silent lunches and silence-only hallway observances, were overly punitive. Nia disclosed,

> Last year, there was supposed to be silent lunch every day and the kids had to skip a seat between every student. And I just remember thinking [that] this is obsessive. I remember last year, during pre-planning, he [the principal] made a comment, 'I'm going to let you all have recess this year.' And I'm thinking in my mind, they never had recess before? They never went outside?

Nia's observations of these strict school practices were confounded by larger worries about the effects of silencing her students. She insisted that her students understand the purpose for the rules, and not simply do what they are told. She pondered, "Am I teaching them [my students] that they don't have a voice?"

Since struggling with classroom and behavior management during the previous academic year, however, Nia has begun to reconsider the importance of order and structure to the overall functioning of the learning environment. During the current academic year, Nia has adjusted her approaches to reflect the ethos of the school in more subtle and nuanced ways. She told me a story about a speaker who was once brought in to explain liberal approaches to discipline, which discourage authoritarian practices and encourage student voice and dissent. While reflecting on the talk, Nia provided a critique that elevated how the speakers' comments lacked consideration

of the African American social and historical context. Further, Nia seemed to believe that a more balanced approach to authoritative discipline must consider the social positions of her African American students. To this point, she asserted:

> I think it's important to teach our kids that they have a voice, it's okay to be outspoken, and feel empowered. However, we have to balance that with teaching them to respect authority. This is something that we have to teach explicitly to our kids. Oftentimes, our Black children are seen as hostile or perceived as a threat when they challenge authority.

Nia explained that she complies with making her students stand in line and observe silences in the hallways, but not always in the lunchroom. This is an unreasonable request, according to Nia. Her comments helped me to consider the ways in which she is negotiating her role as a disciplinarian. She discussed the tension between teaching blind obedience and providing discipline and structure in a well-ordered environment. She also identified the tension that exists for her in teaching students how to identify useful rules and when to resist arbitrary or unjust ones: "I am not teaching them that the rules are important all the time, and I sometimes struggle with it. But at the same time, I don't want it to be where the behaviors overwhelm the environment and we can't learn."

Demonstrating care and love. Ms. Williams, a middle-aged African American woman with several years of classroom experience as a paraprofessional, has been assigned to work full-time in Nia's classroom. According to Nia, Ms. Williams is a vital resource to both her classroom and the entire school community. Ms. Williams' experience, work ethic, good judgment, and reliability are assets that many other staff members rely upon. Nia often relies on the strong model of discipline that Ms. Williams demonstrates. She reflected on her observations of Ms. Williams' approaches to discipline saying that, "[she] has that presence like, you know,

you've got to straighten up." Nia attributes Ms. Williams' strong but balanced approach to discipline to her experiences as an educator and as a mother. Accordingly, Nia is confident that she too will acquire a stronger approach to discipline with time and experience.

Due to high rates of transience at her school, some of Nia's students move frequently throughout the district. At our second meeting, Nia mentioned that she had just received two new students and was preparing to lose another two soon—her classroom was always in flux. However, Ms. Williams noted to Nia that despite the revolving door phenomenon within their classroom, all of Nia's students display a sense of belonging. Nia recalled Ms. Williams' observations one day when she mentioned to Nia "…everybody that's in your class just kind of fits right in. Even the kids who aren't here anymore, for the time they were here, they just sort of fell right in line and just fit." In this quote, Ms. Williams provides Nia with useful feedback and encouragement. Further, her comments imply that sufficient space is created for each student to feel like an important member of the classroom—no matter how short or long their stay.

Making space for each student to feel like an important member of the classroom is of utmost importance to Nia. Moreover, Nia voiced a commitment to ensuring that each of her students feels important and loved. For instance, Nia greets her students in the morning and dismisses each student in the afternoon with a warm hug. Nia believes that this special ritual helps each student feel acknowledged and appreciated. She gauges for students who are not comfortable with receiving physical affection from her. For those students, Nia finds some way to provide them with special, individualized acknowledgement including special gifts, "high-fives," or "fist bumps."

In another example, Nia divulged about one of her former students, Michael. Michael had trouble transitioning to kindergarten; especially after his mother was no longer able to escort him

to class in the mornings. He experienced daily meltdowns and tantrums that, according to Nia, began the first day of school. Instead of mellowing over time, Michael's behavior intensified into violent outbursts that put him, Nia, and the other students at risk of physical harm. Nia and her school counselors began to note Michael's difficulties and to collaborate on strategies and interventions to help him. However, their efforts were unsuccessful. Nia described her feelings of anxiety, bewilderment, and frustration during these times. She said, "It just made me so frustrated and nervous for the other kids because I didn't know when he was going to snap…and it also made me nervous because I was like, what is he going through?" After a few months, Michael's family moved to another area so Michael was transferred to a different school.

Nia endured many trials while she was Michael's teacher; his behaviors even required that Nia physically restrain him on several occasions. All the while, she continued to verbally express her love and care to Michael. She recalled one incident saying, "I would usually take him to another room so that he can calm down, but this time he was still acting out and I had to restrain him. But I told him, 'I still love you', and I kept saying that to him because I wanted him to know that I still care for him." This story helped me to consider the tenacity of Nia's efforts to ensure that her students feel important, loved, and cared for, even when doing so proves difficult.

Growing in faith. Nia draws heavily on her faith as a source of strength to endure other similar hardships in her classroom. She stated, "When I'm having hard days or when [a] child is stressing me out, I remember that God has entrusted me with this. He gives me an opportunity to take care of other people's kids. So I kind of take it as, these are his children, and he is entrusting me with this." Nia revealed that she is seeking to grow stronger in her faith and practices certain rituals daily, including prayer and Bible study. She seemed proud to share her

strong sense of faith with her mother and boyfriend and recounted several stories about their mutual encouragement of each other in these matters.

Moving to the "next level" in teaching. During our last meeting, Nia divulged some of her long-term career goals. She expressed her desire to provide the type of support that was provided to her as a novice teacher. Specifically, she envisioned herself providing feedback and encouragement to other new teachers and sharing resources for instruction and management. Nia felt a particular sense of responsibility to help new teachers who struggled to adjust to the demands of teaching. She stated: "I really appreciated the support that I got, especially when I was having a hard time…If someone was having a major issue with behavior management, for example, I could tell them my story, because I have been there. I can tell them what works and what doesn't because I've had two different experiences from last year to this year." Nia's comments reflected a desire to advance to what she called the "next level" of her career. According to Nia, at this stage of her career she would be able to share the practical knowledge that she has gained from her experiences with other teachers.

Although she no longer teaches pre-school, I also learned that Nia still holds a deep affinity for very young children in early childhood. Nia believes strongly in the role of early childhood education in preparing young students to be lifelong learners. I was not surprised when Nia announced her dream to one day open a child daycare center; specifically given her experience in business and public relations. She talked about her plan to use her upcoming summer vacation to begin drafting a business plan.

Finally, Nia reflected on her past dream of becoming a writer. Nia shared some of her criticisms of modern day news reporting and journalism. She lamented the preponderance of personal opinion and the lack of fact checking. She wondered aloud about whether she should

have pursued journalism in college or whether she would ever write again. Nia wasn't sure what

she would write about if she did re-establish her long lost passion, but she said she would write

non-fiction—"probably something creative."

Case 2: Cassidy's Story

Cassidy was a third grade teacher who was 26-years old and in her second full year of

teaching third grade at the time of our meetings. Cassidy was the first participant to respond to

the email correspondence and to complete the initial online survey that was requested from each

nominated teacher. Initially, Cassidy was eager to participate in the study but as time went on it

seemed that she was much less able to commit to the initial times that were scheduled. As a

former third grade teacher, I felt I understood some of Cassidy's scheduling issues. Further, as a

third grade teacher preparing for the yearly high-stakes examination in just a few months,

Cassidy was under immense pressure. I would learn more about Cassidy's frustrations as we

continued. Given the stress she was under and her limited time availability, Cassidy and I agreed

to meet for shorter amounts of time, but more frequently. We met a total of six times and spoke

for thirty minutes each time.

A slideshow with pictures of African American students, most of whom are posing with

tidy smiles while completing seatwork at tables, scrolls automatically at the top of Cassidy's

school's website. Other slideshows fill the homepage of the website and show pictures of

different visitors to the school during programs and celebrations including a community reading

initiative, a winter drama production, and a school visit from local professional athletes. Some

of the pictures feature student art and other elaborate displays like teachers' bulletin boards

created from students' work or book displays in the library. Black educators, both female and

male and of various ages, are the adults most prominent in the pictures. Describing the history of

the school, the website offers that, "our students are never defined by the zip code in which they reside, but rather the global learners and citizens they are destined to become."

Cassidy was the only participant in the study who requested that all of our visits occur in her classroom after school. On my first few visits, the school secretary—a young Black woman who alerted Cassidy of my presence, greeted me courteously. I was asked to wait in the administrative office until Cassidy came to walk me to her classroom. While waiting for Cassidy, I noticed that almost all of the students, teachers, staff, and parents coming in and out of the office were Black. On one occasion, a middle-aged White woman wearing blue jeans came into the office with a student who she was restraining by their hands and arms and on another occasion I saw a young White woman walking down Cassidy's hallway. However, most of the teachers I encountered in the hallways after school were Black. Eventually, I was allowed to walk myself to Cassidy's classroom on my visits. I began to notice several quotes by prominent African Americans displayed in the hallways including those of Martin Luther King Jr. and Benjamin Elijah Mays; both of who had deep ties to other schools, neighborhoods, and communities surrounding the school.

During the 2014-2015 school year, African American students comprised 97% of the student body at Cassidy's school. Almost all of the students (99.4%) qualified for free or reduced price meals. The school served a total of 532 students from preschool through fifth grade and employed 38 full time teachers, of which 31 were Black (GOSA, 2015). In terms of achievement scores on standardized tests, the school had fared poorly for several years when compared to other schools in the district and in the state. Data from the district website suggests that the school's college and career readiness performance index scores had been one of the lowest in the district for the past three years. Due to the schools' low performance, recent

proposals had been made to close the school and send its students to a new charter academy, further away.

Education as a family tradition. Cassidy, a third grade teacher, was born in 1987 and was the youngest of three children in a self-described African American family. Raised by her mother and father in a predominantly African American middle-class neighborhood, Cassidy matriculated through grade school in the urban district where she now teaches and still resides with her parents in the neighborhood where she grew up. Early in our meetings together, Cassidy described the close bond that characterized the relationships she has with her family of origin, extended family members, and close family friends. She told me that some of her most treasured moments occur during major U.S. holidays when she and other family members gather at the homes of relatives in her mother's southern hometown, one state away. In particular, Cassidy looks forward to catching up on life events, sharing meals, and having leisure time with her adult siblings and young cousins. During these times, senior family members also take interest in Cassidy's accomplishments and plans. Speaking of their encouragement to her throughout her life Cassidy said, "Whenever I see them they are always telling me how proud they are of me and that I should keep doing good things."

As Cassidy talked more about her family, I began to understand that many of her family stories relayed strong familial bonds that are linked to maintaining important family traditions, like education and high achievement. For example, when deciding which high school she would attend, Cassidy elected to continue the family tradition of attending a historically Black high school that is noted in the city for having an excellent college prep program. Cassidy excelled as a student in the schools' magnet program for mathematics and science—earning top grades and recognition for her accomplishments with the National Honor Society and Beta Club. Her

academic success in high school was not a surprise to her or her family members. Like her older

siblings who also attended her high school, she had an almost perfect grade point average.

Family tradition also played an important role in Cassidy's college selection process.

Cassidy grew up in close proximity to the Historically Black College where her parents and her

older brother graduated (her older sister also graduated from an HBCU in the family's home

state). While growing up, Cassidy watched the television show, *A Different World*, which

depicts the experiences of Black students at a fictional HBCU. She said, "I just wanted to

experience that. When you grow up and you see it on television, it just seems so fun. I just

wanted to go to one and to support my [HBCU] college and university. I'm proud to say that I

went to one [an HBCU] and a proud supporter of it." Cassidy yearned for a familiar college

experience—one that reflected what she had heard, seen, and observed.

Being her mother's protégé. Cassidy was proud of her family and their tradition of

excellence in education. According to Cassidy, her success during her early schooling was due,

in large part, to their mother's support and involvement in daily matters pertaining to their

development. In particular, Cassidy explained that her mother's insistence that she become a

well-rounded and respectable member of the community, in addition to a scholar, was very

apparent during our conversations. Commenting on her mother she said, "My mom was always

supportive of me…whenever I had anything due, she made sure I was on top of it. Projects,

homework, any contests, I was in it. Even at church…she's involved in so much and I see how

she interacts with all of these people. She's so sweet to everyone and people love her."

As a part of her memory box, Cassidy shared with me a beautiful picture of her mother

whose bright smile sparkled just like Cassidy's. She also shared a folder that she called her

"mother's stash". The folder was about an inch thick and made from blue cardboard, obviously

worn with time and overflowing with various awards from Cassidy's school achievements as well as extracurricular essay writing and oratorical contests. According to Cassidy, it was her mother who brought many of the extracurricular opportunities to her awareness. Cassidy leapt at her mother's suggestions and developed a positive outlet for her energy. She said, "I've always had a lot of energy. I'm still energetic. My mom just knew that I had all of this energy and she saw that I was interested in these things." When I asked Cassidy about her assessment of the benefits of these experiences she shared that these experiences helped her develop a curiosity and thirst for learning. Cassidy shared that her childhood extracurricular activities cultivated her "love [for] learning about new things, reading books…getting on the Internet and searching for information…just [wanting] to learn everything."

Cassidy's stories about her relationship with her mother helped me to understand the ways in which she felt that her mother had helped her to channel her energy in productive and personally fulfilling ways. In addition to supporting Cassidy's extracurricular pursuits, Cassidy also learned from her mother that their own community was a site that is ripe for their contributions. Indeed, as an active member in their family church, Cassidy's mother seemed to exhibit a vivacious and energetic personality. Cassidy told me that her mother keeps busy leading and serving on auxiliary boards in their church including "Sunday school, vacation bible school, and the adult choir." As a young person, Cassidy was encouraged to be active in their family church. Describing her church activities, Cassidy said,

> I would lead solos, and I was also a teacher for vacation Bible school during college…if they ever needed anybody to speak or say anything I was always on the program, like doing the welcome, or playing a part, or something like that. You know, youth Sunday, every fourth Sunday. I participated [in] everything.

Cassidy's mother was also instrumental in cultivating her daughter's talent for creative dance. As our conversations proceeded, dance became a central theme from her school and community experiences during her young adulthood. As a little girl, Cassidy had shown early interest in creative expression and was enrolled in gymnastics and cheerleading. Further, Cassidy's mother began to take note of her serious interest in dance after she began to perform regularly with a small dance troupe started by a school friend at another church. Soon, Cassidy's mother began a dance troupe at their own church so that Cassidy could continue to perform and develop her skills. In high school, Cassidy joined the dance team, which was well regarded throughout her school district. Further, as a member of the dance troupe for the basketball team at her college, Cassidy competed in state and regional competitions.

As I listened to Cassidy talk about her family, I thought about the sense of pride that she expressed when describing the family traditions that she maintained. Moreover, Cassidy was born into a tradition of high achievement, excellence, and faith that she values and gratefully embraces. As the youngest child in her family, Cassidy seemed to relish in continuing the traditions of her family members including continuing to attend the family church, attending the same historically Black high school as her brother and sister, and graduating from an HBCU. Like her older siblings and her parents, Cassidy came to develop an appreciation for high scholastic achievement and personal development.

Acting as a supporter, facilitator, and role model, Cassidy's mother encouraged Cassidy to dedicate her time to academic as well as extracurricular pursuits and talents. Significantly, due to the direct efforts of her mother, Cassidy was molded into a well-rounded young person with deep interests and broad experiences. Cassidy helped me to understand the particular appreciation and devotion that she has to her mother because of her support and care.

Additionally, as I listened to Cassidy, I learned that the collective achievements of her African American family are a great source of pride to her. Later, when Cassidy described the role that she plays with her students, I also came to see that Cassidy tries to instill a similar sense of pride in their shared cultural achievements.

Choosing teaching and regrets. I was not surprised to learn of Cassidy's early interest in the profession when she explained that after over 20 years, her mother still maintains a long-term substitute teaching position in the district. Cassidy recalled early memories about her mother teaching at her elementary school, saying:

> My mom was really, really hands-on at my elementary school. I remember that everybody knew her; all the teachers, all the students, all the people in the office…and I just remember being in her classroom after I was done with class…writing on the chalkboard and acting like I was teaching like her…that always comes back to my memory when I think about my childhood.

Cassidy recalled her mother's serious regard for her responsibilities as a substitute teacher. Specifically, she remembered staying late into the evenings at school with her mother while she prepared lessons and materials for the next day. Cassidy also shared that her mother is currently pursuing her long-time dream of becoming a certified, elementary school teacher. She has taken and passed the state certification exams and only needs to complete the required coursework and student teaching practicum for her professional license.

Although Cassidy idolized teaching as a young girl via her mother, she developed an interest in animal sciences while matriculating in the science and mathematics magnet program at her high school and decided to become a veterinarian. When choosing which HBCU she would attend, Cassidy chose a school that was well known for their veterinary science program.

However, during her first semester, she changed her major to Pediatric Nursing. By the end of

the semester, she declared her major in Elementary Education. The changes that Cassidy

described seemed to occur abruptly; as if there were other outside factors involved in her

decision to change her major twice and declare a major at the end of her first semester.

Moreover, I wondered if Cassidy faced any challenges with funding her undergraduate education

and experiencing academic success as a science major. When I asked Cassidy to explain her

reasoning for changing her major, she stated, "I started in August, but by December I had

changed my major to elementary education…I wanted to go ahead and declare because I knew

that the longer it takes you to decide on what you want to do, the longer you'll be in school and

the more you have to pay."

Cassidy had only a few recollections of her HBCU teacher preparation experience from

2006-2010. However, the stories she shared seemed to highlight that she felt she had too few

significant opportunities to connect theory and practice. In one example of this point, Cassidy

explained that her teacher education instructors sometimes utilized useful approaches, such as

small group work, in her college courses. However, there were few efforts made to help Cassidy

transfer these activities into her teaching practices. She argued, "…even though I did it in my

courses, I didn't really learn it or how to apply it. I didn't understand why we were doing that.

Now, sometimes I have flashbacks about us doing things in small groups or things like that, and I

get it now, but it didn't really make sense at the time."

On the other hand, Cassidy noted that her student teaching practicum was a significant

highlight of her teacher preparation experience; mainly, because of her cooperating teacher, a

veteran African American woman. Cassidy seemed to have learned a lot from her cooperating

teacher. She especially learned important principles of classroom management such as

implementing daily routines, establishing clear and consistent expectations, and providing students with positive reinforcement. She noted that, "There wasn't any nonsense. No, 'I'm not going to do my work'…she didn't have those types of problems. It was so organized, like everyday. Like she would have this center and you're going to do this assignment. And for what they didn't understand, she made modifications. And they just really, really knew their routines."

While some of the lessons that she learned from her cooperating teacher, who taught at a predominantly White school in the rural south, have transferred successfully to Cassidy's context, others have not. Moreover, it seemed that some of her current roles as a teacher were never discussed or addressed during her undergraduate teacher education. Speaking on some of the shortcomings of her program, Cassidy noted, "They didn't tell us you're not only going to be a teacher, but you're going to be a counselor, you're going to be a parent, and you're going to be a nurse." Here, Cassidy alludes to her sense of unpreparedness for many of the duties she has acquired in her current teaching role. She went on to describe that she previously held simplistic notions about the teaching profession that indulged idealized fantasies rather than the realities of the profession. She said,

> …I was like; I'm going to teach! You just stand in front of the classroom and teach. You have summers off and weekends off. You get off at 3. You have the rest of the day...if only they knew. That's just frustrating to me that people view teaching as just that. But I understand because before I was teaching that was my thinking. So I think the hardest thing was just realizing everything teaching entails. Not just teaching, but writing lesson plans, standards, organizing, grading, and parents, and conferences, and faculty meetings, in addition to like workshops. It's a lot!

As Cassidy continued her critique of her teacher preparation program, I began to understand that Cassidy had felt blindsided and overwhelmed by the demands of teaching as a new teacher in her current teaching context. I wondered if there was any possible way that she could have understood the reality of teaching as a pre-service teacher. Lamenting over her feelings of unpreparedness she added:

I think that people [teacher educators] need to be real. Just be honest. Because [teaching] is not what I thought it would be…Tell us why it changes from day to day—you may be teaching this way one day, then next week they want you to do something totally different. Just be honest about the educational world. I wish that someone had done that with me [pause] told me the truth.

Upon graduation from college in 2010, Cassidy sought employment as an elementary education teacher back in her hometown but was unsuccessful. She took a job instead as a prekindergarten teacher in a state sponsored, prekindergarten program in her district. Cassidy enrolled in an online Master of Education degree program in curriculum and instruction while simultaneously working as a full-time teacher. The program took a blended approach to face-to-face and online learning so Cassidy completed assignments online during the week and met for class with the instructor and her classmates for one weekend per month. Overall, Cassidy still struggled to understand how to apply what she was learning in her master's program. She felt that the misalignment between her prekindergarten teaching assignment and what she was learning in her program impeded her application of theory. She argued, "I had to work really hard to find a [master's] program that would accept me since I wasn't teaching in a regular K-5 classroom setting…with my masters I still have flashbacks about what we were doing then and I can see how it applies now, but I didn't really get it until I actually had my first classroom."

While Cassidy reflected about her teacher education experiences, I thought about how her comments implied some sense of regret about choosing teaching as a career path. On several occasions during our conversations, she suggested it was too late for her to choose a different career—"Once you have gotten your degree, and your training, and you have started your career, it may not be so easy to just stop and start all over." Further, Cassidy seemed to have experienced some trepidation about making the best use of her time and money as an undergraduate student. Choosing a major that would allow her to complete her degree in four years and gain immediate employment was important to Cassidy during her first year in college. However, her reflections on her teacher education experience denote that she feels she made a rash decision based on incomplete information about the complexities of teaching. I wondered if Cassidy would have felt better prepared to make an informed decision about her career path if her undergraduate program had emphasized the preparation of urban schoolteachers, in particular.

