CREATING RACIALLY SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS: AN

INVESTIGATION OF THE PEDAGOGICAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF TWO

AFRICAN AMERICAN TEACHERS IN RACIALLY HOSTILE URBAN

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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Accepted by the Graduate Faculty of Indiana University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Sara Elizabeth Bangert

DEDICATION

To my husband and sons

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Sara Elizabeth Bangert

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Many Americans espouse "post-racial" conceptions of race and its role in children's access to equitable learning opportunities; however, recent studies have illuminated the need to examine the ways in which "new" forms of institutionalized and interpersonal racism continue to hinder the schooling experiences of students in urban schools. Despite that students in urban schools are predominantly African American (27%) and Latinx (41%), the teaching force remains predominantly white (71%). Within these schools, white teachers' lack of cultural competence and racial literacy marginalize students' opportunities for social, emotional, and academic development and, thereby, foster racially hostile learning environments. However, cases of teachers in urban schools who create and sustain learning environments in which their students thrive socially, emotionally, and academically exist and need to be studied. This case study investigated the pedagogical beliefs and practices enacted by two highly regarded African American educators who created racially safe learning environments in two racially hostile urban elementary students. Ethnographic data was collected over a five-month period. Using constant comparative analysis within and across both cases, several significant findings emerged. Findings revealed how "new racism" manifested in the discourses, policies, and practices at both schools and, thus, illuminated the ways in which race marginalized not only the schooling experiences of African American and Latinx students, but their

African American educators as well. Findings examined how each teachers' pedagogical enactments aligned with the ideologies, beliefs, and practices associated with African American pedagogy and revealed how they fostered cultures of community, love, and achievement within their classrooms. Findings suggest that their culturally specific pedagogical beliefs and practices have the potential to create racially safe learning environments within, otherwise, racially hostile schools. Although African American pedagogical excellence is often relegated to discussions of practices needed to reach African American students, this study expands the knowledge base needed to center AAPE in discussions of best practices for teachers in urban schools. This study adds critical insights to discussions of race and its role in the schooling experiences and opportunities to learn in racially hostile urban schools.

Tambra O. Jackson, PhD, Chair

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Prior to becoming a graduate student, I had the opportunity to teach in several

different schools located in various urban contexts. Being a young white[1] woman from a

small Indiana town, these contexts were unfamiliar to me as were the cultural

backgrounds of most of my students. Needless to say, I had a lot to learn about

teaching. Fortunately, many of the teachers with whom I taught were willing to mentor

me as I learned to become a more effective educator. Although I worked with several

effective white teachers, my most valuable guidance came from my Latinx[2] and African[3]

American colleagues. Their culturally specific perspectives, beliefs, and experiences

helped me develop practices and dispositions to more effectively meet the needs of my

students that, ultimately, deepened my commitment to working with students in

underserved communities.

My teaching career began in an urban elementary school in Tucson, Arizona. As a

new teacher, the district mandated three days of professional development workshops

before the school year had even started. While these workshops were beneficial to me as

a novice teacher, I came to view my colleagues as the education experts. These

colleagues were predominantly Latinx, like my students, and suspected that I, a young

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[1] In this study, I recognize the sociopolitical nature of language as well as the importance of using terms that people use to name themselves. In avoiding the conflation of the raced experiences of people who identify as "white" with those who do not, I have chosen to not capitalize the term "white" and, thereby, center the attention of my study on the lived experiences of those who do not privilege from their whiteness and white racism. Moreover, in an effort to honor their historical struggle for racial equality, I have chosen to capitalize terms used to refer to people who do not identify as white such "Latinx, Black, and African American" throughout the study.

[2] I chose to use the term "Latinx" to include people who trace their origins to Spanish-speaking parts of Latin America and the Caribbean.

[3] I chose to use the terms "Black" and "African Americans" interchangeably to refer to people who trace their origins across the African diaspora.

white woman from Indiana, may not have had much experience with Latinx students and their culture. Not only were my colleagues outgoing and friendly, they were willing to provide me with a substantial amount of support and guidance during my first years as a teacher. We spent many hours together after school discussing various aspects of curricular planning and instructional strategies that I would later learn were culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 2009a). Although many were classroom teachers, I was also fortunate to have other staff members, many of whom had grown up in the neighborhood such as the principal, school counselor, support staff, and teaching assistants, help me develop a more contextualized understanding of my students, their families, and the surrounding community. For example, my colleagues encouraged me to reach out to my students' parents/guardians and communicate with them their children's academic successes on a regular basis. Even though most of these conversations with families happened after school in the schoolyard, I also walked to many of my students' homes and visited with their families. These initial positive interactions helped me to establish more meaningful relationships with my students and their families. By developing these relationships early in the school year, I was able to create a learning environment in which parents felt welcome to lead small group reading discussions and volunteered to assist with in-class projects. When we had class celebrations, many parents or grandparents would bring homemade food such as tamales and enchiladas. I attended many of my students' first communion celebrations, sporting events, and birthday parties. Each of these practices were modeled, recommended, and strongly encouraged by my mentor teachers. As a result, I was better able to understand and use my students' cultural and academic capital, or funds of knowledge (Gonzales, Moll, & Amanti, 2006),

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to become a more culturally responsive teacher. This is not to say that I was not empathetic to some of the difficult situations in which my students lived. Some of my students faced significant challenges in their lives, but those challenges did not define who they were. My positive experiences as a teacher in this community provided me with a strong understanding of the sociocultural nature of learning, the contextualized nature of schooling, as well as the critical role that I assumed as an educator in the lives of children.

My next teaching experience was in an elementary school in Kentucky. Although the town was mid-sized, the school was known as the district's "urban" school, which meant the student population was predominantly African American. Initially, I was excited to teach in this new location as the staff seemed dedicated to providing students with high-quality learning opportunities. However, as my first year progressed, my understanding of my colleagues' dedication on high-quality learning opportunities began to shift. Staff meetings began to focus more on attaining AYP (annual yearly progress) on the annual state achievement tests than meeting our students' academic, social, and emotional needs. Moreover, I felt my colleagues perceived students to be culturally deficit and often equated their roles as teachers in this school to "saviors". During meetings, when discussing curriculum and instruction, my colleagues often referenced our students' academic, social, and emotional needs as products of their "culture of poverty" (Gorski, 2008). Having grown up in a working-class town, their deficit-based assumptions and stereotypes of our students and families (Valencia, 2010) contrasted with my perspectives and experiences. My friends and family who struggled socioeconomically were hard-working and held education in high regard. Nevertheless, I

continued to teach in this school and was, eventually, was asked by my principal to join the school leadership team.

During leadership team meetings, it became more and more apparent that my colleagues' perceptions of our students' "culture" greatly limited their perspectives of the academic and cultural capital (Yosso, 2005) they brought to school. I worked hard to open colleagues' minds to the plethora of assets that our students and their families could contribute to our school but was dismissed as naïve because I was new to the area. At the time, Kentucky education law mandated that at least three of the seven seats on our school's site-based decision-making team (SBDM) be members of the community. I pushed to have more than one parent (who was middle-class) nominated to the board, but our principal was adamant that we could not recruit any other community members as they were incapable of making informed decisions about the school. Nonetheless, I lobbied the other members of the leadership team to stand with me as we, school personnel, were supposed to be equal decision makers with the community. However, this perspective and my actions were considered a threat by my administration and I was fired. This experience opened my eyes to ways in which education is a politically driven institution that does not always center the needs of students, parents, and the surrounding community.

With a better awareness of the politics of public education, I moved to a large Midwestern city and began teaching in its largest school district. I taught third grade in an elementary school that served predominantly African American and Latinx students and, over time, ended up working in schools throughout the district. While I did not find my new teaching environments as supportive and cohesive as I would have liked, I was able

to rely upon the expertise of a few colleagues. A few of these colleagues were Latina, but most were African American. I recognized their deep commitment to their students' academic, social, and emotional development as well as their ability to foster positive and meaningful relationships with students and their families. These colleagues often displayed a warm, yet demanding dispositions and were well-respected by their students. Their strong relationships with students created learning environments in which students thrived. My colleagues were always eager to share the pedagogical practices that they found effective and their guidance supported my understanding of the ways in which my curriculum and instruction needed to reflect the sociopolitical and historical context in which our schools and surrounding neighborhoods were situated. In so many ways, my colleagues were a source of inspiration for the type of educator I hoped to become. At the same time, I was also becoming acutely aware of the ways in which students and colleagues of color were experiencing our schools as hostile. I continuously observed interactions between white colleagues and children of color students that appeared condescending and belittling. To me, these types of interactions produced moments of humiliation for young children.

While I did my best to create a space for students to thrive academically as well as socially and emotionally, I was ill-equipped to understand why our African American and Latinx children were often conceptualized from perspectives that defined them as culturally deficient. I decided to gain a better understanding of these disturbing trends as well as ways to disrupt, so I enrolled in a doctoral program focused on urban education and addressing systemic inequities that marginalize students' opportunities to learn. This study is an extension of my positionality, my teaching experiences, my learning and

growth as an anti-racist educator, and my desire to illuminate the practices of teachers who transform these sites of dehumanization and disenfranchisement into racially safe learning environments.

Studies of "failing" schools, teachers, and students are ubiquitous in urban education research (Nygreen, 2006); however, I sought to engage in humanizing research (Paris, 2011) that would disrupt these types of dominant discourses and highlight the pedagogical practices of successful teachers whose students thrived despite challenging schooling conditions. Knowing that student success is an outcome of asset-based beliefs and culturally affirming pedagogical practices, I wanted to design a study that took place in schools similar to the ones in which I taught and with teachers who "taught against the grain" (Cochran-Smith, 1991); in other words, teachers who not only rejected deficit-based assumptions of students and their families but sought to honor and affirm their students' cultural backgrounds and, in this way, and created learning environments in which students thrived academically, socially, and emotionally. For this reason, I chose two African American teachers, whom I knew taught in schools like the ones in which I had taught in the same district and were successful with their African American and Latinx students. This multiple case study explored the ways that these two teachers' beliefs informed their practices as well as their students' perceptions of their teachers' beliefs and practices. Thus, this study investigated the ways in which these teachers' beliefs and practices created racially safe learning environments in otherwise racially hostile schooling environments.

The Sociopolitical Context of Urban Schools

One cannot fully comprehend the myriad of social and political challenges that educators and students in our nation's urban schools currently face without a critical understanding of the history of race in American education. Overt and subtle racism have undergirded U.S. educational policies and practices since the inception of our nation's educational system (Williamson, Rhodes, & Dunson, 2007). From Americanization schools (Tyack, 1975), to the separate and unequal segregated school system that served African Americans and Mexican Americans (Anderson, 1988), to Native American boarding schools (Lomawaima, Brayboy, & McCarty, 2018), there is a long entrenched relationship between public education and the politics of oppression. More specifically, our educational system continues to be a U.S. institution permeated by white supremacist ideologies that shape the educational opportunities and experiences of students and teachers of Color (Kohli, Pizzaro, & Nevarez, 2017).

Anderson (1988) explains, "both schooling for democratic citizenship and schooling for second-class citizenship have been basic traditions in American education" (p. 1). As such, these traditions, or discourses, policies, and practices, can be examined as social artifacts that operate to recreate and legitimate racially oppressive opportunities for students and teachers of Color (Ladson-Billings, 2009b). Thus, in order to provide appropriate context to this study, I begin this chapter with an historical overview of the ways in white supremacist ideologies have permeated educational policies and practices in American education since its inception. By providing this brief yet, critical overview, I will illustrate just a few of the ways in which racism has marginalized and restricted the educational experiences and opportunities of students and teachers of Color.

African Americans have a long tradition of valuing education; however, racism rooted in white supremacy has always instituted substantial barriers to their access to educational opportunities in the U.S. Prior to 1863, most southern states had enacted legislation making it a crime to teach slaves to read and write (Anderson. 1988). Despite these prohibitions, southern Blacks emerged from slavery with a strong desire to secure their access to educational opportunities (Anderson, 1988; Foster, 1997). Underlying this strong desire was the belief that literacy and formal education was directly tied to the liberation and freedom of the African American community. Hence, upon emancipation, southern Blacks campaigned for universal, state-funded education (Anderson, 1998). Though their efforts were often thwarted by southern whites; nevertheless, southern Blacks continued to work diligently to create and sustain schools for themselves (Anderson, 1988). There is some historical evidence that northern missionaries created some schools for ex-slaves in the post-war south; nevertheless, the majority of the Black schools were founded and financially maintained by southern Blacks which, consequently, laid the foundation for public education in the south (Anderson, 1988).

At the same time, northern Blacks were also seeking educational opportunities for their children (Douglas, 2005). Although northern Blacks were considered free, their access to educational opportunities was also shaped by racism (Douglas, 2005). During the 1830's and 1840's, urban centers in the northern states experienced a significant influx of European immigrants. With the intent of assimilating newly arrived immigrant children into the "common" American culture (Tyack, 1975), the public-school systems in the northern states greatly expanded. Because white supremacist ideologies that deemed African Americans intellectually inferior to whites were widespread throughout

the north, few African American children were permitted to attend these new schools. Consequently, while access to public education was expanding in the northern states, most African American children were excluded from public schools because of their race (Douglas, 2005; Tyack, 1975). Douglas (2005) elucidates, "while some of the northern schools allowed black and white children to learn together, most did not" (p.14). However, these restrictive policies did not deter northern Blacks from seeking educational opportunities for their children. Viewing education as a crucial mechanism for racial uplift, Blacks in northern states fought vigorously to secure educational opportunities for their children either through privately supported schools or newly created public schools (Douglas, 2005; Foster, 1997).

Historically, Latinx and Native American children have also been educated in segregated schools that were consistently underfunded and, often, focused on non-academic instruction. Moreover, curricular materials in these schools had typically already been used and, subsequently, discarded from neighboring white schools. Furthermore, the curriculum and instruction afforded students functioned to strip them of their language and culture and replace it with English and Eurocentric cultural values (San Miguel Jr, & Donato, 2009). In this way, these segregated schools served as sites of "subtractive schooling" (Valenzuela, 1999). In other words, rather than affirming and incorporating the cultural and academic assets that students brought with them from home, segregated schools viewed them as deficiencies and worked to subtract these resources from them (Valencia, 2005).

At the turn of the twentieth century, race and racism continued to permeate educational, discourse, policies and practices throughout the United States. Yet,

even within our larger social system of political subordination and structural racism, many southern Blacks sought to gain control of their lives and moved north in search of educational opportunities and economic freedom. As more southern Blacks migrated to northern cities seeking better employment and an escape from racial oppression, northern whites' hostility toward African Americans surged and demands for segregation in public spheres sharply increased (Douglas, 2005; Lewis- McCoy, 2018). So, while African Americans were considered "free", their access to public resources (e.g. housing, employment, healthcare, and education) existed in a system of racial segregation and second-class citizenship. Consequently, by the late 1930's, "northern school segregation was considerably more extensive than it had been at the turn of the century" (Douglas, 2005, p. 121).

Latinx children's access to educational opportunities has also been shaped by race and racism; however, their communities, did not always passively accept these racist policies and practices. Many parents resisted segregation and advocated for more equitable educational opportunities for their children (San Miguel Jr. & Donato, 2019). Although some Latinx students attended integrated schools, the majority were relegated to separate schools and were excluded from rigorous coursework and bilingual learning opportunities (San Miguel Jr. & Donato, 2019; Shapiro, 2016). Like African American schools, schools serving Latinx children were underfunded and lacked resources. Parents fought vigorously to secure educational opportunities for their children; often choosing to enroll their children in parochial schools (San Miguel Jr. & Donato, 2019). Even though segregated schools were supposed to be 'separate but equal', these communities opposed the institutionally racist policies and practices that marginalized their children's access to

more equitable educational opportunities and, consequently, fought for the end of state-mandated racial segregation in America's public schools (Douglas, 2005; San Miguel Jr. & Donato, 2019).

Court decisions, such as *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) and *Mendez v. Westminister School District of Orange County* (1946) challenged the overtly racist Jim Crow schooling practice of segregated schools; however, they failed to ensure equitable learning opportunities for students of Color (Ladson-Billings, 2009b; Valencia, 2010). Despite the discourse of racial progress often associated with these landmark legal cases, court decisions have been ineffective in dismantling institutionalized forms of racism embedded in our nation's schools. Moreover, desegregation led to a massive displacement of African American educators from public schools as nearly 40,000 lost their jobs in the twenty years following the Brown decision (Foster, 1997; Irvine, 2002). Foster (1997) explains:

> Part of the problem lay in the Brown decision, which rested on the assumption that a school with an all-black faculty could not provide an education equal to that provided by an all-white faculty even if the buildings and equipment were superior (p.xxxv).

The unjust firing of African American educators devastated Black communities and the schools that served them (Siddle-Walker, 1993). Research has documented the long tradition of African American educators' pedagogical effectiveness and the high expectations to which they hold their students. Studies have illuminated African American educators' unique conceptions of their roles as teachers, often referring to teaching as a "calling" rather than just a profession (Irvine, 2002; Mitchell, 1998). African American have also been recognized as educators who express a deep

commitment to their students' academic, social, and emotional development (Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2009a; Ware, 2002). Scholarship has also detailed the culturally specific pedagogical beliefs and practices and the ways in which they have been grounded in African American educators' ethics of care, affirmations of African American culture, and racial uplift (Foster, 1997; Irvine, 2002). Moreover, African American educators often express key understandings for the ways in which racism creates obstacles for African American students and intentionally enact pedagogical practices that help students resist and transcend the racial oppression experienced in their everyday lives (Acosta, Foster, & Houchen, 2018).

Although here has been extensive scholarship detailing the effective pedagogical approaches of African American educators (Acosta, 2019; Foster, 1997; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2009a; Ware, 2006), these discussions are often relegated to discussions of practices needed only to reach African American students rather than students from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. Acosta, Foster, and Houchen (2018) argue that research has shown that African American pedagogical practices are beneficial for *all* students, yet "this field of study remains a discrete practice, marginalized from the main and common canon of literature on effective teaching for *all* students" (p. 343). Using the term *African American pedagogical excellence* (AAPE), Acosta et al. (2018) sought to produce a framework that captured the culturally specific pedagogical ideologies, beliefs, and practices associated with successful African American educators. In this study, this pedagogical framework provided a critical lens for understanding my participants' ideologies, beliefs, and practices. Figure 1 presents a summary of the AAPE framework.

Ideology	Beliefs	Instructional Practices
• Political clarity • Racial uplift • Affirmative view of African American culture • Ethics of care • Oppositional consciousness	• High student intellectual potential • All children can learn • Teacher accountability for student learning • Positive views of families and communities	• Insistence • Connectedness • Interdependent learning community • Collective success • Curriculum relevant to students' lives

Figure 1. Conceptual framework for African American pedagogical excellence.

New Racism

Desegregation was supposed to address racial inequities in U.S. schools; nevertheless, institutionalized racism continued to manifest through a variety of educational discourses, policies, and practices including federal housing policies and school attendance zones (Anyon, 2014), school "choice" and magnet school programs (Lipman, 2011), Eurocentric textbooks and curriculum (Perez Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2002; San Miguel Jr. & Donato, 2019), "English only" language use policies (Bondy, 2016), narrowed curriculum focused on test prep (Irizarry & Brown, 2014); academic standards and achievement tests (Leonardo, 2007), zero tolerance discipline policies (Noguera, 2003), and ability tracking (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Within schools, these discourses, policies, and practices often create racially hostile schooling environments for students of color causing students to feel humiliated, alienated, and marginalized (Kohli & Solorzano, 2012) and negatively impacting their educational opportunities (Kohli et al., 2017). Although many Americans proclaim to live in a "post-racial" society, racism has continued to play a central role in African American and Latinx children's access to

equitable educational opportunities and schooling experiences (Howard & Navarro, 2016).

Kohli, Pizzaro, and Nevarez (2017) explain how the "post-Brown era has bred a 'new racism' that has replaced the overt and blatant discriminatory policies and practices of the past with covert and more subtle beliefs and behavior" that normalize the educational disparities among African American and Latinx students and their white counterparts (Kohli et al., 2017). In a recent review of research focused on exposing racism's permanence in education, Kohli et al. (2017) provide a theoretical framework for examining the ways in which racism and white supremacist ideologies continue to permeate current educational policies and practices and, thus, perpetuate inequitable learning opportunities in K-12 schools. Describing "new racism" as "a more covert and hidden form of racism than that of the past" (p. 182), Kohli et al. (2017) elucidate three patterns of racially oppressive mechanisms that continue to manifest in the schooling experiences of students of Color: evaded racism, colorblind racism, and everyday racism.

Evaded Racism

Omi & Winant (2015) point out that after the *Brown* decision, it became socially unacceptable to express overtly racist sentiments about students of color in schools. In response, more subtle forms of racialized discourses were used to reproduce white supremacist ideologies (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Kohli et al., 2017; Pollack, 2013; Pollock, 2008; Shapiro, 2014; Valencia, 2010). Because these racialized discourses are subtle, they can evade critiques of racism while continuing to maintain racial and cultural hierarchies in educational opportunities. When tasked to discuss race and inequality in

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achievement outcomes, white teachers often express discomfort or avoid naming race

and, instead, point to "culture" as the relevant factor (Tyler, 2016). At other times,

teachers employ deficit discourses by blaming academic achievement disparities among

their students of Color on problems or issues residing within the student or their

community and, thus, protect themselves from blame (Pitzer, 2015; Pollack, 2013).

Colorblind Racism

Colorblind racism is an ideology that often disguises itself as equity discourse but

is, in fact, a form of racism that "erases the contemporary, lived, and systemic

oppressions of communities of Color" (Kohli et al., 2017, p. 190). Like deficit discourse,

the discourse of colorblindness evolved as an ideological response to overt racial bigotry

(Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Underpinned by a premise that public spheres (i.e. education,

housing, criminal justice) should be blind to skin color and racial differences,

colorblindness purports to not notice difference and, in doing so, perpetuates a pervasive

'common sense' ideology that race should not really matter (Leonardo, 2007; Pollock,

2008).

Racial Microaggressions

Lastly, microaggressions are expressions of racist ideologies that occur subtly

during everyday social interactions between white people and people of color. Perez-

Huber and Solorzano (2015) define microaggressions as "the layered, cumulative and

often subtle and unconscious forms of racism that target people of Color" (p. 302). While

they may be perpetrated by white people unconsciously, microaggressions perpetuate the

larger system of white supremacist ideologies and, thereby, must be exposed in order to

understand how racism continues to marginalize the experiences of people of color.

Recent research in education has begun to examine these forms of new racism and explore the ways in which they produce racially hostile schooling environments for students and teachers of color (Allen, Scott, & Lewis, 2013; Hotchkins, 2016; Perez Huber et al., 2006; Kohli & Solorzano, 2012, Suárez-Orozco, Casanova, Martin, Katsiaficas, Cueller, Smith, & Dias, 2015; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solorzano, 2009). Conversations about racially hostile schooling climates in K-12 schools has garnered public attention as well. Often described as the "Trump Effect", the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) has documented the recent escalation in harassment of all kinds including race, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation. In a recent report, *Hate at School* (2018), the SPLC uncovered 821 reports of school-based incidents of racial harassment targeting students and teachers of color across the United States in the media.