Giving and receiving from colleagues. Cassidy intimated several stories about the nature of her relationships with colleagues as a new teacher. As a pre-kindergarten teacher, Cassidy co-taught alongside a veteran African American woman teacher for two and a half years. She described their relationship as warm and collegial and told me how much she had enjoyed having access to a more experienced colleague for several reasons including curriculum planning and discussing strategies to address individual students' needs. However, after Cassidy transitioned into her role as a third grade early intervention program teacher, she began to realize that some of her new elementary education colleagues would be less willing to offer her support and guidance. At the onset of her transition, Cassidy recalled that one of her colleagues, a veteran African American woman teacher, stated, "Well, you're on your own now. You will

need to figure it out. I can't do everything for you." More generally, Cassidy felt isolated in her new role and mentioned very little in terms of formal induction, mentoring, or support from administrators.

Cassidy also described the difficulty in transitioning into her new role in the middle of the school year. She related that in her new position as an early intervention program teacher, she began to realize more fully the dynamic roles of a classroom teacher. Cassidy had no materials to assist with her work as a supplemental instructor and had no prior exposure to the third grade curriculum that she would be expected to cover. Luckily, another one of Cassidy's new colleagues, a veteran African American woman teacher, stepped in to provide informal mentoring and support by sharing materials and inviting Cassidy to her classroom to make observations about strategies for providing early intervention support to third grade students.

After teaching as an early intervention program teacher for one semester, Cassidy secured a position as a third grade, regular education teacher for the 2012-2013 school year at the school where she was employed during our interviews. Although she was not assigned a formal district mentor, Cassidy was pleased to find that her favorite teacher from elementary school was also a third grade teacher at her school and was willing to step into the role of mentor. Cassidy described that the teacher, a veteran African American woman, provided her with many classroom materials and suggestions for effective practices. According to Cassidy, the informal mentoring that her colleague provided included verbal praise and encouragement that helped her build confidence in her teaching skills. For example, Cassidy once recalled when the teacher complimented her saying, "You are doing so well, you're awesome…and if you can make it here, you can make it anywhere."

While Cassidy received informal support and guidance from a few veteran teachers, she also described the support that she provided to those and other veteran teachers, albeit different in nature. Specifically, Cassidy drew some distinction between what she termed, the "new school" way of teaching, which included differentiated instruction and technology integration and the "old school" way of teaching, which included primarily direct instruction. For instance, speaking about the differences between her and some veteran teachers, Cassidy explained,

> I know a lot of times they can learn from us. We learned how to do grouping and
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> differentiation. They know the old school way. But the new school way, that's all we ever
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> learned…something like, differentiation, things they [administrators] want to see in the
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> classroom, or how to put grades in, calibrating and using the Promethean board,
>
> technology…Yeah, I always help them [the veteran teachers].

Being a role model. Being a role model to all children, whether they are family members, church members, or students in her classroom, is a responsibility that Cassidy takes seriously. As a role model to children outside of school, Cassidy has taken on the responsibility of laying out a career pathway and acting as a guide for others that might follow. For example, she shared about times when she has provided advice about higher education to younger people who look up to her. When several of Cassidy's younger cousins and church members expressed interest in attending college, Cassidy was able to offer some guidance about school selection and the application process. She told me that she has persuaded several young people to attend her alma mater by making a compelling case to them about some of the benefits of attending and supporting HBCUs and by supporting them through the application process.

On the other hand, Cassidy's efforts with her students were quite different in that she sought to be a consummate role model for her students to look up to, admire, and desire to

emulate. The emphasis that Cassidy placed on her duty to be a positive role model was due in part to her critique about their being a lack of access and contact with positive, adult figures for her students to learn from. She asserted,

> I know that sometimes when some of them go home…they don't have anyone there that cares enough about them to sit down and work with them or tell them how to talk or how to respect an adult. So, pretty much whatever they see, they will emulate…I can tell what they have been around or who they have been talking to because children imitate the people they are around the most.

> In a more specific example, Cassidy described how the absence of positive, adult figures at home negatively influences her students' classroom behaviors. She told me a story about her struggles with some students who speak and act in a generally disrespectful manner by calling names, mocking, teasing, or bullying other students. She said, "Last year, I had a group of about seventeen girls and they spent so much time arguing and fighting and talking to each other any kind of way." Last year, Cassidy felt that she spent too much time diffusing arguments and admonishing the girls about how to show respect to each other. While reflecting on these experiences, Cassidy attributed her students' difficulties to non-school environments. She said, "I know it's because of home. At home, they have older siblings and older people around and they don't realize that they rub off on the child and they come to school with that. And they feel like they can talk to each other that kind of way…I have to break them out of that mindset."

Making the "best behaved class". As indicated in the quote above, Cassidy sought to change her students' mindsets about how to speak and behave appropriately at school. Accordingly, maintaining a safe and positive classroom atmosphere where students can focus solely on their learning, growth, and personal development is very important to Cassidy.

Cassidy told me that many of her students loved school because they saw her classroom as a place of escape from their difficult living situations. She stated, "You have a lot of students that deal with broken families, broken homes, homeless shelters, not getting enough food, abuse…when they come to school, they don't have to be in that environment anymore. They can be themselves, smile, laugh, have fun with other children, play and learn at the same time."

Cassidy noted that many of her students admire and seek to imitate her. Thus, Cassidy's approach to creating a positive classroom atmosphere begins with modeling the behaviors that she wants students to follow and providing consistent structure for her students to practice these behaviors. Cassidy intimated what I felt to be some of her most thrilling stories about being a role model while explaining her unique approaches to classroom management and her high expectations regarding student behavior. Speaking on the integral role she plays in providing a consistent structure she said, "I just feel like structure is really important for a student because if there is no structure, you can't concentrate and learn…You can have fun when you have a structured classroom...We can get loud and laugh, but when I hold my hand up or if I start counting or give you a look, then they [students] know to cut it off."

Cassidy described the highly structured classroom management plan that she implements. At the beginning of the school year she provides clear explanations to her students about school norms, classroom rules, routines, and rituals. One such ritual that Cassidy described were the "meetings" which take place at the beginning of every morning and allow Cassidy and her students an opportunity to discuss important school news, revisit teacher expectations, or address student concerns. Cassidy also provides her students with positive reinforcement through regular acknowledgement of behaviors that reflect school norms and classroom rules. Every day, Cassidy's students have the opportunity to accumulate tickets, which are used once a month for

bartering for special toys, prizes, and treats out of Cassidy's "Treasure Chest." Notably, students can earn tickets from Cassidy in the classroom, in the hallway, or at the playground—everywhere and anytime.

One of Cassidy's proudest moments in her career occurred when her students were selected as the "best behaved" class. She explained that the honor came about through a school wide discipline initiative that sought to recognize individual classes for appropriate school behavior and conduct; including silence in hallways, the lunchroom, orderly lines in the hallway, and participation and orderly conduct in specials classes (P.E., music, art, etc.). Further, every teacher, administrator, and staff member was provided with tokens that were then randomly distributed to classes based on their adherence to the school rules. As the class with the most tokens awarded, Cassidy's students were recognized at a special assembly. While all of the other students, teachers, and staff were seated, Cassidy and her students were given plastic crowns to wear as they walked into the auditorium on a pretend "red carpet" made from large, red butcher paper, and onto the stage. They were awarded with a pizza party and a field trip by the school principal. Cassidy explained,

> So, the principal was really impressed and she felt like she should show the entire school,
> this is what a model class looks like, this is what I want to see when I come down the
> hallways or when I come into your class. They did it in front of the whole school and
> they talked about how proud of us there were and they also got a field trip...So we got
> a bus, it was just us."

Cassidy's stories about being a role model and having the "best behaved" class in the school helped me to understand the ways in which Cassidy seeks for her students to learn to imitate her actions and behaviors, as they better reflect the norms and expectations of the school

and the broader society. Speaking on her duties as a role model she said, "I try to help give them a taste of what the real world is going to be like. The real world is not going to accept that kind of behavior. You have to learn how to be in the world from somewhere." Cassidy seeks to help her students acquire the norms, values, and behaviors that can enable them to navigate the world beyond their neighborhoods.

Teaching respect, responsibility, and discipline. I was particularly intrigued by Cassidy's explanation of her role in shaping her students' behaviors. As we continued, Cassidy extended her discussion about classroom management by highlighting that respect is an important behavior that she seeks to cultivate within her students. Cassidy shared that once, she overheard a student imitating her exact admonishment to use respectful language while interacting with peers. She said, "I don't think my students knew I was listening, but they were talking to each other and they were just having a debate and one person was like, shut up, just being rude, so then one of my students was like, don't tell him to shut up, tell him to be quiet, stop being rude to each other." Cassidy was proud to hear the student make the same demand from her peers. As a result of these types of exchanges, Cassidy feels successful in her efforts to teach her students how to show respect to their peers.

In another story, Cassidy illustrated her insistence upon teaching her students to also show respect for authority figures. She told me about a time when she decided to intervene in a conversation overheard between one of her female students and another third grade teacher who happened to be male. According to Cassidy, the student was speaking to the teacher in a disrespectful manner—" I couldn't tell who the child was and who was the adult. She was talking to him like she was on his level. It was just disrespectful. It was unacceptable." Cassidy pulled the student aside to explain to her the significance of disrespect towards authority, saying,

[That] man might give you a job in fifteen years and he might remember how you

behaved at school. You never know when you meet people how you might interact with

them along your life. You might come into contact with people you met ten years ago

and they might influence your life. They will remember you. You don't want that

impression to be stuck in his head.

In the above example, Cassidy connects her insistence on teaching respect for authority to

her students' interactions in the broader society and for purposes beyond the third grade.

Further, Cassidy hopes that her students' respect for authority figures will help them be well

regarded by teachers in other school settings who might aid in providing much needed

opportunities and resources. She stated, "…yes sir and yes ma'am goes a long way…If they go

to another school, and they're like, "yeah," "huh," a teacher might not even listen to what [they]

have to say just by that alone. But maybe if you say, yes ma'am or thank you or excuse me, they

may have a different opinion about you."

Cassidy is also adamant about teaching her students to show respect for themselves as

African Americans. During our conversations, Cassidy noted that her students were particularly

fascinated with learning about African Americans during a social studies unit on American

historical figures of the 19th and 20th centuries. She recalled a lesson where she introduced her

students to Frederick Douglas, the African American abolitionist, writer, orator, and intellectual.

The lesson culminated with a whole-group conversation about how African Americans from the

past had persevered against many odds. She told her students, "If Frederick Douglas, a former

slave, could do all that, just think about all of the possibilities that we have now." In this

example, Cassidy amplifies a part of the curriculum that she connected to both her and her

students' cultural heritage in order to spur them towards beliefs about their unlimited abilities and potential.

Cassidy believes that by instilling a sense of respect for their culture, her students will be better equipped to reject negative stereotypes and denigrations of African Americans. Cassidy told me a compelling account that was shared by one of the students who had been particularly engaged during her lesson about Frederick Douglas. Shortly after the lesson, the student reported to the class that he was offended to hear an older cousin use the word "nigga" to refer to himself and other African Americans. Cassidy beamed while recounting the morning her student came to school and told the class that he had bluntly interrupted his cousin saying, "Wait a minute, don't say that word! That is a bad word! It's disrespectful. Don't you know that people used to call us that a long time ago?" Cassidy was proud about the way in which this student was able to voice his discontent with the use of the word. She was hopeful that other students would be able to draw upon a sense of cultural pride to refute other similar denigrations of their culture.

Teaching her students to be responsible for their own education was another significant theme that resonated from Cassidy's stories. Further, Cassidy felt it was imperative that her students learn to be disciplined about completing their schoolwork and take full advantage of the learning opportunities that they are afforded. She told me a story about a boy in her class who sometimes refuses to complete writing assignments. She recalled telling him one day, "You are an African American male…you want to grow up and become a great man. So, you're going to have to write, whether you like it or not. We all do things that we don't necessarily like, but we have to do it." In her appeal to this student, Cassidy drew upon the background knowledge and relationship that she had with the boy's family to strengthen her point. She told him, "I know your grandma wants the best for you, I want the best for you, your mom wants the best for you,

but you have to want the best for yourself." Cassidy called these types of interactions with her students, "preaching," and she emphasized that she admonishes all of her students about the importance of self-discipline with their schoolwork, whenever she has the opportunity.

Overall, I was struck by Cassidy's determination to instill the virtues and practices of respect, responsibility, and discipline in her students. Her emphasis on these values seemed to be connected to an acute awareness of negative stereotypes about African Americans and the real effects that these stereotypes can have on students' lives. Speaking pointedly on this matter she argued, "Black people get so many stereotypes. But I want my kids to break the stereotypes, break the mold…show them that you're not what they perceive you to be…be more, be better." Cassidy seeks to shield her students from the negative perceptions of others by providing them with alternative images and messages. She also seeks to cultivate qualities within her students that she feels can refute negative beliefs and portrayals about African Americans.

Sparking students' interests. In addition to high expectations and standards for behavior, Cassidy expects all of her students to excel academically. She holds herself to a high standard of teaching and described her efforts to ensure that all of her students demonstrate growth. She told me a story about a student she once had that began third grade and could not read. Cassidy worked steadily with the student at school and gave her books and materials to take home to work on independently. By the end of the year, the student was reading at a third grade level and was able to pass all subjects of the end-of-the-year exam. Cassidy also shared her excitement about the results of a recent quarterly exam that her students took. She said, "So the benchmark reading assessment that they do is on the computer and we can compare their scores. All of my students improved since the last quarter. Some of them improved by more than

400 points." Cassidy finds witnessing her students' academic growth to be personally rewarding and said, "…this is why I teach, so that I can see that growth and progression."

Cassidy regularly integrates technology and differentiated instruction to enhance her teaching of the state standards. According to Cassidy, providing these types of learning opportunities aids her students in gaining mastery of the content; which is her primary instructional focus. She further noted that a mix of these approaches along with teacher-centered, direct instruction gives her students varied opportunities to practice and master basic skills and competencies. For instance, on one of my visits to Cassidy's classroom she explained that she had recently introduced her students to strategies for solving rectilinear equations and building upon their knowledge of perimeters and areas. Cassidy began the lesson by allowing several volunteers to use the Smart Board to diagram and discuss their problem-solving strategies aloud. Meanwhile, Cassidy provided feedback to the volunteers while the rest of the class listened and followed along by taking notes at their seats. For the rest of the week during the mathematics block, Cassidy's students continued to practice the concept collaboratively in small groups. They continued to use teacher-created prompts on the Smart Board along with dry erase boards and markers to help them diagram and discuss their work.

Cassidy made a poignant observation about her students' particular learning style preference for hands-on, kinesthetic experiences. For example, she explained that she recently led her students in using small candies to practice making multiplication arrays. In another recent science lesson plan that she shared, she provided students with various magnets in order to explore the concept of repelling and attraction. She told me that she uses manipulatives in math as much as possible and has created teacher-made games and activities for language arts and reading instruction. Speaking further on this point, Cassidy argued, "…it's just easier for them

to understand something that is difficult or hard for them to get if they have those tangible

objects…it really clicks in their mind if they have something to connect what they are doing to

the real world…it will make sense to them."

Nonetheless, Cassidy expressed disappointment about not being able to provide more

kinesthetic, hands-on learning experiences for her students. She recalled a recent instance of

frustration about the lack of materials and resources available to her. She said,

> I wanted them to do interactive notebooks because it's something I learned about in a PD
>
> and it makes it easy for them to reference back to things they have already learned…it's
>
> just organization of their ideas, you can print stuff out and glue in it, and you can just do
>
> all kinds of things. At the end of the semester they gave us these little order forms and I
>
> was planning to start doing them in January. We have yet to receive our orders.

Here, Cassidy discussed a technique she learned in a professional development workshop that

she wanted to implement in her classroom. The technique would enable Cassidy and her

students to integrate more kinesthetic learning experiences into their daily routine. However,

absent using her own money to purchase a class set of materials, Cassidy lacked the necessary

resources.

Feeling frustrated. Cassidy spoke on other issues that she felt impeded some of her

efforts with her students. On one of our afternoon visits she expressed feeling overwhelmed by

miscellaneous tasks she needed to complete beyond her regular teaching duties. Cassidy

explained that the most laborious task—gathering all of the prior assessments that her students

had completed in all subjects thus far and noting the performance standard and element that

corresponds to each test item— was assigned to teachers recently during a faculty meeting.

While she bemoaned and questioned the usefulness of this task, she commented that she felt the

task took valuable time away from her planning for instruction. She said, "I feel like it takes a

toll on everything. It's so time consuming…sometimes, I just have to try to compose myself

when I'm in the classroom and not think about all the other work and data that I have to

do…otherwise, my frustrations might rub off on my students."

The constant pressure of collecting data and tracking student performance also spilled

into Cassidy's frustrations about professional development meetings and workshops. She noted

that when professional development took place it was limited to one-time discussions or

demonstrations of an instructional strategy. She said, "Because we tend to have professional

development that introduces you to something for thirty minutes and then [they] expect me to be

a pro at it in my classroom…it's like I feel like this is a useless waste of my time." Building

more on her critiques about data and tracking student performance, she pointed out that too much

focus is given to data-informed instruction for professional development. She said, "We'll have

a professional development on looking at data. And we'll have twenty of them looking at the

data and how to use the data and how to show the data and whatever. I can see the first time…

but by the tenth time, I get it." Based on her comments, it seemed that Cassidy felt frustrated by

the emphasis on data during professional development and the implicit messages that are

communicated about its importance above everything else.

Cassidy also expressed her frustrations with some of her students' parents. During our

conversations, she told me that she had only met a few of her students' parents and often had

trouble maintaining regular contact with them. This was especially troublesome to Cassidy

during the time we were meeting because she was holding weekly afternoon tutoring sessions for

students who needed extra academic support to pass the end-of-year exams. Moreover, several

students who needed to come for afterschool tutorials were never able to stay because they rode

the bus to get home afterschool. Cassidy expressed the disdain she felt towards some of her

parents saying,

> …I'm calling and you're not answering or I'm sending notes and you're not
>
> answering back. That's frustrating because I'm trying to let you know that your child
>
> needs help and I want to help them, but I need your help as well. Some parents think
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> it's only the teacher, but it takes a village to raise a child, so it's teamwork. So whatever
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> I'm doing at school, you need to continue it at home. It takes both of us, not just me.

Saying prayers for her classroom. One of the items that Cassidy selected to share in her

memory box was a beaded cross bracelet, which she wears to school every day. According to

Cassidy, the bracelet is a symbolic reminder of her belief in God and her Christian faith. She

explained that glancing at her bracelet sometimes prompts her to read scriptures from the Bible

in the few moments of quiet that she has before the start of the school day. Pulling out the top

drawer of her desk, Cassidy showed me the small Bible that she transports back and forth from

home. A small, standing flipbook entitled, *Prayers for Teachers*, sits atop Cassidy's desk too. It

is a Christian devotional book with short reflections and prayers made especially for teachers.

On Cassidy's most difficult days, the bracelet reminds her to draw upon her faith to

persevere through life's obstacles. Moreover, Cassidy gives her faith credit for the success of

her classroom and for the obstacles that she and her students are able to overcome. She told me

that the week before the students came back to school for the new school year, she spent time

praying for her students and her classroom. Specifically, she explained that she whispered

prayers for a successful school year while walking around her classroom—using her fingers to

smear a small amount of olive oil on the desks and chairs where her students would soon sit and

on the doorway entrance of the classroom. She then told me a compelling story to illustrate her

belief about the importance of her prayers for the success of her classroom. She said, "I believe it works…[there] was a little boy coming down the hall and he was cussing, yelling, screaming at the teacher. So he came from all the way down that hallway to my room, but when he got to my door he just stopped. He couldn't cross my door. He just stared at us, then he turned around and went the other way and started cussing and fussing down the other part of the hallway. In my mind, that was God."

In the story above, Cassidy gives a compelling picture of the significant role that she feels her faith plays in the classroom. For Cassidy, the story illustrates one way in which she and her students are shielded from negative distractions or influences. Rather than exclude her personal beliefs from her professional practice, Cassidy integrates her spirituality into her daily work through the reading of sacred texts from the Bible, prayers, and reflection. Importantly, Cassidy believes that these practices enable the success of her classroom; and because she takes her students' success seriously, she stays committed to her faith. Additionally, Cassidy's faith seemed to give her a sense of efficacy for her work. Despite the many obstacles and frustrations that she faced on a daily basis with administrative tasks, testing pressures, and parents, I was impressed at the very least by how her faith enabled her to continue to persevere for the sake of her students.

Requesting a transfer. When I went to visit Cassidy on the last day of school, she had just finished clearing out her classroom and was preparing her final exit packet to hand in to her school administration. I brought her a ginger-scented candle as a tiny token of appreciation for her participation. While we caught up, Cassidy shared that she would be transferring to another school in the district next year. She went on to tell me that she had decided to submit a request to transfer to a different school earlier in the semester and took the fact that her request was

granted to be a good sign. She told me that the new school is not too far away and serves the same general demographic student population. She said that she was "looking for something different, a different experience" and that being at a new school might provide that. I left her wondering more about what she was looking for—more opportunities to lead and advance in the profession, more parental involvement, fewer issues with student behavior, less pressure about data collection, or more funding and access to material resources?

Case 3: Patrice's Story

At the time of our meeting, Patrice was a 32-year old, first grade teacher who was in her fourth year of teaching. Describing herself as a "person of few words," Patrice expressed caution about being a viable participant for the study. She consented to meet briefly at her school for an informal pre-conference about the study after being contacted twice via email in the space of several months. Upon my visit, I sensed Patrice's hesitation to participate in the study. After I assured her that she had been highly recommended by both her school principal and the school's Parent Teacher Association and that we would have an open conversation with no stakes attached, Patrice finally consented. As we prepared to depart from our pre-conference, Patrice surprised me by extending her arms to embrace me. I was pleased to do so and was grateful that she had consented. However, I left wondering about how I had changed Patrice's perceptions of me and the goals of the study.

Patrice lived about 30 minutes away from her school in a predominantly Black, middle class, southeastern county in the metro area. She suggested that we meet in the city for the sake of convenience and because of the far distance of her home. Our first meeting took place at a local coffee shop about 15 minutes north of her school and our second and third meeting took place in her classroom immediately after school in early spring of 2014. Our third meeting was

held over the phone in early spring of 2015. Each of our meetings lasted approximately one to one and a half hours.