One particularly disturbing trend in the news has been the recent reports of African American students experiencing "curricular violence" (Jones, 2018; Love, 2014). The term curricular violence pertains to the incidents of white teachers requiring African American students to participate in simulations of slavery such as being sold at auctions, being transported via the Middle Passage, and escaping on the Underground Railroad. Through her project, *Mapping Racial Trauma in Schools*, Dr. Stephanie P. Jones has tracked students' experiences with curricular violence and found more than 30 separate incidents in 2018. Although teachers justify that the goal of these activities is to convey the brutality of slavery and foster empathy; in practice, slavery simulations minimize horrific events, recreate racist power dynamics, and cause psychological trauma to African American students (Jones, 2018). These recent examples of 'curricular violence' demonstrate just one of the ways in which a staff's lack of racial literacy created racially

hostile learning environments that not only impeded African American students'

educational opportunities but contradicted their self- interests and humanity (Kohli et al.,

2017).

Despite decades of educational reform efforts, recent scholarship has documented

the ways in which racism continues to marginalize the schooling experiences of students

of Color. Although overtly racist sentiments are no longer socially acceptable, scholars

have pointed to the ways in which newer, more subtle forms of racist discourse manifests

in our nation's schools fostering racially hostile schooling environments for students and

teachers of color. While there is a considerable body of research documenting the ways in

which all students can benefit from the pedagogical approach of African American

educators; to this date, the ideologies, beliefs, and practices associated with African

American pedagogical excellence continues to be marginalized in discussions of

education reform.

Purpose of the Study

To reiterate, schooling environments are often sites of racially hostile learning

environments for students of color (Lewis-McCoy, 2018). Left unmitigated, racially

hostile learning environments greatly hinder students' opportunities for academic, social,

and emotional development. However, cases of teachers in urban schools who create and

sustain learning environments in which their students thrive exist and need to be studied.

The purpose of this research project was to understand the pedagogical beliefs and

practices of two highly- regarded African American educators in two urban elementary

schools. Previous studies have illuminated the culturally specific pedagogical beliefs and

practices enacted by African American educators and provide a basis for this study

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(Acosta et al., 2018; Foster, 1997; Ware, 2006). The present study is distinctive because it examines the ways in which these teachers' culturally specific beliefs and practices created racially safe learning environments in otherwise racially hostile schools.

Research Questions

To give focus and direction to this study, the following research questions guided this investigation:

R1: How do two highly regarded African American educators describe their beliefs about teaching in urban schools as well as their teaching practices?

R2: How do two highly regarded African American educators enact their beliefs about teaching in urban schools?

- In what ways do their beliefs undergird these enactments?

- In what ways do their enactments produce racially safe learning environments for their students?

R3: How do students describe their teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices?

- In what ways do students name their teachers' beliefs about teaching?

- In what ways do these students name the practices that support their learning?

Assumptions

In this study, there were several underlying assumptions:

1. Teachers in the study participated willingly, taught authentically, and answered interview questions honestly.

2. Students in the study participated willingly and answered focus group questions truthfully.

3. The use of multiple forms of data collection through triangulation provided a clear description of teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices.

Researcher Positionality

While this research project was an extension of my teaching experiences in diverse contexts and my doctoral coursework in urban education, I came to this study as a white researcher seeking to conduct research with African American educators and African American and Latinx students in what I perceived to be racially hostile schooling environments. I am foregrounding issues of power, race, and racism, as they relate to the experiences of students and teachers of color and, as such, it is critical for me to acknowledge my own positionality as a researcher. As a white, middle-class woman, I recognize that it is an exercise of my privilege as well as a political act, to represent my participants in this study. Informed by my race, my gender, and other aspects of my identity, I carried my own biases and assumptions about teaching and learning into this study. These biases not only shaped my research questions, but the data I collected and the analyses I made. Therefore, it was critical for me to reflect extensively upon the ways my positionality impacted my understanding of the phenomenon under study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this reason, I sought to continuously interrogate my perspectives and challenge my biases throughout the study.

As a white researcher, my positionality (worldviews and perspectives) limited my understanding of the socially and culturally situated meanings that students and teachers of Color in this study held about their experiences in their schools (Blackburn, 2014). Therefore, in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of the beliefs and actions of two African American teachers as well as the perspectives of their African American and

Latino students, I had to consciously approach this study with my "third eye" (Irvine, 2003, p. 29) so that I could gain a closer, more culturally sensitive understanding of the perspectives of my participants. Moreover, because it was my desire to convey the lived experiences of my participants as accurately as possible, these understandings required me to come to the study as a critical listener in hopes of achieving hopefully the status of a "worthy witness" (Paris & Winn, 2014). I sought to build relationships of dignity, respect, reciprocity, trust, and care with my participants and learn as much as possible about my participants' meanings, perspectives, and experiences (Paris, 2011).

Significance of the Study

Research continues to document the critical role of teachers in the educational opportunities and experiences of students in urban schools. Given the unrelenting permanence of racism in the experiences of students of color, increased understanding of the ways in which educators' pedagogical beliefs and practices mitigate racially oppressive schooling conditions is greatly needed. Although teachers alone cannot alleviate the socioeconomic challenges that students in urban schools face, they can provide students with racially safe learning environments in which they are able to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Therefore, researchers must act responsibly by shaping and refining the knowledge and literature base. It is my hope that educational stakeholders will rethink the term "best practices" and begin to center African American pedagogical excellence in the discussion of teaching practices that can redress racialized inequities experienced by students of color.

Operational Definitions

- **Students of color**, in this study was used to refer to students who identify racially as non-white (i.e. African American, Latinx, Native American, etc.). This term is not meant to homogeneously stereotype or pathologize non-white students; rather, it is used to reflect the individual and shared experiences of students from non-white populations experience in schools.

- **Teachers of color**, in this study refers to teachers who identify racially as non-white (i.e. African American, Latinx, Native American, etc.). This term is not meant to essentialize the experiences of non-white teachers but, rather, it is used to reflect the individual and shared experiences that teachers from non-white populations experience in schools.

- **Urban schools**, in this study is used to describe schools in densely populated cities and, as such, include schooling contexts heavily influenced by outside of school factors such as size and density of the particular locale as well as access to resources such as housing, transportation, and healthcare. In addition, urban schools face specific challenges associated with their sociopolitical context including high attrition of teachers and insufficient funding and resources (Milner, 2012).

- **Race,** in this study is conceptualized as a sociopolitical construction; that is, race has fluid, decentered social meanings that are continually shaped by political pressures (Parker & Lynn, 2009)

- **Racism,** in this study is conceptualized as an ideology that justifies the dominance of one race over another because of supposed inherent superiority of

one race over all others; this ideology produces privileges and benefits for the

ruling groups while negatively impacting all other racial and/or ethnic groups; it is

an institutional power that produces negative material consequences for members

of the non-ruling groups but is also perpetuated interpersonally through thoughts,

actions, and words (Solorzano & Yosso, 2009).

- **Counternarratives**, in this study is conceptualized as the stories told by

  marginalized people that challenge accepted views, myth, and norms that are

  steeped in historical stereotypes and racism. Because they "talk back" to master

  narratives that make assumptions based on negative stereotypes and, therefore,

  distort and silence the experiences of people of Color (Solorzano & Yosso, 2009),

  counternarratives can reveal experiences with and responses to racism. Moreover,

  counternarratives can add necessary contextual contours to objective

  understandings of inequality and discrimination (Ladson-Billings, 2009b).

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 describes the current

context of urban education and establishes the need for the current study. Chapter 2

details the relevant research related to racism, racially hostile schooling environments,

and African American pedagogy. The purpose of Chapter 2 is to situate the study in the

literature and reveal the distinctive qualities of the study. Chapter 3 explains the research

methodology that led to the findings. Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 describe those findings.

Chapter 4 explicates the pedagogical beliefs of participants focusing on how participants'

biographical backgrounds and schooling experiences have influenced their teaching

beliefs and practices, while Chapter 5 illuminates participants' pedagogical practices and

examines the ways in which these practices created classroom cultures of achievement, community, and love. Finally, Chapter 6 is a discussion of the findings and its implications for research and practice.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Urban schools are often sites of racially hostile learning environments for students of color. Left unmitigated, racially hostile learning environments greatly hinder students' opportunities for academic, social, and emotional development. In this chapter, I will examine the literature concerning the ways in which racism continues to manifest in educational discourses, policies, and practices. I will also discuss recent research that has illuminated how racism manifests in schools often creating hostile schooling environments for students and teachers of color. Lastly, I present the conceptual framework for this study, African American pedagogical excellence, and explore the ideologies, beliefs, and practices associated with African American educators.

New Racism

Despite decades of educational reform efforts targeted at ensuring more equitable opportunities to learn in our nation's public schools, achievement outcomes of African American and Latinx students continue to lag compared to their white counterparts (NCES, 2017). At the same time, racially hostile schooling environments continue to marginalize the schooling experiences and learning opportunities of African American and Latinx students. Using racism critical race theory to critique dominant narratives in education, recent scholarship has illuminated the ways in which racism has evolved but continues to thwart the educational opportunities and experiences of students of color. Therefore, a review of the current research that has begun to explicitly "name racism as the problem" is presented.

Critical Race Theory in Education

Frustrated by the backlash to the Civil Rights movement, a group of legal scholars including Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, Lani Guinier, and Kimberle Crenshaw began to openly critique the ways in which American law not only created but reproduced racially based social, political, and economic oppression (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Taylor, 2009). Aiming to explain how racism and white supremacist ideologies upheld oppressive structures and discourses in American society, critical race scholars worked together to formulate a new theoretical framework, Critical Race Theory (CRT). Because American society was founded upon white supremacy, white supremacist ideologies are practically unrecognizable to whites; in response, critical race scholarship begins with the notion that racism is "normal, not aberrant in American society" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 21). Because of the ingrained nature of white supremacist ideologies in American society, whites are often unaware of the extent to which race directly impacts every facet of life in America. Taylor (2009) explains these "political, economic, and educational advantages are invisible to them (whites) and many find it difficult to comprehend the non-White experience and perspective that White domination has produced" (p. 4-5). Thus, critical race theorists have pointed to the ways that white supremacist ideologies have and continue to perpetuate racial inequality and discrimination in the everyday experiences of people of color including housing, education, employment, and the criminal justice system" (Taylor, 2009, p. 5) and built a scholarship aimed at dismantling these oppressive structures in American society.

In the 1990's, key education scholars built on critical race theory legal arguments to deconstruct the ways that schooling, fraught with institutionalized racism, affirmed and

maintained racial and cultural hierarchies in the educational opportunities afforded to students of color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016). In addition, these scholars illuminated the ways in which inequitable schooling outcomes were the result of these institutionalized racial and cultural hierarchies. By challenging educational policies and practices steeped in white supremacist ideologies, this scholarship helped to create a framework that can be used to theorize and examine the ways race and racism shape the experiences of students and teachers of color in K-12 schooling contexts (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solorzano & Yosso, 2009; Taylor, 2009).

Accordingly, CRT in education "seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2009, p. 132). Solorzano and Yosso (2009) describe this framework as a unique combination of at least five tenets and explain how it is different from other educational frameworks because it:

(1) critiques separate discourse on race, gender, and class and therefore focuses on the intercentrality of racism with other forms of subordination

(2) challenges dominant ideology that supports the deficit theorizing prevalent in educational and social science discourse

(3) focuses on the experiences of students and communities of color to learn from their racialized experiences with oppression

(4) works toward social justice in education as part of a larger goal to promote a liberatory or transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination

(5) utilizes the interdisciplinary knowledge base of ethnic studies, women's

studies, sociology, history, and the law to better understand the experiences of

students of color (p. 156)

"New" Racism in Education

In the post-Civil Rights era, overt racial expressions are considered "in bad taste";

however, racism and white supremacist ideologies persist in the United States.

Contemporary social conceptualizations of race, though, continue to view racism from an

outdated perspective and greatly hinder the education reforms that are crucially needed to

redress educational disparities afforded students of Color (Leonardo, 2007). Leonardo

(2007) explains:

> Defining racism as fundamentally a problem of attitude and prejudice fails
> to account for the material consequences of institutional racism, behaviors
> that produce unequal outcomes despite the transformation of racial
> attitudes, and the creation of policies which refuse to acknowledge the
> causal link between academic achievement and the racial organization of
> society. (p. 265)

In a recent review of research, Kohli, Pizarro, and Nevarez (2017) provide a

theoretical framework for examining the ways in which racism and white supremacist

ideologies continue to permeate current educational policies and practices and, thus,

perpetuate inequitable learning opportunities in K-12 schools. Describing new racism as

"a more covert and hidden form of racism than that of the past" (p. 182), Kohli et al.

(2017) elucidate three patterns of racially oppressive mechanisms of new racism, that

continue to manifest in the schooling experiences of students of Color: evaded racism,

colorblind racism, and everyday racism. These unacknowledged forms of

institutionalized and interpersonal racism normalize and even justify racial inequities in K-12 schools (Kohli et al., 2017; Pollack, 2004).

Evaded racism. Omi & Winant (2015) point out that starting in post-Brown era of the 1960's, it became socially unacceptable to express overtly racist sentiments about students of Color in schools. In response, more subtle forms of racialized discourses were used to reproduce racist ideologies of students of Color (Bonilla Silva, 2006; Kohli et al., 2017; Pollack, 2013; Pollock, 2004; Shapiro, 2014; Valencia, 2010). Because these racialized discourses are subtle, they evade critiques of racism while continuing to maintain racial and cultural hierarchies in educational opportunities. Critical race scholars have highlighted the ways in which these discursive strategies reinforce the "master narrative" of Whiteness as the desired norm and any divergence from that norm a form of deficit. Identifying and complicating deficit thinking about students of color in schools provides researchers opportunities to denaturalize disparities in educational achievement (Leonardo, 2007; Pollack, 2013; Solorzano & Yosso, 2009).

Deficit thinking is perhaps the most enduring theories put forth in the past several decades to explain educational disparities experienced by African American and Latinx students (Pollack, 2013; Valencia, 2010). Valencia (2010) describes the ideological nature of deficit thinking as a "dynamic and chameleonic concept" (p. 13) as it can transform in order to align itself with current understandings of racial and cultural difference. At the turn of the century, differences in academic achievement were attributed to genetic inferiority. Once debunked, students' cultural deficiencies were used to explain academic disparities (Omi & Winant, 2015; Valencia, 2010). Deficit perspectives of students assert that academic disparities are due to deficits "internal to the

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student rather than problems with the structure of schooling and society" (Tyler, 2016, p. 292) resulting in schooling becomes a culturally and linguistically subtractive process, rather than an additive one (Valenzuela, 1999). Simply put, deficit perspectives "blame the victim" for educational disparities, while simultaneously, minimizing the cumulative effects of current and historical systems of institutionalized racism in education, healthcare, employments, housing, and the criminal justice system (Pollack, 2013; Tyler, 2016; Valencia, 2010).

Several recent studies have examined the ways in which deficit thinking about African American and Latinx students persists in teachers' narratives of difference and diversity (Pitzer, 2015; Pollack, 2013; Tyler, 2016). When discussing race and inequality, Tyler (2016) found that teachers were silent, expressed discomfort, and avoided naming race and, instead, pointed to "culture" as the relevant factor (Tyler, 2016). Other studies have found that by employing deficit discourses, teachers blamed academic achievement disparities among their African American and Latinx students on problems or issues residing within the student and, thus, protected themselves from blame (Pitzer, 2015; Pollack, 2013). For instance, teachers often described students as lacking important, real-life experiences such as attending the symphony, zoo, or library and correlated this absence to students' lack of preparation for school (Tyler, 2016). Deficit discourses are also used by teachers to frame students as angry and out-of-control resulting in teachers' overemphasis on classroom discipline (Tyler, 2016). In addition, deficit discourses shaped teachers' understandings of their students' families as lacking, chaotic, and unstable (Pitzer, 2015; Tyler, 2016). On the surface, teachers' deficit discourses often connote care and concern for their students; however, they were also used to divert

responsibility for the educational outcomes of their students and, consequently, justify lowering academic and behavioral expectations for their African American and Latinx students (James, 2012; Pitzer, 2015; Pollack, 2013; Tyler, 2016; Valenzuela, 1999).

Although these studies illuminated how deficit thinking shapes white teachers' beliefs about culturally and linguistically diverse students (Pitzer, 2015; Shapiro, 2014; Tyler, 2016), more understanding about the ways teachers' deficit thinking informs and, consequently, negatively impacts their social interactions with students. Moreover, missing in this scholarship are studies that explicate how teachers respond to deficit discourses by enacting pedagogical practices that mitigate hostile schooling environments for their students.

Colorblind racism. Kohli et al. (2017) describes colorblind racism as an ideology that masks itself as equity discourse, but is, in fact, a form of racism that "erases the contemporary, lived, and systemic oppressions of communities of Color" (p. 190). Like deficit thinking, colorblindness evolved as an ideological response to overt racial bigotry (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Underpinned by a premise that public spheres (e.g. education, housing, criminal justice) should be blind to skin color and racial differences, colorblindness purports to not notice difference and, in doing so, perpetuates a pervasive 'common sense' ideology that race should not really matter (Leonardo, 2007; Pollock, 2004). Colorblind discourse confuses talking about race with being racist and, therefore, appeals to whites who do not want to appear to be racist (Pollock, 2004). In education, researchers have found that white teachers often employ colorblind discourse to circumvent talking about race or making race-based decisions about curriculum and instruction in order to avoid overt racial conflict and/or personal discomfort (Castro

Atwater, 2008; Kohli et al., 2017; Lewis, 2001; Stoll, 2014). Because educators and policymakers often struggle viewing student achievement through the lens of race, they choose to erase race labels from discussions of systemic academic inequities (Castagno, 2008; Pollock, 2004).

In her ethnography of a racially and culturally diverse high school in California, Pollock (2004) documented teachers and administrators employing colorblind discourse when discussing achievement disparities. Rather than framing achievement publicly in racial terms, teachers and administrators advocated for equal educational opportunities for "all" students. However, Pollack (2004) noted even when teachers and administrators spoke of "all" students, this discursive practice did not in itself produce equality, nor was it helpful in analyzing inequality. Colorblind discourses prevent educators from being able to conceptualize institutionalized racism as significant factor in the achievement disparities among African American and Latinx students and their white counterparts (Stoll, 2014). In other words, colorblindness masks the significance of race while maintaining the status quo (Castagno, 2008; Pollack, 2004). These studies described the ways in which white teachers' colorblind attitudes about race serve to maintain educational inequities (Castagno, 2008; Leonardo, 2007; Pollack, 2004; Stoll, 2014); however, few studies have examined how colorblindness informs their everyday interactions with students and colleagues and produces racially hostile schooling environments.

Everyday racism. Critical race scholarship often examines the discursive strategies that 'mark' people of color or render them invisible in representations in society. These strategies reinforce the master narrative that Whiteness is the desired

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norm, and that divergence from that norm is a form of deficit. Foundational to these invisible discursive strategies are racial microaggressions. Elusive in nature, racial microaggressions are expressions, verbal and non-verbal, of racism. Subtle in nature, racial microaggressions are conceptualized as interpersonal manifestations of institutionalized racism ((Hotchkins, 2016; Kohli et al., 2017). Perez-Huber and Solorzano (2015) define racial microaggressions as a "form of systemic, everyday racism used to keep those at the racial margins in their place" (p. 302) and detail the insidious and pervasive nature of racial microaggressions in the everyday lives of people of Color:

> (1) verbal and non-verbal assaults directed toward People of Color, often carried out in subtle, automatic, or unconscious forms
>
> (2) layered assaults, based on race and its intersections with gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent, or surname
>
> (3) cumulative assaults that take a psychological, physiological, and academic toll on People of Color (p. 302).

To the perpetrator, racial microaggressions may seem trivial as they are often unaware of their position of privilege. When confronted, perpetrators often respond that the comment was not ill-intentioned or blame the victim for being overly sensitive (Kohli & Solorzano, 2012; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). Sometimes racial microaggressions are even justified as compliments or jokes (Kohli, Arteaga, & McGovern, 2019). Intentional or not, racial microaggressions communicate racial hostility to their victims and, consequently, produce oppressive schooling conditions racially hostile schooling environments for students (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015).

Recent studies have to examined the ways in which students have experienced racial microaggressions; yet, these studies focus on students' experiences in higher education contexts and secondary schools (Allen, Scott, & Lewis, 2013; Hotchkins, 2016; Perez Huber et al., 2006; Suárez-Orozco, Casanova, Martin, Katsiaficas, Cueller, Smith, & Dias, 2015; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solorzano, 2009) leaving a gap in our understanding of the ways in which students and teachers in elementary schools experience racial microaggressions. More studies are needed to illuminate the ways in which racial microaggressions shape the schooling experiences of students and educators in elementary school settings (Kohli, 2018; Kohli & Solorzano, 2012). Therefore, this study seeks to expand the scholarship examining ways in which racial microaggressions manifests in the lives of students and teachers in two elementary schools.

Racially Hostile Schooling Environments

Racially Hostile Learning Environments

Although public education is often conceptualized as the 'great equalizer' in American society, research has documented the interpersonal and institutionalized acts of racism experienced by African American and Latinx students (Kohli et al., 2017; Lewis-McCoy, 2018). In addition, research has also shown the ways in which urban and suburban schools have responded to high stakes testing and federal government mandates by drastically narrowing curricula, intensifying discipline policies, and dramatically reducing funding to art and music programs (Irizarry & Brown, 2014; Lewis-McCoy, 2018; Lipman, 2011). These pedagogical and administrative responses create oppressive schooling conditions that are too often disregarded in discussions of education reform; however, examining the ways that schools perpetuate racially hostile learning

environments is crucial to understanding the educational experiences of African American and Latinx students.

At the macro level, institutionalized racism permeates district and school-level policies and practices. Undergirded with deficit and colorblind discourses, district and school-level policies and practices can perpetuate racist ideologies that marginalize the cultural capital African American and Latinx students bring with them to school (Yosso, 2005) such as "English only" language policies, academic tracking, and hegemonic curricula and, in this way, become institutionalized racial microaggressions. (Allen et al., 2013; Hotchkins, 2016; Perez Huber et. al, 2006; Shapiro, 2014). At the micro level, deficit and colorblind discourses surface in the daily interactions between teachers and students in which students experience racial discrimination (Allen et al., 2013; Hotchkins, 2016; Kohli & Solorzano, 2012). Experiences with racial discrimination have been found to produce feelings of anger, anxiety, and depression among students (Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003).

In a prominent study conducted by Wong, Eccles, and Sameroff (2003), findings revealed African American middle school students' experiences with racial discrimination caused feelings of isolation and alienation and were negatively associated with their academic motivation, positive mental health, and self-esteem. In a more recent study, Allen, Scott, and Lewis (2013) examined teachers' perceptions of African American and Latinx high school students as disrespectful and aggressive negatively impacted students' mental health and well-being as well as their self-concept and racial identity development.