Although the neighborhood where Patrice's school was located has a rich legacy of African American, community-based organizing for and about the school, the school has suffered from high rates of student transience and low student enrollment over the years. Enrollment declined most significantly in the years that followed the near closure of the school by the district school board. However, the community fought to keep the school open and the school board eventually relented. To address the declining student population, the school had recently begun a dual language immersion program that is open to all students in the district as well as students who are zoned to the school. Patrice expressed hope about the program enhancing the reputation and academic rigor of the school as well as attracting more diverse students from around the district.

During the 2014-2015 school year, African American students comprised 96% of the student body at Patrice's school. Approximately 99% of the student body qualified for free or reduced price meals. The school served approximately 250 from preschool through fifth grade and employed a total of 24 full-time teachers; of which 22 were Black (GOSA, 2015). In terms of achievement scores on standardized tests, the school had faired poorly for several years when compared to other schools in the district and in the state. Data from the district website suggests that the school's college and career readiness performance index scores were the lowest in the district for the 2014-2015 school year.

Growing up in a family of teachers. While speaking about her background, Patrice described the important role that having a close-knit supportive family has played in her life. As a part of her memory box, Patrice shared pictures of her mother and father, three younger

siblings, and friends while politely bragging over several cute baby pictures of her nephews and niece. She explained that her family always maintained close ties with relatives when she was growing up. Family trips were particularly memorable events for Patrice, especially when her family went to visit an uncle whom Patrice described as "the rock of the family." Speaking about these trips Patrice said, "We used to take family trips with one of my dad's best friends' family, who has kids about the same age as us…me, my mom and dad, my two sisters, and my brother would all pack into the car together."

As she continued to share more about her upbringing, I learned that Patrice grew up in what she described as a "family of teachers." She said, "My parents are both educators…my father would always come to my school in middle school and would talk with some of the teachers that he knew and my mother was always at my elementary school volunteering or helping out in some way…all of my parents' friends were educators too." She remarked that her father, a veteran physical education teacher and high school football coach, instilled within her an ethic of hard work. She said, "I just remember my Dad being such a hard worker and making me have that work ethic." Her mother, a retired special education teacher, was especially involved with Patrice's daily school activities.

During our conversations, Patrice discussed some of what she called her parents' "traditional" approaches to child rearing including her mother's vigilance of her extracurricular activities and associations with peers. She said,

My Mom was very particular about who I was with and what I participated in…as far as

the different things I did, my mom put me and my sister in a dance group that did ballet

and tap. We also danced at our school and were in Girl Scouts…but as far as my

interactions with boys, that was not really happening. I couldn't talk on the phone with

boys until later on and I didn't go on my first date until I was 16. In that sense, my

parents were traditional.

Although the family lived in a city known for its history and culture, Patrice noted that she was

not allowed to participate in parades and celebrations that were not designated for children, such

as *Mardi Gras*. Patrice noted further that her parents always picked her up and dropped her off

when she participated in social activities, such as school dances. She also remarked that a

general rule in her household was that she could only attend social gatherings that were approved

by her parents and supervised by adults.

While listening to Patrice, I also came to learn that she has maintained close ties with her

family as an adult. Indeed, at the time of our interview, Patrice lived only a few minutes away

from her parents and siblings in a suburban area outside of the city. As a doting aunt, she talked

about enjoying the time she spends with her young nephews and niece. She also shared her

excitement about the family's summer plans to take an out of state trip together for a family

reunion. Patrice's remarks helped me understand that although she is an adult, her mother,

father, and siblings still hold a place of prominence in her life. Patrice's comments about her

family also helped me to understand more about her life outside of school. As the oldest of four

adult children in a close-knit family, Patrice spends time outside of school maintaining strong

family bonds.

Additionally, while Patrice shared details about her mother and father, I thought about the

ways in which her upbringing had been characterized by the closeness and warmth of her family

as well as the authoritative discipline style of her parents. Specifically, her stories about the

strict rules that she was made to follow were particularly compelling to me. Patrice's parents

seemed most watchful about potential negative social influences and took great lengths to ensure

that Patrice was engaged in positive activities. I was struck by the matter-of-fact tone that

Patrice employed while reporting about her parents' strictness. Though her parents were strict,

Patrice did not relay any disdain about their rules. Rather she seemed to express a deep gratitude

for the efforts they took to shelter her from potential distractions. Throughout our conversations,

Patrice continued to interject comments and stories about the advice that her parents have given

her over the years at certain critical moments in her life.

　　　Being racially isolated. Patrice's family lived in a working class community made up of

families from ethnically diverse backgrounds in Eastern New Orleans, Louisiana. She remarked

that, "…at the time, we lived in an area that was pretty much Black and Vietnamese. Our

neighborhood was very close to the Vietnamese Village." After a brief stint in a local,

predominantly Vietnamese kindergarten school, Patrice was transferred to a predominantly

Black school in the first grade. She remembered that her mother was an active member of the

school's Parent Teacher Association. Patrice also recalled the names of some of her teachers and

briefly described her perceptions of some of them. She noted for instance, "…in second grade I

had Dr. Elliot and you didn't play with Dr. Elliot. I just remember her being no-nonsense. She

was an older teacher and she was really serious."

　　　After taking a standard reading assessment in the third grade, an issue with Patrice's

reading fluency was identified. Patrice was placed in a remedial reading program where she was

pulled out of her classroom to work separately every day. Reflecting on her feelings about the

experience Patrice stated, "…I guess I was on the cusp of reading on grade level...I didn't like

being pulled and being separated from the other students because everyone knew if you were

pulled, it was because you were behind and couldn't keep up." Despite the embarrassment that

Patrice incurred, she made significant progress while in the program. She said, "I really

flourished in the program because we worked in small groups of four…I made such an improvement that they gave me a trophy, a medal, and a Black history book with bios of famous African Americans at this big awards program they had at [a] hotel."

At the end of Patrice's third grade year, her family moved to a different area of the city where she was, again, zoned to a predominantly Vietnamese school. I learned that being only one a few African American girls in fourth and fifth grade became problematic for Patrice. As an African American girl with a dark-skinned complexion, Patrice was sometimes made the object of ridicule by other students. During this time, Patrice recalled becoming hyper aware of her skin color in comparison with the other students stating, "…I started to feel like even though there were a few other Black students, I was darker than some of them…since it was so few of us, it was mentioned. 'You're black. You're ugly'…just things that kids would say." While Patrice shared these recollections, I sensed that this was an especially troubling time for Patrice. She confirmed that during this time she became anxious about the opportunity to move on to middle school where there would likely be more African American students and where she would not be targeted for being different. However, I wondered if she had told anyone about the incident.

Finding belongingness. When Patrice finally moved on to middle school, she encountered more African American students. According to Patrice, the student body in her middle and high school settings represented a culturally diverse mix of Latino, Southeast Asian, African American and White students. After her third grade experience, Patrice went on to experience high academic success and remained on A/B honor roll throughout her matriculation. As an honors student in a high school magnet program for accelerated students, Patrice participated in Beta Club, the National Honor Society, and was briefly a member of the high

school track team. Her favorite subject to study in school was always English and Language

Arts. She mentioned a particularly memorable high school English teacher, Mr. Riddley, whom

she described as "funny, but no-nonsense". She said, "He would always make us laugh but he

was not telling jokes. He was so serious and it was so funny to me."

Additionally, Patrice described having positive social interactions with other African

American peers in middle and high school. She noted the significance of meeting and becoming

best friends with another African American girl for the first time in middle school. Since her

father was the football coach at her high school, Patrice also described being known amongst the

staff and students at the school. She commented,

> I would say that I was pretty popular…I wasn't this outgoing, social butterfly. I didn't
>
> have the biggest group, but I think what made the difference for me was that I didn't only
>
> know my peers. I knew a lot of students in the upper grades. My Dad was the coach for
>
> the football team. He would come after school. The football players, they were really
>
> nice to me and looked out for me. They were like, 'You're going to be my little sister.'
>
> I was just well known and that was fun for me.

The positive social interactions that Patrice had with peers in her culturally diverse high

school greatly contrasted with her earlier experience as only one of a few African American

students in her elementary school. Her stories made me wonder about the social consequences

that Patrice was susceptible to in the absence of a more diverse peer group. Did the bullying she

endured because of her skin complexion affect her sense of pride, confidence, and belonging?

Did she tell anyone about it? Is Patrice sensitive to similar issues of colorism and skin color bias

in her predominantly African American classroom now? Our conversation about her elementary

school experience also made me think about the effects of her time in the remedial reading

program. Although she disliked being separated from the other students, she noted that her

reading began to flourish because her needs were better accommodated in a small group setting.

I wondered if Patrice related differently to the needs of her students by integrating ability

grouping or small-group instruction in her classroom.

Transitioning after the storm. While Patrice's parents and many other family members

attended an HBCU in a neighboring state and pursued careers in teaching, Patrice wanted to

follow a different path. She chose to attend a large, traditional state university and decided to

study psychology. Patrice continued to enjoy an active social life in college but her interest in

psychology seemed to wane with time. While reflecting on her experience she noted that during

her matriculation she realized that she was more interested in counseling than in studying the

scientific aspects of psychology. According to Patrice, her disinterest in psychology led to her

average performance in college. She stated, "I was an average student…I barely had a 3.0. You

know how you'll have an idea of what something is [but] then when you get into it, it's

something totally different? I think that's what happened to me." Patrice began her studies as a

psychology major with a lack of understanding about the field. Moreover, while she enjoyed her

college experience overall, her comments implied that she had some regrets about her course of

study.

Patrice graduated with her bachelor's degree in May 2005. While celebrating her

birthday later that summer out-of-town, Patrice was suddenly called home to New Orleans by her

mother who warned of an extreme weather forecast in the area. Patrice recalled noticing that

during the drive home as she was entering the city, all of the other cars were going in the

opposite direction. Once she arrived home she said, "We were watching T.V. and they were

saying that we really need you to evacuate your home now. My family and I, we packed up

about three outfits and we had a family friend who lived in [another state]. We were traveling on my birthday." With the help of family members and friends, Patrice's family eventually settled in another southern state. Throughout our conversations, Patrice often referred back to this event as well as the time period just after her family left New Orleans in 2005. While describing this period Patrice intimated feelings of confusion and uncertainty. She argued, "…the storm put me in a fuzzy place. I was trying to grasp what had just happened and then still trying to figure out how to move forward."

Patrice's story about leaving New Orleans to escape Hurricane Katrina helped me to understand the difficult position that Patrice found herself in at the time. Having just finished college, Patrice was planning to go back home to start her adult life. However, she no longer had the security of having a home to go back to in New Orleans. She intensely began to ask the question, "What am I going to do?" during her time of transition after the storm. With a degree in psychology, Patrice briefly considered pursuing graduate school to study marriage counseling before deciding against it. Meanwhile, her parents sought teaching positions in the school system of the new county where they now resided. Patrice's mother suggested that she consider submitting an application for an open paraprofessional teacher's aide position. She said, "When I first moved here, one of the first things my mom said to me was, 'Why don't you go on and work in the school system? At least you'll have benefits and then you can decide what career you want."

Though hopeful about the employment opportunity in the school district, Patrice was not hired by the school system that year. Instead, Patrice found employment as a sales associate in a large, national retail store. Patrice recounted a specific incident that occurred while working in retail that led her to think differently about the state of race relations in the state where she was

newly transplanted. She explained that when she tried to request approval to make a personal

exchange at her job, a White manager on duty refused to grant the request. Additionally, Patrice

felt that the manager's questioning and tone implied extreme and unnecessary distrust of her.

Patrice recalled:

> I felt like I was literally stepping back in time when I had my first real racial
>
> experience here. At home, I had a lot of interactions with Whites, but here it was
>
> different. I just remember trying to make an exchange and the manager wouldn't let me
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> complete the transaction and I was like, why is this a problem? [The manager asked]
>
> why I was trying to use my discount and it was just all of this questioning and she didn't
>
> let me complete my transaction. I was so mad I got my things and left.

The manager that refused to approve Patrice's transaction reported the incident to Patrice's

supervisor. Feeling that the manager's action threated her job security, Patrice was infuriated

even more. She added, "…my supervisor was Black and she told me that basically this is how

things are done here and I should just basically go along with it…I felt like the only reason I was

having this problem was because I was Black...[this] was unacceptable to me."

Learning to observe as a paraprofessional. The story that Patrice shared about her

experience in retail signified the beginning of a paradigm shift that she had as a newly

transplanted resident away from home. She was baffled by the manager's behavior toward her

and blindsided by her supervisor's apathetic comments. Given her feelings about the unjust

outcome of the event, Patrice felt more susceptible than ever before to acts of racial

discrimination in her workplace. She drafted an incident report and had the manager and her

supervisor to sign the document and put it in her file. While she continued to work in retail for

two more years, she became more guarded about the interactions she had with all of her fellow employees.

In 2008, Patrice had a customer that she happened to recognize as the administrator of a school where she had previously sought employment. The administrator remembered Patrice too and told her to apply for an open paraprofessional position at the elementary school. Patrice was brought in for an interview and was hired soon after. Becoming a paraprofessional teacher's aide was a significant step for Patrice. For two years, Patrice was employed at an elementary school in a metropolitan district that served predominantly African American and Hispanic students from working class backgrounds. Patrice assisted in several classroom types including special education, first grade and fourth grade general education, and English as a Second Language classrooms. She also told me that she developed a few significant friendships with some of the teachers and other paraprofessionals that she worked with at her school.

I also learned that Patrice initially found her work as a paraprofessional enriching because it allowed her to observe teaching and learning with different types of students and assist in a variety of elementary school classrooms. Commenting further on the perks associated with her former role she said, "As a paraprofessional, I was able to sit back and see the things that children do, like when the teacher would turn their back. I learned how they act and how they respond to things. So I just already had this idea of how children are and like all of the things that go on in a classroom that teachers have to attend to." In this quote, Patrice points out the significance of having observed the social, intellectual, and developmental levels of students as well as the daily demands of elementary classroom teaching during her time as a paraprofessional.

On the other hand, Patrice recalled some of the limitations associated with being a paraprofessional. She explained that she sometimes felt that she was not afforded much respect. For instance, she mentioned often feeling invisible when teachers and administrators failed to acknowledge her presence stating, "…people would come into the room and not even acknowledge that I was in there." As a paraprofessional, there was no established professional ladder for Patrice. Consequently, Patrice was unsatisfied with the limited professional duties and lack of respect afforded to the paraprofessional teacher aides at her school. While talking about the reason she began to consider next steps she said, "I knew that I didn't want to stay in that position because sometimes I felt myself getting comfortable and it wasn't very demanding. I needed more than that."

Going to graduate school, learning to teach. Patrice acknowledged that her experience as a paraprofessional helped her to decide to take another step in her career. After two years, Patrice began to feel compelled to pursue her teaching certification stating, "I just started to get this itch for my own classroom." In 2010, she applied to a large, traditional state university to pursue a Master of Arts in Elementary Education. Patrice was excited and anxious when she was called in to interview for the program and remembered being stunned by the rigorous, multilevel interview process. She helped me understand her feelings during the interview process by explaining:

> …there was your regular application and you had to have your prerequisites and then there was a written part…Then they actually interviewed me and I just wanted it so bad. I knew that if I got into school I was going to be moving forward to start my career and so it was a big deal to me. So I sat there and cried in my interview. I was so full of emotion.

According to Patrice, going to graduate school was a big professional step forward. Given the time she spent in transition, she was overwhelmed by the prospect of being able to move into the next phase of her life and expressed these feelings in her interview. As we proceeded in our conversation about Patrice's graduate school experience, I learned that she had quit her job as a paraprofessional in order to be a full-time student for the first year of the program. Fortunately, Patrice was able to capitalize on a federal first time homebuyers' credit in 2010 that allowed her to finance a one-year work sabbatical. She explained further, "I had actually just bought my house and this was the year that they did the [housing] stipend, so it was almost like things just aligned because I was able to live off of that and literally not worry." With the support of her parents and family members, who pitched in to help her buy gas and groceries, Patrice financed her graduate education with a combination of student loans and her personal funds.

Patrice excelled in graduate school. She insisted, "When I was in undergrad I passed my classes, but I didn't really care much after that, but in graduate school I did really well. When I went to graduate school I was extremely ready."   Her comments made me reflect on how her average academic performance in college contrasted with her excellent academic performance in graduate school. Further, the stories that Patrice shared about her graduate program connoted her engagement and overall satisfaction with the instruction she had received and her feelings of being exceptionally prepared to teach. Patrice portrayed her course instructors as being model master teachers who taught in ways that helped her understand the pedagogical techniques that she was learning. For example, she described that in one course, the instructor introduced them to dialogue and required that they participate in class discussions by speaking up without raising their hands or waiting to be acknowledged. Patrice recounted asking herself,

Why are they not acknowledging me? But I figured out that they were trying to get me to

see that I don't have to be just so like, 'I'm in the classroom and I'm the teacher and

that's how it's supposed to be!' They really promoted that that is one way of teaching,

but don't think that is the only way. What I said in class, it was all a part of the

discussion. The instructor wasn't the only teacher.

As a naturally reserved person, Patrice felt that participating in classroom dialogue

pushed her out of her shell as a speaker. The discussion style that she learned in the course also

helped Patrice to conceptualize dialogic approaches to teaching—where students are encouraged

to take an active role in their learning by asking questions and sharing their insights as well as

learning from the teacher and their peers. In addition, Patrice told me that she participated in

many small group and partner activities in her courses and gained a better understanding about

the utility of cooperative learning approaches in the classroom. She exclaimed about an instance

when she and her class engaged in expeditionary learning to study more about a special topic

saying, "I told my mom, guess what we are doing for class? We're going on a fieldtrip! Who

goes on a fieldtrip in college?"

Patrice shared an electronic copy of the capstone project that she completed in graduate

school as one of the items from her memory box. She told me that the project was a collection of

essays, poems, photographs, and video recordings that synthesized her teaching philosophy and

how she plans to implement effective teaching strategies in her classroom. She recalled

specifically, "It was a synopsis of everything that I had learned and what kind of teacher I

wanted to be…the biggest part was my explanation of the features I wanted to include in my

classroom…my plan for incorporating different features and how I was going to build

relationships with my students." Patrice also shared two items that commemorated her

graduation from graduate school: the tassel from her cap and gown and a photo that her mother took of her at her graduation ceremony.

Upon graduation, Patrice felt especially gratified. She commented, "I guess in 2012 things really, professionally, just all came into place. Since I first moved here in 2005 I had been in transition and so 2012 was just a really good year. I was finally professionally in a good place and where I wanted to be." For Patrice, obtaining her teaching certification was the fulfillment of a dream to begin a career in teaching; which began several years before when Patrice was a paraprofessional. Moreover, Patrice noted that what drove her to excel in graduate school was the vision that she had for herself and her professional life as an educator. Likewise, Patrice felt proud to continue the family legacy in teaching. When she shared the photo that her mother took of her at graduation, she began to weep while remembering the pride that she observed on her mother's face.

Creating a no-nonsense classroom environment. The rich teacher education experience that Patrice described made me think about the many assets that she brought to the profession. Patrice had a deep respect for the profession via her mother and father and felt passionate about continuing a proud family legacy in education. As a former paraprofessional, Patrice was already familiar with some of the issues, goals, and norms associated with culturally and economically diverse public schools. Likewise, the teacher education she obtained seemed to greatly enhance the practical knowledge that she already had by deepening her understandings about learners and learning and by equipping her with many different pedagogical skills. Given her passion and previous paraprofessional experience as well as her ability to pay for graduate school, Patrice was perfectly positioned to excel in the study of teaching in graduate school, and she did just that.

Indeed, Patrice had been well prepared to enter the classroom. When seeking her first teaching assignment, Patrice intentionally selected the inner city, urban school district that neighbored the school district where she had been employed before. Explaining her intention to teach in a predominantly African American setting with students who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, Patrice said, "…even when I was student teaching and I worked with a mostly Hispanic population, they were a pleasure to work with, but I felt a duty to teach the students I work with now. They deserve the best teaching." In this quote, Patrice described feeling personally responsible for the education of economically disadvantaged African American students, in particular.

As we continued, I learned that Patrice is serious about her goal to provide the best education to her students. To help her reach her goal, Patrice takes a no-nonsense interactional approach when speaking to her students. During her first year as a classroom teacher of first grade students in 2011, Patrice was assigned a university mentor that visited her classroom a few times a month. Among the many compliments given to Patrice about being a "natural" at teaching, the mentor also remarked on Patrice's interactional style saying to her,

> She [the mentor] said that I talk to them like they're little adults…I'm like, they're just little people so I don't talk down to them…sometimes, I'll hear things that I say to them, I'll hear them say it to each other. Like, you're being inappropriate. Then they'll tell me and be like, 'This person just said an inappropriate word.' I'm just like, why do you even know that that's appropriate?"

Patrice's story made me think about the significance of her interactional style for her students. As the quote above depicts, Patrice provided her student with a model for behavior and the student in the example complied. I became more intrigued with Patrice's statements about

her interactional style and asked her to talk more about how she relates to her students. She extended the conversation by stating,

> I try to keep this, no emotions, when I'm interacting with them, because this year, behavior has been a slight challenge. This year, I really haven't smiled just all day, everyday. I have to keep this very stern face. When I hear something that's supposed to be funny, I'm like, what is funny? Why are we laughing? I'm trying to figure out why is that funny to me? Yes, it's no smiling, you know, when something is funny.

While explaining her practice to me, Patrice acted out how she talked to her students by changing the tone of her voice, her facial expression, and her body language and taking on a sterner persona. Her comments and actions provided a glimpse into how she goes about creating an environment that is conducive to learning by adjusting her interactional style. In so doing, Patrice communicated to her students her consistently high expectations for their engagement and on-task behaviors during instruction.

Not only did Patrice model to her students how to behave in a no-nonsense classroom, she showed her students how they should expect to be treated. She told me that when addressing her students, she often refers to them as "young ladies" and "young men" instead of girls and boys. She also uses common pleasantries when interacting with her students such as, "please," "thank you," and "excuse me." Patrice explained, "I respect them as individuals. I think they understand that I respect them and I will hear them use that same language with each other. I can ask them to do things, and even when they don't want to do it, they will do it." As the quote illustrates, the respect that Patrice shows to her students is an important factor in her no-nonsense classroom environment because it serves to ground a community of trust and mutual respect.

Patrice takes great care to show the utmost respect to her students by behaving in ways that communicate respect.