Hotchkins (2016) explored the perceptions of six African American male high school students and the ways in which their perceptions were shaped by their interactions with White teachers, peers, and coaches. Participants felt they were monolithically viewed from deficit perspectives that "framed Black males in collective deficit terms, including being incapable of exceeding expectations and not interested in being successful academically" (p. 16). Students felt that teachers perceived them as aggressive, disrespectful, and defiant and, in response, disengaged both academically and socially in order to avoid negative interactions with White teachers and administrators. Although they felt stereotyped as students with "problem behaviors", participants demonstrated their resiliency and persistence to learn in racially hostile learning environments by creating alliances with peers of all racial groups that afforded students opportunities to feel supported by each other and successfully mediate their experiences in schools. Collectively, these studies demonstrate how institutional and interpersonal racism manifest in the daily lives of African American and Latinx students and, thereby, deny children access to inclusive and nurturing learning environments (Love, 2016).

Kohli and Solorzano (2012) explored the schooling experiences of 41 students of Color in higher education context and found that every student interviewed had suffered racial microaggressions related to their names during their K-12 years. Sometimes subtle and sometimes overt, these racial microaggressions resulted in students feeling humiliated, alienated, and demeaned causing many to disengage in classroom activities. One student, who had graduated with high honors, described that throughout her years in elementary and secondary schools, she "felt the need to become invisible" (p. 453) and even prompted her to change her name. Many respondents explained that they adopted

nicknames or anglicized their names to avoid embarrassment in class causing student to internalize negative perceptions of themselves and their culture. Although mispronouncing or even changing a child's name at school is often framed as benign, students recounted how these experiences greatly impacted how they perceived themselves, their culture, and the world around them (Kohli & Solorzano, 2012). Kohli and Solorzano (2012) explain:

> If a child goes to school and reads textbooks that do not reference her culture, sees not teachers or administrators that look like her, and perhaps does not hear her home language, the mispronunciation of her name is an additional example for that student that who they are and where they come from is not important (p.455).

Taken individually, racial microaggressions may seem minor and insignificant; however, each microaggression is like "a toxic raindrop" (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015) and, over time, these raindrops accumulate causing corrosive damage to students' sense of safety and well-being (Allen et al., 2013; Hotchkins, 2016; Perez Huber et al., 2006; Kohli & Solorzano, 2012, Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015; Yosso et al., 2009). In addition, students' experiences with racism have a tremendous cumulative impact on students' academic, social, and emotional development (Allen et al., 2013; Hotchkins, 2016; Kohli & Solorzano, 2012). Recent scholarship has explored how secondary and higher education students mitigate their experiences with institutionalized and interpersonal racism; however, the ways in which elementary students perceive their schools as racially hostile schooling is undertheorized. Exploring elementary students' perceptions of racially hostile and racially safe learning environments would provide much needed understandings of the schooling experiences of young African American and Latinx students.

Racially Hostile Teaching Environments

Historically, racism has always shaped the environments in which African American educators have taught. Prior to the Brown decision, African American educators taught almost exclusively in segregated schools (Anderson, 1998; Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 1193). However, because racist ideologies deemed them inferior and, therefore, unfit to teach white children, desegregation dramatically altered the professional lives of African American educators (Foster, 1997). Consequently, desegregation led to a massive displacement of African American educators. Within the first eleven years of desegregation, nearly 40,000 African American educators lost their jobs (Foster, 1997; Irvine, 2002). Unable to secure jobs within desegregated school systems, African American educators had to work as substitute teachers rather than full-time employees (Foster, 1997). When African American educators were hired as full-time teachers integrated schools, they were systemically paid much less than their white colleagues.

Although vast inequities in school funding and facilities existed, segregated schools afforded African American educators the opportunity to provide rigorous learning environments in which their curriculum and instruction pushed their students toward academic excellence and instilled racial pride within their students. In addition, they were able to openly discuss racism with their students and "prepare them to overcome these socially imposed barriers" (Ware, 2002, p. 38). However, African American educators lost these opportunities once they began teaching in integrated schools as they did feel that they could speak freely about racism in mixed-race classes, (Foster, 1997; Irvine, 2002; Ware, 2002). Many felt frustrated and constrained teaching in

integrated schools as they were expected to ignore the significance of race in their students' lives (Foster, 1997; Ware, 2002).

The massive displacement of African American educators also created a system of public schools staffed with a predominantly teaching staff and African American students were increasingly taught white teachers (Foster, 1997). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2017), this demographic gap has widen in public schools as students of color comprise almost half of children attending public schools (46%), yet less than one fifth are teachers of color (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Given that institutionalized and interpersonal racism continues to manifest in racial microaggressions targeting African American and Latinx students, these statistics are problematic because racism not only pushes students out of schools, it pushes teachers of color out of the profession too (Kohli, 2016).

In a recent study, Kohli (2016) investigated the experiences of 218 racial-justice oriented teachers of color in urban schools. Although their experiences were varied and complex, findings revealed a myriad of ways in which racial microaggressions manifested in the everyday experiences of teachers of color and caused feelings of isolation and alienation (Kohli, 2016). Racial microaggressions manifested in several way including white colleagues monolithically essentialized teachers' cultural experiences, framed their cultural capital as a deficit, and expressed colorblind stances to issues of race and racism (Kohli, 2016). Teachers also reported a lack of mentorship from administrators and even sensed a climate of distrust and disdain from fellow teachers that, ultimately, takes "a toll on their well-being, growth, and retention in the field" (Kohli, 2016, p. 328). This study adds to a small body research exploring the ways in which

racial microaggressions create racially hostile teaching environments (Rauscher & Wilson, 2017). While studies have demonstrated the ways in which their culturally specific beliefs and practices are often disregarded by white colleagues (Acosta, 2019; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 200b; Rauscher & Wilson, 2017), more studies are needed to understand the ways in these racial microaggressions foster racially hostile teaching environments for African American educators.

Education research has also explored the gendered stereotypes that surface in the experiences of African American educators (Acosta, 2019; Johnson & Bryan, 2017; Kohli, 2016; Kohli & Pizzaro, 2016; Milner & Hoy, 2003; Pabon, 2016; Pizzaro & Kohli, 2018; Woodson & Pabon, 2016); Acosta (2019) explored the African American female educators described the paradoxical position in which they are often placed by white colleagues who essentialize their teaching identity to that of "superheroes" or "bodyguards." When positioned as superheroes, African American women were expected to "deal" with the white colleagues' young African American male students whom they perceived to be misbehaving. When positioned as bodyguards, African American women were expected to "handle" situations with upset parents (Acosta, 2019). African American male educators experience similar racialized and gendered microaggressions (Bristol & Goings, 2019; Brown, 2009; Pabon, 2016; Woodson & Pabon, 2016). Beyond their traditional teaching duties, African American male educators, like their female counterparts, are expected to fill additional roles such as mentor, surrogate father, and school disciplinarian (Brown, 2009; Bristol & Goings, 2019; Pabon, 2016; Woodson & Pabon, 2016). Shouldering these additional responsibilities, teachers

simultaneously found themselves having to "prove" the effectiveness of their teaching

practices to their white colleagues (Acosta, 2019; Bristol & Goings, 2019; Pabon, 2016).

In addition, teachers are also witnessing students' experiences with racial

microaggressions. These daily experiences with racial microaggressions in which African

American educators feel rejected, silenced, and disrespected accumulate causing

additional stress, or racial battle fatigue (Johnson & Bryan, 2017Pizarro & Kohli, 2018;

Rauscher & Wilson, 2017). Pizarro & Kohli (2018) describe the devastating impact of

racial battle fatigue on the emotional and psychological well-being of teachers of Color:

> Be it micro or macro, racism is not confined to a specific moment in time.
> Those who endure it carry it with them; and those who challenge it expend
> a great deal of personal energy, often throughout their professional lives
> (p.3).

African American educators often teach in challenging conditions; yet, studies

have demonstrated their commitment and persistence (Milner & Hoy, 2003; Pizzaro &

Kohli 2018). Nonetheless, at a rate 24% higher than their white counterparts, they are

rapidly leaving the field (Ingersoll & May, 2012). Although recent research has

illuminated the ways in which teachers color experience racism within their teaching

environments, understanding the ways in which teachers mitigate these environments for

themselves and their students is undertheorized. This study seeks to add not only to the

literature that "names" racism as the source for hostile schooling environments, but also

the pedagogical practices African American educators enacted in order to mitigate these

oppressive conditions for their students.

African American Educators' Culturally Specific Beliefs about Education

African Americans have a long history of organizing and advocating for access to equitable educational opportunities (Acosta et al., 2018; Anderson, 1988; Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 1993). Prior to the *Brown v Board of Education (1954)* decision, African American educators fought hard to remedy the numerous injustices their students faced within a segregated education system (i.e. inequitable financial resources, secondhand instructional materials, lack of student transportation, and inadequate teacher salaries) (Acosta et al., 2018; Siddle-Walker, 1993). Although African American children were educated almost entirely in underfunded schools, these schools "were rich in community support and benefitted from deep parental investment and engaged, caring faculties" (Acosta et al., 2018, p. 345).

Acosta et al. (2018) explain that, despite the hardships created by segregation and Jim Crow laws, African American educators built an educational system that provided a "powerful education for the masses of African Americans seeking education as a means of personal and community uplift" (p. 345). Staffed by dedicated educators committed to their students' academic, social, and moral development, African American established schools afforded children nurturing learning environments (Foster, 1993). Believing they had an obligation to ensure each child succeeded, African American educators taught with tenacity (Foster, 1993; Siddle-Walker, 1993). Although they held high expectations and demanded their best (Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 1993), students regarded their teachers as warm, supportive, and caring. Consequently, many African Americans favored segregated schools to racially integrated schools (Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 1993).

In her examination of 18 African American educators' schooling experiences,

Foster (1993) found their experiences attending segregated schools greatly influenced

their conceptions of their roles as teachers such vital members of their communities and

surrogate parents to students. In their stories, teachers expressed a sense of connectedness

and solidarity with the students they taught. In this way, these teachers' stories were "key

events in the formation of their ideas about the teacher's role" in the lives of their

students (Foster, 1993, p. 378). Although educators expressed positive associations with

their experiences as students, their current experiences as teachers in desegregated

schools left them frustrated with the much more subtle forms of racism, such as ability

tracking, that marginalized African American students' schooling experiences and

learning opportunities (Foster, 1993). Desegregation not only created a massive

displacement of African American teachers, it disregarded the pedagogical excellence

fostered within the African American education system (Foster, 1997; Irvine, 2002).

Although contemporary scholars have documented the ways in which these culturally

specific pedagogical beliefs and practices continue to positively impact the academic,

social, and emotional development of African American children (Ladson-Billings,

2009a; Howard, 2001a; Ware, 2006), African American pedagogical excellence is often

relegated to discussions of effective teaching practices for Black children. However,

research has documented the success of African American pedagogy with children from

varied cultural and racial backgrounds. Recently, Acosta, Foster, and Houchen (2018)

conceptualized the distinctive and culturally situated pedagogical beliefs and practices

that have long been associated with successful African American educators into a

pedagogical framework. Foster (1990) argued the culturally specific beliefs are directly

tied to African American educators' positionality experience within a racist society. In other words, their lived experiences shaped their perspectives of schooling as well as the ways in which institutionalized racism hindered the educational opportunities of students of Color (Irvine, 2002; Ware, 2002).

African American Pedagogical Excellence

Pedagogical beliefs are defined as "the ideological underpinnings that shape teacher attitudes and behavior" (Acosta et al., 2018, p. 342). Acosta et al. (2018) summarized decades of scholarship and asserted that there are four culturally specific pedagogical beliefs that fundamentally inform the pedagogical practices of effective African American educators:

(a) an assumption of each individual's full potential and personhood that was inextricably coupled with personal responsibility to contribute to the community, nation, and wider humanity

(b) deftness with an assortment of instructional methods

(c) employment of curricula sequences and texts that were expansive and culturally situated

(d) the belief that teachers bore the responsibility for maintaining a standard and practice of professional excellence and providing students with prosocial environments as oases within the largest racist city, state, and nation

While a tremendous body of work has operationalized the effective instructional practices of African American educators for the purpose of replication (Acosta, 2019), African American pedagogy remains marginalized in educational policy and practice (Acosta et al., 2018). Acosta et al. (2018) posit a conceptual framework was needed to in order to

capture the pedagogical excellence of African American educators and operationalize it for broad inclusion in teacher education.

Building upon the seminal scholarship of Michele Foster, Gloria Ladson-Billings, and Joyce E. King, Acosta et al. (2018) provide a conceptual framework for African American pedagogical excellence (AAPE) that outlines the fundamental ideologies, beliefs, and practices central to the success of African American educators (see Figure 2). Employed as a conceptual framework, AAPE provided a lens through which observational data was collected and analyzed. In the present study, AAPE provided a conceptual framework that allowed me to not only capture but analyze teachers' pedagogical enactments as well as the pedagogical beliefs that undergirded them. This framework focuses on key ideological underpinnings that informs African American educators' beliefs and practices: (1) racial uplift; (2) ethic of care; (3) affirmative view of African American culture; (4) oppositional consciousness; and (5) political clarity (Acosta et al., 2018). The following section of this literature review uses these ideological tenets to expound upon recent studies of African American educators' culturally specific beliefs and practices.

Ideology	Beliefs	Instructional Practices
• Political clarity • Racial uplift • Affirmative view of African American culture • Ethics of care • Oppositional consciousness	• High student intellectual potential • All children can learn • Teacher accountability for student learning • Positive views of families and communities	• Insistence • Connectedness • Interdependent learning community • Collective success • Curriculum relevant to students' lives

Figure 2. Conceptual framework for African American pedagogical excellence.

Racial uplift. Historically, African American culture has held education in high regard and critical to sustaining improvement within the community (Acosta, 2019; Acosta et al., 2018; Anderson, 1998; Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 1993). Undergirded by this fundamental view of education, African American educators are deeply committed to the success of their students (Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009; Mitchell, 1998; Ware, 2006). A deep commitment compelling them to take a *do whatever it takes approach* to teaching (Acosta et al., 2018). Several scholars have examined the perspectives of African American educators who take a 'no excuses' approach to teaching and learning (Foster, 1997; Irvine, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2009a; Mitchell, 1998; Ware, 2006). Because they feel responsible for their students' success, African American educators hold their students to high expectations and work tirelessly to help them meet them (Acosta, 2018; Mitchell, 1998; Ware, 2006).

Effective African American educators are able to demand the best from their students because they have developed warm and caring relationships (Ware, 2006). Using the term *warm demander pedagogy,* Ware (2006) examined the beliefs and practices of two community-nominated African American educators, one novice and one veteran, who employed a 'no excuses' approach to teaching, and found that both asserted authority through a tough-minded, no-nonsense style of teaching and employed firm, but judicious classroom discipline (Acosta, 2018; Ware, 2006). Using Collin's (2000) conception of *lifting as we climb,* Ware (2002) described the sense of responsibility demonstrated by African American educators feel to use their position as professionals to improve conditions in their communities.

In her study of eight successful African American educators, Mitchell (1998) found they embraced their role as teachers and their pedagogical enactments were manifestations of their educational philosophies that were "steeped in the notion that the ability to learn is innate and that it was their job to nurture that innate ability" (p. 114). Simply put, because they understand the sociopolitical implications of academic achievement in the lives of their students, African American educators feel responsible for their success (Acosta, 2018).

Ethic of care. African American educators' approach to teaching is informed by an ethic of caring for their students; a view of care that is distinctively broader than Western conceptions of care (Acosta, 2018; Irvine, 2002; Ware, 2002). While demonstrations of care manifest in a variety of ways, students' social, emotional, and academic development is always the desired goal (Ware, 2006). African American educators often demonstrate care by conveying a positive attitude, expressing a strong belief in their students' abilities, showing affection, and listening to their students' concerns (Chowela, Amatea, West-Olatunji, & Wright, 2012; Irvine, 2002; Ware, 2002). In her review of the literature, Ware (2002) explained African American female educators often demonstrate a culturally specific practice known as "other-mothering" in their approach to teaching. Because they understand the crucial role positive student-teacher relationships play in student success, African American educators often create familial relationships with their students by structuring their relationships with students around care (Chowela et al., 2012).

Chowela, Amatea, West-Olatunji, and Wright (2012) examined the pedagogical practices enacted by an African American educator and found she specifically fostered

emotional connectedness, or a sense of attachment and emotional bonding between herself and her students. Enacting pedagogical practices such as making eye contact with students by getting on their level when speaking with them, was fundamental to her ability to develop strong relationships with her students. She also used proximity, a hand on the shoulder, and eye contact to reengage distracted students. Moreover, not only did she foster strong relationships with individual students but, also, with her class as a whole. Fostering a sense of community with her students, she encouraged them to help each other and consistently expressed a strong belief in their abilities and potential (Chowela et al., 2012).

　　Affirmative view of African American culture. African American educators reject ideologies that position African American culture and, therefore, people as inferior Acosta (2018). In her exploration of the pedagogical perspectives of five African American educators, Acosta (2018) their insistent approach to teaching was undergirded by the belief that they were teaching more than just academic content; they were preparing students for life outside of the school walls. These teachers' experiences with racism also shaped their pedagogical enactments as they sought to counteract students' exposure to deficit discourses and other racist ideologies. Understanding the emotional and psychological toll of racism on their students, these educators believed it was critical for them to develop their students' "psychological fortitude necessary to pursue academic achievement despite negative societal perceptions" (Acosta, 2018, p. 1003). Acosta (2018) concluded that these educators' rejection of Western constructions of Blackness undergirded their success with African American children. In this way, educators'

pedagogical practices fostered learning environments that asserted the brilliance of African American children.

Research has found that African American educators also understand the powerful role that culture plays in the learning process and strive to create learning environments in which student culture is affirmed (Howard, 2001a; Ladson-Billings, 2009a). Knowing students' academic achievement increases when new content is related to their lived experiences, educators often modify their curricular and instructional practices to include cultural referents in an effort to create cultural congruency between children's prior knowledge and new academic content (Ladson-Billings, 2009a; Mitchell, 1998; Ware, 2002). African American educators often operate as cultural mediators for their students (Mitchell, 1998). While they recognize each students' inherent potential to learn, African American educators often also aware of the challenges their students face and work hard to support their students' emotional and academic needs.

Oppositional consciousness. Effective African American educators possess an "oppositional consciousness to mainstream American discourses about themselves, their students, their communities, and others" (Acosta et al., 2018, p. 343). Their critical race consciousness is what often fuels African American educators' sense of urgency to enact pedagogical excellence for the expressed benefit of their students (Acosta, 2019). Underscored by a critical perspective on racism and education, African American educators reject dominant discourses in education that normalize achievement disparities and understand the effects of institutionalized racism on students' schooling experiences (Acosta et al., 2018).

Political clarity. Successful African American educators recognize the tremendous challenges institutionalized racism creates in the everyday lives of their students (Acosta et al., 2019) and use their position to advocate for their students' rights in and out of school. Acosta et al., 2018 explain, "teachers who embrace this philosophical approach view their teaching as a way to help resist and transcend oppression and learn to instantiate change" (p. 342). In her examination of two African American elementary teachers, Dixson (2003) examine the ways in which their pedagogical beliefs and practices were both implicitly and explicitly political. Neither identified as political activists; however, both believed it was their professional obligation to act as advocates for their students.

In an earlier study of the pedagogical enactments of eight successful African American advocates, Mitchell (1998) found participants understood "the powerful and political forces" (p. 118) that posed obstacles to students' academic achievement and often gave their time outside of the classroom to advocate on their behalf at school board meetings, committee meetings, and in their communities. Caring about their students' well-being, African American educators often take an activist role and view teaching as a way to give back to the community, fulfill a valuable service, and carry on a cultural tradition. (Mitchell, 1998; Ware, 2002). While Acosta et al. (2018) summarized a tremendous body of scholarly work concerning the instructional practices of effective African American educators, few studies have employed African American pedagogical excellence as a conceptual framework. Therefore, the present study seeks to add to the well-established literature that has operationalized several key tenets associated with African American pedagogical excellence, it also seeks to build new understandings

about the ways in which African American teachers' culturally specific beliefs and practices can provide learning environments in which students feel psychologically safe and thrive academically and, in this way, create racially safe learning environments for students of Color.

Conclusion

As discussed in this review of the literature, racism, intentional or not, continues to manifest in our nation's educational discourses, policies, and practices and, in this way, create and maintain hostile schooling environments. This review of the literature detailed only some of the ways that racially oppressive schooling conditions negatively impact the experiences of African American and Latinx students and African American educators. Much more scholarship is needed to understand not only the ways in which everyday racism maintains racially hostile schooling environments, but the pedagogical practices African American teachers employ in response. While literature concerning the documented effective pedagogical ideologies, beliefs, and practices of African American educators was reviewed in this chapter, less was presented about the conceptual framework. Because their pedagogical framework was recently published, few studies have employed it as a conceptual framework. Consequently, this study also seeks to build upon Acosta et al.'s (2018) framework of African American pedagogical excellence.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodology that was used in this study. A comprehensive explanation of the research design for collecting and analyzing data is outlined according to a qualitative case study approach. The information will be organized into the following sections: methodology, research context and participants, data collection methods, data analysis, role of researcher, and issues of trustworthiness.

Research Questions

Urban schools are often sites of racially hostile learning environments for students of Color. Left unmitigated, racially hostile learning environments greatly hinder students' opportunities for academic, social, and emotional development. However, cases of teachers in urban schools who create and sustain learning environments in which students thrive exist and need to be studied. The purpose of this research project was to understand the pedagogical beliefs and practices enacted by two highly regarded African American educators in two urban elementary schools. To give focus and direction to this study, the following research questions guided this investigation:

R1: How do two highly regarded African American educators describe their beliefs about teaching in urban schools as well as their teaching practices?

R2: How do two highly regarded African American educators enact their beliefs about teaching in urban schools?

- In what ways do their beliefs undergird these enactments?

- In what ways do their enactments produce racially safe learning environments for their students?

R3: How do students describe their teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices?

- In what ways do students name their teachers' beliefs about teaching?

- In what ways do these students name the practices that support their learning?

Research Approach

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) define the overall purpose of qualitative research as an effort "to achieve an understanding of how people make sense of their lives, delineate the process of meaning-making, and describe how people interpret what they experience" (p. 15). Qualitative researchers do not strive for the "truth," but a "particular rendering or interpretation of reality grounded in the empirical world" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 24). In other words, this qualitative study was an effort to explore teachers' pedagogical enactments in their uniqueness as well as students' perceptions of these enactments as part of a particular context and, thus, was exploratory and descriptive in nature (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Qualitative researchers also strive to provide holistic descriptions that emphasize the social and interactional nature of reality and, thus, employ various ethnographic data collection techniques such as participant observations, interviews, and focus groups that will provide the researcher with rich and descriptive data (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In order to uncover the situated meanings and interpretations of each teachers' approach to teaching, this qualitative study required in-depth and long-term interactions in each classroom and, hence, necessitated the use of a multiple case study approach (Glesne, 1999; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Multiple Case Study Approach

Education researchers employing case study research designs are interested in "how children, teachers, and other educational participants experience the world around them" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 19); hence, my interest in the meanings that teachers and students gave to their experiences in their classrooms as well as their processes of interpretation required the employment of a case study methodology (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Although both teachers are African American elementary educators teaching in the same urban school district, each have developed their own unique pedagogical practices specific to their schools and, thus, presented more than one bounded system or case. For this reason, a multiple case study approach was employed to collect and analyze data in hopes of expanding my understanding of the meanings in context rather than reduce it to one single reality (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Case study researchers view reality as socially constructive and, therefore, strive "to see what the phenomenon means as it is socially enacted within a particular case" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 10). In each of these cases, the phenomenon of interest was the ways in which these teachers' pedagogical enactments fostered cultures of achievement, community, and love. Therefore, understanding the phenomenon meant understanding how these teachers and their students made meaning of the interactions that took place in their classrooms (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Qualitative case studies are defined by their specific design features and so can be characterized as particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic (Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) uses the term, *particularistic*, to characterize case studies because they "focus on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon" (p. 29). Because of my interest in

the pedagogical approaches of two African American teachers in two different schools, a multiple case study design allowed me to uncover specific features of both classrooms and how these features might inform teachers in similar contexts (Merriam, 1998). Case studies require the investigation of complex social units, consisting of several variables of potential importance, and result with a product that is a rich and thick description of the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1998). In this study, teachers' self-reported as well as students' descriptions of their teachers' pedagogical enactments revealed contextualized understandings of these teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices (Merriam, 1998, p. 29). Because case studies are also heuristic in nature, insights from this study may inform future academic research, professional practice, and education policy concerning effective pedagogical practices in K-12 school settings (Merriam, 1998).

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Research Context and Participants

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Context

This study takes place in a large, urban mid-Western school district. Although it was once the largest school district in the state, desegregation and white flight produced a steady decline in student population and tax revenue over the last four decades causing the school district to consolidate many of its schools, particularly those in low-income communities serving predominantly African American and Latinx students. Over the last ten years, schools with similar demographics have been closed by the district, only to be reopened the following year as charter schools. The district also greatly expanded their network of magnet schools, particularly in middle- to high-income neighborhoods serving predominantly white communities. In addition, the district recently implemented

a plan encouraging many of its lowest-achieving schools to close and reopen as quasi-charter schools meaning they would be managed by outside charters and allowed to operate independently of district mandates and oversight. Consequently, only a handful of traditional elementary schools remained in the district; all of which served African American and Latinx students.

The schools in this study were in the far eastside of the district; a community that had been significantly impacted by these district changes. Within the last ten years, this community has lost eight traditional schools- two had become quasi-charter schools and six had become charter schools who were completely independent from the school district. These closures left only two traditional schools in the neighborhood: Eastside Elementary and Deer Creek Elementary. These changes coupled with significant demographic and economic changes caused by the city's lack of investment in the community contributed to the unique and often challenging context within which both schools operated.

The overarching reason these schools were selected was my connection to the community and school system. First, as a former teacher in the neighborhood, I anticipated my insider knowledge of locally recognized discourses and practices, especially educational policies, procedures, and politics, would allow me somewhat easier entrée into the field, and tools to establish greater rapport with administrators, teachers, and students. The second reason concerned the uniqueness of the community itself. As stated, the landscape of public schooling in this community had dramatically changed over the last decade. These changes greatly impacted the schooling context in which my participants taught, and their students learned. As such, I wanted to examine

the ways in which these schools were impacted by the micro- and macro-level discourses surrounding urban education in this community. Because both schools were publicly labeled "low-performing" or "failing" by the state and local media, teachers and administrators at each school expressed frustration and exhaustion as they faced intense pressure from the district to improve students' academic outcomes on state achievement tests. This pressure produced fear and anxiety that bore heavy on those teaching and learning with them and often surfaced in the interactions between teachers and students. surfaced in many teachers' classrooms as well.

Eastside Elementary. Eastside Elementary (pseudonym), a K-6 school, is situated in a working-class neighborhood with mostly African American and Latino residents. Surrounded by several acres of green grass, the small school was nestled within a quiet, 1970s subdivision of single-family homes. Most students lived in the subdivision, so it was not unusual to see groups of students smiling and laughing on their way to and from school. It was also not unusual to see groups of students smiling and laughing during recess since Eastside had a new playground with basketball courts and an outdoor learning area.

Eastside's interior had been renovated as well. The front office was bright and spacious with lots of decorations. The office staff was always pleasant and helpful during my visits. Upon entering the main hallway, there was a large cabinet with glass doors that housed trophies students had won in athletic and academic competitions over the thirty years. Walking around the school, classical music could be heard coming from the hallway speakers. While the hallways were bustling with students and teachers, the principal or vice principal were often seen walking around the school and engaging with

them. During the study, the administrators and staff were always very welcoming and supportive.

Eastside Elementary had an enrollment of approximately 350 students, with 83% qualifying for free/reduced lunches. According to the state department of education website, students identified as predominantly African American (64%) and Latino (29%) (see Table 2); however, the teaching staff was predominantly White (81%) (see Table 3). Throughout the past decade, Eastside Elementary had struggled to attain passing rates on the annual state achievement tests lagging significantly behind both the state and district averages. During the previous year, only 25 of the students (11.4%) in the school passed both the math and reading portions. Eastside Elementary had been assigned several different letter grades over the last seven years, including a two C's and a B. However, in the last three years, Eastside Elementary has been assigned one D and two F's (see Table 1).

Deer Creek Elementary. Deer Creek Elementary (pseudonym), a K-6 school, is situated in a working-class neighborhood with mostly African American and Latino residents. Like Eastside, Deer Creek was also nested in a 1970s subdivision. Deer Creek was situated on a large grassy plot of land. Several recently built playgrounds and basketball courts were located outside of the school. Deer Creek also had a courtyard with a basketball court that teachers often took their classes for recess. Mr. Thomas' classroom overlooked this green space. Walking inside Deer Creek, it was evident that this school had been recently renovated. The floors sparkled and the hallways were spacious. Colorfully decorated bulletin boards lined the walls in the hallways in the primary section of the school while bright red lockers lined the hallways of the

intermediate section. During the study, I often witnessed the assistant principal walking

around the school and checking in with various teachers to see if they needed any

assistance or had any concerns. It was also not unusual to see groups of teachers

socializing in the hall before or after school. While there had been significant turnover in

the staff over the last few years, administrations and faculty appeared to have good

working relationships with each other.

Deer Creek Elementary had an enrollment of approximately 350 students, with

74% qualifying for free/reduced lunches. According to the state department of education

website, students identified as predominantly African American (65%) and Latino (25%)

(see Table 2), while teachers identified as predominantly white (22%) (see Table 3). Deer

Creek Elementary had also struggled to attain passing rates on the annual state

achievement tests. During the previous year, only 20 of the students (10.2%) in the

school passed both the math and reading portion. Over the last seven years, Deer Creek

Elementary has been assigned a letter grade of D or F (see Table 1).

Table 1

Department of Education Accountability History

	Eastside Elementary	Deer Creek Elementary
2011- 2012	F	F
2012- 2013	B	D
2013- 2014	C	D
2014- 2015	C	D
2015- 2016	D	F
2016- 2017	F	F
2017- 2018	F	F

Table 2

Student Count and Ethnicity

	Eastside Elementary	Deer Creek Elementary
Total Student Population	350	350
% of African American Students	64%	65%
% of Latino Students	29%	25%
% of Free/Reduced Lunch	83%	74%

Table 3

Teacher Count and Ethnicity

	Eastside Elementary	Deer Creek Elementary
Teacher Count	88	82
% of White Teacher	81%	76%
% of African American Teachers	17%	22%
% of Latino Students	1%	2%

Participants

   Ms. Edgars. Both participants in this study were purposefully selected as each was well-regarded by their colleagues. Nominated for Teacher of the Year, Ms. Edgars (pseudonym) was often sought out by colleagues on a variety of professional practices such as use of technology in the classroom and strategies that fostered teacher-parent communication. During her three years teaching at this school, she had also developed a reputation for fostering strong relationships with her students and their families. Her students considered her a strict, but caring teacher. Having spent considerable time at Eastside, I had often observed Ms. Edgar's interactions with her students and felt that she

enacted a warm, but demanding approach to teaching and felt that much could be learned from her unique pedagogical approach. Ms. Edgars was a fifth grade who identified as African American and female at the time of the study. While her undergraduate degree was in French, she had recently graduated with a master's degree in urban education. She was a mother of four young children and had been teaching for the last five years in this district. During one of our conversations, Ms. Edgars informed me that she grew up in a nearby neighborhood and described herself as a 'product' of this school system.

Mr. Thomas. At Eastside Elementary, Mr. Thomas (pseudonym) received similar praise from staff and administrators. During one of my early visits to Deer Creek Elementary, I met a former colleague in the hallway who was also teaching there. Upon mentioning that I was interested in Mr. Thomas' pedagogical practices, she enthusiastically replied, "Mr. Thomas is like a teaching guru! We're so glad he's here." This opinion was shared by the rest of the staff and administration as well. After spending time in his classroom, I recognized that much could be learned from his approach to teaching. At the time of the study, Mr. Thomas had been teaching for four years and identified as African American and male. He too had graduated with a master's degree in urban education and was active in teaching collaborative groups focused on social justice. During the study, he told me that he had recently been accepted into a doctoral program focused on urban education.

Data Collection Methods

Using a case study approach requires collecting multiple forms of data through a systematic and detailed method of data collection (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). To answer the research questions for this case study, I conducted semi-structured teacher interviews, critical events discussions, student focus groups, and multiple teacher observations. Figure 3 presents the research questions and corresponding data collection methods employed in this study.

Research Question	Data Collection Method
Question #1: How do these two highly regarded African American educators describe their beliefs about teaching in urban schools as well as their teaching practices?	Teacher interviews Critical events
Question #2: How do these two highly regarded African American educators enact their beliefs about teaching in urban schools? • In what ways do their beliefs undergird these enactments? • In what ways do their enactments produce racially safe learning environments?	Observations Photographs Critical events
Question #3: How do students describe their teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices? • In what ways do students name their teachers' beliefs? • In what ways do students name the practices that support their learning?	Focus groups

Figure 3. Research questions and corresponding data collection methods

Teacher Interviews

Each teacher was formally interviewed twice throughout the data collection phase. Both interviews were semi-structured in nature affording me flexibility to ask additional interpretive questions to clarify my understandings of their responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The first interview took place at beginning of the study and was used to gather background information and explore teachers' beliefs about teaching and

learning in urban schools. The second interview took place at the end of the study and was used to explore their pedagogical enactments as well as interactions with students, observed throughout the study. In addition, I engaged in numerous informal conversations with teachers about their perspectives of teaching and learning within their current schools. These informal conversations allowed me to explore specific events with each teacher and gain their feedback regarding those observed events. The purpose of the interviews was to gain an overall understanding of each teachers' pedagogical beliefs and understandings; however, details from informal conversations were written into field notes for analysis as well. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed for data analysis. Interview protocols are provided in Appendix A and B.

Photographs

Digital photographs were taken to document the visual messages conveyed within the physical environment of both teachers' classrooms such as bulletin boards, anchor charts, posters, and whiteboards. In conjunction with other forms of data that were collected, these photographs provided a means of remembering and studying details that might have been overlooked had these images not been available for subsequent reflection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this way, photographs allowed me to revisit these visual messages as themes emerged during data analysis.

Critical Events

Critical event methodology emphasizes the descriptive and inductive nature of qualitative research methodology (Flanagan, 1954). As a method of data collection this study, critical events methodology elicited participants' perceptions upon discussion of interactions between teachers and their students (Wragg, 2013). Not only was it used to

corroborate observational data, critical event methodology allowed me to uncover

participants' beliefs and perceptions that may not have otherwise been revealed during

teacher interviews and focus groups (Flanagan, 1954). Some of the discussions centered

on teachers' interactions with individual students, while others centered on interactions

with the whole class, usually focusing on classroom interactions or events that were

"illustrative of some salient aspect of the teacher's style" or approach to teaching (Wragg,

2013, p. 67).

In order to elicit participants' reflections of critical events, an open-ended

protocol was used. Participants were asked to reflect on an observed interaction, discuss

their in-the-moment thought processes, as well as any post-interaction understanding of

the critical event. Typically, these discussions with teachers happened soon after the

critical event and lasted no longer than 30 minutes. Critical events were discussed with

students during focus groups. Each discussion was audio-taped and transcribed for later

analysis. These transcriptions were analyzed alongside focus group transcriptions of the

same observed interaction; thereby, provided an additional layer of depth to the analysis

of the data collection. The critical event protocol is provided in Appendix C.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were used to examine and illuminate students' viewpoints,

perceptions, and interpretations of their teacher's pedagogical enactments. Focus group

interviews followed a semi-structured protocol with a total of ten open-ended questions.

In order to gain insight into students' interpretations of critical events (Wragg, 2013),

focus group protocol also included opportunities for students to reflect and describe their

perceptions of observed classroom event when obtainable. Focus group protocol is provided in Appendix D.

Focus groups were conducted near the end of the study allowing me greater opportunities to build rapport with students. In order to secure a broad group of students and perspectives, I sought to recruit equal numbers of female and male students, African American and Latinx students, as well as students from teachers' homeroom classes as well as their other class (in the same grade) to participate in focus groups (see Figures 4 and 5).

Focus Group	Student Pseudonym	Gender	Race/Ethnicity
Group 1	Julia	Female	Latina
	Karmyn	Female	Latina
	Yasmin	Female	Latina
	Claudia	Female	Latina
Group 2	Eduardo	Male	Latina
	Barry	Male	Latino
	Alejandro	Male	Latino
	Arturo	Male	Latino
Group 3	Alexandria	Female	Latina
	Myeshia	Female	African American
	Flora	Female	Latina
Group 4	Tia	Female	African American
	Jonathon	Male	African American
	Mica	Female	African American
	Kandy	Female	African American

Figure 4. Student focus groups from Eastside Elementary

Focus Group	Student Pseudonym	Gender	Race/Ethnicity
Group 1	Javier	Male	Latino
	Demetrius	Male	African American
	Lucia	Female	Latina
Group 2	Kate	Female	Latina
	Aisha	Female	African American
	Idalia	Female	African American
	Jada	Female	African American
Group 3	Tabitha	Female	African American
	Calista	Female	African American
	Sadik	Male	African American
Group 4	Remi	Female	African American
	Christina	Female	African American

Figure 5. Student focus groups from Deer Creek Elementary

In order to protect their confidentiality, each focus group participant was assigned a pseudonym. Each focus groups had no more than four participants in each and took place interviews took place in their classroom during non-academic time such as lunch, recess, or special area classes. Focus group interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis.

Classroom Observations

With the aim of obtaining data that reflected each teachers' approach to teaching, a significant amount of observational data was collected requiring immersion in the field (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). Immersion allowed me to both explore teachers' and students' interpretations of their experiences (Emerson et al., 2011). As a participant observer, my peripheral membership afforded me opportunities to "observe and interact closely with members to establish an insider's identity without participating in those activities constituting the core of group membership" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 145). In an attempt to accurately represent observed interactions, I endeavored to create rich,

descriptive, and systematic field notes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Field notes were used

to produce narrative texts representing my best effort to "objectively record the details of

what has occurred in the field" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 112) and became products of

my ongoing process of interpretation and sense-making while in the field (Emerson et al.,

2011).

In order to capture descriptive details, field notes were typed in a narrative format

immediately or as soon as possible after each observation. Once typed, I reflected upon

and recorded emerging patterns, connections between the data, and additional thoughts as

"observer's comments" in the margins of my field notes. Observer's comments allowed

me to take time and contemplate the day's experience, speculate on what has been

observed, and plan for the next observation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell,

2016). At the end of a set of notes, analytic memos were written to document emerging

themes and future directions of what was observed in the field (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007;

Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data Analysis

Constant Comparative Analysis

Qualitative data analysis does not begin from preestablished analytic categories;

rather, it proceeds inductively by creating analytic codes and categories that reflect

significant events and experiences documented in the data set. Thus, the researcher

engages in a continual process of expanding or enhancing her perspectives on the

findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Initially, the data set was read several times in its

entirety and, then, read line-by-line and segmented into meaningful analytic units. During

this phase of open coding, meaningful analytic units were assigned initial codes. First,

descriptive codes were assigned to meaningful units of data in each of the data subsets including transcripts from teacher interviews and focus groups, field notes, and photographs. Then, in order to capture participants' beliefs and perspectives, in vivo codes were also assigned to meaningful units in the transcript data.

Using constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the data set was examined further by reflecting holistically on the initial descriptive and in vivo codes. Questions were asked of the data by reflecting upon the ways in which both teachers described their philosophical beliefs about teaching in urban schools and examining how those beliefs undergirded their pedagogical practices. Subsequently, focus group transcripts were analyzed the ways in which students named and described their teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices. After noticing some initial patterns in my codes, similar codes were clustered and constructed into tentative categories. Codes and categories were subsequently examined within and across both cases (Merriam, 1998).

During this phase of focused coding, I continuously reflected upon these categories and their associated codes by writing analytic memos (Saldana, 2016) and hypothesizing about how these categories and codes were connected (Merriam, 1998). Recognizing the ways in which each teachers' beliefs and practices fostered positive learning environments, within their respective classrooms, I nested codes into categories that reflected emerging themes. For example, descriptive codes (e.g. "attending soccer games") as well as in vivo codes (e.g. "dig into the culture") associated with Ms. Edgars' pedagogical belief of "building strong student-teacher relationships" were nested in tentative categories that captured her pedagogical enactments such "communicating

cultural excellence", "learning about students' cultures", and "communicating counternarratives" (See Figure 6).
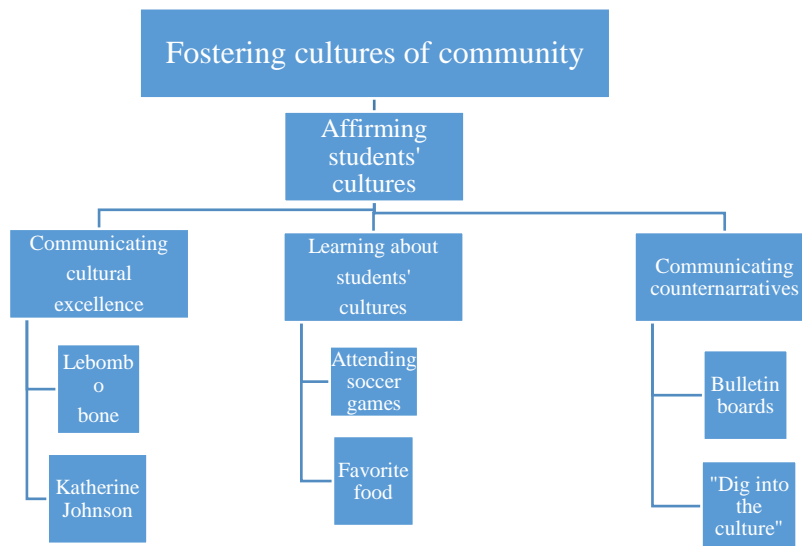
Figure 6. Simplified data analysis flow chart- Ms. Edgars

      Codes associated with Mr. Thomas' pedagogical belief of "building strong student-teacher relationships" were also clustered and nested in tentative categories representing his pedagogical enactments of "honoring students' freedoms" and "negotiating power". Once clustered, I reflected upon these categories and their associated descriptive codes (e.g. "freedom of movement") and in vivo codes (e.g. "give and take") and conceptualized them as practices that affirmed students' rights as human beings (See Figure 7). From this perspective, I recognized how both teachers' beliefs about building strong relationships with students informed their pedagogical enactments which, consequently, fostered cultures of community in their classrooms.

```
Fostering cultures of community
            |
      Affirming
    students' rights
       |        |
Honoring students'   Negotiating power
   freedoms              |        |
      |              Brain
  Freedom of         breaks
  movement           "give and
  Freedom to          take"
  socialize
```
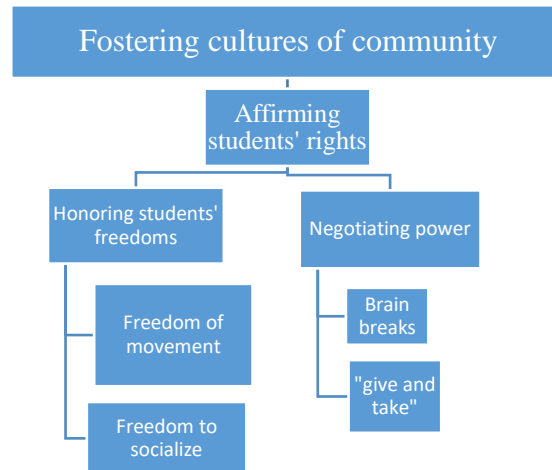
Figure 7. Simplified data analysis flow chart- Mr. Thomas

Throughout this iterative process, themes emerged that revealed the ways that these teachers' pedagogical enactments not only fostered classroom cultures of community, love, and achievement, but also learning environments in which African American students and Latinx student thrived (See Figure 8).
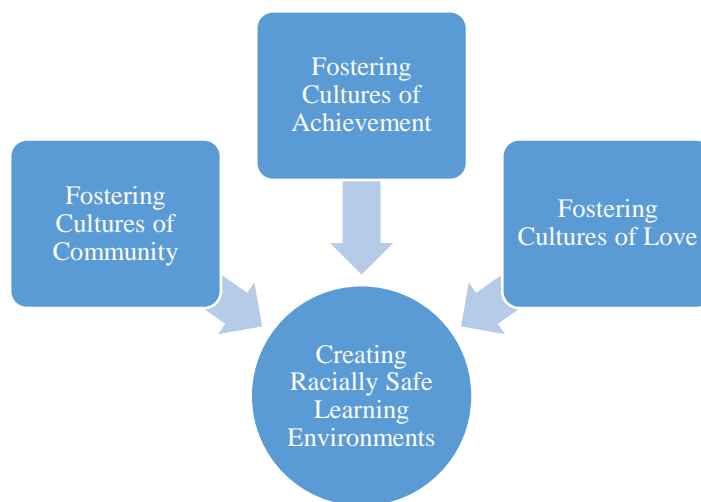
Figure 8. Simplified data analysis flow chart- Emerging themes

In order to understand the ways in which each teachers' beliefs and practices aligned with Acosta et al.'s (2018) framework of ideologies, beliefs, and perspectives associated with African American pedagogical excellence, I went back to the data and

reflected on the codes, categories, and themes. Using AAPE as an analytic lens, connections emerged between the pedagogical enactments observed in each teachers' classroom with those outlined in Acosta et al.'s (2018) framework. Reflecting upon these connections, I examined the data and sought to understand the ways in which Ms. Edgars' and Mr. Thomas' pedagogical beliefs were undergirded by the ideologies presented in the AAPE framework as well as how each teacher's pedagogical practices were informed by those beliefs. Findings revealed that some of the observed pedagogical practices were, in fact, responses to the racially hostile schooling environment in which both teachers taught. Conceptualizing their pedagogical beliefs and practices as their responses to racism provided a deeper understanding of the ways in which each teachers' pedagogical approach created racially safe learning environments in, otherwise, racially hostile schooling environments (See Figures 9 and 10).