Further, as I thought about the measures that Patrice took to create a no-nonsense classroom environment including behaving in ways that minimized distractions from learning and cultivating mutual trust and respect amongst her students, I was reminded of the few remembered teachers that Patrice noted when she shared about her early school experiences. Most importantly, she had described her favorite teacher from high school, Mr. Riddley, in similar ways. I wondered if Patrice had learned this style of interacting from him or from other remembered teachers. I also thought about the ways in which parts of Patrice's upbringing were reflected in her communication and interactional styles with her students. Patrice's mother and father had an authoritative parenting style, but they provided her with a nurturing and caring home environment. Likewise, Patrice placed high demands on her students, but also supported them by providing consistent models for behavior, having high expectations, and creating an environment of mutual trust and respect.

Implementing her training. I came to learn of Patrice's intention to also provide the best teaching to her students by integrating the best practices that she learned in graduate school. Patrice reflected,

> I feel like I got some good teaching from [graduate school] and I truly just felt like my teaching needed to be with Black students, students who look like me, because I don't know if they always get [pause]…I struggle even saying that I'm a good teacher, but I felt like, with my training, I really try to implement these things. I truly want to stay in my population. I feel like they deserve someone invested in their education…they deserve the best.

Here, Patrice reflects on the ethnic heritage that she and her students share and her sense of responsibility for their education. She also elevates the value of the professional knowledge she gained through her teacher education training and uses it to instruct the student population that she serves. Most importantly, Patrice provides a critique about a lack of access to highly skilled, caring teachers—like her—for the students at her school.

Given her beliefs about the inequality that she feels sometimes threatens her students' lack of access to good teachers, Patrice seeks to implement research-based, learning approaches in her classroom. For instance, she described that she promotes a more student-centered environment where both she and her students take part in generating new knowledge. She said, "In my classroom we are teaching and learning, meaning that [the students] are teachers also. You're not the only one learning. I'm the teacher, but it's a process for both us." Patrice's comments led me to think back to what she had learned about dialogue and knowledge construction in graduate school. Moreover, Patrice sought to implement her training by reproducing a similar learning process for her students.

Further, Patrice hearkened back to her early school experiences when defining her classroom. A former math teacher of Patrice's, for example, "would have two math problems on the board and then would show us the steps to solve it. Then we did such and such pages, numbers one through whatever and you better not have personal conversations." In contrast, Patrice's students often devise their own strategies for solving math problems and are supported in working collaboratively to do so. Patrice recalled a specific time in math class when a student shared an alternative strategy to the one she provided. She said, "It may not necessarily be how I would have solved it or how I taught it, but they got the same answer and they shared how they did it…it's definitely a collective effort."

As a third grader, Patrice flourished in a small-group setting for remedial reading instruction. Now as a first grade teacher, Patrice integrates small-group learning and instruction in her general education classroom. According to Patrice, small group learning and instruction provides her students with important opportunities to learn from each other. Commenting on this point Patrice said, "…students work in partners a lot in my class. You know how sometimes teachers will put their high and low students together? I let my students pick who they want to work with…allowing them to work with someone. They can bounce ideas off each other and critically think together. Patrice also works with students in small groups during reading instruction where she can better attend to her students' individual needs and adjust her teaching style to accommodate their personal learning styles.

Integrating across content areas. I learned more about Patrice's persistent efforts to implement best practices in her classroom when she shared a recent social studies lesson unit that described a project her students had completed. The objective of the unit was to help students understand basic concepts related to economics such as saving, spending, earning and how to differentiate between consumers needs and wants. Patrice began the unit with a mini-lesson where she used direct instruction to introduce the aforementioned concepts. Afterwards, Patrice provided each student with a "wallet" made from construction paper, twenty dollars in faux paper money, and advertisement papers from family retail stores like Target and Wal-Mart. She then instructed her students to sift through the advertisements and to find items that they need and items that they want all while making sure to stay within their twenty-dollar budgets while calculating their costs.

Calling her students' projects "Budget Bags," Patrice showed me a pile of neatly constructed folders that contained her students' final products. The folders were incredibly

organized with handles affixed to the top of each one, pre-printed labels of students' names displayed on the front, labels that organized each component of the project, and differently colored pages that represented the various components. Further, each folder contained a large collage displaying the items that the student selected and how they distinguished between their wants and needs. A page displaying students' precise calculations—including how they decomposed the number twenty—was also included in the final product. Likewise, Patrice explained that the students completed a writing assignment where they reflected on how the concepts they had learned were differently represented in two contrasting texts—their social studies textbook and the first grade social studies magazine that Patrice often used as a supplemental text.

I could tell that Patrice was proud of her students' work as she and I scanned the projects. I could also sense that Patrice's students had been particularly engaged while completing the project and had enjoyed the real-world application of the concepts they had learned. Patrice remarked similarly,

> I think it [the Budget Bag project] gave them a chance to talk about like, 'Oh, I think I want this, but do I need it? I really, really like this container because I have a lot of things in my room, so this could help me clean my room.' And so then I could ask them, is that something you need or something you want? You know, it was a very engaging, hands-on lesson. Of course we have our standard textbook, but here they were able to apply it."

Patrice noted that one student was still working to complete the project well after her peers were done because she had become so engrossed in deliberating about her wants and needs. It was important to Patrice that her students be able to apply the concepts they were studying to a real-

word context. Furthermore, the "Budget Bags" project enabled students to connect with a topic of study in a meaningful and relevant way.

Patrice also commented about the way in which the project "touched just about every subject," enabling her to integrate across social studies, math, reading, and writing standards for first grade. While I was familiar with the idea of cross-curricular integration, I wondered if this practice was one that Patrice, herself, commonly instituted. She explained to me that as a result of the Common Core State Standards, she had been encouraged to find ways to incorporate extended time and attention to literacy. She said, "What we've started to do is make it just a block of literacy and we'll use the social studies or science book as their literature…I'm still teaching social studies but I am, you know, pulling in the literacy at the same time."

As Patrice shared her story about the "Budget Bags" project and her efforts to integrate across content areas, I thought more about why she had been hesitant to believe that she was a viable participant. To say the very least, I was impressed as she shared examples and stories to illustrate how she integrated many research-based practices in her teaching. Yet, Patrice still hesitated to identify herself as a "good teacher." I wondered if Patrice had any concerns with her teaching, if she was comparing herself to a more ideal model, or if she just felt like she had a lot more to learn. I also wondered about the factors that influenced Patrice's critique about inequity as it related to the quality of teachers that her low-income African American students have or will encounter. Was she aware of any specific teachers who lacked what she had learned were the necessary skills and qualities of an exemplary teacher? Had she witnessed or heard anything that indicated that access to professionally trained teachers was threatened for the particular students that she serves?

Teaching pride, building confidence. The "Budget Bags" project highlights how Patrice ensured academic growth for her students. The project also illustrates the ways in which Patrice sought to promote her students' sense of ownership for their work. For example, Patrice gave each of her students the opportunity to choose how they would use their twenty dollars. During the activity, Patrice constantly reinforced to her students that they were solely responsible for the decision-making, outcomes, and quality of their work. While Patrice was willing to serve as a guide or facilitator for her students, she refused to involve herself in decisions that they were capable of making for themselves. She described one instance where a little boy asked her if the item he had selected was a want or a need. Instead of providing a direct answer, Patrice questioned the student and helped him to assess his own question. Patrice said, "Sometimes they will want me to just tell them or do the work for them, but I tell them, this is your work. You have to do your own work and rely on your own brain."

Further, Patrice sought to empower her students to be proud and confident about the work they produced. In order to promote her students' sense of pride about their work, Patrice often allowed her students to share what they have completed with the class. She said, "Usually when we do writings, they'll have to show an illustration with it…that's one way of helping them to build their confidence. After they are done I will also have the kids applaud for them." While students are preparing their work for display or to share with the class, Patrice reminds them to invest time and careful attention to their work. In so doing, Patrice supports her students in completing their assignments in a manner that they can be proud of.

Additionally, Patrice has observed that some of her students are embarrassed when speaking before the class. Further, some of Patrice's students are reluctant to hold their head up, project, and elevate the volume of their voice in front of an audience. In response to these

students' behaviors, Patrice explained that she instructs her students about how to speak in front

of an audience, appropriately. She asserted that,

> Sometimes when they share, they're reading to themselves, so I will stop them and I'll
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> start doing what they're doing. I'll say, Does Ms. [Patrice's last name] teach like this?
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> Can you even hear me? No, because I need to speak up. I'll model for them. When I
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> was in elementary school, I was a very shy person. When I'm working with my students,
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> I definitely can relate to them being shy or timid in a lot of ways. For me, that's
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> something I definitely don't remember, having a teacher modeling it for me.

In the above example, Patrice immediately addressed the students' speaking behaviors in

front of the class. She then pretended to be the student by mimicking their soft voice and body

language, helping everyone to reflect on the effectiveness of the students' manner of speaking.

In a different example, Patrice described how she provides personalized attention to her students

in a more private way. Speaking again about what she does when some of her shyer students are

speaking in front of the class, Patrice stated, "I may go stand with them and just whisper in their

ear to help them read a word. Sometimes, they'll write something. It may not be correctly

spelled. I'll talk just so they can hear me and just help them out."

Beyond her observations about some students' speaking behaviors, Patrice observed that

some students come to school looking generally unkempt saying, "at home their appearance is

sometimes overlooked." Though Patrice noticed the students who come to school without being

properly groomed, she tries her best not to behave in a way to bring attention to these students.

Instead, Patrice encourages all of her students to show pride in their appearance by paying

attention to the aspects of their appearance that they can address. For example, she told me that

she encourages her students to check the appearance of their clothes and the cleanliness of their

faces in the mirror on bathroom breaks. She said, "…if someone does come in at maybe a different level of cleanliness, it's not ever acknowledged, but I do want for the young men and the young ladies, if you go into the restroom, if you notice something is off, go ahead and take care of that."

In Patrice's classroom, the students' differences in their physical appearance are sometimes obvious and unavoidable. For instance, Patrice told me about an incident when the only White student in her class told her that another classmate had called him a "White boy" in a pejorative manner. Patrice confronted the offending student saying, "Why? Why would you say something like that? Do you want him to call you a Black boy? When I say your name do I call you Black boy? His name is not White boy, his name is [students' name]. Say his name." Upon Patrice's admonishments, the offending student apologized. In another example, Patrice noticed when one of her female students began to wear a religious head covering and garment to school and sensed the students' discomfort and embarrassment with her ensemble. Patrice admonished the class about showing respect to the student and her religious tradition. Further, Patrice remains hopeful that the student can one day develop a sense of pride about her faith. She said, "I continue to want her to be confident, because I know first, it was jus the headpiece, but the other day, she didn't want to wear the headpiece and the gown. Her confidence is something that I'm still working on."

The theme of pride and confidence continued to resonate during the conversations between Patrice and I. Further, as we continued, I learned that Patrice took great strides to ensure that her classroom was carefully furnished, organized, and decorated. For instance, she recalled that at the beginning of the school year, she found round tables in the teacher supply room. Knowing that having round tables instead of individual desks would help facilitate her

students' collaborative work, Patrice spoke up for herself and requested that the tables be put in her classroom. She also shared that she had insisted on having the same colored chairs. She said, "…there were different colored chairs, all different colors from each other, so I went on a rampage looking for matching chairs. I just want my classroom to look put together and I want my students to take pride in their room."

Accordingly, Patrice believed that having a classroom that was well organized and attractive would help her students to respect their classroom as a learning environment and take pride in maintaining it. Upon my visit to Patrice's classroom one afternoon immediately after dismissal, I also witnessed that Patrice's classroom was tidy, thoughtfully organized, and well maintained. When I exclaimed about how neat her classroom appeared, even at the end of a school day, she said, "I think they take pride in their room. I think that's one reason why…they will leave their setting the way they came in to it. I make sure they do that." Here, Patrice explains that she expects for her students to honor the classroom environment by maintaining the order and structure that she has put in place—leaving it in the way they found it. Patrice hopes that her students will remember this particular virtue as they move forward in life.

I learned many things about the instructional strategies that Patrice used to enhance the rigor and academic quality of her classroom. But aside from wanting her students to grow academically, I also learned of Patrice's desire to help her students grow socially and emotionally. Patrice agreed, "I love seeing or just recalling where they were when they came in, and then just seeing their growth. I take pride in that, I really do. That motivates me to keep pushing forward." According to Patrice, some of her students entered her classroom exhibiting behaviors that implied a lack of pride or confidence in themselves, their voices, and their

academic abilities. To offset students' perceptions of their own deficits, Patrice employed different strategies to help build all of her students' sense of pride and self-confidence.

Being supported as a teacher leader. Patrice also took advantage of professional opportunities that would support her own growth. Indeed, our first meeting was held on a Saturday afternoon just after she had completed a voluntary professional development seminar. She explained that the professional development seminar provided training for a character development program that she and another teacher had elected to take the lead on implementing at their school. Interestingly, Patrice's school principal had been instrumental in encouraging her to lead the implementation of the school-wide character development program. According to Patrice, her school principal insisted, "This is something that you [Patrice] need to be a part of. You may not want to do this, but this is going to be good for you." Patrice's recollection of her principal's statement caused me to think about the parallels between Patrice's relentless efforts with her students and the school principals' determination to support Patrice's professional growth.

Further, as we continued, I learned that Patrice's school principal had taken a special interest in Patrice by encouraging her to pursue leadership roles within the school. Patrice noted the encouraging and supportive nature of her relationship with her school principal. She said, "I have a really good relationship with my principal. Something in her reminds me of my Mom, and so I'm drawn to her. I remember when my Mom was helping me in my classroom, and I introduced her. She responded to my Mom like she knew her already. It was so funny. I think outside of my mom, she has really pushed me professionally. She encourages me a lot." Patrice described a connection that was made when her mother and school principal met for the first

time and discovered their common interests in education and family. Patrice also felt connected

to her principal and was especially appreciative of her support.

When Patrice was a first year teacher she was assigned a mentor. The mentor was a

model teacher from the school district who serve as a liaison between Patrice and her school

principal. Patrice recalled several instances when the mentor approached her on the principal's

behalf. She said, "The district mentor was the middle person and I knew she was coming, not so

much to observe, but was just there to support me…if my principal had a concern, she would tell

me how the principal wanted me to do something…she was a good medium for both of us." The

district mentor was also responsible for creating professional development resources for Patrice

during her first and second years in the classroom. Although Patrice described most of the

professional development she received as less than useful, she believed the other support that she

received from the district mentor was invaluable. The district mentor visited Patrice's classroom

less frequently during her second year, but she continued to provide many helpful resources to

Patrice. Beyond their second year together, Patrice reported that she has kept in touch with her

district mentor.

As a fourth year teacher, grade level chair, and lead teacher of the school-wide character

development program, Patrice was working to develop several different leadership skills at the

time of our meetings together. One of things that Patrice first learned to overcome were the

negative assumptions made about her abilities by colleagues, because of her petite frame and

reserved demeanor.   She said, "When I first started working at my school, a lot of the teachers

thought I wasn't going to make it…they were like, 'She's soft. Her classroom management is

going to be awful." However, some of the other teachers offered Patrice useful classroom

management advice by reminding her to set clear and consistent classroom routines. After

following these teachers' advice, Patrice found that her students responded positively. Over time, Patrice's confidence in her own abilities grew. She also earned the respect of many of her colleagues and has since enjoyed excellent professional relationships with them.

Further, Patrice noted that she enjoys several close relationships with colleagues and has a positive work relationship with all of the teachers on her grade level team. She said,

> I definitely look to any teacher. If I see something that someone else is doing, I will go to them and ask them to teach me, support me. Then it's vice versa too…if someone wants me to share what I know or my resources, I will do that. Sometimes I'm reluctant to just go and share. Sometimes I do shy away from that, because I don't want people to be like, she is not all that!

Patrice's willingness to exchange resources with her team members and other peers was very apparent. In the above quote, Patrice especially noted her distaste for hierarchical relationships with colleagues that were characterized by one dominating the other or telling the other what to do. Rather, Patrice was more than willing to provide assistance to peers who asked for it and felt more comfortable maintaining a democratic space with her colleagues.

Patrice was actively engaged in her growth as a teacher leader. She told me that she is in "no hurry to leave the classroom" and looks forward to growing into a stronger teacher. She hopefully anticipates being able to see past and current elementary school students when they are older. She stated specifically, "I want to see my students when they are older students. That would be so cool to have some of them come back and see me and they are in high school or something. I look forward to that day." Additionally, Patrice shared her dream to one day provide mentoring to teachers in much the same way her mentor had supported her. More specifically, Patrice desired to work with the teachers who are members of Teach for America.

She said, "I don't know if they always go into teaching for the right reasons. I would like to help them be better and make sure they are in it for the right reasons." Accordingly, I wondered more about Patrice's experiences with Teach for America teachers. Were these the teachers that she was referring to when she critiqued her students' access to caring, quality teachers earlier in our conversations?

Having professional and cultural integrity. As mentioned previously, Patrice initially expressed trepidation about participating in the study because she felt some discomfort about disclosing information about her personal life. As we began a conversation about her work environment and her relationship with other teachers, I learned that Patrice is adamant about maintaining a clear boundary between her personal and professional life. She explained, "A lot of my friends outside of school are educators…I have a good relationship with the people that work here, but I like to keep school and my personal life separate." Patrice's comments made me think more deeply about her understanding of professionalism and the importance that she places on maintaining a professional image and decorum in the work environment at all times. Further, her reflections made me think about possible connections between her no-nonsense approach with students and the professional demeanor she maintained with colleagues at her school. I also wondered if Patrice's professionalism was one of the qualities that her principal had noticed, admired, and decided to help cultivate.

As we continued to talk about her work environment and experiences, Patrice shared that she felt an overall sense of comfort working with her predominantly African American teacher colleagues. She recalled a story that her mother shared about working in a more culturally diverse school environment to illustrate her point. She said,

My Mom said that one day when she had on a President Obama shirt and another Black

person came up to her and questioned her about wearing the shirt at their school. And

my Mom told them, 'You know, we are free.' It made me see that there is politics in the

school system and you just have to be very cautious about what you say and do. But

being here at a Black school it takes out that element…I don't have to worry about if this

person is interacting with me or not interacting with me based on the color of my skin. I

didn't want to have to deal with that. I literally just want to teach and learn.

Patrice insisted on being in a setting where she not only served predominantly low-

income African American students, she also wanted to work with a predominantly African

American staff. She argued that having a predominantly African American staff helped to

protect her "mental stability and sanity" against potential racial microaggressions. I thought about

some of Patrice's past work experiences and how important it was for her to have a pleasant

work environment and respectful relationships with her colleagues. Working in a setting where

she could concentrate on teaching and learning was significant for Patrice. Thus, she insisted on

working in an environment where racial microaggressions were less likely to happen. In another

example, Patrice discussed her concerns about wearing her natural hair and the effect that her

personal style might have on others in a more culturally diverse working environment. At

Patrice's school, however, she felt comfortable wearing her natural hair. At her predominantly

African American school, she never had to contend with any such issues relating to her personal

style or appearance.

Overall, I learned that it was important for Patrice to work in an environment that aligned

with her professional and cultural values. Specifically, Patrice desired a professional work

environment where the lines between her personal and professional life remained clear. Given

all of the goals that Patrice had for her students and her classroom, I was not surprised that she preferred to focus on her professional goals rather than fraternizing with colleagues and making close, personal friends. Likewise, Patrice desired a work environment that allowed her to remain true to some of the values and norms related to African American culture. Patrice's school setting aligned with both her professional and cultural goals and enabled her to maintain her integrity in significant ways.

Case 4: Monica's Story

When we first met in late fall of 2014, Monica was 27 years old and was in her second year as a second-grade teacher. I arrived to her school on a fall afternoon for our initial meeting and was stunned by the large size of the dark-red, brick school building. The door was already ajar as I entered. The receptionist showed a warm smile and immediately stopped ruffling with papers on a broad, wooden desk to greet me and help me find my way. I noticed the wooden floor and the tall ceiling of the foyer, which opened up into two wide hallways as well as a large, wooden-floored gymnasium. Student artwork and hanging arrangements filled the walls alongside the entrance of the foyer and the hallway leading to Monica's classroom. While exchanging pleasantries about our backgrounds, Monica and I discovered that we lived in the same part of a metro-area county just a few miles outside of the downtown area of the city. Thus, she agreed that we would meet on Sundays at her home for each of our visits.

When I arrived to Monica's home for our first meeting, I discovered a two-story dwelling in a quiet, predominantly Black, middle-class suburban subdivision. I could hear her husband shouting at a football game on the television upstairs, while Monica escorted me to a couch in her living room. We remarked again about living in the same area of the county and she told me that she spent most of her childhood in the area after having moved from a neighboring

metropolitan county in elementary school. As soon as we began, she seemed to open up and quickly revealed her thoughtful and reflective nature. Her willingness to open up about her experiences was quite refreshing, as I had sensed that she was rather shy. Instead, in her own soft-spoken way, Monica seemed excited to be able to express herself.

I sensed that Monica was hesitant, however, to share much about her upbringing and home life as a child. Thus, she relayed only a few details about some of the difficulties that she faced growing up as the only girl in a "poor" African American family with three older brothers, a mother who worked full time, and a father who was in and out of their lives. At the time of our meetings, Monica was a young wife and was expecting her first child, a girl, to be born in a few months. She seemed most comfortable talking about her life as a wife and a soon-to-be mom and often referred to those roles while reflecting on her professional practice.

Monica was the only participant in the study who taught at a predominantly White school and a public, charter school. Demographic data from the 2014-2015 school year indicated that approximately 71% of the student body was White, 19% of students were Black, 5% of students were multiracial, and 4% of the study body was Hispanic. Thus, Monica's school boasted a culturally diverse study body unlike any of the other schools in the study. The ethnicity of the teachers at Monica's school was also quite diverse when compared with the other schools in this study. At the time of the study there were 10 Black teachers and 28 White teachers. Additionally, 13.4% of the students at Monica's school received free or reduced price lunches. The school served approximately 430 students from kindergarten through eighth grade. Based on their test scores from the 2014-2015 school year, the school boasted one of the highest college and career performance index scores in the district and outperformed the state on several measures.

A major part of the charter agreement that Monica's school had with the district and the State Board of Education involved the school's agreement to meet or exceed state performance-based goals and measurable learning objectives. To help them retain their charter, Monica's school remained an independently run charter school that incorporated a framework used amongst a cadre of similar schools, consisting of ten guiding principles. Further, the school's website states that the principles were, "exemplified by small personalized learning communities where teachers and students know each other well in a climate of trust, decency and high expectations for all…modeling democratic practices with a strong commitment to equity." While Monica and I talked about her professional experiences, I thought a lot about how the unique framework and philosophy of her school, which she mentioned several times during our conversations, affected her beliefs and practices. Did she support the framework of the school? If so, how did she incorporate the guiding principles into her classroom?