Figure 9 and 10 represent the connections between Ms. Edgars' and Mr. Thomas' enacted pedagogical beliefs and practices and those outlined in the AAPE framework. These figures also represent the relationship between those beliefs and practices and the culture of achievement each teacher was able to cultivate in their classroom. For example, Ms. Edgars' asset-based perspective of her students undergirded her belief that her students were capable of learning at high levels (See Figure 9). Her focus on student learning was undergirded by her belief that she should communicate high expectations to her students. This belief was undergirded by an asset-based perspective of students. Within Ms. Edgars' classroom, students were affirmed as highly capable learners and, thereby, a culture of achievement was fostered.
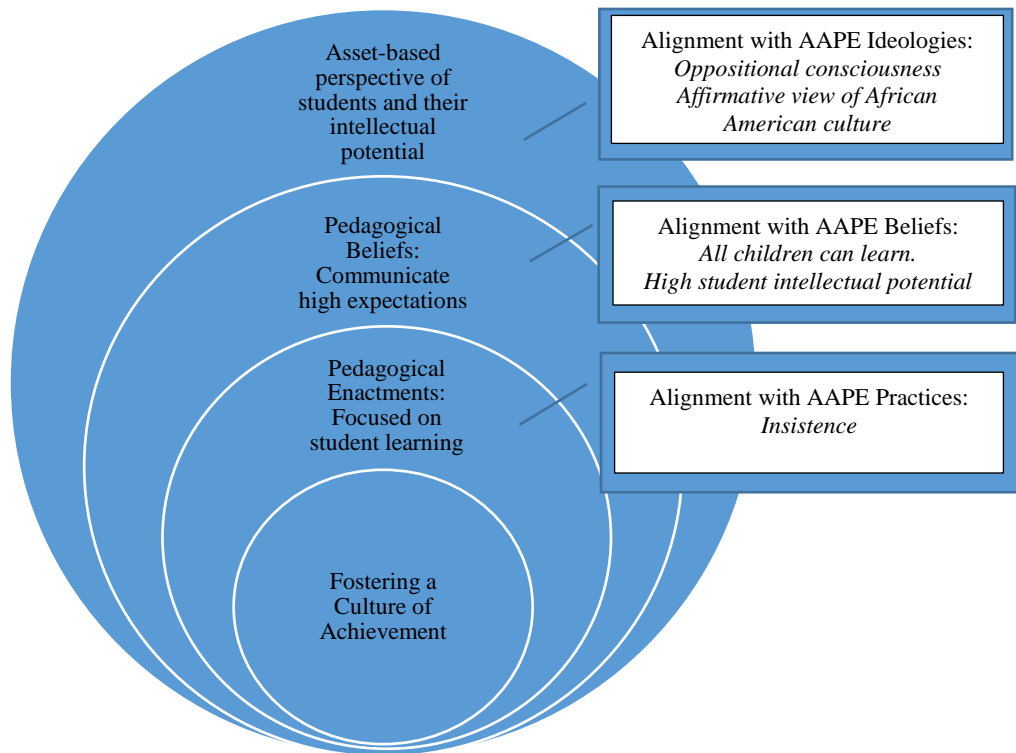
Figure 9. Fostering a culture of achievement- Ms. Edgars
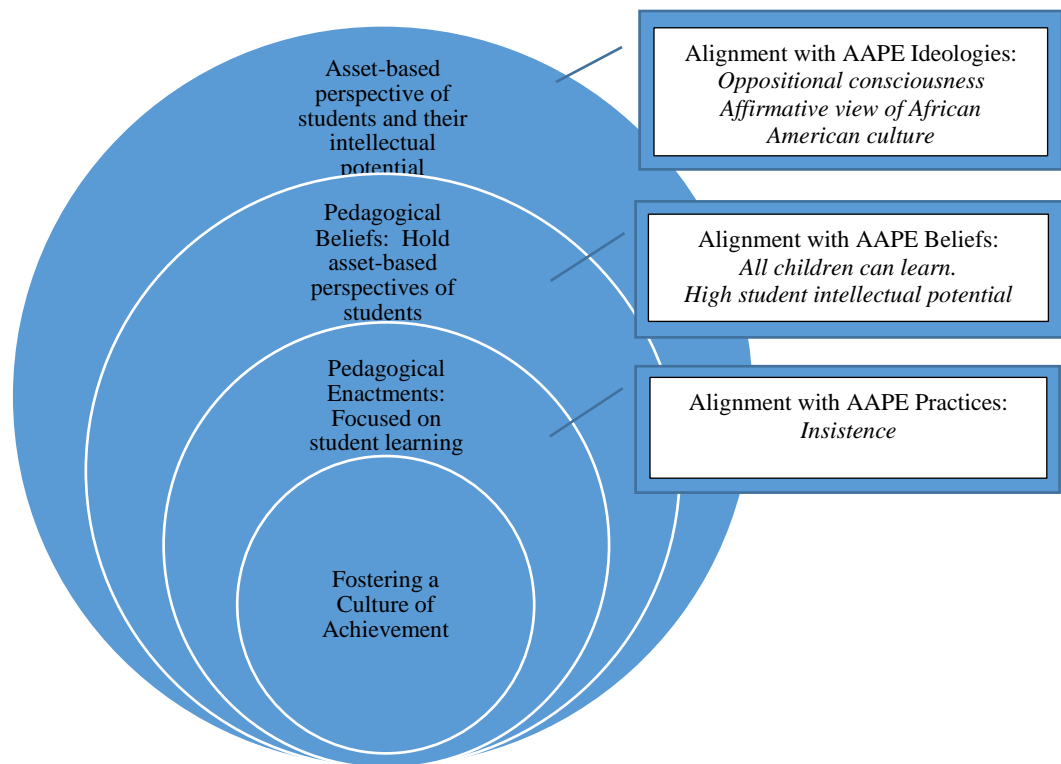
Figure 10. Fostering a culture of achievement- Mr. Thomas

Role of the Researcher

In my experience, urban schools can be sites of whiteness in which covert messages of colorblindness and deficit thinking of students of Color pervade the discourse of teachers and administrators. While this research project is an extension of my teaching experiences in urban schools and my doctoral coursework in urban education, I came to this study as a white researcher seeking to conduct research with students and teachers of Color in racially hostile schooling environments. Most importantly, I recognize that, as a white, middle-class woman, it is an exercise of my own privilege, and a political act, to represent the participants in this study. Moreover, as the primary research instrument, it is also important to acknowledge that my positionality. As a white researcher, my positionality (worldviews and perspectives) limited my understanding of the socially and culturally situated meanings that students and teachers of Color in this study held about their experiences in their schools (Blackburn, 2014), yet I strived to be a "worth witness" (Paris, 2011). Building relationships founded on respect and reciprocity with my participants I sought to gain a closer, more culturally sensitive understanding of the meanings my participants made in their daily experiences to (Paris & Winn, 2014). Moreover, because of my positionality, I carried my own biases and assumptions about teaching and learning into this study (Nygreen, 2006). For this reason, throughout the study, I continuously interrogated those biases and the ways in which my perspectives of the data and phenomenon under study were informed by my race, my gender, and other aspects of my identity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Issues of Trustworthiness

To avoid distorting participants' beliefs, perspectives, and practices, multiple

strategies were employed to ensure the trustworthiness of this study: (1) prolonged

engagement, (2) persistent observations, (3) triangulation, and (4) member checking

(Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Prolonged Engagement

Creswell and Poth (2018) describe prolonged engagement as "close, long-term

contact with the people under study" (p. 262). Because the aim of this study is to get as

close as possible to the participants' understandings, prolonged engagement was used to

collect the substantial amount of data needed to develop information-rich descriptive

cases about the practices and interactions that took place in both teachers' classrooms. In

this study, I repeatedly observed both teachers' practice over the course of five months.

Prolonged engagement afforded time to build rapport with participants and opportunities

and follow-up on comments from semi-structured interviews, observations, or informal

conversations. Prolonged engagement also afforded numerous opportunities to deepen

my relationships with study participants resulting in critical understandings of the ways in

which the sociopolitical context of the schools influenced their teaching and learning

experiences. Furthermore, prolonged engagement throughout data collection allowed me

an ample amount of time to examine and challenge my own biases and assumptions.

Persistent Observations

Persistent observations with corresponding field notes were used to identify the

characteristics most salient and relevant to the purpose of the study (Creswell & Poth,

2018). Observations in each classroom occurred twice a week over a five-month

period and concluded when the data and emergent findings become saturated. For each

observation, I kept a research log that indicated time, date, and length of my observations

to monitor the frequency and details of each classroom observation. Extensive field notes

were taken during each observation. I spent many hours conducting informal

observations in the hallway, on the playground during recess, and in the cafeteria during

lunch. In addition, I spent many hours eating lunch and discussing various aspects of

teaching with staff member in teachers lounges in both schools. Consequently, these

persistent observations allowed for opportunities to look closely for pervasive elements

of the interactions between students and their teachers in each classroom.

Triangulation

In order to gain a rich, detailed understanding of these teachers' practices,

multiple data sources were used in this study including a) field notes taken from

classroom observations, b) transcripts from teacher interviews, c) transcripts from focus

groups, d) notes from informal conversations, and e) reflections from my research

log. Triangulation was achieved by comparing coded interview and focus group data

(Merriam, 1998), direct observation field notes, and previous research concerning

African American pedagogical beliefs and practices. Collecting multiple sources of data

allowed me to more fully describe my participants' understandings of

each teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices as well as the way in which these

practices produced a racially safe learning environment.

Member Checking

Keeping in mind the ways in which my own positionality affords me culturally

specific and possibly limited ways of understanding the data, member checking was an

on-going as well as summative process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition to those regular member checks, teachers were provided copies of initial emerging themes in the data, which we read over together and discussed. Doing so allowed me to solicit each teachers' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to outline the research method used to explore the pedagogical enactments of two African American teachers in two similarly situated urban elementary schools. A discussion of the methodology, study participants, contexts, data collection, and analysis outlined the specifics of how the study was conducted and who participated in the study. Constant comparative analysis was used to examine the data and understand the ways in which race and racism impacted their teaching and learning experiences. In the following chapters, I present findings that emerged during data analysis. Chapter Four focuses on how participants' biographical background and schooling experiences influenced their teaching beliefs and practices. In Chapter Five, I move toward understanding the ways in which their pedagogical beliefs undergirded their pedagogical practices and created classroom cultures of achievement, community, and love. Finally, Chapter 6 is a discussion of the findings and its implications for research and practice.

CHAPTER FOUR

REFLECTING ON RACE: HIGHLY-REGARDED AFRICAN AMERICAN

EDUCATORS' BELIEFS ABOUT TEACHING IN URBAN SCHOOLS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the pedagogical beliefs and practices enacted by two highly- regarded African American educators. This chapter explores each teachers' pedagogical beliefs and the personal and professional experiences that have shaped them. As noted in Chapter 2, pedagogical beliefs are defined as "the ideological underpinnings that shape teacher attitudes and behavior" (Acosta et al., 2018, p. 342). In order to explore teachers' beliefs and the ideologies that undergirded them, data collection included teacher interviews, critical events, and prolonged observations. In addition, because I sought to understand students' perceptions of their teachers' beliefs about teaching, extensive focus groups data was also collected. Analysis of the data revealed the ways in which teachers' stories represented two compatible, yet unique cases and, as such, are presented separately. Findings in this chapter explore how each educator describes their pedagogical beliefs and how they have been shaped by their schooling experiences as African American students and teachers. This chapter begins with Ms. Edgars describing the ways in which her pedagogical beliefs were shaped by her nurturing schooling experiences and ends with Mr. Thomas describing his experiences as a student and how they inform his approach to teaching. In this chapter, teachers' stories of their experiences as students and teachers in racially hostile schooling environments are explicated as well.

Ms. Edgars' Pedagogical Beliefs about Teaching in Urban Schools

Looking Out for Everybody: Learning to Teach in Nurturing Environments

Ms. Edgars proudly described herself as a "product" of the urban school district (USD) in which she currently taught and credited her positive schooling experiences to her decision to become a teacher. During our initial interview, Ms. Edgars described the ways in which her pedagogical beliefs were rooted in her positive schooling experiences, both as a student and a teacher. While she spoke fondly of all her teachers, both Black and white, she felt that her Black teachers served as pedagogical role models and thus, greatly influenced her teaching style and approach. For instance, Ms. Edgars identified her Black teachers' use of authority (Ware, 2006) as one of the main reasons she enjoyed being a student in their classroom. She felt her teachers had "control of the classroom" which protected students from unnecessary harm (i.e. student bullying) leading her to feel more comfortable in their classrooms. Unlike many of her other teachers, she felt her Black teachers were "looking out for everybody" and enacted teaching practices that provided students with safe and nurturing learning (Acosta, 2018).

Ms. Edgars also described her Black teachers' insistence (Acosta et al., 2018), or focus on student learning, as one of the reasons she enjoyed having them as teachers. Her teachers not only stressed the importance of academic achievement, but also expressed their belief in each of their students' intellectual potential (Acosta et al., 2018). Moreover, her Black teachers held students accountable for their learning. They did not accept excuses for missing assignments. In other words, students' academic achievement was not negotiable. She felt setting high goals for student learning and insisting students'

work hard to learn created a classroom culture of achievement in which student failure "was not an option."

In many ways, Ms. Edgars' approach to teaching was also a "product" of her positive schooling experiences. When we discussed her beliefs about effective teaching in urban schools, Ms. Edgars attributed her current pedagogical beliefs about teaching in urban schools to her former Black teachers:

> But, like, the high expectations, um, the not accepting excuses. Those are the two main things. And then, you know, just like my teachers who told me about their home life and let them know that you're a real person, that helped build a connection as well. So those are like the three things: let the students know that you're regular too, and this is where you need to be 'up here' and I want you to be 'up here', so expressing my concern and care for their grades and well-being, so those are some things that I try to model after some of the great teachers that I've experienced.

Overall, Ms. Edgars' descriptions of her Black teachers' influential pedagogical practices echoed Ware's (2006) conception of a warm demander approach to teaching. In her synthesis of the culturally specific ways that African American teachers support student achievement, Ware (2006) identified several common pedagogical practices consistently enacted by successful African American teachers that align with Ms. Edgars' beliefs including a no-nonsense style of teaching in which students were held to high expectations and nurtured to meet those expectations. Ware (2006) explains, "their firm, yet caring, expectation that African American students will achieve success in their class" is a central feature of a warm demander approach to teaching" (p. 443).

Ms. Edgars believed that their warm demanding approach to teaching created a nurturing classroom environment which in turn allowed her Black teachers to cultivate strong relationships with their students. Because her Black teachers provided safe

learning environments in which students were "pushed" and simultaneously "nurtured",

Ms. Edgars expressed she felt "more of a connection with her Black teachers" than her

most of her other teachers:

> I had a great relationship with all of them. They always had those high
> expectations. They pushed me. They didn't take any excuses. And they
> always showered us with love as well.

In essence, their approach to teaching supported an emotional connectedness (Chowela et

al., 2012) between themselves and their students. Chowela et al. (2012) explains that it is

not always necessary for teachers to put aside time to develop strong relationships with

their students, rather, "relationships can be built through a series of positive teacher-

student or teacher-class interactions that occur naturally in the classroom" (p. 268).

According to Ms. Edgars, "all of her Black teachers" served as pedagogical role

models; however, Ms. Edgars' perspectives about teaching were also influenced by

former colleagues with whom she taught with as a novice teacher, most of whom were

Black. During her first two years of teaching, Ms. Edgars taught in another elementary

school; one with a predominantly Black staff and student population, much like the one

she had attended as a student. Even though she told me the school was labeled "failing"

by the state department of education, Ms. Edgars believed it was a "great school." Ms.

Edgars indicated that school staff struggled to help students achieve "passing" scores on

standardized tests; however, she felt that the standardized tests were biased. She did not

believe that test scores were an appropriate indicator of the excellence of the school. Ms.

Edgars' rejected the dominant perspective pervasive in education discourse that

associates test scores with school quality (Valencia, 2010). She understood that students'

achievement outcomes were shaped by the sociopolitical contexts in which schools were situated and, therefore, rejected the label "failing."

Ms. Edgars expressed that she missed teaching there. She held fond memories of working with her colleagues. Much like her own teachers, Ms. Edgars felt that her Black colleagues enacted an approach to teaching that cultivated a positive, "no-nonsense" school culture while, at the same time, demonstrated care and concern for students in the school:

> Everybody is going to say something to you. You're not going to be able to walk down the hall and nobody say anything to you, no care or concern. Now the school was still a bit out of control, but the students knew that they were loved.

Because her colleagues believed that every child was capable of engaging in a rigorous curriculum (Acosta et al., 2018), their high expectations for students manifested in a positive school culture in which everyone felt responsible for student success (Ladson-Billings, 2009). To Ms. Edgars, a school culture in which students were held to high expectations was more valuable than standardized test scores.

In conclusion, Ms. Edgars' experiences as a student and as a teacher greatly influenced her beliefs about creating caring and nurturing environments. She even felt that her teachers and colleagues served as pedagogical resources and role models for her own approach to teaching. Although she currently taught in a school with similar student demographics to those whom she has such fond memories, Ms. Edgars found herself teaching in a much different schooling environment. As you will see in the next section, Ms. Edgars' experiences with microaggressions created schooling conditions that were racially oppressive.

I Wanna Be with My Kids: Beliefs About Teaching in Racially Hostile Schools

Although Ms. Edgars currently taught in a school with similar student demographics, this was her first experience teaching with a predominantly white staff. At Eastside Elementary, the administrative staff was entirely white (one principal and the two assistant principals), and Ms. Edgars was one of only two African American classroom teachers in the school. Two members of the ESL staff identified as Latinx but, other than that, classroom teachers were almost entirely white. On the other hand, the support staff (custodians, teaching assistants, administrative assistants, and lunchroom attendants) was almost entirely African American. Within this school, Ms. Edgars was highly regarded by her colleagues as an effective educator who nurtured strong relationships especially with students. Throughout the day, it was not unusual for teachers and students from other classrooms to pay her a visit. Students from other classrooms often stopped by to share good new with Ms. Edgars or receive some words of encouragement before heading to their own classrooms in the morning.

Ms. Edgars was highly regarded among her colleagues. Her colleagues even nominated her to represent Eastside in the district's annual "Teacher of the Year" competition during the study. Although she was designated a "teacher leader" within the school, colleagues did not just come to her for advice about instructional strategies. Colleagues might drop in before school to discuss her perspective of one of their students or ask for advice on ways to facilitate parent-school connections with students' families. She had close connections to the support staff as well. They often stopped in to discuss instructional strategies, but, often, they stopped by just to socialize. While Ms. Edgars was highly regarded by her colleagues and students, she expressed frustration that her

white colleagues too often diminished her effective pedagogical practices by conflating her success with student to her positionality as a Black woman (Kohli, 2018; Kohli & Pizzaro, 2016; Pizzaro & Kohli, 2016).

At the beginning of the study, Ms. Edgars was hesitant to share her critical perspectives of Eastside, particularly the ways in her colleagues' lack of racial literacy created an oppressive school climate. As a member of the dominant group, my positionality as a white, middle-class woman conducting research, was a barrier to building rapport and trust with Ms. Edgars. However, as I shared some of my observations and critical perspectives of my experiences as a teacher in the district, I believe Ms. Edgars began to trust the intentions of my research. Sharing my stories seemed to accelerate the development of our relationship and, soon thereafter, Ms. Edgars began to open up more and share her own stories. Her stories illuminated the ways in which she experienced Eastside Elementary as a racially hostile teaching environment (Kohli, 2018).

Racial microaggressions targeting Ms. Edgars. As our relationship developed throughout the study, Ms. Edgars and I shared increasingly candid conversations concerning the frustrating ways in which students' race and culture were not only ignored by her white colleagues, but often considered excuses for their low expectations of students (Tyler, 2016). Within the school walls, conversations about race and racism were almost nonexistent. Because they became uncomfortable during discussion of race or racism, teachers considered those topics "taboo." She shared a story about how a colleague's lack of racial understanding made her feel isolated, yet extremely frustrated. Throughout the study, Ms. Edgars often wore a red T-shirt with the phrase, *Racism is*

whack, printed on the front. One day, while Ms. Edgars was making photocopies at the

copy machine, the assistant principal, who identified as a white male, noticed her T-shirt.

At some point during their quick conversation, he informed her she would not be able to

wear that T-shirt to school anymore. When Ms. Edgars inquired as to why the shirt was

inappropriate, he explained that he felt the phrase on the T-shirt was too

"political." Ultimately, she was given permission to wear the shirt by the principal, but

the incident illustrates the ways in which everyday interactions for Ms. Edgars can

become racially hostile. Although unintentional, his comment became a racialized

microaggression for Ms. Edgars (Kohli et al., 2019).

Ms. Edgars shared another instance in which she felt targeted by a colleagues'

racial microaggression. Throughout the study, I often observed Ms. Edgars wearing a

beautiful pair of large, circular wooden earrings with the phrase, *Black Lives Matter*,

carved inside. One day, while wearing these earrings, one of her colleagues, a white

woman, noticed and compliment them, but then remarked that she felt the phrase *should*

really read "*all lives matter*." Although Ms. Edgars expressed her irritation with this

comment, she felt it was useless to engage her colleague in a discussion about the

significance of the phrase and walked away. She explained to me, "Yes. All lives do

matter, but *I'm* talking about *Black* lives." Ms. Edgars felt that her colleagues' comment

demonstrated a lack of racial sensitivity, or even a disconnect from the sociopolitical

context in which they taught. This comment illustrates how this colleagues' expression of

white fragility (Diangelo, 2018) became a racial microaggression, or everyday act of

racism, during routine interaction among two teachers. This comment also exemplifies

the ways white people often recenter their whiteness in discussions of race or racism

(Halstead, 2017). Halstead (2017) explains:

> "All Lives Matter" is a problem because it refocuses the issue away from systemic racism and Black lives. It distracts and diminishes the message that Black lives matter or that they should matter more than they do. "All Lives Matter" is really code for "White Lives Matter," because when white people think about "all lives," we automatically think about "all *white* lives." (italics in original)

These stories illustrate the ways in which her colleagues' lack of racial literacy undergirded their insensitive comments, or microaggressions. Kohli (2018) clarifies that microaggressions are "not just personal slights, but instances of racialized harassment," (p. 318). Confronted with daily reminders of the way in which race and racism were disregarded, Ms. Edgars expressed that she often felt frustrated and alone at work (Acosta, 2019; Rauscher & Wilson, 2017). Although they demonstrate Ms. Edgars' resistance and resiliency, these stories also illuminate they ways in which her colleagues' lack of racial literacy manifested as racialized microaggressions and created oppressive working conditions.

Racial microaggressions targeting students. Ms. Edgars recognized that her colleagues lack of racial literacy also produced a racially oppressive schooling conditions for African American students. Like the above comment about her earrings, her white colleagues' "compliments" were often veiled microaggressions indirectly targeting African American students. In the following passage, Ms. Edgars discusses the way that her colleagues' compliments about her Latinx students steeped in deficit perspectives of African American students:

> I kind of resent when I hear people say well, you got the easy class, or I got the easy class because I got all ESL, like I have some ESL students

who act the fool just with everybody else and I have some black students who overachieve.