Attending predominantly black schools. During our first conversation, Monica shared that she "always just knew" that teaching was in her path and that she had aspired to become a teacher from an early age. Monica credits her early interest in the teaching profession to the influence of her favorite teacher, Ms. Hopkins. Ms. Hopkins was a second grade teacher in the predominantly White school district where Monica attended elementary school. When describing Ms. Hopkins, Monica declared, "She was just amazing. She really got to know me and knew what I needed as a student and I just really enjoyed her and her classes." After having Ms. Hopkins in the second grade, Monica set her sights on becoming a teacher one day. When Monica was entering middle school her mother and father separated. Monica and her three older brothers moved with their mom to a neighboring county. In contrast to where she had lived

before, her new neighborhood was comprised of mostly working and middle class African

American families.

Monica's experience with Ms. Hopkins was the highlight of her elementary school

experiences. As she spoke of her secondary school experiences, however, her interests seemed

to shift to her social activities and how much she enjoyed being able to connect with other

African American students for the first time. She was very active in her predominantly Black

high school and participated in track, the National Beta Club, chorus, and the school drama club.

As she began to recall her positive social experiences in middle and high school, she also began

to tell stories about how the schools fell short in academic challenge and rigor. She shared that

as a student she felt that her mostly African American high school teachers "really didn't care"

about where she and her peers would end up after high school. Talking about her teachers' lack

of commitment later, she said, "There were a lot of academic things that they just didn't focus on

and they could have just done so much more."

As Monica spoke about moving on to attend secondary schools in a new, predominantly

African American school district, I learned that her thoughts about a career in teaching slowly

began to change. Monica also began to share stories about the impact that her father's passing

had on her family during her senior year. It was soon after his passing that Monica found herself

making plans for college and pondering the increased monetary value of a degree in psychology,

rather than a degree in education. She describes what motivated her new revelation:

> Financially, during this time, it was just really hard for my family, and things just kind of
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> fell apart…with all the struggles we had, I didn't grow up with a lot of money. And just
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> seeing my teachers, you know, you start to notice things [about their income levels]. So I

was like, I can go be a teacher and make forty thousand dollars a year or I can go pursue

this psychology degree and be able to support myself and help my family.

As she began to tell me stories about her college experiences, I learned that Monica had

suffered some major academic challenges as a psychology major at the local, public state

university where she was later accepted after graduating high school. Although only a short

distance from her high school geographically, Monica felt that her university and her high school

were "two different worlds." She told me that she was initially in "culture shock" because of the

racial/ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity at the university. Monica described her

freshman and sophomore years as particularly difficult and told me that she struggled to "catch

up" on some of the background knowledge that she felt she should have been exposed to in high

school. She said, "I felt like I had to learn a lot, not even *re-learn*, but *learn* a lot of things that

everyone else seemed to already know…books that I should have read in high school, like, *Of*

Mice and Men, you know books that my peers were familiar with, I had never even heard of. I

felt so unprepared." While Monica still had a desire to pursue a teacher education degree, she

worried that her academic deficits from high school could not be overcome in time to meet the

requirements for entry into the college of education at her university. She graduated with a

degree in psychology but had few long-term plans to pursue a career in that field.

Making responsible career decisions. When discussing the period immediately after

college, Monica began to tell me stories about the many career decisions that had to be made in

order to gain entry into the profession. Firstly, her decision to pursue a career in teaching came

about while she was working as a teacher at a private, pre-school just after college. She said, "I

was teaching preschool and I just really started to want to be in the classroom. It was where I

felt comfortable. I could come home with a different story every day and it was exciting, and so I just knew that that's where I should be."

Secondly, while teaching pre-school, Monica told me that she began doing independent research to find an on-line teacher certification master's degree program that would allow her to continue to work while pursuing the degree.   Though she was skeptical of on-line degree programs, the stories she told about her school suggest that her experience was positive. The program was a two-year Master of Arts in Teaching Elementary Education framed around a competency-based model of instruction. Students covered an outlined curriculum and progressed, individually, as they demonstrated mastery of the content. During our first meetings, Monica spoke very highly about the rigor and usefulness of the coursework as well as the valuable time that she spent completing two full semesters of student teaching in local, public schools. The highlight of the program, according to Monica, was the retired educator mentor that she was assigned to for the duration of the program. Monica and a small cohort of other graduate students in the area met frequently with the mentor throughout the program. They worked together to complete collaborative assignments and receive advising on various matters pertaining to the program. Importantly, Monica told me that being in an online program offered her some flexibility to complete the requirements for her teaching certification, while still maintaining full-time employment.

Monica also told me about how she came to the decision to teach at a charter school. She told me that the director of the preschool where she had been working heard about an opening for an assistant teacher at the charter school, thought it would be a good fit for Monica, and recommended that she apply. Upon receiving this recommendation from her preschool director, Monica began independently researching the school website for more information about the

school and the community. She was impressed by the school's child-centered and constructivist philosophies and talked about how content the students and teachers appeared in photographs on the website. She decided to apply for the job and was offered a position as an assistant teacher at the school.

As Monica told her story about entering the profession, I began to see how the time she spent "playing catch-up" in college was interwoven with her determination to make responsible career decisions for herself as she moved forward. While Monica cited poor high school teachers as a contributing factor to her setbacks in college, she later told me that she feels she is also partially to blame. She lamented about the mentality that had enabled her to seek a degree in psychology over following the career path that she knew was hers to follow from an early age. She also told me that becoming a teacher has taught her that every student must take responsibility for his or her own learning and that she should have taken more responsibility for her learning as a high school student. Monica learned from these experiences. She was diligent in her research and planning for entry into the profession and was determined to figure out a meaningful career path.

Observing and learning as an assistant teacher. Monica described the two years that she spent at her school, as an assistant teacher, as being invaluable to her training for the profession for two major reasons. Firstly, because of her diligence in researching available opportunities to gain entry into the profession, Monica was able to draw funds from her work as a full-time assistant teacher to help pay for her schooling. Monica told me that without this opportunity, she would have never been able to complete her certification requirements. Additionally, as an assistant teacher, Monica had the opportunity to learn about the unique culture of her school. Specifically, Monica said that she spent a lot of time "just observing" her

assigned classroom, as an assistant teacher. It was during this time of observation that Monica began to understand the school philosophy.

Monica's lead teacher, Tara, was a White woman in her mid-30s who had been teaching at the school for approximately six years. Monica explained that Tara was very helpful in explaining and demonstrating the school principles to Monica. Namely, Monica recalls learning one of the governing metaphors of the school, that the "students are workers and the teachers are coaches." As a mentor teacher, Tara included Monica in her weekly process of lesson planning and preparation for class activities that reflected the "teacher as coach" metaphor. According to Monica, Tara helped her to make the transition from "old school teaching practices like what [she] grew up seeing" to new approaches to teaching including personalizing learning and teaching for mastery.

Being mentored by a veteran educator. As mentioned previously, Monica was enrolled in an on-line master's degree program for teaching while she worked as a full-time, assistant teacher at her charter school. Monica acknowledged the benefits that came along with being an online student including having a flexible schedule and being able to work while completing her degree requirements. However, Monica shared that without the structure and accountability that is provided by instructors in traditional face-to-face courses, it was often difficult to remain motivated and focused on successfully completing her assignments. Monica also provided her critique about the competency-based model of instruction, stating that as a teacher she would never wait until the end of a learning unit to assess her students' competence. Rather than assessing students' mastery all at once, Monica believed that it is better to continuously assess students' understanding over time.

As Monica provided more details about her teacher education experience, I came to learn about the important intermediary role that Monica's mentor played during her matriculation. During our final conversation, after I inquired about her race, Monica revealed that her mentor was a middle-aged African American woman. Monica felt that her mentor went above and beyond to meet her needs and to help Monica fulfill the program components. For example, Monica described one of the program components required that she hold weekly phone meetings with her mentor at a regularly scheduled time to gain clarity and to receive feedback about her assignments. Monica was appreciative of the many times that her mentor made herself available to discuss her concerns or to provide her with additional resources and support outside of the regular meeting time.

Working with upper-middle class White students. During our second meeting, I learned more about Monica's family background. Monica described that when she was growing up, both of her parents worked long hours while she and her older brothers were often home alone. Monica described her family as "poor" when she was very young. She told me a story about having to sit out of a fieldtrip once in elementary school because her parents did not have the money to send her. She also told me that by the time she was eight years old, she was cooking meals for herself and her brothers while her parents were busy at work. Monica told me that she developed a sense of responsibility, self-reliance, and independence as a young girl out of necessity and because of her family's socioeconomic status.

As Monica began to talk about her current teaching assignment, I came to learn that there were tremendous distinctions between her background and the background of her predominantly White students. When describing the demographics of her teaching site, Monica observed that the student body was very diverse, not in terms of race/ethnicity, but with regard to family make-

up and student learning needs. Describing further, she said that there are a number of students at her school with "two moms or four moms." She also told me about the large population of students at the school with special learning needs.

In addition to these characteristics, Monica talked about how most of her students come from middle to upper-middle class homes. She said, "I feel like the culture that I am in now, the children have a lot of freedom. They have a lot of free reign. They have a lot of choices." Monica believes that the freedom that her students are given at home enables them to be reflective and expressive students at school—a quality that Monica finds invaluable to their capacity to learn. However, Monica also told me stories about how the freedom that her middle and upper-middle class students enjoy can sometimes conflict with school rules and expectations. For instance, Monica said that she and many of her colleagues have noticed that the students leave their personal belongings everywhere throughout the school despite teachers' constant efforts and reminders. Monica talked about why she feels that some her students' behaviors are related to their class backgrounds stating,

> Most of my students' families are very well off. So the thing about leaving your things everywhere, not taking responsibility for your things, or just knowing that everybody doesn't get a million gifts for Christmas…just understanding that you are very privileged to be able to come to a school like this, you've very privileged for all the things that you have. I want them to know this and be grateful for all of the things they have.

Building relationships. Monica and her students are significantly different from each other in terms of cultural background and socioeconomic status. These differences are not unlike the differences that she encountered as a new college student at a very diverse public state university. As we talked more about Monica's experience navigating diversity at her charter

school, she began to tell me stories about how she had navigated a diverse setting before, during

college. Due to her lack of prior exposure, Monica was initially uncomfortable around other

students who spoke or dressed differently from her. As she began to build relationships with her

peers, however, she said that she started to appreciate the diversity of backgrounds and

perspectives of the students at her university.

As a lead teacher for the first time last year, Monica faced many significant difficulties

relating to student diversity. She told me that over half of her class had diagnosed special

learning needs, while a significant portion of the class was composed of gifted, high achievers.

She also said that she had several students in the class with severe behavioral problems and

several others who were dealing with unfortunate circumstances at home. Given the variation

between her students, Monica felt challenged to meet all of their needs. She spoke about how

her experience with such a diverse group helped her learn to prioritize building relationships with

her students, above all else. She said, "It was a very diverse group, but they ended up being the

dream class. They didn't start that way…I had a lot of challenges trying to figure out how I was

going to teach all of them. I really started to think about, is it important that I cover all the

standards or is it important that I really get to know these kids and really reach them." As

Monica grew to know each of her students personally, she was better able to capitalize on their

strengths, incorporate their interests, and maximize their engagement in the classroom.

During our conversations, Monica also shared the valuable relationships that she has

developed with several colleagues at her school, some of whom were Black. She told me several

stories about how much she has enjoyed collaborating with the associate teacher that has been

assigned to work with her this year. The associate teacher, who is a Black man in his early

thirties, is a current student in the college of education at Monica's undergraduate institution and

is completing the degree requirements for his teaching certification. Monica told me that they both act as co-teachers in the classroom. They share responsibilities for planning lessons and collaborate to plan units of study and class projects. They also co-teach by working with small groups or by splitting the class to provide instruction to two smaller groups.

Monica told me that her assistant principal, who was a woman of color, was assigned to be her mentor during her first year in the classroom. She told me that she and her assistant principal agreed to share a collaborative journal. Specifically, Monica was encouraged to write and express her personal feelings, challenges, and questions as the year progressed. She could leave the journal on her assistant principal's desk, and it was promptly returned to Monica's desk the next day with the administrators' encouraging words and suggestions. According to Monica, the journal enabled the two of them to establish an open and honest line of communication that was free from criticism or judgement. As a new teacher, this was very important for Monica as she was learning to cope with the day-to-day challenges of the classroom.

As I listened to Monica tell her stories, I came to understand how building relationships is a deeply lived metaphor. For Monica, building relationships that were characterized by empathy during college enabled her to navigate a very diverse and multicultural university setting. The lessons that she learned as an undergraduate about the importance of building relationships now informs the ways in which she successfully navigates the diversity that characterizes her charter school. Likewise, building relationships with colleagues and administrators at her school has helped to sustain Monica, both personally and professionally.

Meeting the needs of her students. As we continued, Monica talked about how important it is for her students to build positive relationships with each other, as well. At the beginning of the year, she especially focused on building community within the classroom so

that students felt like they were valuable players on a team. One way that she goes about

building community in the classroom is by reading and highlighting themes from the book, *The*

Junkyard Wonders, by Patricia Polacco (2010). She explained that the book is about a little girl,

a second grader with special needs, with classmates who are not accepting of her differences. As

the story unfolds, the little girl and her classmates grow to respect each other's differences and

go on to do amazing things together. While teaching from this book, Monica states that, "I

always talk about how our differences make us stronger as a unit. Things that I have or don't

have, maybe you have something that supports me and I may have something that supports you."

Monica also talked about how she differentiates her instruction to meet the varied needs

of her students. She said, "If you come to my classroom you may see students sitting at their

desk doing independent work. You may see students sitting on the rug working together. You

may see some students tossing a ball. It's just whatever they need." Monica shared with me a

reading lesson that she used with her students that engaged them in the practice of activating

their background knowledge on a topic in order to support their comprehension of a text. She

incorporated useful visual aids to help students comprehend her interactive mini-lesson, she

modeled the reading strategy for her students, and she allowed students to ponder aloud about

how they used the reading strategy to help them comprehend the text.

As Monica reflected on her efforts with her students, she recalled again her regret about

not taking more responsibility for her own learning during her high school years. Monica seeks

to cultivate her students' independent learning skills so that they can sidestep some of the

personal challenges that she faced as a student. She told me a story about a little boy who is in

her class and is usually disinterested with everything. After completing a unit that explored the

job of the president, governor, and city mayor, Monica was surprised when the student showed

up to class with a report full of additional information about the office of the president. The

student completed his project over the weekend with no prompting from her. She praised the

students' independent interest and research on the topic. Soon, other students began bringing

independent research projects to class to share with their peers. Monica shared that she sees

herself as a guide or a coach to her students as they navigate the learning process. She hopes that

her efforts will enable her students to take personal responsibility for their own learning and

success.

Given the class background of most of her students, Monica also seeks to make her

students sensitive to others who are less privileged. She told me that every year she and her

students participate in a community service project. She said that during a persuasive writing

unit, her students came up with the idea to begin a letter writing campaign to convince the

principal of the need for a school bake sale to raise money for the homeless. Monica

commented, "…It was just one of those experiences where I think the kids really got something

out of it. It wasn't just learning about how to write persuasively. It was that we really made a

difference in other people's lives. We could take what we learn and use it to try to solve a real

life problem."

As I listened to Monica, I came to understand that meeting her student's needs involved a

constant appraisal of their needs within their specific context and culture. Moreover, assessing

the particular needs of her predominantly White, middle class students is central to Monica's

purposes in the classroom. Given that Monica's students represent a diverse spectrum of

learning needs as well as family structure, she seeks to build community in her classroom by

building students' capacity to empathize with others who are different from them. Monica has

embraced the concept of differentiated instruction to meet the wide range of needs represented in

her classroom. She makes a concerted effort to develop her students' ability to learn, think, and act independently so that they can begin to take responsibility for their own success. Monica also tries to cultivate her students' self-awareness and compassion for others who are economically underprivileged.

Feeling cultural tensions in her workplace. As mentioned previously, Monica told stories about how the freedoms that her students enjoy at home sometimes conflict with school rules and expectations. Monica shared with me another example of this point. She told me that the entire school community (students, faculty, administrators, and parents) meets in the gymnasium every morning to make announcements, say the pledge of allegiance, and sing the school song. Overall, the purpose of the morning meeting is to build a sense of unity and community. However, according to Monica, the morning assembly has devolved into a chaotic display of students' disrespect for school rules. She told me that during the morning meeting, many of the students are talking and playing in a manner that is disruptive to the flow of the assembly. She has observed that most of the students do not regard adults' requests of them to quiet down.

Unfortunately, students' disregard for adult requests spills over into the classroom. Monica said that, "There has been many times in my day where I have had to completely stop the lesson because the majority of my class is just talking. And it's not that they're not interested, it's just they haven't quite learned the separation between when it's my time and when it's their time." She told me that her administrators have begun to recognize the degree to which students' excessive, school-wide chatter is interfering with instruction. The school has adopted a new discipline and behavior management system called *Conscious Discipline* and Monica and her colleagues have been learning how to implement the program via teacher led

professional development. While Monica is hopeful about the changes that are taking place, she is still struggling to fully understand the program and is wary that it lacks concrete consequences for student misbehavior.

Interestingly, as Monica shared her story, she began to compare the expectations for student behavior at her charter school to the expectations for student behavior in more racially diverse settings. She said,

> I grew up in schools that were predominantly African American and I student taught
> where it was mixed and where the culture is just completely different and students
> know that when adults are talking, they know that they have to say excuse me or wait
> patiently. That may not happen at my school…the students are kind of like, I'm here and
> you need to answer me now. It's a very different feel from what I've seen and from what
> my background is.

Monica continued to explain that although she tries to teach her students about respect for adults in accordance with her cultural norms and values, it seems to her that respect is defined differently within her current school and community context.

Monica told me another story about a tense moment between her colleagues in the teachers' lounge. It occurred just after the announcement was made that George Zimmerman had been acquitted of the second-degree murder of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed seventeen-year-old African American boy. She recalled her own feelings of bewilderment and outrage about the acquittal. Thus, when her White teacher colleagues made comments to suggest they were pleased with the outcome of the trial, Monica was devastated. The next day, Monica and another African American male teacher at her school confronted the teachers who made the comments. They explained to the teachers that although they may not have intended to be hurtful, their

comments were indeed insensitive. The experience served to remind Monica that although she

has positive relationships with many of her colleagues, they are "different people coming from

very different places."

Monica's stories illustrate some of the threads of tension that exist for her as a cultural

"other" in a predominantly White, middle class school setting. In particular, some of the cultural

norms and values that Monica is accustomed to inform her views of appropriate and respectful

interaction between adults and children. Monica believes that her views may be in conflict with

the cultural norms of her school. Additionally, while Monica enjoys a friendly and collegial

environment with her colleagues, there are some vast differences in their perspectives on racial

injustice in the broader society. These differences resound loudly in the few instances they are

made apparent.

Advocating for African American students. As Monica and I continued, I began to

learn that being an ally to the African American students in her classroom is also very important

to Monica. She shared with me that out of the 24 students she has this year, she is excited that

five of them are African American (the most that she has ever had in any of her classes at the

school). Monica told me stories about how she understands her African American students'

behaviors because of their shared cultural and class backgrounds. She commented:

> Coming from my background, I can see the differences between students from this area
>
> and Black students who might come from other areas. At our school during
>
> morning meeting there is a lot of singing and holding hands and sometimes my
>
> students who are Black are like, "I don't want to hold your hand." And things that may
>
> be stressful to other students like, "She doesn't want to be my friend," the Black students
>
> are like, (laughing), "I don't care if she's my friend." You know, just kind of a different

attitude in how they approach things, and I get it. It's easy to resolve things with them

because I get it and I've been there where as with my other students, when something is

going on, I kind of have to sit and process and get their viewpoint, first.

To another teacher, the African American students' behaviors may have been misunderstood as

causes for concern. But to Monica, her African American students' behaviors are consistent with

cultural norms and values, of which she is very familiar.

As she talked more about the African American students at her school, Monica began to

share stories about how she also advocates for Black students that are not in her classroom by

reaching out to her predominantly White colleagues. Monica told a story about a time last year

when she noticed that a little Black boy in kindergarten was being taken to the principal's office

on almost a daily basis. Monica sought out the boy's teachers. She told me that the teachers

complained that the boy "wouldn't stop moving" and being physically active in the classroom.

Monica responded to the teachers' complaints by sharing suggestions: "I have three brothers and

I know how active and how much they need to move. [Black boys] they like to build things.

They like to do things with their hands. This may not be just specific to Black children, but you

have to know that this is what he may need." Monica also told me a story about how she was

once invited to attend a student support team meeting for the boy, along with his mother, his

teachers, and school personnel. Monica told me about the horrified look on the mother's face

after listening to the teachers open the meeting with a barrage of negative comments about her

son. Afterwards, Monica admonished her colleagues by reminding them to begin their meetings

with parents by saying something positive. She said, "Just going forward, remember this is not

just a student, this is someone's baby, this is someone's everything."

While I listened to Monica's stories, I began to see that her role as an ally and advocate to the African American students in her classroom extends into the broader school community. This role is very important to Monica. Monica seeks to be a resource to her professional colleagues, who are predominantly White, for the purpose of ensuring that the needs of African American students at the school are met. For Monica, being a resource to the broader school community means drawing upon her cultural knowledge to assist other teachers, especially with their African American students.

Becoming a mother. Monica's new baby girl was just one month old when we had our final conversation. Not surprisingly, Monica seemed to be more reflective about her family experiences and talked about how much she was enjoying motherhood. She told me that she was actually born in a rural county in a nearby state and had moved as a child to the metropolitan city where she now resides. Monica was private regarding details about her family members, but she emphasized that her immediate family members: her mother and three older brothers are very close knit. As a new mother, Monica now feels that maintaining a close-knit family and re-building her bonds with extended family back in her home state is important. Since she became pregnant and since the birth of her child, she and her extended family members have begun to visit each other more often.

As we talked, I wondered whether Monica had considered the educational future of her child. During our last conversation, I asked her if she planned to send her daughter to her school one day. Monica responded with an emphatic, no. She said that she and her husband had discussed this option in detail and they both agreed that certain norms and values, which they hold dear with regard to child rearing, did not match with the values emphasized at the school. Specifically, Monica told me that she believes that respect, manners, gratefulness, and personal

responsibility are values that are just as important as intellectual curiosity. Monica wants all of these values to be cultivated within her child and hopes to be able to find a school for her child with similar values.

Practicing her faith. While discussing the close-knit bond that she shares with her family members, Monica disclosed her family's long-term affiliation with a nearby large, predominantly Black church. As a child, Monica, her mother, and her three brothers attended the church every Sunday. Now, she and her husband attend the same church and often meet up there with other family members on Sundays. Accordingly, Monica's faith figures prominently in her professional life. Every day, before school, Monica takes a moment to read a daily religious devotion book that is specifically geared towards classroom teachers. This ritual allows Monica to prepare for the difficulties and daily challenges that she faces as a classroom teacher.

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Cross-Case Analysis

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RQ1: What are the beliefs and practices of exemplary, novice African American teachers?

Findings for research question one, what are the beliefs and practices of exemplary, novice African American teachers indicated six categories of themes: 1) beliefs about spirituality and hope, 2) beliefs about a commitment to uplift, 3) beliefs about the significance of race, culture, and class, 4) teaching for differentiation and mastery, 4) teaching and modeling discipline, 5) teaching skills for life, and 6) teaching for cultural identity. The following section provides participants' explanations and examples of each of their beliefs and practices.

Beliefs about spirituality and hope. Cassidy, a third grade teacher in the study, expressed feelings of self-doubt and trepidation about her ability to continue in the profession. However, findings from her case revealed a significant theme related to her belief in a divine power and a "sacred calling" (Irvine, 2003). Cassidy's story about prayer extends this theme

from previous research on African American teachers by highlighting how her anxieties about teaching are reassured by her spiritual beliefs and practices. Seeking reassurance about how to persist in the profession remains an integral part of Cassidy's daily professional life. Cassidy says for instance, "I pray to God that I will be able to handle it, handle the workload and handle the children. It's just a very important part of my life. I don't know if that works for everyone, but when people ask me what do I do, I just have to tell them that [prayer] works for me." While Cassidy details several circumstances that are out of her control including students' home lives, parental involvement, a lack of time set aside for instructional planning, a lack of ongoing and enriching professional development, and a lack of classroom resources, she believes that the assistance of a divine power will help her to make up the many differences for her students while they are in her charge.

Along with Cassidy, Monica and Nia's narratives included multi-layered stories about the role that faith plays in their sense of self-efficacy (Archung, 2002). Monica and Nia shared items in their memory boxes that pointed symbolically to the influence of their religious faith. Specifically, Monica shared a prayer book for teachers that she keeps in her classroom and reads every morning before the beginning of her workday. She noted that prayer and reflection as a daily practice helps her to put aside issues that might interfere with making the most of each school day. Nia shared a well-marked Bible with scribbled notes and yellow highlights from her reading and study. She described the duty bestowed upon her by God to take care of "other people's children" (Delpit, 1995). In both Monica and Nia's stories, their personal faith strongly accounted for their motivation to persevere in the profession. Likewise, their particular spiritualities (Dillard, 2006) enabled a belief in their personal abilities to bring about positive

outcomes for their students, despite difficulties or the appearance of their immediate

circumstances.

Cassidy was the only participant who shared stories highlighting how her spiritual beliefs

are used in pragmatic ways; thus, blurring somewhat traditional boundaries between personal

faith and public school.   She specifically alluded to her beliefs about the influence of a divine

power on the actual happenings of her classroom through the telling of stories about the effects

of her prayers on student behavior. She recounted a particular incident where an upset student

from another classroom approached her room in a tirade, but quickly decided to leave Cassidy,

her classroom, and her students undisturbed. Through the lens of her distinctive spirituality,

Cassidy attributed the outcome of the event to her diligent prayers for a positive classroom

environment—one where she and her students could be safe and thrive in their endeavors.

To be clear, Cassidy's praying took place within the confines of her classroom, but only

occurred before or after the school day and while no other students or teachers were present. It

should also be noted that Cassidy was the only participant who elected to hold all of our recorded

conversations in her classroom. Thus, a discussion on the pragmatic nature of her spirituality

within the classroom may have been more likely to occur. In comparison, the conversations that

took place with Monica and Nia occurred in their homes. While they referenced their classroom

often in their discussions, they tended to discuss how their spirituality functioned in their

personal lives more than in the classroom. In other words, the setting of our conversations may

have influenced what the participants emphasized about their personal and professional lives.

Beliefs about a commitment to uplift. The theme of spirituality was strikingly absent

from Patrice's narrative. Although she noted attending church services as a family activity

sometimes during childhood, she did not expound about religion in her adult life or its influence

on her teaching practice. Still, Patrice intimated a strong commitment to teach African American students as well as her strong sense of efficacy to do so. Commenting on her deliberate choice to teach in a school setting serving predominantly African American children she said, "I taught Hispanic students during my student teaching and found they were a pleasure to work with, but I felt it was my duty to teach Black students…I feel they deserve the best teaching…" (Patrice, Interview 2). During our conversations, Patrice described that past visitors to her classroom remarked about how impressed they were with the rigorous learning environment as well as the higher order thinking and engagement reflected by her students. Patrice's stories illustrate her belief that African American students deserve no less than the best learning environment. This belief serves to drive her determination to provide the optimal learning environment for her students.

A commitment to teach and advocate for African American students, in particular, was a common theme across all of the participants' narratives. Nia argued that educating African American children ought to be the collective undertaking of the African American community. She saw teaching African American students as fulfilling a personal duty or obligation to "uplift the race" (Dubois, 1939; Woodson, 1936). Similarly, Cassidy's stories captured her intentions to empower her African American students with a sense of pride about their culture and history. In particular, Cassidy emphasized to students that African Americans from the past were resilient, resourceful, and worked together to bring about changes that bettered their circumstances.

Even in the case of Monica, who taught in a predominantly White, middle-class charter school in the district, the findings show her vigilance for the well-being of the few African American students in her school. In her narrative, Monica told a story about becoming aware of an African American student from another class who was frequently being brought to the

principal's office for disciplinary issues. Out of concern for the student, Monica began an on-going dialogue with the students' teachers on his behalf. Over time, Monica came to be included in helping the teachers communicate with the students' mother during parent-teacher conferences. She intervened on behalf of the mother when she felt the teachers spoke insensitively about the child and his supposed deficits. Additionally, during these meetings, she redirected conversations that reflected teachers' deficit perspectives (Gorski, 2013) about the student and his mother's moral failings. Instead, she helped them begin to consider ways to best meet student's needs.

Beliefs about the significance of race, culture, and class. Overall, the teachers who participated in this study took pride in their roles as educators who are deeply concerned for the well-being of African American children. In their consideration of the identities of their students, the teachers who participated in this study articulated critiques regarding the socio-political context of K-12 urban education and the unfavorable circumstances faced by their low income, predominantly African American students (Nieto & Bode, 1992). From Nia's perspective, for example, the broader society sometimes holds African American students from low socioeconomic backgrounds in poor regard. Despite her awareness of the negative perceptions of her students and their community, Nia views her students through the lens of their strengths. She affirmed the prior knowledge that her students possessed by virtue of their social positionalities and experiences. Further, Nia finds that her students were particularly adept to certain skills such as orality, collectivism, and problem solving or what she called common sense. She built on her students' strengths by integrating academic activities into the classroom that allowed them to tap into their personal assets.

Similarly, Patrice told several stories that illustrated her intention to provide low-income African American students with the very best learning environment that she could offer. In a poignant critique, Patrice suggested that the level of teacher quality varies sometimes in her setting and other similar school settings where low-income African American students comprise the majority of the population.   She cited educational inequity as the cause for the increased likelihood that her students may encounter teachers who are licensed through provisional, emergency, or alternative certification pathways. As a well-trained professional, Patrice sought to embody the teacher education principles that she learned for the sake of her students. Further, Patrice believed that the wealth of care, knowledge, and skills that she possessed would be most beneficial to students who have the least access to teachers like her.

It should be noted that teacher bias about the social and economic class backgrounds of students was present in Cassidy's narrative. Describing her socioeconomic background as middle-class, Cassidy drew stark distinctions between the middle-class values that defined her upbringing and the values of her students' parents. During our conversations, she often described her students' parents as uncaring about her students' education, well being, and development. She bemoaned the parents for being poor role models to their children. She also expressed frustration with the parents of the students who seemed to have the most trouble, either for behavioral or academic reasons. When these parents did not return her phone calls or when they failed to secure transportation arrangements for their children to attend afterschool tutoring, Cassidy cited their behaviors as indicative of their moral failings. She did not provide an alternative rationale for their behaviors and never acknowledged their poverty or the effects that poverty could have had on the resources available to the parents that she served.

While Nia and Patrice came from self-described middle class backgrounds too, they related differently to the low-income students and parents that they served. For instance, Nia acknowledged that poverty affects important factors for some of her students such as some of their parents' access to school involvement or some parents' inflexible, low-wage, employment schedules, which prevented many of them from being home in the evenings after school. Nia believed that, despite the unfavorable circumstances, the experiences of some of these students provided them with certain assets and strengths that were useful to learning in the classroom. Similarly, Patrice observed that some of her students came to school each day appearing unclean and disheveled. Patrice carefully made her students aware of aspects of their appearance that could be addressed at school and assisted them in doing so. She believed it was important for her to empower her students with a sense of pride in their appearance and with an understanding about how to represent themselves in public.

Contrastingly, Monica's narrative highlights a nearly opposite class dynamic between she and her students. Monica grew up in a working-class, single-parent family that struggled substantially due to their finances. According to Monica, her students, who were predominantly White, and came from middle to upper-middle class homes, experienced a level of privilege and entitlement that she was unaccustomed to and that oftentimes troubled her. Monica believed that she had a duty to help her students acknowledge their privilege and to challenge their perspectives about meritocracy, fairness, and justice. The experiences of less fortunate others were sometimes the topic of discussion in Monica's class and she incorporated certain service learning projects into the curriculum that helped her students to grapple with concepts associated with their privilege.

Cassidy's narrative illustrated some of the deficit beliefs (Fordham, 1996) that have been found amongst middle class African American teachers serving in low-income schools. On the other hand, the critical perspectives that Monica, Nia, and Patrice had about privilege, oppression, and the effects of poverty allowed them to reject theories that blamed students and parents for their circumstances. Notwithstanding differences in how they related to students and parents based on their social and economic class backgrounds, Nia, Cassidy, Patrice, and Monica believed all of their students were capable of learning and growing as whole human beings. Indeed, each of the teachers believed that they played a most critical role to ensure that each student learns, grows, and develops during the year they are under their charge.

Teaching for differentiation and mastery. In so doing, the teachers employed specific practices to address their articulated purposes and concerns. All of the teachers in this study paid close attention to their students' interests and personal learning styles and adapted the curriculum in ways that could enhance motivation, engagement, and promote student success. Monica, for example, sought to build relationships with her students. She noted the importance of relationship building above all of her other duties and her belief that doing so had helped her meet the learning needs of a classroom comprised of many gifted students, students with individualized education plans, and students with emotional and behavioral concerns. She described that in her differentiated classroom, students often work independently and are engaged in a wide range of activities so that they are each learning the proposed curriculum in a manner that fits them best.

Nia, Patrice, and Cassidy noted their students' preferences for active learning experiences. Further, the teachers used adaptive teaching methods by integrating didactic, traditional methods with differentiated instruction. They used whole-group and guided

instruction, small group instruction, and independent group work (Corno, 2008). For example

Cassidy's math lesson on rectilinear equations began with a mini-lesson using direct instruction

approaches and was then followed by a whole-group, guided instruction period that integrated

the use of the classroom Smart Board to display and edit diagrams. For the rest of the week,

Cassidy's students worked in small groups to continue practicing the new skill and used various

manipulatives, including the Smart Board, to master the concept.

The social studies unit that Patrice shared began with students reading and learning about

economic concepts by comparing and synthesizing two different texts. Patrice then guided her

students in their independent work as they cut out pictures and created collages to represent their

learning, while showing the work of how they decomposed the prices of their items from the

number 20. The unit integrated reading, writing, social studies, and mathematics and allowed

Patrice's students to practice many important skills in the first grade curriculum. Patrice

remarked about her students' high level of engagement with the kinesthetic components of the

project. The final products that students completed reflected a high level of academic rigor as

well as Patrice's hard work and careful planning.

The teachers' practices of adapting their teaching helped students to experience academic

success. Further, the scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978) that Monica, Cassidy, Patrice, and Nia

provided to their students helped them to transfer knowledge and gain independent mastery. In

another relevant example of this point, Nia scaffolded the learning activities that students

completed during a writing unit on sequencing in a manner to ensure their ultimate success. To

begin the unit, Nia taught her students a song that highlighted the sequences of a story. Students

practiced writing steps in sequential order by engaging in two hands-on activities with Nia's

guidance. Finally, students culminated the unit by completing an at-home project with the help of a family member.

Of note, although all of the teachers talked about the ways they sought to provide instruction that aligned with their students' personal interests and learning styles, only Cassidy remarked about impediments in doing so. Specifically, Cassidy asserted that she had experienced issues with securing certain curricular materials that would aid some of her instructional efforts. She told a story about requesting materials, a class set of composition notebooks, to implement a new instructional strategy that she had learned in a professional development workshop. After waiting several months, Cassidy still had not received the order she had placed with an administrator. None of the other participants relayed similar issues with resources and curricular materials.

Teaching and modeling discipline. Several common practices that were shared by the teachers emphasized the teaching of non-academic skills that could help students navigate the world beyond the classroom and the school. Further, a major point of convergence amongst all of the teachers was their insistence on building relationships with their students characterized by trust and mutual respect. For example, Nia built relationships with her students by making sure to acknowledge them as individuals by greeting them with a hug each morning. She sought to ensure that each student felt seen and heard in the classroom and described that she often strikes up personal conversations to check in with individual students. Nia and Patrice built relationships with their students by soliciting relevant, personal experiences that connected to topics they were studying in the classroom. In so doing, both of the teachers sought to honor their students' personal experiences by utilizing students' prior knowledge as a launch pad for learning in the classroom.

Additionally, the nature of the discipline that Cassidy and Patrice cultivated in their classrooms was grounded in their consistent modeling of respect for their roles, their classroom, and their students. Cassidy's narrative highlights how she modeled the virtues of respect for her students by taking care to treat them in a respectful manner. Her consistency enabled the integrity of her demand for students to also treat others with respect and to respect the school and classroom rules. As a consistent role model, Cassidy's students trusted her leadership and complied with her high academic expectations and strict behavioral demands. Cassidy acted in the ways she expected her students to act. Likewise, Cassidy acted in authority in her classroom and her students saw her as such (Delpit, 1995).

Similarly, Patrice's narrative illustrates that the trust and mutual respect that characterized her classroom began with her own behaviors towards her students. She demonstrated respect to her students by calling them "young men" and "young ladies." In her effort to ensure her students' academic success, Patrice was adamant about supporting a "no-nonsense" (Irvine & Fraser, 1998) classroom environment with clear routines and consistent expectations. Patrice embodied the pride, dignity, and respect that she desired her students to imitate. The relationships that both Patrice and Cassidy developed with their students served to ground their effective discipline and classroom management strategies.

Though all the teachers pursued developing relationships and discipline characterized by mutual respect, the narratives point to an important tension that hindered the efforts of Nia and Monica. Nia described that as a third grade and pre-school teacher, she had heavily critiqued her school's approach to control student behaviors, believing them to be a hindrance to the development of their voice and their ability to dissent. While she initially shunned many of the school's rules, she also experienced major issues with discipline and classroom management.

Once she was paired with a veteran African American paraprofessional, whom Nia described as a "warm demander" (Vazquez, 1989), she began to rethink some of her beliefs about her school's disciplinary measures. Further, while teaching kindergarten during her third year, Nia started to incorporate some of the school's rules into her own teaching practices, while still questioning the utility of others.

Mutual respect was also an issue for Monica, as illustrated by her narrative. She described difficulties with cultivating her students' respect for adult authority figures, in particular. For instance, she described that some of her students often interrupted her lessons and that the student body at her school regularly disregarded administrators' requests for silence during morning assemblies. Despite this, Monica tried to instill within her students a respect for adult authority figures but often found her efforts to be fruitless. As an African American teacher from a working class background, Monica believed that her students' behaviors were a reflection of the norms associated with their economic and cultural privilege. She pointed out differences between the norms for childrearing and respect in her home and community context and the context where she worked. Monica felt a subtle displeasure with the lack of respect shown by some of the students at her school and voiced dissatisfaction about not being able to instill this virtue in her students.

On the other hand, a critical component of Cassidy's effective discipline approach emphasized the teaching of respect for adult authority figures. Interestingly, Cassidy considered the ways in which other teachers may perceive some of her African American students' behaviors negatively. In response to this potential threat, she insisted that her students use formal titles such as "sir" and "ma'am" when referring to adults and was adamant that her students learn to use other conventional southern pleasantries, especially with persons in

authority. Cassidy hoped that her students would learn to integrate behaviors that showed respect to adults in order to help offset negative perceptions or actions from others, namely, the future teachers that her students would encounter.

Teaching skills for life. The participants' narratives about their successes and missteps in providing the "the right-mix" (Lynn, 2006a) of discipline signaled another overarching thread related to the teachers' practices. Having a well managed and highly structured classroom environment enabled the participants to provide their students with an academically rigorous environment as well as time for instruction about other important life skills. For example, all of the teachers told stories to illustrate their emphasis on collectivism and collaboration within the classroom. The teachers' regular use of flexible learning groups and student pairings illustrates this point. Additionally, an emphasis on teaching respect for other peers was common across the cases. Monica, for instance, emphasized the notion of her classroom as a family unit. She integrated stories and lessons that allowed her students to gain a sense of empathy for the diverse experiences and needs of their classroom peers.

Another non-academic instructional focus found in Nia's narrative amplified her emphasis on teaching students to be responsible for their personal well-being and academic success. She noted that some of her kindergarten students were faced with the task of navigating their way home after school or entertaining themselves without the supervision of an adult in the evenings. Nia felt she played an important role in helping her students learn useful skills that could support their needs for independent action and critical thinking. She explained that she uses the last few minutes of every school day to give instructions and help her students begin their homework so that they will know what to do. She also assists her young students to find older siblings, relatives, or neighbors that can help to safely escort them home afterschool.

Additionally, Patrice noticed that some of her first grade students were especially shy and timid to speak in class. Patrice sought to cultivate her students' confidence by promoting their ability to speak before an audience; again, illustrating that the teachers took extra time to advise their students about skills that were not directly related to academic instruction. After students completed independent assignments, Patrice often allowed them to stand up in front of the class to share their work. During these moments, Patrice helped her students learn to speak with appropriate volume, tone, and with expression. As far as she was concern, Patrice believed it was her duty to help her students present themselves as best as possible. Again, Patrice's story illustrated that the teachers took extra time to advise their students about skills that were not directly related to academic instruction.

Cassidy's narrative pointed to the way in which she helped her students learn school norms that contradicted with the norms of their home and community. She told me a story about an incident that began when a physical altercation broke out between several of her third grade students who were fighting about how to share sports equipment during recess. Several other students who were not initially involved in the incident joined sides and escalated the fight. One parent who was informed of the incident later explained to Cassidy that she encourages her child to defend his family members and acquaintances. Cassidy responded by explaining a different norm for school: that students should defer to adult authority figures to address such matters as fighting and student-to-student grievances. This story illustrates that Cassidy sought to help translate school norms to her students and parents that were critical to their continued success in the school context.

Teaching for cultural identity. Nia, Cassidy, and Patrice's narratives intimated the teachers' desire to imbue their students with a sense of pride and respect for African American

culture and history. In Nia and Cassidy's narratives especially, the teachers described the ways in which they cultivated students' cultural identities through their dialogue about African American history and culture during social studies lessons. Further, the teachers elevated notions about African American's triumphant past through slavery to the Civil Rights Movement while discussing historical figures like Frederick Douglas, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Martin Luther King, Jr. They described the spontaneous dialogue that occurred as they engaged their students in deeper discussions linking this culture and history to the students' present day lives. By amplifying students' connections to Black historical figures, they hoped to promote students' pride, self-respect, and hope for the future.

An important dimension of students' sense of pride and respect for their culture was also their respect and tolerance for others who are different from them. Monica and Patrice's narratives extended the notion of promoting cultural identity development to also include promoting students' respect for others from different backgrounds than their own. Monica talked about admonishing her students about tolerance for others in her classroom, which included students from diverse racial, cultural, and economic backgrounds as well as family configurations and academic exceptionalities. In one interesting story, Patrice intervened when she was made aware of offensive remarks made by a Black student to the one White student in her first grade classroom.   She was also conscientious of a Muslim student and her development of a positive self-image. Patrice paid attention to all of her students and to distinctively marginalized identities within her classroom.

Consequently, all of the teachers in the study offered important countermessages to respond to the specific needs of their students. They sought to offer positive messages in order to help counteract the effects of students' multiple, marginalized identities. Further, since the

teachers were keenly aware of negative beliefs projected on to marginalized student populations,

they provided alternative messages to discount messages in the broader society. The teachers

made deliberate choices to elevate countermessages most relevant to the particular demographic

they served. For instance, working in all-Black classrooms, Cassidy and Nia's narratives

reflected their emphasis on countermessages for and about African Americans. Since Patrice had

students from other diverse backgrounds, her narrative also included alternative messages to

promote these students' positive cultural identity development. Likewise, Monica offered

countermessages to refute negative perceptions and beliefs about a broad spectrum of

marginalized identities.

RQ2: What are the family and community, early schooling, teacher education, and

mentoring experiences that inform the beliefs and practices of exemplary, novice African

American teachers?

Research question two elicits descriptions of the family and community, early schooling,

teacher education, and mentoring experiences that related to the beliefs and practices of the

participants. These findings are presented in the following four sections: 1) family and

community influences, 2) early schooling influences, 3) teacher education influences, 4)

mentoring influences.

Family and community influences. All of the participants grew up in self-described

African American families. Of the four participants, Nia and Patrice reported having grown up

in more racially diverse neighborhoods. Nia grew up in a suburban community in a metropolitan

city in the Deep South with mostly White neighbors and Patrice lived in a culturally diverse

enclave in New Orleans, comprised of mostly Black and Southeast Asian families. Nia, Cassidy,

and Patrice reported growing up in "middle class" homes. The narratives alluded to an important

factor related to the participants' definition of middle class. According to these participants, being middle class was defined by both parents' education and employment status, not only by material wealth.   Monica, who described her socioeconomic background as "poor," grew up in a single-parent home for much of her upbringing.