Though unintentional, this racial microaggression illustrates the deficit perspective her colleagues often expressed about African American students and the coded language used to communicate their deficit views (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

On another occasion, Ms. Edgars shared a story with me about a conversation she had with a student, an African American female, from the fifth-grade other class. One morning, this student walked into Ms. Edgars' classroom upset. The source of the student's frustration was an interaction that had happened moments earlier with the other fifth-grade teacher, a white woman. The teacher reprimanded her for not reciting the Pledge of Allegiance during the school's morning announcement. Ms. Edgars described the emotional state of the young girl:

> And one day she was just so upset, and she was just walking in the hallway just huffing and puffing and I was like "Just come on over here and just chill." And she was so upset because she [her white homeroom teacher] got in her face about saying the Pledge of Allegiance.

She felt frustrated with this interaction because she felt her teacher demonstrated little understanding of her decision to stay silent and seated during the Pledge of Allegiance. However, Ms. Edgars understood this students' frustration with this interaction as she explained:

> She ain't feeling the pledge, like the student, you know she just doesn't support it . . . If anything, okay, everybody needs to be quiet, but you're going to make them recite it at the same time? And I get so frustrated because everybody knows about the controversy with the National anthem.

Ms. Edgars believed the students' decision to stay seated and not recite the Pledge of Allegiance was influenced by Colin Kaepernick and his decision to kneel during the National Anthem in protest to our nation's long-standing and systemic racial oppression of African Americans. To Ms. Edgars, this student's decision to stay seated was an expression of solidarity with her Black community. While many Americans, particularly in white communities, believed Colin Kaepernick's decision to kneel was a sign of disrespect, many Americans, particularly in the Black community, praised his decision to raise awareness of the racial injustice and police brutality. However, Ms. Edgars' colleague seemed unaware of the ways in which African American students might feel about standing for the American flag. She perceived this student's actions as a sign of disrespect and reacted with hostility:

> And why do you feel so strongly to tell this student you're not going to disrespect *my* country and *my* flag and ...Well, yeah, you would feel like this is *your* country and *your* flag. Did you ask her how *she* feels about this country and that flag? You know?

These daily acts of racism, however slight and unintentional, take a collective toll on the psychological well-being of teachers causing feelings of professional discouragement and alienation (Kohli, 2016); yet, these experiences also seemed to strengthen her commitment to remain an educator at Eastside Elementary, "I wanna be with my kids. I'm not at that school for any other reason. I wanna work in the hood, because I feel like our kids are not getting the services that they need." Although Ms. Edgars expressed frustration, she was also optimistic that schools serving African American and Latinx students could enact beliefs and practices that created nurturing learning environments within challenging conditions. From her perspective, educators

must be willing to learn more about their students' sociocultural backgrounds and enact pedagogical practices that affirmed them. Ms. Edgars also believed that effective pedagogical practices in urban schools must be built upon the following: (1) Developing strong student-teacher relationships (2) Communicating high expectations, and (3) Expressing concern for students' academic, social, and emotional achievement.

Developing strong student-teacher relationships. Ms. Edgars believed that building strong student-teacher relationships was an important aspect of being an effective educator in an urban school. She felt teachers were able to cultivate strong relationships with students when they shared aspects of their personal life with them. Ms. Edgars believed teachers should let students "know you're a real person." Ms. Edgars often discussed aspects of her family life with students and encouraged them to do the same. These types of informal conversations occurred naturally throughout the day such as when students were unpacking their bookbags or lining up for restroom breaks. On several occasions, I witnessed students asking Ms. Edgars about her children. There were days when Ms. Edgars missed school to care for a sick child. Often, these small inquiries would lead to larger, more inclusive conversations in which students would share their own stories about when they or a loved one was sick. Ms. Edgars regularly initiated in these kinds of informal conversations with students while they worked independently at their desks asking them about events happening in their lives outside of school such family celebrations, special occasions, and sporting events. These conversations created opportunities for students to share their experiences, feelings, and opinions with Ms. Edgars. Students named these conversations as one of the reasons they thought she cared about them. Students also told me that she always makes sure everyone has a coat before

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they go outside for recess and, if someone does not, she gives hers to them. These types of interactions with students strengthened Ms. Edgars' connections with her students. One student, Karmyn, explained that students appreciated Ms. Edgars' "mom-heart."

Ms. Edgars also took advantage of opportunities to socialize with her students. For instance, Ms. Edgars taught her students how to play a high-paced two player card game called Speed and often played against at least one of them during recess. She had several decks of cards so, at any time, there might be up to six pairs of students playing; however, every student wanted a chance to beat Ms. Edgars. Students expressed how much they enjoyed playing the game with her because she competed enthusiastically with them. Although these games were highly competitive between everyone, they always ended in laughter and smiles.

Ms. Edgars' pedagogical enactments of sharing stories and playing games, fostered not only an emotional connectedness with her students, but among her students as well (Chowela et al., 2012). Considered a critical aspect of developing strong student-teacher relationships, *emotional connectedness* fosters "a sense of attachment and emotional bonding between the teacher and the students" (Chowela et al., 2012, p. 255). Because Ms. Edgars developed an emotional connectedness with her students, her students interpreted her beliefs and practices that demonstrated that she cared for them and, thus, was establish strong relationships with her students (Acosta, 2019; Acosta et al., 2018; Foster, 1993; Irvine, 2002; Ware, 2002; 2006).

Communicating high expectations. Ms. Edgars believed that communicating high expectations was another important aspect of being an effective teacher in an urban school. She believed teachers should view each of their students as capable of high

academic achievement and stressed that they should "not take any excuses" from students

(Acosta et al., 2018). She believed teachers should take responsibility for students'

academic success by providing as much additional support as students needed.

Describing her role in the academic success of her students, Ms. Edgars expressed her

belief that teachers play a critical role in student achievement (Tyler, 2016).

> Because I can't have half my class failing and not think I'm part of that
> reason. So, throughout the year, I consciously think, "What can I do to get
> them involved? What can I do better?" Because I know that the students
> are capable and I know that I'm capable of teaching, but we both have to
> figure out what can we do to make everybody successful.

From her perspective, Ms. Edgars felt many of her colleagues gave up too easily give

when students struggled with new concepts:

> If you teach a class and you feel like, 'Well these kids can't do it", before
> you even give them a chance to try. Then you try and it fails and then you
> don't try again. That's a problem in my opinion. Because all of your kids
> can do 'whatever', you know, we just have to kind of meet them where
> they're at. And we have to really believe in our heart that they can do it.

Ms. Edgars' close connections with students allowed her to build relationships

strong enough that she could "push" students out of their comfort zone during learning

engagements and persevere when struggling with new concepts. Although Ms. Edgars

insisted students actively participate, she also positively reinforced their hard work on

regular basis. Ms. Edgars constantly walked around the classroom encouraging students

with verbal affirmations, such as "Don't give up," "You almost got it," and "Impressive."

Even though she felt nervous. Myesha a shy, African American student who was new to

the class, believed that she was learning more in her new class because she was

participating. She explained that she has raised her math grade since becoming a student

in Ms. Edgars' class. She attributed her good grades to Ms. Edgars' insistence that she participate explaining, "she challenges me to answer the questions in class." Her students consistently expressed appreciation for her no-nonsense approach to teaching. Eduardo fondly described Ms. Edgars as a "teacher for the army" because she's "strict, but nice." Claudia, a shy Latina student, echoed her feelings about Ms. Edgars' insistence sharing with me that although she first interpreted Ms. Elliot's teaching style as "rough", she explained that it was really "for our own good." During focus groups, many of her students named her insistence was one of the main reasons they liked being students in her class. Students interpreted Ms. Edgars' insistence on academic excellence as a demonstration of care (Valenzuela, 1999).

Expressing concern for students' academic, social, and emotional development. In Ms. Edgars' class, academic success was not just encouraged but expected. In a motherly tone, she consistently communicated the importance of turning in completed homework and attaining good grades because, as Tia put it, "she thinks all of her students should have A's." Ms. Edgars also emphasized to students that they needed to take an active role in their learning. In her classroom, students were not just expected to solve an equation, but also be able to explain how they solved it. Jonathon explained, "You can't just tell her the answer, you have to explain how you got it." When she taught, Ms. Edgars did not hesitate to assert her authority in order to maintain a culture of achievement in her classroom and, thereby, demonstrated her "profound willingness and sense of duty to lead the class with authority in ways that facilitate student academic and cultural success" (p. 986). Asserting their moral authority, Ms. Edgars insisted students work hard and provided support until students demonstrated comprehension (Acosta,

2019). However, Ms. Edgars did not just focus on students' academic achievement; she also stressed that she was concerned about their social and emotional development as well. From her perspective, Ms. Edgars believed effective educators express concern for students' "grades and well-being."

When Ms. Edgars expressed concerns to her class, she often talked to them as if they were her own children. While she often expressed concerns to the entire class, she also pulled students aside to talk privately with them. Claudia told me she had several private conversations with Ms. Edgars during her parents' separation and divorce. Another student told me that when she was struggling in her class, Ms. Edgars met with her one-on-one so that they could discuss what types of support she needed to be successful. These types of one-on-one interactions demonstrated to students that Ms. Edgars cared not only about their grades and academic success, but their social and emotional struggles as well. Ms. Edgars employed a holistic perspective of student growth and expressed a strong belief that they must be active supporters of their students' growth and development (Irvine, 2002; Mitchell, 1998). African American educators who express concern for students' academic, social, and emotional development often connect their role as an educator to larger social goals, which means "teaching the whole child, not just promoting college and career readiness" (Acosta, 2019, p. 31).

Shaped by former African American teachers and colleagues, Ms. Edgars' pedagogical practices fostered a nurturing learning environment for her African American and Latinx students. Within this nurturing environment, Ms. Edgars' enactments developed an emotional connectedness between she and her students. Students perceived these practices as evidence that she cared about them (Chowela et al.,

2012). By developing strong relationships with her students, Ms. Edgars could push her students to participate and work hard during class. Her pedagogical enactment of insistence reinforced her students' perceptions that she cared about them and their academic success. Ms. Edgars' warm, yet demanding pedagogical approach was the main reason they enjoyed being a student in her class (Ware, 2006). While Ms. Edgars' schooling experiences influenced her beliefs about teaching effectively in urban schools, her experiences are unique and do not necessarily represent an experience universal to all African American educators. As you will see in the next section, Mr. Thomas' schooling experiences were less nurturing but nonetheless, have influenced his beliefs about teaching effectively in urban schools.

Mr. Thomas' Pedagogical Beliefs about Teaching in Urban Schools

Didn't Fit the Mold: Learning to Teach in Subtractive Schooling Environments

Like Ms. Edgars, Mr. Thomas' pedagogical beliefs were also informed by his various schooling experiences, both as a student and teacher; however, his experiences were quite different from hers. During our initial interview, Mr. Thomas recounted several schooling experiences that he believed shaped his approach to teaching. Although these experiences produced feelings of the "other", they also produced a critical awareness of the ways in which students are often negatively positioned in schools (Acosta et al., 2018).

Racial microaggressions targeting Mr. Thomas. From kindergarten to third grade, Mr. Thomas attended a few different public schools in suburban Chicago in which the teaching staff was predominantly white. He recalled that because his parents had spent a significant amount of time preparing for school by teaching him both academics

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and social norms (i.e. sit quietly and follow directions), he came to school seemingly more prepared than his peers. Reflecting on these schooling experiences, he felt that this cultural capital (Yosso, 2005) won him favor with these teachers, however, Mr. Thomas also felt that it positioned him as the "other" in classroom. as his teachers often made comments about the ways in which he was "different from them." Mr. Thomas explains the ways in which he was positioned as an African American male student in these schools, "I'm the Black that they liked because I can adjust to their white middle class norms." He explained that his teachers often sent him overt and covert messages that he was different from his classmates, "Ethan [Mr. Thomas' first name], you're not like them." Looking back, Mr. Thomas now equated these messages to the "hidden curriculum" of American schools that rewards knowledge and behaviors associated with white, middle class norms. Thus, although he saw himself reflected demographically within the student body (i.e. most of his classmates were African American and middle-class) and connected with his peers, his teachers often positioned him as the "other." Although Mr. Thomas felt these microaggressions greatly hindered his ability to develop strong relationship with his teachers (Allen et al., 20133; Hotchkins, 2016; Perez Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2006), he also believed that these early schooling experiences helped to inform his approach to teaching in a positive way (Allen et al., 2013).

In the fourth grade, Mr. Thomas began attending an elite private school where his dad has recently become the school chaplain. He also explained that it was only because his father had taken a job as the school chaplain and, therefore, received a hefty discount on student tuition that he and his siblings were given the opportunity to attend. Mr. Thomas recounted that before he could enroll in the fall, he had to pass an entrance exam.

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Unfortunately, he failed it several times and, consequently, had to attend summer school before he was admitted to fourth grade. Having been positioned as the "smart" Black student in his previous schooling experiences, this schooling environment positioned Mr. Thomas as deficient (Valencia, 2010). Rather than feeling included and welcomed, the experiences made him feel "othered", like an outsider in an established community, "It's a private school. I sort of feel like somehow, I'm not supposed to be there." Within this privileged environment, Mr. Thomas attended school with predominantly upper middle-class African American students and, consequently, continued to feel "othered".

The next year, after his family moved to Arizona, Mr. Thomas returned to public school. This was his first experience in a predominantly schooling. He explained that before attending this school, he had not spent very much time in predominantly white spaces. Describing his discomfort in this new schooling environment, Mr. Thomas recounted, "So, I feel like in Arizona and being Black, I had to identify in a larger cluster of other . . . I found myself connecting with the Latino community because we were all 'other' in this space." Although he felt marginalized within this space as well, Mr. Thomas also found support and encouragement by creating alliances with peers from other racial groups as a means for coping with oppressive schooling conditions (Hotchkins, 2016, p. 21).

His family lived in Arizona for six more years and, throughout this time, Mr. Thomas recalled that he continued to feel marginalized as one of the few African American students in school. To Mr. Thomas, his race was central to how he was perceived by classmates and teachers causing him to constantly feel "othered". He shared

a story about a time when he was sitting in a sex education class when one of his classmates told him:

> This person likes you. And she wants to go out with you, but only because she's gone out with all the black boys in the school, and so if she goes out with you, that'll be all the Black boys she's gone out with.

Mr. Thomas explained that throughout his K-12 schooling experiences, he struggled to make sense of his positionality, "All this stuff as a sixth grader in a new space, I was like, I don't even understand what is happening here." Because he was at an age when children are seeking to understand their place in the world, Mr. Thomas felt these experiences were particularly challenging. As he was trying to make sense of himself, he was also learning that "who I am is not accepted in all spaces." These experiences developed his sensitivity to the ways in which students from culturally and linguistically diverse background can experience schooling as a subtractive process (Valenzuela, 1999). This sensitivity also shaped his approach to teaching.

Mr. Thomas shared stories of the ways in which he struggled to make sense of himself within a predominantly white space. He shared a story about the time he did not make his middle school basketball team. Having played basketball from a young age, Mr. Thomas excelled into a talented athlete. He even went on to play in high school and college. However, he explained that although he was talented enough to play on the middle school team and had good grades, the coach would not give him a chance because he "didn't fit the mold" of what how he thought a young African American man should behave:

> I kept analyzing race because I didn't make the team, but I did everything else. But I still think I didn't fit the mold of the Black person that they wanted. There was another Black male who was trying out and he was

more of the entertaining type that put on a show and fed into what they wanted him to do. I wasn't that type.

Mr. Thomas also recalled the first time a racial slur was directed at him at school, "My second year of high school, that was the first time I can vividly remember being called the n-word." As one of only a few Black students in a predominantly white schooling environment, these stories provide a glimpse into Mr. Thomas' struggles within his predominantly white middle school. These stories also provide new understandings into the ways in which young African American male students can experience schools as racially hostile environments (Allen et al., 2013; Lewis- McCoy, 2018). Unfortunately, his struggles went unnoticed leaving him feeling isolated and alienated (Wong et al., 2003). In response, Mr. Thomas attempted to find connections with characters in young adult literature:

> That middle school stuff was all interesting. That was my first time really having to grapple with race. I would go to the library and find different books. There was always a small Black section in the library, so I would go and get books from there and I would make . . . I guess I'd call it sort of fictional friends, because I didn't see anybody that looked like me, really, outside of going to a book. I could connect with the characters to some extent but the characters in the books are cookie-cut black males and while it was good, it didn't show a plethora of the Black experience.

Sadly, even the books he read were not entirely culturally relevant for him. The young, African American male characters were cast from a mold with which Mr. Thomas could not relate and, thus, reinforced his "otherness" as a young Black male student. These experiences critically shaped his approach to teaching as they developed his critical awareness of the ways in which schooling can be a "subtractive" experience for students (Valenzuela, 1999). Although the stories he shared about school focused on his

struggles, Mr. Thomas also expressed that these experiences inspired him to become the

type of teacher he wished he would have had as a student:

> Also, I think it's my own background, like the schools I had been at
> growing up and knowing . . . I wanted to still see that experience and
> interact with students who are seeing the world from the same viewpoints
> that I did.

Looking for a Messiah: Beliefs About Teaching in Racially Hostile Schools

Throughout the study, Mr. Thomas consistently described himself as a teacher

who "didn't fit the mold" of the stereotypical Black male educator (e.g. loud, aggressive

disciplinarian) regularly portrayed in mainstream media and often expected by colleagues

with whom he worked (Woodson & Pabon, 2016). During my visits, Mr. Thomas

conveyed a calm, relaxed demeanor and rarely, if ever, raised his voice during instruction

or any other times. Once he discussed how his positionality as an African American male

urban educator provided him with a glorified "superhero" status in schools (Jackson,

Boutte, & Wilson, 2013; Pabon, 2016). Referencing the pervasive narrative that positions

African American male educators as "rare" and yet, at the same time, fundamental to the

success of African American male students (Jackson et al., 2013), Mr. Thomas explained

that he initially enjoyed the privilege explaining, "Everyone's looking for a messiah or a

saver or someone to come and save or help these children."

Having experienced this "glorified" status as an African American male educator,

Mr. Thomas recognized his own privilege but also felt it came with a price. He felt that

his identity as an African American male educator was too often reduced into a default

disciplinarian (Brown, 2012; Woodson & Pabon, 2016). Summarizing numerous

interactions with administrators, he explained, "You're brought in like 'You know what

you're here for. Use that voice and get these kids in check and have them learn something along the way.'" Because he was male and African American, administrators and colleagues often expected him to enact the role of disciplinarian and "handle" discipline issues with African American students. In this way, Mr. Thomas was expected to enact a professional identity contrary to his beliefs about his role as an educator.

Mr. Thomas rejected the dominant narrative of Black male educator that positioned him as the default disciplinarian believing that it perpetuated an image of Black maleness that relied on toxic stereotypes of Black masculinity. He decided that he wanted to carve out a professional identity that was sensitive to his students' social and emotional development, any easier (Woodson & Pabon, 2016). Having critically reflected on the ways in which he wanted to interact with his students, Mr. Thomas believed relying on toxic masculinity to enact teacher authority in the classroom would position him as the bully in the classroom and, consequently, would impede his ability to foster meaningful relationships with his students. He explained that he wanted to model a different version of Black maleness to his students. He felt that this dominant narrative reinforced toxic understandings of Black maleness and, thereby, recruited Black male educators in the perpetuation of white supremacist ideologies, "When you're a person of Color, you have to be careful in how these institutions will use you, because white supremacy works best through the bodies of people of Color." He told me that he was constantly reflecting on the ways in which he would be perceived by his students, "How am I going to manage this space without being toxic in this space?" Rather than "leaning in" to a toxic image of Black masculinity, Mr. Thomas decided that he wanted to enact a

teacher identity that aligned more closely to his authentic self (Pabon, 2016; Woodson & Pabon, 2016).

Mr. Thomas' experiences schooling experiences as a student and teacher also shaped his beliefs about being an effective teacher in urban schools. During our initial interview, Mr. Thomas expressed his belief that discussions of education in urban schools needed to center on the racialized experiences of students, "You always have to start the conversation, you always have to center race, as the reason why we're having these students are having different experiences." However, he explained that teachers' critical reflections on race cannot begin and end with students' racial and cultural backgrounds. He stressed the importance of teachers critically reflecting on the ways in which their own positionalities impact the interactions between themselves and the students, "It's constant criticality of oneself . . . I'm constantly making meaning and reflecting as I engage with them . . . I'm always thinking to myself- how does this position the students?" From this perspective, Mr. Thomas defined three beliefs about effective teaching in urban schools (1) Developing strong student-teacher relationships, (2) Viewing students from asset-based perspectives, and (3) Recognizing students as human beings.

Developing strong student-teacher relationships. Like Ms. Edgars, Mr. Thomas believed that building strong relationships with students was a critical component of being an effective educator. According to Mr. Thomas, building student- teacher relationships required teachers to "open up" and share personal aspects of their life with students. He explained that the more he opened up and shared his life with his students, "the easier it was to teach." Although he understood the importance of "opening up" with

students in order to foster strong student-teacher relationships, he admitted that he was originally concerned that he should "hide" some aspects of himself from them:

> To be open is to be dangerous. If you open up too much, too soon, you lose control, but if you give them a little bit every day with a story here or there, you end up having a different relationship.

When I walked into Mr. Thomas' classroom, one of the first things I noticed were all the visual references to current American pop-culture. He had several Marvel action-figures (i.e. Spiderman, Venom) displayed on top of one of his cabinets and over twenty posters of professional basketball players were hung on the wall behind his desk. Mr. Thomas explained that one of the ways that he opened up and shared himself with his students was to engage in pop-culture discussions with students. Having an affirmative view of African American culture (Acosta et al., 2018), he often drew upon cultural referents, such as hip-hop lyrics, to connect with students during instruction and informal conversations. He also discussed current events in professional sports like football and basketball as well as popular movies and television shows with students. He felt that these discussions allowed his students to see him as an actual person, not just their teacher. Because Mr. Thomas was quite familiar with the video games that his students played in their homes, he often joined their conversations about Fortnight and Minecraft. He expressed that he wasn't always sure if it was appropriate to discuss games with questionable subject material (i.e. criminal activity) such as Grand Theft Auto; however, he felt these discussions allowed him to connect with students in an authentic and personal way.

During my visits, I often observed Mr. Thomas' ability to engage informally with students and then, refocus their attention back to the learning engagement. Mr. Thomas

always walked around the classroom and gave support to students as they completed examples together during instructional activities. While supporting students' questions concerning the math lesson, Mr. Thomas used this time to check-in with students and engage in small talk. He also initiated conversations with students as he monitored their independent learning activities or transitions to other classes. Many students also expressed their appreciation for Mr. Thomas' ability to balance his funny mentor persona with his image as a focused educator. Javier commented that he liked that Mr. Thomas could "say something funny" but then, was able "to get serious" about the lesson he was teaching. Students enjoyed his sense of humor, but they also knew that he was focused on student learning. Tabitha expounded, "He knows when to play and when not to play."

Viewing students from asset-based perspectives. Mr. Thomas believed that viewing students from asset-based perspectives was an important aspect of being an effective educator in urban schools explaining, "It's like, not assuming they can't do anything on their own." He felt that teachers too often diminished students' prior experiences and background knowledge and underestimated their intellectual potential. Challenging students with rigorous curricula, Mr. Thomas also emphasized developing students' critical thinking strategies. During one of the focus groups, not only did they express appreciation for Mr. Thomas' challenging curricula because "it's not just easy", Calista and Sadik also felt his focus on teaching critical thinking strategies was central to their success in his class. When students struggled with new concepts, Mr. Taylor did not display frustration. He would explain the concept a little differently and encourage students to "use their golden brains." Sadik explained, "If only one person doesn't understand it, he won't go to the next lesson." Mr. Taylor would "make us understand

it." Indeed, he expressed it was his responsibility to ensure that his students were learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994) and worked hard to design highly engaging learning opportunities. Many of his students referenced his practice of reteaching concepts until everyone "got it" as a reason they felt comfortable in his class. Students, like Idalia and Aisha, also noted that his encouragement provided them with the faith that even when "you don't know the answer, you can say it confidently." Although he felt that many of his colleagues considered his perspective "radical", he held true to his belief that every child was "whole" and, therefore, capable of learning (Acosta et al., 2018).

Recognizing students as human beings. Mr. Thomas believed another essential aspect of teaching was recognizing that students are "human beings". He felt it was important to consider student's social and emotional development along with their academic growth. Mr. Thomas felt that urban educators focused too much on standardized tests and, consequently, often disregarded their socioemotional development. In an effort to raise state students' scores on standardized tests, Deer Creek administrators had decided to departmentalize third and fourth grade classrooms which meant that third and fourth grade students switched classrooms for core subject areas (math, reading, writing) three times a day. While he believed his students were more than capable of a rigorous curriculum, Mr. Thomas also believed the decision to departmentalize classes did not consider their social and emotional needs:

> Yes, we can have high expectations, but the fact is, most of them can't do this because an eight-year-old cannot deal with that much transition in a day. It doesn't give their brain any time to reach an equilibrium. They are constantly up and down.

One of the reasons Mr. Thomas felt students struggled with this departmentalized schedule was that their ability to develop meaningful student-teacher relationships was impeded explaining, "The relationship building is different because you only have them for a short amount of time." He felt his third-grade students had the most difficulty adapting to the departmentalized schedule. He told me, "The kids, third grade, has hurt them a lot. Like you can see not only academically but socially." He felt the school administration's decision to departmentalize third and fourth grade disregarded students' social and emotional needs, "I think it's because the administration here has a high school background, so the schedule's set up like a high school . . . without thinking developmentally, is *this* what kids need?" School administrators focused solely on their academic achievement, and, consequently, failed to recognize the ways in which these educational practices would negatively impact students. Mr. Thomas explained, "Okay, yes, math is important, but at the same time, what about the human being? How do we humanize what's happening in this space?"

When I began visiting his classroom, one of the first things I noticed was his relaxed manner. He consistently displayed a calm and cool demeanor during his interactions with individual students and with the class as a whole. When students talked during instructional time, he would often pause in the middle of the sentence and turn his attention toward the students talking. Realizing that everyone was waiting on them, students would quickly return their focus to Mr. Thomas. If the disruptions continued, Mr. Thomas would say sternly, "Eenie meenie miny moe, one of you has got to go." At that point, one of the students talking in the group would decide to move their belongings and sit at an empty desk with another group. This consequence put an end to any

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disruptions that I saw while observing Mr. Thomas. There were no power struggles, and no one was offended during the interaction. Students seemed to appreciate his patience and consequently, respected the classroom norms that Mr. Thomas had established. Tabitha explained, "Most teachers don't like to be patient." She shared a story about a time when the class was noisy while they were taking a test. In frustration, Mr. Thomas told them that they had lost 10 minutes of recess time. When students continued to talk, Mr. Thomas increased the time to 20 minutes but, by the end of the class period, he assured them they had earned all of their recess time back because they had "changed their act."

Students also commented that he rarely threatened them with consequences for their compliance. Mr. Thomas did not carry around a clipboard with students' names and record their infractions. Nor did he use the classroom management software, Class Dojo, that most of the other teachers used to track student behavior infractions. When I asked him if he ever used Class Dojo, he responded that he only used it for parent communication about homework, school events, and grades. Mr. Thomas demonstrated a critical awareness that his students' academic achievement was inherently intertwined with the ways in which they are positioned in schools and that students thrive academically when they are taught in socially and emotionally nurturing environments. His belief that students needed to be recognized as human beings echoes Noguera's (2008) assertion that the types of learning environments students are afforded directly impact their schooling experiences and learning opportunities:

> The trouble with Black boys is that most never have a chance to be
> thought of as potentially smart and talented or to demonstrate talents in
> science, music, or literature. The trouble with Black boys is that too often
> they are place in schools where their needs for nurturing, supportive, and

loving discipline are not met. Instead, they are labeled, shunned, and mistreated in what creates and reinforces an inevitable cycle of failure (p. xxi).

In effect, Mr. Thomas' experiences in schools developed his understanding of the ways in which students are far too often positioned as the "other" and needed educational spaces in which their authentic selves would be affirmed and nurtured.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the pedagogical beliefs of Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas were explored as well as the personal and professional experiences that shaped those beliefs. Both teachers described the ways in which their teaching approaches were shaped by their experiences as African American students. Ms. Edgars expressed an appreciation for her positive schooling experiences. She felt that each of her Black teachers served as powerful pedagogical role models on which she based her own approach to teaching. Shaped by these experiences, Ms. Edgars articulated a critical understanding of what students in urban schools need, to feel supported and loved and, as a result, compelled her to create nurturing learning environments similar to those she had experienced as a student. While his schooling experiences also had a significant impact on his approach to teaching, Mr. Thomas shared several stories and described his racialized experiences as a young African American male had caused him to often feel often isolated and marginalized as a student. Shaped by these experiences, Mr. Thomas also articulated a critical understanding of what students in urban schools need, to feel affirmed and empowered and, as a result, sought to create nurturing learning environments for his students.

Although their journeys to become teachers were shaped by vastly different schooling experiences, Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas found themselves teaching in similar contexts. Findings in this chapter also uncovered how each teachers' pedagogical beliefs were also shaped by their racialized experiences as African American educators. While each teacher's experiences are distinctive and were presented separately as unique cases, Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas shared similar perspectives of the ways in which racism has not only shaped their experiences but those of their students as well. Both teachers taught in elementary schools they perceived to be racially hostile toward and, consequently, each teacher strove to mitigate these racially hostile schooling environments by nurturing learning environments. In Chapter 5, findings will demonstrate the ways in which these beliefs undergirded their pedagogical practices and fostered cultures of community, achievement, and love.

CHAPTER FIVE

FOSTERING CULTURES OF COMMUNITY, LOVE, AND ACHIEVEMENT:

HIGHLY-REGARDED AFRICAN AMERICAN EDUCATORS' PEDAGOGICAL

ENACTMENTS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the pedagogical beliefs and practices enacted by two highly- regarded African American educators, Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas. This chapter explores the ways in which each teacher's pedagogical enactments created positive psychological learning environments (Ross et al., 2008) as well as the ways students perceived and described Ms. Edgars' and Mr. Thomas' approach to teaching. Thus, observational and transcript data from teacher interviews, critical events, and student focus groups were analyzed. Analysis of the data revealed how each teachers' unique pedagogical enactments fostered cultures of community, love, and achievement. Findings revealed that although Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas enacted unique practices, both teachers' pedagogical enactments cultivated a culture of community in their classrooms in which students felt emotional connected to their teachers. Findings also revealed that although Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas enacted unique practices, both teachers communicated care and concern for the social, emotional, and academic needs of their students. Their unique practices fostered a culture of love within their respective classrooms. Lastly, findings illuminate how both teachers enacted similar practices to foster cultures of achievement in their classrooms as well as the ways in which students interpreted each teacher's pedagogical enactments.

Fostering Cultures of Community

As noted in the previous chapter, Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas believed that building strong relationships with students was an important aspect of teaching in an urban school. In the following section, findings explicate how each teacher enacted this belief as well as the ways in which both teachers' practices fostered a culture of community within their classroom.

Affirming Students' Cultures

On the days I would visit Ms. Edgars' room, I was always excited to see what she had decided to display on the bulletin boards in the hallway surrounding her classroom. At Eastside Elementary, bulletin boards lined the hallways, both upstairs and downstairs. Over the course of the study, I observed that Ms. Edgars typically had all four of the bulletin boards outside of her room decorated and, unlike her colleagues' bulletin boards, those bulletin boards were always teacher-made, meaning, other than the border, everything on those boards was made by Ms. Edgars. Figure 11 is a photo of a bulletin board she dedicated to an ancient African artifact, the Lebombo bone, discovered in the Lebombo Mountains between Swaziland and South African. Dating back over 30,000 years, this African artifact, the Lebombo bone has been credited as the one of the oldest mathematical artifacts ever unearthed. The bulletin board features several questions with each small group's responses written on Post-it notes that display their answers. Although the Lebombo bone is a well-documented mathematical artifact (Bangura, 2011); in my experience, it is typically absent in the traditional math textbooks used in public schools.
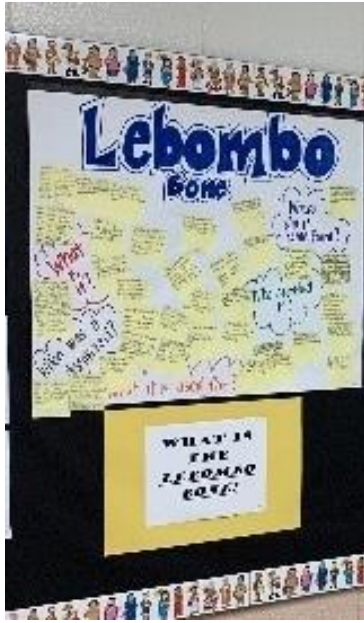
Figure 11. Ms. Edgars' Lebombo bone bulletin board

Another bulletin board was dedicated to Katherine Johnson. Ms. Edgars

understood that Katherine Johnson is an important figure in the African American

community. While her list of accomplishment is to lengthy to summarize here, Katherine

Johnson is best known as one of three young, female African American mathematicians

whose calculations were crucial to the launch of NASA's first spacecraft to the moon.

She continued to work with NASA for thirty more years and, at the age of 97, she was

presented the Presidential Medal of Freedom, America's highest civilian honor, by

President Obama.

Communicating cultural excellence. Like the Lebombo bone, typical lessons in

public school textbooks rarely illuminate the contributions of African Americans in their

content in any significant way (Peterson, 2009); however, Ms. Edgars wasn't simply

including cultural referents in her math curriculum. Explaining the significance of these

activities and why she chose them, she said, "I try to explain to the students that they

come from greatness". In this way, Ms. Edgars enacted pedagogical practices that

communicated a counternarrative of cultural excellence to her students (Acosta et al., 2018). Ms. Edgars understood that these visual messages also reinforced positive messages to the students about African Americans, women, and women of Color. Knowing that these culturally affirming messages are rarely communicated to students in Eastside Elementary, she decidedly enacted culturally responsive pedagogical practice that affirmed the identities of her African American students (Au, 2009; Zaccor, 2018).

Learning about students' cultures. Another bulletin board that caught my eye had a map of Central and South America in the center of it. Upon closer inspection, I realized that Ms. Edgars' students had taken a poll and voted for their favorite foods. Then, using yarn, she connected the picture of the food to its country of origin. While some scholars in the field of multicultural education might consider Ms. Edgars' bulletin board an example of "tokenism", this bulletin represented an interpreted attempt to include her Latinx students' culture and reflected one of Ms. Edgars' core beliefs about developing strong relationships with students:

> So my thing is, when it comes to building relationships, I *definitely* take their culture into account because I know there can *easily* be a disconnect between teachers and students.

Ms. Edgars admitted that she was unfamiliar with the Latinx culture when she began teaching at Eastside Elementary. As an African American woman, she also acknowledged that, in order to learn more about her Latinx students' cultural backgrounds, she had to intentionally develop relationships with her students and their parents as well, "You know, I'm Black, so with me having a majority of Latino students, I had to do a little more work than I have to do with my Black students." For instance, Ms. Edgars made it a point to attend her students' after-school events like basketball and

soccer games. While these experiences provided her with opportunities to develop more meaningful relationships with her students, they also provided her with opportunities to extend herself and socialize with her students' families. Not only did she make it a point to develop relationships with her students, she also brought her own children to these afterschool events so that her students could learn more about her personal life.

Communicating counternarratives. When I arrived at Eastside Elementary in January to begin field work, I quickly noted the overwhelming absence of students' racial and cultural backgrounds in the school culture in my field notes. In my observations, there was no recognition of students' racial and cultural backgrounds in the hallways, particularly on the first floor. While the hallways had plenty of decorated bulletin boards, almost none of them reflected the student populations' racial or cultural backgrounds. Bulletin boards were typically used to display graded worksheets. Other than that, most of the visual content in the hallways were posters addressed school discipline concerns such as appropriate voice levels, student absence policies, and school rules.

In my experience, schools in urban contexts typically encourage their teachers to celebrate Black History month with their students by decorating a bulletin board or having students complete an assignment about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. or Rosa Parks. While these efforts alone would surely be superficial examples of recognizing Black history month, they do acknowledge that February is considered a month to recognize Black history. Because of my own teaching experiences, I expected to see some acknowledgment of Black History month during the month of February at Eastside Elementary. However, the only recognition of Black History month were the bulletin

boards in the hallways on the second floor of the school next to Ms. Edgars' classroom as well as a few decorated on the first floor.

When I brought up my concern to Ms. Edgars, she explained that she had decorated three of those seven bulletin boards, and Black support staff had decorated the other four. To Ms. Edgars, not only was this a blatant example of her colleagues' lack of cultural competence, but an overall unwillingness to learn from and about their students' cultural backgrounds. She explained, "that's why I say you've got do dig into it" in order to learn more about students and their cultural backgrounds. Because she understood how important it was to get to know and affirm your students' cultural backgrounds, she expressed frustration and disappointment that her White colleagues were not willing to put forth any effort to celebrate Black History month in school in which over half of the student population was Black. In fact, she noted she was the only "homeroom teacher" who had decorated their bulletin board for Black History month. In her opinion, if it were not for the Black teachers and support staff at Eastside Elementary, Black History month would go unrecognized.

In contrast, not only did she recognize the significance of her students' racial and cultural identities in their schooling experiences, she felt compelled to affirm them. For instance, I arrived early one morning to find Ms. Elliot finishing a bulletin board in the hallway outside of her classroom. The background has three colors: green, red, and yellow- resembling the flag of the African country, Cameroon. In the middle of the bulletin board was profile of an African American with large 3-dimensional paper dreadlocks (See Figure 12). She was stapling the last paper dreadlock when I arrived. In very large font was the following declaration, "They did NOT steal slaves from Africa!

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They stole . . . farmers, midwives, artists, kings, queens, mothers, fathers, doctors, mathematicians, architects, teachers, griots, scientists, sons, daughters, astronomers, and more and made them slaves."

Figure 12. Ms. Edgars' Black History month bulletin board

Ms. Edgars understood the ways in which her colleagues' disregard for Black history month communicated to African Americans that their community and culture didn't matter (Au, 2009) and created a bulletin board that expressed a counternarrative to her students modeling ways to "talk back" to negative discourses about the African American community (Vaughan, Woodard, Phillips, & Taylor, 2018). Understanding her students might have experienced cultural disconnections at school, Ms. Edgars created visual displays that communicated positive messages of her students' cultures. Findings revealed that Ms. Edgars struggled to represent her Latinx students' cultures in a meaningful way (Lee, 2009); yet, more importantly, these findings revealed her desire to learn more and willingness to create a classroom that reflected all of her students'

backgrounds. Although these findings exposed the school's glaring disregard for Black History Month, they also illuminated the pedagogical practices Ms. Edgars enacted to mitigate schooling conditions she felt were oppressive. By affirming students' racial and cultural backgrounds. Ms. Edgars' pedagogical practices cultivated a culture of community in her classroom.

Affirming Students' Rights

One day I arrived early to Mr. Thomas' classroom and sat down at the back of the room. Upon my arrival, I found the room was empty. His students were still in the cafeteria eating lunch. As I sat in the dark, quiet room, I decided to take field notes of the sights and sounds outside of Mr. Thomas' classroom door:

> I can hear the sounds of younger students talking loudly to each other in the hall. Their laughter sounds like they are in a good mood and being silly with each other as they line up to return to their classrooms after eating lunch. They're happy because they have had fun socializing with each other in the cafeteria and are having a hard time quieting down. I can hear teachers saying firmly, "Zero voice levels in the hallway." And "Find your bubble." Repeatedly as they lead their students back to their classrooms; however, I can still hear students talking and laughing. One teacher is now shouting, "Walking feet!" As the classes continue to walk down the hall to their classrooms, I can hear the teachers' voices get louder and harsher, ""Zero voice levels in the hallway!" and "Find your bubble!" (Field memo 5/12/19)

Although these scenes are familiar to me, I still cringe when I hear teachers using these types of hostile and aggressive communication practices. Almost every time I visited, I recorded a similar interaction between a teacher and her students. Sometimes I observed similar scenes during a class's bathroom break and sometimes as they traveled to and from a specials class. Teachers were obsessed with controlling students' bodies and did so with demeaning language.

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Students are very social beings; however, in my experience, those who attend schools in urban contexts are often expected to remain quiet almost the entire day; however, in my observations of Mr. Thomas' classroom, one of the things that stood out to me was the substantial amount of freedom he affords his students- freedom to move about the room, freedom to talk with their peers, and freedom to walk up to him and ask him questions.

Honoring students' freedoms. In Mr. Thomas' class, it was not unusual to see children moving freely about the room to sharpen a pencil, throw away a piece of paper, or even get up to grab the restroom pass before leaving the room. Students usually didn't ask permission. They were trusted to make appropriate decisions and, most of the times, they did. In addition, I regularly observed students socializing throughout the day. For example, students could discuss how they got their answers, get help from a peer, or even chit chat while they waited for the next learning engagement. Mr. Thomas explained to me the belief he communicates to students- students deserved some basic freedoms- and unless their actions infringed upon someone else's freedom, such as their freedom to learn, then they were afforded these basic freedoms. Mr. Thomas explains, "We can *all* be free, but we need to be respectful of the boundaries of other people's freedoms." Figure 13 is a photograph of an anchor chart that Mr. Thomas had created to remind students of their "rights":
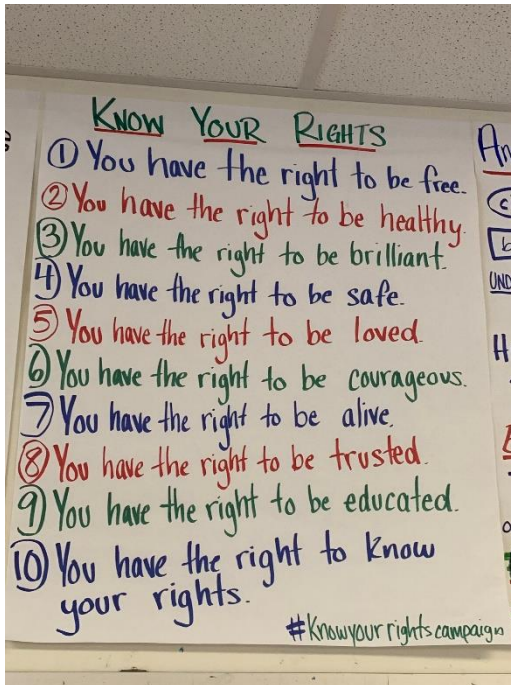
Figure 13: Mr. Thomas' Know Your Rights anchor chart

Pushing back on dehumanizing schooling practices that seek to control the bodies of

students of Color (Noguera, 2008), Mr. Thomas believed that students needed and could

be trusted with some personal freedoms. During our initial interview, he expressed this

belief:

> Sometimes classroom management is seen as getting students to be
> complicit in their dehumanization so that, [mimicking his colleagues] 'I
> need you to do everything I say, exactly as I say it.' I think some people
> want kids to be *robots*.

He felt teachers too often focused on maintaining power and control over the interactions

with students, "As a teacher, as a human, to be confident enough that I don't . . . I don't

need everyone in this room to know that I have all the power." In response, Mr. Thomas

sought to negotiate his power with his students so that everybody felt free.

Negotiating power with students. Due to the departmentalized schedule, third and fourth grade students moved from classroom to classroom throughout the day receiving a significant amount of direct instruction with each of these classes lasting over an hour. Consequently, overwhelmed with the enormous amount of time they were expected to sit still and complete schoolwork, students became restless, acted out, and sometimes laid their heads down on their desks. I observed these behaviors several times, particularly as the end of the day neared.

Mr. Thomas was sensitive to his students and felt it was important to give them unstructured time throughout the day. He recognized that, besides recess, students did get much free time and needed breaks throughout the day to relax and socialize. So, he began giving his students two "brain breaks" per class, usually about every twenty or thirty minutes, depending on the learning engagement. Brain breaks usually lasted around ten minutes. Students could move around the room, gather with their friends to socialize, and even use the restroom and get a drink from the water fountain. From my observations, students happily engaged in the same activities. For example, most of the girls would congregate and chat happily with each other. A large group of boys typically stood in a circle and tossed a ball back and forth to each other. Some boys sat at their desks and talked. Mr. Thomas usually sat at this desk and read a book with different students coming up to his desk to chat. The atmosphere of the room seemed relaxed and students seemed happy. When the timer went off, students quickly returned to their seats and continued with their learning activity.

Mr. Thomas felt it was beneficial for everyone to "take a break and relax." He felt that came back to their learning activities refreshed and ready to learn again. During

focus groups, nearly all of his students named Mr. Thomas' practice of giving them "brain breaks" as one of the main reasons they enjoyed being in his class. They expressed their appreciation that they could count on getting a couple of breaks in his class.

He described his approach to building relationships with students as a "mix" of encouraging students to become independent and providing opportunities for them to practice self-management. His interactions could be described as a "give and take" style in which he negotiated power between himself and the students. Mr. Thomas was sensitive to his students' perception of the power dynamics in the classroom and felt it was important to make the students "responsible for themselves in that space . . . gives them more ownership over what's happening. It takes the power from me and gives it to them." Understanding his students might have experienced infringements on the human rights from former teachers, Mr. Thomas communicated positive messages of his students' rights and sought to negotiate his power so that his students felt that their freedoms were intact. Mr. Thomas felt it was important to establish classroom expectations and consistently reinforce them; yet, he also believed students need to develop their independence and, by giving some of his power to them, was able to support their needs. By enacting pedagogical practices that affirmed students' rights, Mr. Thomas cultivated a classroom culture of community.

While both teachers believed it was critical to develop strong relationships with their students, each enacted unique and varied practices. While Ms. Edgars communicated culturally- affirming messages to her students, Mr. Thomas focused on affirming students' rights and freedoms and, at times, negotiating his power with his

students. Although Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas employed different practices, both teachers' practices fostered a culture of community within their classroom.