While the participants described their backgrounds as "middle class" they were distinctly describing their families' educational and employment status and aspirations, not their access to wealth. This point was most evident when discussions arose about limitations in financing their college educations and/or teacher education. Monica argued that she would not have been able to complete the requirements for her master's in elementary education had it not been online and allowed her to work full-time. Cassidy alluded to financial limitations during college and revealed details about the turmoil she had experienced in paying off college loans.   Nia described that the teacher education tuition scholarship she received was a major perk that accompanied her membership in a national teacher corps. The arrangement necessarily allowed Nia to work full-time; she would not have been able to complete the degree without such arrangement.

The significance of being brought up in close-knit families with parents, siblings, extended family members and fictive kin (Fordham, 1996) was also evident across the teachers' narratives. Except for Monica, whose parents separated, all of the participants grew up in two-parent homes headed by their biological mother and father or stepfather and had several biological and non-biological siblings. While describing the activities that their families took part in, participants alluded to the significance of events that included coming together, usually through interstate travel, with other African American families and close family friends. Going to church with family was described as a significant event for Monica, Nia, and Cassidy's

families while they were growing up. Mostly, each participant asserted that family activities served the purpose of promoting family cohesion and togetherness.

The participants' narratives also indicate the significance of family in their current lives. For example, building relationships with extended family members for emotional support was becoming more significant to Monica as she was beginning to grow her own family and was approaching the birth of her first child. Both Monica and Cassidy still attended the churches they grew up in with their families on Sundays. As a new transplant to the city, Nia came to depend on the support of extended family members who allowed her to live with them until she could support herself. Patrice's family migrated to the same city after their home was destroyed during Hurricane Katrina. Although she lives alone, she visits her family members weekly and they have provided financial support to her at certain critical times. As adults, the teachers are still closely tied to their families, especially for emotional and financial support.

The most central figure in the participants' upbringings were their mothers. The primary responsibilities for childrearing and the emotional and social wellbeing of the children were a central focus in the family because of the special efforts of the mothers (McCray et al., 2006). Cassidy's account illustrates this point by emphasizing how her mother provided structure and promoted productivity in her day-to-day life. Further, Cassidy's mother sought to promote the holistic development of her daughter by teaching her respect for authority, supporting her academics, and arranging various extracurricular activities that helped her to develop important life skills. Similarly, Patrice described her parents as "strict" and denoted the clear rules and boundaries that were in place in her home while growing up. Her mother was especially watchful and responsive to her social development and peer social networks.

Monica, Nia, and Cassidy described their mothers as religious and highly involved in their local church congregations. Nia's mother, who was also an adult Sunday school teacher, provided spiritual guidance by admonishing her about her divine calling to persevere in the profession. Similarly, Cassidy emphasized her mother's high involvement in their family church as a leader of the choir, Sunday school, and a member of several other auxiliary programs. Cassidy followed in her mother's footsteps and became an active participant in their church as well. Importantly, Cassidy also followed her mother, who had been a substitute teacher for over twenty years, into the teaching profession. It should be noted that although Patrice did not describe her mother as religious, she also attributed her mother's direct suggestion to become a paraprofessional as being most critical to her reason to enter the profession.

A latent theme in the narratives of Nia and Cassidy elucidated the significance of family to the teachers' early cultural identity development as African Americans. That is, within their family and community contexts these participants began to identify with other African Americans due to their sense of shared history and values (Erikson, 1963; Tatum, 1997; 2008). For example, Nia recalled that as a child her mother often shared stories about the Civil Rights Movement and the pivotal events that took place in their hometown. Cassidy also alluded to developing a sense of cultural identity as a result of her upbringing in an African American family and community context. For instance, as a young child she became aware of the cultural and historical pride and significance associated with HBCUs. She attended homecoming events at her parents' and older brothers' alma mater and desired as a young person to be a part of the HBCU legacy of Black educational excellence.

Early schooling influences. Cultural identity and development became a more prominent theme across all of the participants' narratives as they matriculated through K-12

public schools. Cassidy, for example, recounted memories of being a recipient of numerous

awards and honors in the predominantly Black schools she attended. In high school, she was

accepted into an honors magnet program that was well known for its historical tradition of Black

educational excellence. Cassidy was also a member of the school's dance team and participated

in several academic clubs. Moreover, as an active member in the community via her activities in

a local Black church, Cassidy developed a positive sense of herself as an African American,

especially as it related to her identification with the virtues of discipline, high achievement, and

the importance of education.

Similarly, Monica attended predominantly Black schools for the most part during

elementary, middle, and high school. She especially recounted positive social experiences

interacting with the Black peers at her schools. She was an above average student and was an

active participant in many different academic and social clubs in high school. Indeed, Monica

described that the African American cultural experience predominated her early life in such a

way that she was largely unaware of other diverse groups and experiences. Like Cassidy, the

cultural isolation that Monica experienced led to the development of a positive cultural identity.

However, given their racial segregation during grade school, both Monica and Cassidy had few

significant encounters with outside stereotypes that reflected the diminished value of their culture

in the wider society or that challenged their personal beliefs.

Nia and Patrice, who attended schools with only a few other African Americans, had

drastically different experiences than Cassidy and Monica. Their narratives spoke to certain

critical incidents that took place during their schooling that reflected back to them common

stereotypes and/or denigrations associated with African Americans. Nia, for instance, described

her traumatic experiences with a White elementary school teacher who made comments to

indicate her low appraisal of Nia because of her race. Importantly, Nia shared the incidents with her parents and they interceded on Nia's behalf by meeting with the school principal. In another example, Patrice recounted that she had been singled out as one of only a few African Americans in her class because of her dark skin complexion. Both teachers described that moving on to middle and high school provided them increased access to other African American peers, which proved to redirect the positive development of their cultural identity.

Moreover, these participants were prompted to discern unequal treatment of African Americans in their K-12 school settings, especially during elementary school. In settings where the participants' race was underrepresented in the demographic of the school, the participants felt isolated, singled-out, and marginalized. In Nia's case, a young White female teacher propagated cultural biases and low expectations in her second grade classroom. The teacher singled Nia out among the rest of the class and made her to doubt her sense of belonging in the class. Whereas the teacher was the source of Nia's problem in second grade, the cultural biases of other students of color, including African American and Vietnamese students were the main culprits in Patrice's narrative, which highlighted the lack of connectedness she experienced as an upper elementary school student. She endured taunts from other students about her dark skin complexion and none of her teachers ever intervened. Furthermore, unlike Monica and Cassidy, Nia and Patrice experienced a crisis in their cultural identities during their K-12 schooling.

Despite some of their negative experiences, all of the teachers intimated several positive details about significant teachers that they encountered in school. Some of the teachers that were noted in their narratives were Black, but some of their most influential teachers were also White. For instance, Monica's favorite teacher from first grade was a White woman who made an effort to build a relationship with Monica that allowed her to meet Monica's particular needs. A high

school English teacher who noticed that Nia was a gifted writer and was especially encouraging and supportive of Nia's interests in journalism, also happened to be White. On the other hand, Cassidy's favorite teacher from first grade was a Black woman who made memorable learning experiences for her students by incorporating storytelling and hands-on activities. Patrice fondly remembered several Black teachers from high school who were stern disciplinarians and who had high expectations for student engagement during instruction.

Of note, only one participant, Cassidy, received an undergraduate degree in elementary education. The other three participants, Monica, Patrice, and Nia, received their undergraduate degrees in other fields at large, public state universities. While discussions about their undergraduate experiences as non-education majors were outside of the bounds of this study, an important finding related to cultural identity development during college emerged in the narrative of Monica.   Monica's narrative illustrates some of the realizations that she began to make about her academic preparedness as a new college student in a multiracial and multicultural setting for the first time. During college, Monica began to question the quality of the education she had received at her mostly Black high school. She specifically pointed out inequalities in her education that were related to a lack of quality teachers, academic rigor, and access to resources in her high school.

Teacher education influences. The significance of the participants' teacher education experiences resulted from their active engagement in classroom settings or interactions with teacher education instructors that reflected best practices in education. In other words, the strategies that were used as participants began to learn educational theories and concepts helped them to better conceptualize the learning process and the teacher's role in enabling the transfer of learning for students. Nia and Patrice's narratives best illustrate this particular finding. The

teachers, who completed their master's degrees in the same teacher education program, both

noted how much they gained from the differentiated learning strategies employed by their

teacher education instructors including dialogic instruction, experiential learning, student

collaboration, and project-based learning.

Nia especially detailed memorable teacher education experiences. She completed her

two-year program while teaching public school full-time. One of the courses she took called for

her to apply what she had been learning to assess and meet the particular needs of one of the

students in her classroom. Through the course, Nia learned how to observe and pay close

attention to her students in a manner that allowed her to assess their personal interests, learning

styles, strengths, and areas of need. By meeting independently with a small group of classmates,

Nia also learned the importance of dialogue and mutual exchange within a professional learning

community with other teacher colleagues.

Monica, who completed an online program for her master's degree in elementary

education, was paired with a teacher education mentor who monitored her progress through each

course for the duration of the program. Monica's narrative speaks to the positive influence of

her mentor, a retired Black veteran educator. Although they had few face-to-face interactions,

Monica's mentor provided consistent and regular feedback about her work and generously

shared useful tips, strategies, and resources with Monica over the phone and online. Monica also

noted that on several occasions the mentor agreed to assist Monica on assignments or provide

feedback outside of their weekly scheduled times. Thus, her program mentor went above and

beyond what was required of her to ensure Monica's success.

Cassidy's narrative illustrated a starkly different outcome from her teacher education

program. Though she learned important lessons about classroom management as a result of her

student teaching experiences, Cassidy felt ill prepared to apply any of the instructional strategies she had learned into an actual classroom. She felt that her teacher education instructors had offered only idealized notions about teaching with little consideration for the complexities and nuances involved in teaching in low-income, urban settings. Additionally, Cassidy felt that her instructors had done little to help her make connections between their teaching style and the best practices that she should employ in her classroom. Once she graduated with her undergraduate degree, she became disconnected from teacher education and was virtually on her own as a new teacher.

Contrarily, Monica, Nia, and Patrice intimated the significance of their teacher education in helping them translate theory and practice in their classrooms. Moreover, close ties between their actual teaching experiences in the classroom and their formal teacher education were maintained through various means. For instance, Monica served as an assistant teacher in the classroom of an experienced teacher who taught at her charter school for two years while working to complete her master's degree. She not only observed the teacher's implementation of educational theory into the classroom, but also witnessed and took part in helping the teacher to incorporate the philosophy and guiding frameworks of the school. Additionally, the teacher-mentor co-taught the class and in small groups with Monica and included her in curriculum planning. Thus, Monica was given ample time to serve in an apprenticeship role and there were clear linkages for her application of effective teaching strategies.

Like Monica, Nia completed her master's degree while simultaneously working as a public school teacher. While her narrative indicates her high level of stress during this time, it also signifies the gains that she made from one year to the next. For example, Nia was given assignments that allowed her to draw from her actual classroom experiences to directly apply

what she was learning. She began teaching with little to no direction about increasing the achievement of her students, but put more thought and planning into her classroom each year. Patrice was not a full-time teacher during the first year that she was enrolled in her teacher education program. However, Patrice was able to draw from her experiences as a paraprofessional to make real-world connections with what she already knew, what she was learning, and what she would need to do as an actual teacher. She began teaching full-time during her second year of the program and was especially supported by a district mentor and a teacher education supervisor as she learned to translate theory into practice.

Mentoring influences.

The lines between teacher education and mentoring were admittedly blurry for Patrice and Nia as they were assigned university supervisors who mentored them until they completed their teacher education programs. These participants were also assigned district mentors during their first two years in the classroom. Their assigned mentors had been identified as model teachers within the school district and they visited the teachers' classrooms several times a month. Nia and Patrice both remarked that the district mentors primarily offered non-judgmental, professional advice. The mentors minimally observed the participants' teaching, but mostly served as mediums to communicate the goals and expectations of the instructional leaders at their respective schools (Achinstein, Ogawa, and Speiglman, 2004). They also addressed the participants' concerns and offered encouragement to the teachers to persevere. Thus, Patrice and Nia's professional independence as novice classroom teachers was gradual and occurred over time. Each of the teachers' district mentors were experienced African American teachers.

During Monica's first year as a lead classroom teacher at her charter school, she was assigned to be mentored by her assistant principal, who was a veteran educator of color.

Monica's mentor did not observe her teaching or offer constructive criticism about her classroom management or instructional strategies. Instead, Monica and her mentor primarily communicated through the regular exchange of a journal. The journal contained Monica's observations, ideas, and concerns and her mentor's corresponding feedback and suggestions. Like Patrice and Nia, Monica noted the importance of the non-judgmental support—both personal and professional—that was offered by her assistant principal via their journal exchange.

The significance of several informal teacher mentors, who served the teachers outside of formal mentoring arrangements, was also an evident theme across the narratives. Especially for Nia, Cassidy, and Patrice, other experienced educators at their school often served critical, supporting roles to their professional development. For example, Nia described the significant role that her paraprofessional, a veteran Black educator, played in modeling for her the behaviors of a warm demander (Vazquez, 1989; Ware, 2006). As a new teacher with few of her own materials, Cassidy was appreciative when a veteran Black teacher provided her with many curricular resources including decorations for the classroom, books, and manipulatives. The teacher also supported Cassidy by noticing her hard work and encouraging her efforts. Likewise, Patrice noted that her school principal, also a veteran Black educator, encouraged her to begin to hone her leadership skills by sponsoring an important extracurricular program at her school.

Indeed, the teachers noted the significant relationships that they had with veteran Black educators in their respective school settings. In noting the importance of these relationships, Cassidy, Nia, and Patrice also amplified that mutual exchange between novice and veteran teachers also characterized these relationships. For instance, Cassidy's narrative elevates the professional exchange that occurred between her and the veteran Black teacher who provided her with curricular materials. Cassidy specifically noted that she assisted the teacher by showing her

how to use technology to enhance instruction, how to use online platforms for grading and assessment, and how to integrate small group instruction. Nia remarked about how she had assisted her paraprofessional in updating her resume to better reflect her teaching skills and experiences. Likewise, Patrice denoted that as the grade level chair, she gleans from what she observes other teams are doing and also offers them her support.

RQ3: What is the relationship between exemplary, novice African American teachers' family and community, early schooling, teacher education, and mentoring experiences and their beliefs and practices?

The participants' shared background experiences, including their family and community socialization and early schooling experiences, greatly informed their overarching beliefs and goals for their students. The findings that follow relate to research question three and denote in detail the relationships between each variable and the participants' beliefs and practices. The findings are presented in four sections: 1) family and community on praxis, 2) early schooling on praxis, 3) teacher education on praxis, 4) mentoring on praxis.

Family and community on praxis. All of the teachers in the study described the mutual support that exists within their close-knit families and community networks. The participants' experiences within these broad networks, which included biological and non-biological family members, church members, and other family friends promoted their notions about extended family or fictive kinship. Thus, the family and community socialization experiences noted by the participants in this study amplified the teachers' sense of connectedness to the students, parents, and the communities they served (Foster, 1993). As persons who grew up in African American families and/or communities and self-identified as African Americans, the teachers felt a kinship with their students because of their shared racial positionalities. Subscribing to notions of

collectivism, the teachers also believed they had a special responsibility to teach African American students.

The participants' experiences as adult members in families with school-aged relatives also seemed to buttress their feelings of connectedness to African American culture. Monica's narrative, in particular, highlights this point. Since she was approaching motherhood at the time of this study, Monica reflected on the values that she hoped to emphasize with her child. She reflected on the norms and values for childrearing in her school setting and distinguished them from her own. More specifically, Monica wanted her child to acquire values that promoted respect for adult authority figures and gratitude for privileges afforded. She felt that her child would be unable to acquire these values in her predominantly White school setting. Thus, Monica was not planning to send her child to the school where she worked, but rather to a school that reflected her values.

To varying degrees, however, the teachers felt disconnected from their students because of differences between their socioeconomic backgrounds. Monica identified with the low-income African American students at her school since she had also endured hardships associated with her socioeconomic background as a youngster. Nia and Patrice possessed certain forms of middle-class social and cultural capital by virtue of their education and employment statuses, however, their narratives highlighted several moments when they and/or their family members experienced economic insecurity. As such, they seemed to recognize that while their economic circumstances happened to be different from their students, their financial stability was not completely assured or secure either. However, Cassidy's middle-class background led her to make moral judgments about her students' parents for their low-income.

The narratives also revealed that the participants drew similarly from their relationships with their mothers to inform the nature of the relationships they sought to cultivate with their students (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Collins, 1990). Like their mothers, these teachers sought to be role models to their students. Further, the teachers sought to embody the virtues of collectivism, discipline, and respect in order to garner the compliance of their students. For example, Patrice and Cassidy's narratives illustrated how they sought to promote structure and discipline in their classrooms by demonstrating respect for their students, but by also being consistent and strict about their expectations, rules, and routines. The teachers' embodied demeanors and behaved in ways to denote to their students their high expectations for behavioral and academic success. Likewise, both teachers' narratives spoke to the pride they felt about the effectiveness of their disciplinary approaches.

The teachers sought to attend to the social, emotional, and cultural needs of their students in ways similar to their mothers. These needs included seeking to make students feel a sense of belonging in the classroom, building students' confidence and pride, and making sure each student felt respected in the classroom. Moreover, like their mothers, the teachers sought to attend to the whole child by making sure that their students possessed the life skills that they would need in order to function in society (Walker & Snarey, 2004). To that end, their efforts with their students extended beyond the teaching of academic subject matter, but also included the teaching of many non-academic lessons for the purposes of their survival.

The participants in this study learned from their mothers that spirituality is an important tool for survival. Through their mothers' examples, Monica, Cassidy, and Nia learned the discipline of reflection and prayer, which enabled their hope and perseverance during difficult times in the profession. The participants also sought to imbue their students with a sense of pride

for African American culture and history. The narratives of all of the participants highlight the ways in which cultural pride was also promoted in their families. To varying degrees, their parents amplified their connections to African American history, culture, church organizations, and/or historically Black colleges. As adults, the teachers sought to continue this legacy through their varied involvement in the African American community, including teaching in predominantly Black schools.

Early schooling on praxis. Importantly, the participants in this study also shared similar experiences with each other as African American students in public school. These experiences greatly informed their articulated beliefs and goals for their students. For example, Nia and Patrice lacked the emotional and sociocultural supports that they needed to thrive in environments that were hostile to their presence in elementary school. Their narratives speak to the lessons they learned about educational inequality for African Americans at the interpersonal level, especially in environments where African American students are isolated from other Black peers and teachers. Monica learned in college that while she had excelled in her predominantly Black high school, she was academically ill-prepared for higher education in comparison to other students. Thus, Monica learned about educational inequality for African Americans at the organizational level where predominantly Black schools are not up to par because they are significantly more underresourced than others.

These experiences led all of the participants to hold critical perspectives about the predominance of educational inequality for African American students in many K-12 public school settings, whether through interpersonal or institutional means. Despite their varied experiences with education inequality in K-12 public schools, the participants noted significant teachers, both Black and White, that they encountered and that ultimately helped them reach

their goals. They remembered that these teachers built relationships with them, noticed their strengths, interests, and needs, and responded accordingly. The participants were aware of the sociopolitical nature of education for low-income African American students. However, because of their experiences they believed that teachers have the potential to make a significant difference in the lives of students if they are so willing.

Teacher education on praxis. Given their shared experiences and beliefs, the participants in this study sought ways to actualize practices that reflected their particular goals. The teachers' narratives regarding teacher education illustrate how these programs built upon or did not build upon their values and goals for the students they sought to teach. Specifically, since the teachers sought to empower students who were marginalized in society and in school, they were especially drawn to the lessons they learned about differentiation and individualization strategies because these strategies would allow them to reach all of their students. For example, Nia and Patrice learned scientific approaches for learning about their students' personal learning styles, interests, and needs. Cassidy learned from her student teaching mentor how to set and maintain routines that helped to provide structure in the classroom. Monica learned from her program mentor that meeting students' needs sometimes meant going above and beyond the official duties that a teacher's role actually requires.

Furthermore, the teachers brought to teacher education values that esteemed professional for the success of everyone involved. Thus, a most valuable aspect of their teacher education was that it provided a means for teachers to practice professional collaboration with other peers. Nia's narrative, in particular, points to the value that was gained from being in a setting where she was learning from and with her peers. Monica, who completed an online program, also noted the value of the monthly, in-person meetings she had with her cohort of peers.

Additionally, working in small groups during their teacher education helped the teachers to transfer their values for collectivism to apply to their actual practices with students. Notably, all of the teachers noted the usefulness of small group instruction in the classroom. The success of the teacher education they received depended heavily on the extent to which the program aligned with their initial values and purposes.

Mentoring on praxis. The novice participants in this study also drew upon their notions of collectivism for the good of the whole and gladly accepted the support of many colleagues. Monica, Nia, and Patrice noted the significant support provided to them by administrators, university, and district mentors. The nature of the support that was offered to the teachers was significant in that the mentors never criticized or punished the teachers, but rather they assisted in ensuring the success of each teacher. They did so by routinely investing in the teachers' personal and professional development. Additionally, informal mentoring of the participants by other experienced colleagues, including Nia's paraprofessional, played a significant role in their success. The informal mentors noticed and encouraged the teacher's efforts, generously shared their resources, and provided important and effective models for classroom management and discipline. Notably, the district and informal mentors mentioned by the participants of the study were experienced Black educators.

Drawing further on their notions of collectivism and mutual support, the participants provided certain supports to their colleagues as well. Monica discussed how she included her assistant teacher, who was also a full-time student completing the requirements for a state teaching license, in co-teaching and curriculum planning for their classroom. Thus, Monica sought to pass on her professional knowledge in the same way it had been shared with her by her mentors. Cassidy described that she often helped her veteran African American mentor to bridge

necessary digital divides and to incorporate new pedagogical techniques in her classroom. As

grade level chair of her team, Patrice also regularly engaged in the mutual exchange of

information and resources with her colleagues for the success of the group. Several of the

teachers also mentioned their future hopes to give back and provide direct support to new

teachers. As formal and informal mentors invested in the participants in this study, the teachers

sought to invest in the professional development of their peers.

Consequently, many of the beliefs and practices of exemplary, novice African American

teachers are culturally embedded in that they derive from their shared background experiences,

values, concerns, and goals. Specifically, the shared family and community socialization

provided them with messages that enhanced their abilities to survive and thrive including their

notions of fictive kinship, collectivism, sense of hope, and cultural pride. Like most African

Americans, the teachers in this study came to know themselves as members of a culturally

marginalized group, especially during their early school experiences. Their family and

community socialization and early school experiences provided a framework through which they

filtered the efforts and supports provided through teacher education and mentoring. In settings

where the values and goals aligned with their own, the teachers thrived. But in settings where the

teacher's values and goals did not align, they did not thrive.

RQ4: What other variables do exemplary, novice African American teachers describe as

influential to their current beliefs and practices?

Several variables emerged from the analysis that relayed experiences besides family and

community, early schooling, teacher education, and mentoring, that informed the participants'

beliefs and practices. For example, Nia taught in two private preschools before becoming a

teacher—a preschool with children from mostly White working class backgrounds and an elite

preschool with children from mostly White upper-middle class backgrounds. Nia recalled several memorable instances where the all-White staff members at the working class school excluded her from their social group because of her race. Although Nia was not the only Black teacher at the elite preschool, she recalled feeling disconnected from the White students and the parents she served.

Patrice's narrative also signified the importance of the participants' prior work experiences. She similarly recounted a prior work experience where she felt she had been targeted unfairly because of her race. Further, prior to becoming a teacher, Patrice worked in a clothing retail store for three years. She recalled that a White female supervisor once refused to allow her to complete a personal return transaction. The supervisor was distrustful of Patrice, heavily questioned her actions, and despite Patrice's explanations, persisted in her refusal. Patrice admitted that she believed the supervisor acted only on her racist beliefs and assumptions.

Consequently, Nia and Patrice's experiences working in cross-cultural settings prior to becoming teachers greatly informed their beliefs and practices. In their previous work settings, these participants experienced discrimination because of their race and felt detached from the values and practices that governed the space. In light of these prior experiences, both participants had sought work environments where they would feel comfortable when they began teaching. Moreover, the participants' prior work experiences helped to reinforce their notions about the predominance of racial discrimination in the broader society. Since both participants had experienced similar incidents in elementary school, their experiences as adults also served to reinforce their beliefs about the increased likelihood that they would experience racism in settings where they were the only or one of a few African Americans.

Another variable that emerged suggests that the participants had visceral reactions to current events involving African Americans and the unfair criminal justice policies they are subjected to. Monica's narrative addressed the non-indictment of George Zimmerman after the murder of Trayvon Martin, for example. Monica was troubled by both the non-indictment and by the comments of a White teacher colleague at her school, which suggested a major difference of opinion about the fairness of the verdict that was rendered. As an African American teacher, Monica was reminded that some of the White teachers she works with have had strikingly different experiences from her, which sometimes causes them to have divergent political beliefs.

Overall, the teachers' reactions to current events, such as the murder of Trayvon Martin, informed their beliefs about the significance of race in the lives of their African American students. For example, while noting the importance of her students' ability to discern how to use their voices effectively, Nia also remarked about how unfair criminal justice policies are levied against African Americans. She sought to help her students avoid violent confrontations with the police. Nia's narrative articulated the process that was underway as she sought to negotiate discipline techniques that could help her students prepare to use their voices appropriately and effectively. Given her beliefs, Nia wished to help her students smartly avoid unfavorable confrontations with law enforcement.

Discussion

This study examined the personal, cultural and professional socialization experiences that inform the beliefs and practices of exemplary, novice African American teachers. Foster (1997), Irvine (1990, 2003), Ladson-Billings (1995) and several others note relationships between exemplary, veteran, African American teachers' beliefs and practices and culturally responsive pedagogy. Yet, a contemporary cross-case analysis of younger, novice African American

teachers and culturally responsive pedagogy had not been fully undertaken before this study was

conducted. This study confirmed that the participants had strikingly similar beliefs and practices

when compared to the exemplary, veteran, African American teachers. The following section

provides a discussion of two areas where similarities are noted.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

The participants in this study articulated stories that centered their roles as culturally

responsive teachers. They not only sought to teach subject matter knowledge, but also desired to

respond to conditions that could potentially threaten their students' ability to participate,

contribute and thrive in the classroom. Irvine and Armento (2001) stress the term, *responsive*,

while arguing that a defining criterion for effective teachers entails their ability to reflect and

react appropriately to the "needs, interests, learning preferences, and abilities" of their students

(p. 4). In order to be responsive to students, teachers must be well attuned to the world as it is

experienced by their students, to what students already know and what they can do, and to the

lessons their students will need to learn in order to successfully navigate schools and beyond

(Freire, 2000).

A significant finding from this study showed resemblances between the beliefs of the

participants and their veteran, African American teacher predecessors. Irvine (2002) emphasizes

the important role of faith in imbuing veteran, African American teachers with a "special Godly

anointing" to educate African American students (p. 104). Similarly, Stansford (2001) finds that

veteran African American teachers rely on their spiritualities as important "reservoirs of

strength" (p. 230). Similarly, three of the novice teachers in this study provided detailed

descriptions and stories about the role that faith plays in their self-efficacy and their ability to

persist. Faith served to ground these participants with a strong mission to respond to the challenges they believed their students faced, despite hardships in doing so.

The findings also revealed similarities in beliefs between the novice participants' and veteran, African American teachers' sense of connectedness to the students they serve (Foster, 1991, 1997). The novice teachers in this study were intensely aware of future difficulties their African American students might encounter due to their marginalized racial and economic identities. However, the participants felt obligated to respond to their students by preparing them to navigate these issues successfully. Ladson-Billings (1994) describes exemplary, veteran African American teachers as "extended family members," and Fordham (1996) describes them as "fictive kin" because of their sensitivity to the life circumstances of their students and their commitment to students' well being. Similarly, the veteran African American teachers in Foster's (1991, 1997) studies express a sense of cultural solidarity and connectedness with their students and the community.

In addition to the beliefs, the participants also articulated practices that were similar to exemplary, veteran African American teachers. The findings signified that participants enacted culturally responsive pedagogy in multidimensional ways (Gay, 2000).   First, in their practices, the participants built individual relationships with their students and promoted positive, interpersonal relationships between students. Ladson-Billings' (1995) profiles of exemplary, veteran African American similarly shows their insistence on building positive interpersonal relationships within the classroom. The researcher argues that "students feel a part of a collective effort designed to encourage academic and cultural excellence" in settings that foster positive social interactions (p. 82).

Second, the participants' practices attended to the whole child by providing both academic and non-academic instruction that responded to the unique needs of their students. This included providing their students with counternarratives about their culture as a means for resisting and transforming the effects of oppression. In Foster's (1997) work, the veteran, African American teachers utilize similar practices. Instead of taking a stance that is oblivious to students' culture, the teachers prompt their students to identify, critique, and combat social injustices such as racism and classicism. Similar to the participants in this study, the veteran teachers' in Foster's research bolster students' awareness and sense of pride by finding ways to incorporate discussions about African American history and culture in the classroom.

Third, the participants' considered ways to build their instruction and the classroom environment upon students' interests, experiences, and norms for learning. The participants in this study often individualized their teaching approaches by drawing upon their professional knowledge of differentiated instruction. They also allowed their students to bring to bear their experiences and cultural knowledge in order to fully engage in knowledge construction and critical thinking. The veteran teachers in Irvine's (2003) study similarly use their knowledge of students' cultures to define how students' school and home cultures intersected and to determine how to build bridges between the two contexts.

Intergenerational Cultural Transmission

This study also conforms to the body of literature on veteran, African American teachers by highlighting the importance of intergenerational cultural transmission (Gates, 1998; Herskovits, 1941; Hilliard, 1995; Holloway, 2005; Levine, 1977). More specifically, the findings extend Irvine's (2003) contention about the shared culture and interpersonal context that exists amongst many African American teachers. Irvine states that African American teachers

"bring to their work values, opinions, and beliefs; their prior socialization and present experiences; and their race, gender, ethnicity, and social class" (p. 5). These variables inform many African American teachers unique worldviews, which situate their pedagogies in distinctively cultural ways.

The addition of the novices in this dissertation study amplified the ways in which culture is transmitted and transformed across generations of African American teachers. The participants in this study were born and came of age in more integrated and culturally diverse school, community, and teacher education contexts than their veteran teacher predecessors. However, several key socialization experiences remain constant between them and must be noted.

The significance of mothers. The findings from this study emphasized the critical roles of mothers in the participants' early intergenerational, socialization experiences. In other words, the participants derived certain beliefs and practices that informed their classroom practices via direct socialization experiences with their mothers. These beliefs and practices included their attention to spirituality, discipline, and the social and emotional needs of their students (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Collins, 1990). Case's (1997) study similarly reveals the influence of biological and "othermothers" (Collins, 1990) on the socialization of veteran teachers. More specifically, the veteran teachers recounted their observations of biological and "othermothers" care for the needs of African American children who lived in their communities. As a result of their socialization experiences, the veteran teachers advocated and cared for their students in ways that were consistent with those who cared for them as children.

A previous study by McCray et al. (2002) found that pre-service African American teachers cite the strictness of their mothers as evidence of their care and concern. Likewise, the

participants in this study articulated no-nonsense teaching styles that reflected their mother's approaches to discipline. An important point to note from these findings is

   Professional socialization. During the period of *de jure* segregation, Black segregated schools in the South were virtually independent educational institutions with complex organizational structures that worked in tandem to serve the educational goals and best interests of the Black community (Irvine & Irvine, 1983; Walker, 1996). Although segregation was an imposed condition, the isolation of African Americans in segregated schools afforded the Black community a publically sanctioned space to continue cultural traditions and practices (Irvine, 1990). The circumstance of segregation resulted in a wide array of opportunities for intergenerational cultural transmission and professional socialization for veteran, African American teachers, as illustrated in both Foster (1997) and Walker's (1996) seminal studies. For example, one veteran teacher from Foster's study stated, "They [veteran teachers] mostly retired a few years after we began teaching, but they were still there when we started. We patterned our life, our teaching lives, after them" (Foster, 1997, p. 38).

   Findings from this dissertation study showed that intergenerational, professional socialization occurred in some similar ways for the participants in this study. The participants' valued supportive, non-judgemental, mentoring exchanges with more experienced others through both formal and informal means (Dingus, 2008; Dingus & Dixson, 2008). Importantly, all of the mentors cited by the participants were experienced and veteran, educators of color. These mentors gave support by providing encouragement, offering suggestions, and sharing instructional resources. For instance, in one case, the participants' mentor was a veteran, African American paraprofessional aide who modeled for her the practices of a "warm demander" (Vasquez, 1988; Ware, 2006).

Importantly, this study did depict class-based biases about some students and parents in the responses of one participant. Her comments are consistent with Loder-Jackson's (2012) study, which observed class biases amongst younger, African American teachers. However, these findings of class-based biases are also consistent with some of the outlier cases found in the research on veteran, African American teachers. For example, Lipman (1998) found that some of the middle-class, veteran African American teachers in her study held class-based biases about students labeled "at-risk" because of their low-socioeconomic backgrounds.

Limitations

Although the findings about the beliefs and practices of the novice teachers in this study aligned closely with those of veteran teachers, four limitations should be noted. First, the participants for this study were drawn from the community nominations of local school principals and parent teacher association representatives. Based on the criteria I provided, these individuals believed the participants displayed "exemplary" behaviors. Nominations did not necessarily include the opinions of the actual parents of the students in the participants' classroom. They also did not include the perspectives of students or veteran teachers who worked in the schools.

Second, the data was self-reported. At no time were school principals or PTA representatives asked to use performance data or teacher evaluations to document teacher performance. The study also did not include classroom observation data. In addition to the lack of confirmatory documents, the participants may have been influenced to make statements that reflected positively on their beliefs and practices. Given our shared racial and gender identities and close proximity in age, the participants may have been more open to divulge "insider" information than they would have done otherwise. Although attention was given to providing

opportunities for participants to revisit, clarify, and refine their responses over time, informants may have made statements based on what they thought I wanted to hear or what they thought most African Americans believed.

Third, the small sample size makes the findings not generalizable to a larger African American teaching population. However, the findings may provide theoretical generalizations (Creswell, 1996). Within the small sample, the failure to obtain the nomination of African American male teachers further limits the generalizability and is a fourth limitation of the study.

Implications for Research

The limitations of the study suggest important areas for additional research. To achieve generalizability, future studies should add classroom observation data and parental and student views to confirm the self-reported data from this study. Future studies should also seek to expand the sample size, while continuing to control for and examine the findings based on entry type and program. Similar studies should also include African American, male participants to analyze the outcomes of race/ethnicity and gender-specific socialization experiences.

Another possible area for research includes the sampling of African American teachers working outside of the South. Since most African Americans continue to reside in the U.S. South, it boasts a higher number of African American teachers when compared to other parts of the country (Morris & Monroe, 2009). A greater preponderance of African cultural retentions has also been noted in the U.S. South; thus, it is presumed that teachers in the South have had more direct contact with the Africanisms and African American cultural forms of teaching (Herskovits, 1941). However, the beliefs and practice of teachers in the west and north are needed.

Student performance is also an important data source that should be included in future studies to extend the self-reported data from this dissertation. Researchers have found that in the presence of African American teachers, African American student achievement increases on several indicators including test scores, school attendance, high school graduation rates, and enrollment in gifted and advanced placement courses (Dee, 2004; Figlio, 2005; Klopfenstein, 2005; Meir, Stewart, & England, 1989). All of these indicators have gained some traction in the way that school achievement is evaluated and reported via school performance index scores (ESSA, 2015; U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2009).

However, most of the aforementioned performance indicators are not weighted when determining the effectiveness of teachers. In the current era of educational accountability, priority is given to student achievement outcomes on high stakes tests to measure teacher effectiveness (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Causal links between test scores and African American teachers have been established, but the effect of culturally responsive pedagogy on test scores is not well documented in the research. Future studies should integrate qualitative and quantitative methods to examine the effects on student performance via standardized test scores when teachers successfully demonstrate or fail to demonstrate culturally responsive beliefs and practices. Furthermore, studies that include student achievement data will fill important gaps in the culturally responsive pedagogy literature.

Implications for Policy

Value-added measures (VAMs), which use a single student test score to measure teacher effectiveness, are particularly controversial additions to the education reforms adopted by a majority of state education departments under President Obama's Race to the Top initiative (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2009). Ballou and Springer (2015) argue that VAMs assume certain ideal

conditions such as the complete reliability of standardized tests and randomized assignment of below, on, and above grade-level students within and across schools. Additionally, VAMs presume similar in-school factors across localities, districts, and schools such as class size, curriculum choices, amount of instructional time, and access to supplemental and specialized supports.

Since VAMs are utilized throughout the nation, they have the potential to create structural biases for many African American teachers in the field today. As noted previously, African American teachers are disproportionately inclined to work in high poverty, urban school settings (Bireda & Chait, 2011; Hill, Bacheler, Allen, & Coble, 2004; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Scafidia, Sjoquistb, & Stinebrickner, 2007). While out-of-school factors regarding the economic and racial background of students correlates most with student achievement, value-added measures pin students' low performance on many urban, African American teachers (ASA, 2014; Kozol, 1991; Milner, 2015). Darling-Hammond (2015) affirms that value-added measures tend to distort the efforts of teachers who serve typically poor performing students from low-income backgrounds. Additionally, VAMs fail to account for variance in student background factors (Johnson, 2015).

Additionally, Ingersoll and May (2011) observe a "revolving door" phenomenon amongst African American teachers who are exiting the field at nearly three times the rate they are entering in several major urban cities. Their findings amplify a key point that affects African American teachers—that is, the professional and organizational cultures that characterize their work settings. While high stakes testing and accountability has increased under current reforms, Ingersoll and May find that many African American teachers who have exited the field cite unfavorable work conditions as the primary reason for leaving. More specifically, these teachers

cite a lack of professional autonomy in decision making as their primary workplace dissatisfaction.

A diminished sense of professional autonomy brought about by high stakes accountability signifies a no-win situation for African American teachers and the students they serve. Without professional autonomy, the culturally embedded beliefs and practices of exemplary African American teachers may be pushed to the margins of the classroom. As their visions become compromised, some African American teachers may experience significant distress with the competing values and goals that high stakes accountability, standardization, and VAM's introduce (Johnson, 2015). The largest burden falls on low-achieving African American students. These students are prohibited access to teachers who will likely provide important learning opportunities beyond the curriculum that cater to their unique needs and that may prove vital to their academic achievement.

Findings from this dissertation study support contentions that strongly caution federal, state, and local policymakers' overreliance on high stakes accountability measures in urban school settings (ESSA, 2015). To promote the success of diverse groups of students and teachers, policymakers must support the expansion of innovative ways to assess student achievement using multiple sources of data. These data might include academic portfolios of student work constructed by collaborative groups of teachers as they are guided by curriculum and student goals. Additionally, teacher-created exams, performance-based assessments, attendance, and promotion/graduation rates should be used to evaluate teacher contributions to student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2013).

Over the past thirty years, policymakers have increasingly supported reforms that disregard cultural diversity. However, the recruitment and retention of exemplary, novice

African American teachers hinges on policies that appropriately evaluate these teachers' culturally informed practices. Policymakers must consider the ways in which some reforms scapegoat urban, African American teachers in particular. By disregarding the significance of their cultural identities to their teaching practice, certain policies and reforms become the cause of continued educational inequity for African Americans. Instead of using VAMs to evaluate, rank, and even perhaps dismiss teachers, culturally responsive pedagogy should be utilized as an effective teaching framework to assess the quality of interpersonal relationships, academic rigor, and curricular relevance in urban settings. Culturally responsive pedagogy should also be used to inform appropriate supplemental professional training for urban teachers.

Implications for Practice

Current reforms also affect the teacher education of African American and White teacher candidates. The research elevates that particular training is needed for teachers to be successful with culturally diverse student populations (Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995).   However, many colleges of teacher education have not adopted programmatic initiatives to adequately address these needs (Howard, 2015). This neglect may be due in part to the expansion of accountability policies that constrain academic freedom in teacher education at the university-level (Dunn & Faison, 2015). Nevertheless, many African American and White teacher candidates are left ill-prepared to meet the complex needs of culturally diverse students.

To support the personal and professional development of African American teacher candidates, teacher education programs must seriously re-evaluate teacher education practices that reinforce the broader society's marginalization of culture. The findings from this study illustrate that many African Americans arrive to teacher education programs with an implicit understanding that culture matters. However, it is up to teacher education programs to affirm and

assist students in explicating their tacit cultural knowledge. Likewise, some African Americans hold class-based biases that result in low expectations and deficit beliefs. Responsive teacher education programs must address the intersectionality of race and class in order to help develop the critical consciousness of African American teacher candidates (Freire, 2000).

Alternately, teacher education must lead in countering the notion that culture does not matter by magnifying its significance in the learning and teaching process as much as possible. Paramount to the endeavor of infusing culturally responsive pedagogy across teacher education coursework, fieldwork, mentoring, supervision, and assessment will be the training of teacher education faculty across content area disciplines. Without faculty "by-in", expertise and support of culturally responsive pedagogy, many African American teachers will find it difficult to thrive and remain in teacher education programs.

White candidates preparing for teaching placements in urban schools will also greatly benefit from programmatic efforts that illuminate the centrality of culture in teaching and learning and the intersectionality of race and class. Specifically, urban teacher education programs should conduct rigorous screening processes to identify candidates who demonstrate a willingness to learn about the cultural context of teaching and learning. Milner (2011) and Sleeter (2008) agree that programs must also provide teachers with multiple opportunities to reflect on their personal, cultural identities and to consider the cultural identities of others as they relate to equity and access in education. In content-specific courses, teacher candidates should be engaged in building pedagogical-content knowledge that enables them to respond thoughtfully to the interests, experiences, and concerns of their students.

Teacher education candidates should be provided with cultural immersion experiences in urban school and community contexts prior to the student teaching internship (Waddell, 2011).

University field experiences should be designed to provide candidates with extended and meaningful opportunities to work alongside experienced teachers, elders, and respected figures from the community who embody the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy. Additionally, special efforts should be made by teacher education programs to cultivate formal and informal mentoring experiences with veteran and retired African American teachers. Meaningful exchanges with exemplary, African American teachers may aid candidates in transferring their knowledge about culturally responsive pedagogy into practice (Moule & Higgins, 2007).

The increased visibility of teacher education partnerships with exemplary, veteran African American teacher mentors in K-12 schools may also serve the broader purpose of African American teacher recruitment. First, increased involvement provides teacher education programs with opportunities to exchange expertise and help to address educational pipeline issues that affect the available pool of qualified, African American teacher candidates (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2016). Second, the visibility of exemplary, culturally responsive, teacher candidates in field experiences may help to spark the future teaching aspirations of urban, K-12 students.

Conclusion

An important question remains at the conclusion of this study—will education policymakers and practitioners empower culturally diverse communities by reflecting their articulated values or will values continue to be imposed from above? Supplementary findings from this study denote the professional regard accorded to participants by the communities they serve via their nomination. The beliefs and practices of the participants selected for this study align with broader values espoused by the low-income, African American communities where

they work. In other words, these communities lauded participants' efforts to provide culturally sustainable environments for their students.

Given these findings, it is imperative that policymakers and practitioners consider the voices of African American teachers as they legislate and enact reform. More simply put, African American teachers matter. If there increasing absence from the field is dismissed, democratic practices in public education will be severely compromised. Structural discrimination based on cultural marginalization is evident for not only African American students, but also African American teachers. Therefore, critical attention should be given to the underlying causes of their attrition and strategic planning should be made to address their concerns.

Finally, Dingus (2006) ponders, "…who will pick up the mantle of transmitting the idea of teacher as cultural worker to a new generation of Black teachers?" (p. 204). Her query implies an impending threat to the loss of historical African American teaching traditions as well as a moral grappling for solutions. This study offers a glimmer of hope by uncovering the traditions that have been transmitted to a new generation of African American teachers and the means by which this transmission continues to occur. These themes are particularly salient to the recruitment, retention, and success of African Americans teachers in the field today. African American teachers play a significant role in bettering the lives and opportunities for some of the nations most vulnerable students. We must not allow these teachers to be silenced, nor should we allow their cultural practices to be erased.

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