Fostering Cultures of Love

As noted in the previous chapter, Ms. Edgars believed that teachers in urban schools needed to express care and concern about their students' academic as well as their socioemotional well-being and consequently assumed an "other mother" role with students. For Mr. Thomas, reflecting on one's positionality in the classroom was an important expression of his care and concern for students' socioemotional well-being. In the following section, findings explicate the ways in which each teacher enacted their beliefs. Although Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas enacted different pedagogical practices, both teachers' practices fostered a culture of love within their classroom.

Expressing Care and Concern

Often, when I arrived in the morning, I would first encounter Ms. Edgars. She was usually standing at the door, smiling, and greeting students as they arrived. On more than one occasion, she would roll the large chair from her desk and use it to sit in as she knitted and waited to greet her students. She usually pointed out the written agenda for the morning which she kept posted on a whiteboard easel typically placed just inside her door so that students would see it as they arrived. Her students would come in, read the message, and follow the instructions which were usually to turn in their homework, retrieve their laptop from the charging cart, and begin their morning work. Although they often socialized with each other, more often than not, students would quickly get situated and ready for the day.

Not only did she greet her own students, Ms. Edgars said "good morning" to every student who passed her in the hallway. If Ms. Edgars happened to be inside her classroom assisting one of her students or checking an email at her computer, she would frequently have "visitors", or students from other classes, stop in and say "good morning" to her on their way to their homeroom classes. Sometimes "visitors" shared good news about their grades or school behavior and would, consequently, receive a hug or verbal affirmation from Ms. Edgars. At other times, students might come for words of encouragement and support. Although some of her visitors were younger siblings of current or former students, many of the children were former "guest students" who came to her room when their homeroom teachers kicked them out. Many of the students in the school, particularly African American, perceived Ms. Edgars as a mother figure (Ware, 2002).

Facilitating critical dialogue. As discussed earlier, Ms. Edgars was sensitive to her students' racial and cultural backgrounds and sought to include them as best she could in the classroom environment. However, she was also sensitive to the misunderstandings that arose between her African American and Latinx students. Unlike the peaceful classroom climate that I consistently observed, Ms. Edgars described a time at the beginning of the school year when her Black students and her Latinx students were experiencing some cultural misunderstandings, or as she described it, "bumping heads":

> My black students felt when my Latino students were speaking Spanish . .
> . they were automatically talking about them. We had to have a few
> classroom discussions about that. And then I kind of threw it out there to
> the class. "Y'all could be learning Spanish right now, with all these
> Spanish speakers. It's eventually going to make sense to y'all."

Then, speaking to her Latinx students, she said:

> I don't speak Spanish either, but I pay attention to your body language
> and, sometimes, you are talking about people. Like when you're
> whispering and looking over here. Not Black people specifically, but just
> people.

I was somewhat shocked when she shared that story with me because I had never

witnessed *any* disagreements (explicit or subtle) among her students. Throughout the

study, I consistently observed a peaceful and relaxed atmosphere in her classroom.

However, she explained that, in order to achieve that peaceful and relaxed atmosphere,

she and her student also had some conversations. Rather than ignore their cultural

misunderstandings, she sought to resolve them through critical dialogues.

Creating familial environments. Undergirding her pedagogical practice of

facilitating critical dialogue was her desire to create an environment in which students

felt comfortable and loved. During our first interview, Ms. Edgars explained that she tells

the students:

> We're a family unit. We're not all related but we spend so much time
> together, we like a family unit. We may bump heads, but at the end of the
> day we love each other. We are going to treat each other with respect.
> And that's something I've been trying to instill in them from day one.

Ms. Edgars sought to provide opportunities for her students' families to

meaningfully participate in her classroom as well. Each year, she also hosted a "family

meal" in which students would bring in their favorite dishes prepared with someone with

whom they lived. She, too, brought in her favorite dishes. Food was served buffet or

potluck style and students sat together and socialized in familial ways. Sharing food was

a way to build community and foster a family-like atmosphere in the classroom.

Moreover, Ms. Edgars communicated to students positive views of their families and the community (Acosta et al., 2018).

During our initial interview, Ms. Edgars expressed her frustration with her white colleagues' understanding of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) as a teacher's use of positive reinforcement only, with "no negative consequences." She believed that ignoring students' inappropriate behavior caused students to become socioemotionally disconnected from their teachers and act out, which teachers understood as "acting crazy." Having grown up just a short distance from the school in which she teaches, Ms. Edgars had a robust understanding of the sociopolitical context in which Eastside Elementary was situated. However, she felt her White colleagues lacked this understanding and, as a result, often misunderstood students' behavior, "I feel like that, uh, my colleagues feel like these students have a problem. There's something wrong with them. They cannot control their behavior." She felt students were "putting on a show" and needed to be communicate high expectations of behavior. Ms. Edgars believed her students could and would behave appropriately if they were given explicit boundaries and consequences if and that teachers. Ms. Edgars felt that ignoring inappropriate behavior set students up for failure, "They can do it. But when they're not doing it, there are no consequences. Then, just like any child, they're going to do what they want to do."

Rejecting her colleagues' deficit narrative of students, Ms. Edgars' accepted the role of students' "other mother" (Irvine, 2002; Ware, 2002) and enacted a pedagogical her belief that students could be held to high expectations.

> But I feel like, as a teacher, it's a fine line job. Because it's just like being
> a parent in my opinion. I can joke with you and play with you, but are you
> going to know when I'm serious when we need to get this work done?

Ms. Edgars expressed that she viewed her role in the classroom as "just like being a parent,"; and, as such, believed she was responsible for reinforcing students' behavior with consequences. By facilitating critical conversations about cultural misunderstandings, Ms. Edgars fostered a sense of emotional connectedness between her students (Chowela et al., 2012). Ms. Edgars' practices of creating familial learning environments and facilitating critical race dialogues relate to Acosta et al.'s (2018) conception of African American educators' culturally specific ethic of care that often informs the "gender- and kinship-based roles with students such as other-mothering" (p. 343) that African American female educator often assume with their students. Because she embraced her role as students' "other mother", Ms. Edgars' pedagogical practices cultivated a classroom culture of love.

Reflecting on Positionality

One day, while his student teacher was leading the class in a learning activity, Mr. Thomas stepped out in the hallway to discuss something with another teacher. Sitting in the back of the room, I noticed one of his students, De'Angelo repeatedly get out of his seat and open the classroom door to spy a peek at Mr. Thomas talking with a colleague. After a few times, Mr. Thomas recognized De'Angelo's behavior and sharply dared him in a threatening tone, "Touch it again." De'Angelo sat down and never got back up. For many teachers, controlling the students' behavior is the goal so interactions, such as the one above, are often left unresolved between the teacher and the student.

Admitting mistakes. Later, when Mr. Thomas and I were talking, he reflected on this interaction as well as the one he had with De'Angelo later after the learning activity. Mr. Taylor pulled D'Angelo into the hallway to have a frank conversation about

the incident and expressed that he felt he could have handled it better. During their ten-minute conversation, Mr. Thomas explained to De'Angelo, "It probably wasn't the best decision to say that to you . . . maybe I was wrong in how I delivered it." Mr. Thomas told me that, after he took responsibility for his part in the interaction, De'Angelo apologized to him and the issue was, essentially, resolved. Afterwards, he explained to me, "I could only have a moment like that with De'Angelo because of the moment after and because of moments before."

Mr. Thomas credited his ability to resolve the interaction with De'Angelo to the authentic relationships he had developed with his students. Mr. Thomas was sensitive to the ways in which Black male educator stereotypes informed his interactions with students explaining, "I started to dig deep into . . . how I was interacting within the classroom, whether through my voice or my interactions with students." Like his colleagues, Mr. Thomas believed that most of students originally thought he would be a strict disciplinarian, "Like he's going to set us straight. We have to do whatever because he's going to lay down the law." However, Mr. Thomas didn't want to rely on a loud voice or an intimidating presence to resolve classroom conflicts, such as the one with De'Angelo. Rather, he sought to model appropriate behavior and, if he made a mistake, he admitted it and apologized. Mr. Thomas admitted, "*No one* likes to apologize, like *I* don't because you have to admit you're *wrong*, and no one like to admit they're wrong to a child."

Apologizing to students. Using an analogy, Mr. Thomas described his initial feelings of needing to apologize to students, "It's like the largest humility pill to swallow." Mr. Thomas believed it was important to admit your mistakes to students and

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apologize to them when you made a mistake. In this way, he hoped to create and sustain

relationships with students based on mutual respect. Mr. Thomas expressed that he

viewed his role in the classroom as "mentor,"; and, as such, believed she was responsible

for reinforcing students' behavior with consequences. The interaction with De'Angelo

discussed above illuminates the ways in which Mr. Thomas sought to foster a sense of

emotional connectedness (Chowela et al., 2012) between himself and his students.

Assuming the role of a "mentor", Mr. Thomas also enacted practices often associated

with effective African American educators and their ethic of care. Acosta et al. (2018)

explain that their care, "often requires a commitment to name and honor bold truths

wherein teachers are 'telling it like it is' to help students successfully navigate . . . a racist

society" (p. 343), and, in this way, cultivated a classroom culture of love.

Findings illustrate the pedagogical practices each teacher employed in order to

develop strong relationships with their students. While Ms. Edgars assumed an

"othermother" role with her students, Mr. Thomas approached his relationships with

student from the role of a "mentor". Although Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas employed

different practices, by fostering a sense of emotional connectedness between themselves

and their students (Chowela et al., 2012), both teachers' pedagogical enactments created

a culture of love within their classroom.

Fostering Cultures of Achievement

When I initially walked into Ms. Edgars' classroom, my senses were

overwhelmed by the visual stimuli, particularly the amount of teacher made anchors

charts that were posted everywhere. Other than the wall of windows on the southside of

the room, her walls were covered with multicolored anchor charts, most of which related

to math concepts she had previously taught. Even her ceiling tiles had anchor charts attached to them. Although I knew Ms. Edgars taught math both fifth grade classes, I was still surprised. Given the detail on each as well as the number around the room, it was evident that she had spent quite a bit of time making these charts for her students. During subsequent visits, I observed Ms. Edgars direct students' attention to them in an effort to promote their independent use and, as the semester progressed, I consistently observed students referring to them to complete their class work. Because she encouraged students' independence, students were allowed to walk over to anchor charts for reference. Sometimes, students walked over and stayed to complete the assignment. I often watched students crane their necks in order to refer to anchor charts on the ceiling.

Similar to Ms. Edgars, when I walked into Mr. Thomas' classroom, one of the first things I noticed were his extensive display of bulletin boards. One bulletin board, labeled "Data Wall," stuck out to me. It was divided into four columns labeled: Emerging, Developing, Proficient, and Mastery. Under each label was a description that categorized the level of learning for each category. At the beginning of the study, Mr. Thomas had post-it notes indicating the percentage of students at each level. When I inquired about the meaning of the bulletin board, he expressed that, as a "turnaround school", school administration required him to post the percentages of student mastery based on district math assessments. However, later in the study, I observed that he had modified the bulletin board by replacing the post-it notes with photos of students actively engaged in math activities. I asked him why he changed it and he explained that he felt the original bulletin board sent the wrong message about learning to his students. At the bottom of this bulletin board was an affirmational message handwritten on sentence strips

that read, "I am patient with my self-growth. I embrace any progress that I can make. If I stay committed, I will reach my potential exactly when I should." Mr. Thomas revised the bulletin to express a model of learning that communicated growth rather than mastery. As noted in the previous chapter, Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas held high expectations for their students' academic achievement. In the following section, findings explicate the ways in which each teacher enacted their beliefs into pedagogical practices. Findings explore the ways in which teachers' practices fostered a culture of achievement within their classroom.

Focusing on Student Success

Both teachers believed their students' success was their responsibility and, as such, worked diligently to support students' comprehension of new concepts. Throughout the study, I observed Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas enacting pedagogical practices associated with guided release of responsibility (Vygotsky, 1962; 1978; Fisher & Frey, 2013) in which both educators employed various instructional strategies to support students' success and independence. Typically, both teachers would begin with a review of earlier math lessons to connect their new content previously taught material. After a review, direct instruction was employed to slowly demonstrate the steps needed to solve the problem often pausing to make sure her students were following along or needed further explanation. Next, guided instruction would be used to demonstrate a few more examples while simultaneously encourage students to participate in a more shared instruction. During this time, students would often raise their hand and get their teachers' attention so they could show their success with new concepts. Then, each teacher would review the steps and make sure everyone was successful. Followed by a few more shared

demonstrations, both teachers would have students begin an independent learning activity and practice solving problems on their own. Both teachers consistently used this instructional routine and their students responded well to it. Students seemed to feel comfortable and supported during instructional time. Because they held high expectations for her students, Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas' instructional strategies focused on supporting and scaffolding students to academic independence.

  Breaking down concepts. During focus groups, students in both classes named their teachers' practice of slowly demonstrating new concepts to students as a reason they felt they were successful in their classes. Javier explained, "What I like about Mr. Thomas is he just don't give us the paper and tell us to do it. He actually explains it to us, or maybe he will do one problem for us." Demetrius added, "He always does an example. He doesn't just let us go." Discussing Ms. Edgars, Eduardo described her as a "good teacher" because she made sure to explain "all" the steps associated with their math concepts. Although several of their students named their practice of breaking down concepts as one of the reasons they liked being a student in their class, several students noted that he gives examples or reteaches content with which the students are struggling. For example, Jada said, "If we don't understand, he'll go back and reteach it." Similarly, Myeshia commented, "the thing I like about Ms. Edgars . . . she break it down to us to where we understand. And if we don't understand . . . she'll break it down [again]." Another student commented, "He teaches us math strategies that help out my brain when learning a new concept is not easy." Students consistently cited their teachers' use of a variety of instructional strategies as well as a willingness to scaffold their learning with strategies, explanations, and examples as reasons they liked being in his class.

In Ms. Edgars' and Mr. Thomas' class, learning was not negotiable. Students were expected to pay attention and take notes. Students were also expected to ask questions if they were confused or unclear about a concept. Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas were always willing to help or guide with small hints; however, they pushed students to try to complete problems on their own. Many students commented that Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas did not just teach, they taught until students demonstrate their comprehension of new academic concepts. Compared to students' previous teachers, Jazmine described Ms. Edgars as "focused on the lessons" and a teacher who did not "stop until we get the whole lesson." Flora explained, "She makes us understand more" and, then, Yasmin clarified, "She does more things to help you understand." Several students described Mr. Thomas' willingness to help students succeed as atypical, "He helps us. Because some teachers, they just leave us. They give us a paper then just tell us, 'Do it' and when we ask for help, they say we are supposed to do it alone." Similarly, Calista said, "Other teachers will move on if you don't get it. But Mr. Thomas won't go on to the next lesson. He will make sure we understand it." Idalia summarized this practice as, "He doesn't set you up for failure" and, then, explained:

> Other teachers won't take their time with you. They will just be like, "Oh, you did that, no, you can't get that." Most teachers don't like to be patient. If you don't get the lesson that she's already teaching you, then they're just going to be like, "Oh, you don't know it."

Although they spent quite a bit of time demonstrating new concepts for students, Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas also gave students opportunities to practice independently and in small groups. When students worked independently or in pairs on assignments, both teachers energetically circulated around the classroom to see if anyone needed any

assistance or had any questions. Neither teacher used this time to sit behind their desks; both were consistently walking around the classroom and creating opportunities to positively interact with their students. Both teachers also used this time to affirm students' efforts and hard work.

In addition, I often observed Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas pose guiding questions to students as they worked on their assignments that required them to critically think about the concept. Both teachers required students to explain how they solved their problems or provide evidence to support their solutions. Students were consistently engaged and eager to explain their answer. In order to develop their academic independence, both teachers also encouraged them to refer to their notes or an anchor chart when students struggled. Because Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas focused on student success, students felt free to get up from their seats and ask questions if they so needed. Although students were continuously engaged in some form of learning, it is also critical to note that they also appeared relaxed and happy. Unlike many of their previous teachers, students in both classrooms felt their teachers wanted them to be successful. Karmen explains, "some teachers, when they explain it, they think all their students already know it after she explained it. All they do is just sit down and wait until the work is done." Knowing their teachers wanted them to be successful, students felt challenged, but they also felt supported. In this way, these teachers' instructional practices supported a culture of achievement in their classrooms.

Insisting students participate. Because learning was not negotiable, every student was expected to actively participate in these classrooms. Both teachers expressed to me that they did not equate students sitting quietly to students learning. Ms. Edgars

and Mr. Thomas expected students to be actively engaged. If students knew the answer, they were expected to raise their hand and be ready to answer. If they did not know the answer, they were expected to raise their hand and ask for clarification. Many students cited Mr. Thomas' insistence on student participation as evidence he was a good teacher. Aisha commented, "He makes everyone participate. Even the students who don't raise their hands." Then, Lucia added, "He calls on every student not just the same ones with their hands raised." Both teachers encouraged students to take risks and participate even if they were struggling with the concept. Several Latina students from Ms. Edgars' classroom explained that she had to push them to participate as they were often unwilling to talk aloud in class. At the beginning of the year, unfamiliar with her practice of insisting students participate, Ms. Edgars' students were pulled aside individually and encouraged to raise their hand and participate. When students expressed their apprehension to verbally participate in class, Ms. Edgars told them to "be self with your learning." When I asked her to explain, she said Ms. Edgars meant, "Don't let nobody get in your way from you learning."

Although a few of these students expressed their initial anxiety when she pushed them to answer or ask a question, they also attributed Ms. Edgars' insistence of their participation to them receiving better grades over the course of the year. Students expressed the belief that she pushed them and insisted they participate because she cared for them:

> Myeshia: I think she just wants us to learn.
> Flora: I think she wants us to have a better future.
> Claudia: Yeah. I think she does it because she cares.

Many of Mr. Thomas' students also interpreted his insistence as evidence that he cared about them. Kate commented, "He wouldn't teach us if he didn't care about us." These responses suggest that Mr. Thomas' students recognized not only his commitment to their understanding, but to their academic success.

Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas demonstrated their commitment to their students' success by breaking down concepts, pushing students to comprehension, and insisting on their participation in class. According to these students, these practices demonstrated that their teachers cared about them (Valenzuela, 1999). Unlike previous teachers, learning was not negotiable, and their commitment to students' academic success was a demonstration of care.

Believing in students' potential. Undergirding their focus on student success was a profound belief in each students' ability to learn (Acosta et al., 2018). To be an effective teacher, Mr. Thomas believed that teachers needed to view student learning a process rather than an endpoint. On multiple occasions, I observed him using analogies to explain the learning process to students. For example, while Mr. Thomas was teaching a math lesson, students expressed frustration with a new mathematical concept. He assured his students that frustration was not unusual and related the process of learning this new mathematical concept to learning how to play basketball. He explained that just as you need to practice in order to improve your basketball skills, so would they to improve their understanding of new mathematical concept. On another occasion, he related learning the process of a mathematical computation to learning a new dance move reminding that it takes practice to get better at everything new we learn. To Mr. Thomas, viewing students from a holistic perspective meant communicating a growth model of learning:

> Everyone wants them to be a finished product. Like no kid is going to
> master math or reading in one day, so you can't expect a student to be
> perfect. Essentially, I think a lot of teachers forget. Like, realize these are
> human beings in front of you.

Ms. Edgars felt that, in order to be a successful teacher in an urban school, one must commit to an asset-based understanding of students and pushing them to academic success, "It's really just those expectations and just knowing that the students are capable regardless of everything else." Ms. Edgars' perceptions of the school, the students, and the community sharply contrasted those of her White colleagues. Earlier in the school year, the teaching staff and school administrators at Eastside Elementary had been introduced to the concept of trauma-informed instruction. Trauma-informed instruction was a recent focus of professional development at Eastside Elementary and the urban school district in which it was situated. Ms. Edgars described her frustration with her white colleagues' understandings of student achievement through the lens of trauma.

> Stop using these excuses to say why the students can't do work. You can
> still think if you're poor. You can still think if you've seen or been through
> bad things in life . . . Stop using the student's background as something to
> hinder them by.

She felt many of her white colleagues justified their holding students to low expectations by blaming their students' low academic achievement on their "trauma". Ms. Edgars expressed a counternarrative to the "trauma-informed" discourse that permeated her colleague's pedagogical beliefs and practices. Undergirded by her belief that each of her students was highly capable (Acosta et al., 2018), Ms. Edgars rejected the deficit-laden "traumatized" discourse that excused teachers from their responsibility for their students' success.

Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas expressed their belief that their students' success hinged on their instructional practices and, consequently, worked diligently to break down difficult concepts for their students by explicitly demonstrating the concept, reteaching it when students expressed confusion, and continuing to teach until students demonstrated understanding. Focused on developing their students' academic growth and independence, both teachers also insisted all their students participate by encouraging them to raise their hands to either answer a question or ask one. Students interpreted their insistence as demonstrations that their teachers cared for them. Thus, because they believed their teachers wanted them to be successful, students were motivated to persevere when they struggled.

Conclusion

In this chapter, findings explicated the ways in which Ms. Edgars' and Mr. Thomas' beliefs about teaching informed their pedagogical practices as well as how their practices created positive psychological learning environments within their respective classrooms (Ross et al., 2008). Although Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas shared similar beliefs about teaching such as developing strong student teacher relationships and viewing students from asset-based perspectives, findings revealed each teacher enacted distinctive pedagogical practices that fostered cultures of community and love. Ms. Edgars believed that building strong relationships with students meant she needed to affirm her students' racial and cultural backgrounds by learning about her students' racial and cultural backgrounds and communicating cultural excellence. Mr. Thomas' believed that developing strong relationships with students meant enacting pedagogical practices

that affirmed his students' rights as human beings such as negotiating his power with them.

Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas also believed that teachers should recognize and express concern for their students' social, emotional, and academic needs; however, each enacted pedagogical practices specific to their approach to teaching. Ms. Edgars communicated care and concern for students' well-being by addressing students' cultural misunderstandings by facilitating critical dialogue that built emotional connectedness among her students. Because she strove to create a familial atmosphere within her classroom, Ms. Edgars assumed an "other mother" role with her students and, thus, fostered a culture of love within her classroom (Irvine, 2002; Ware, 2006). Although he found it difficult at times, Mr. Thomas communicated care and concern for his students' well-being by admitting his mistakes and apologizing to students. By assuming a "mentor" role with his students (Acosta et al., 2018), he, too, was able to cultivate a culture of love within his classroom.

Focusing on student learning, findings also revealed how Ms. Edgars' and Mr. Thomas' pedagogical enactments fostered cultures of achievement in their classrooms. Both teachers emphasized the crucial role of believing in every student's intellectual potential and consistently enacted pedagogical practices that supported their academic achievement. Findings explored students' perceptions of these enactments and illuminated their positive interpretations. Students described teachers' practices of breaking down new concepts and insisting all student participate as key factors in their academic success in Ms. Edgars' and Mr. Thomas' classrooms. Students' also related their teachers' insistence on student learning as one of the main reasons they appreciated

being learners in their classrooms. Chapter 6 begins with a discussion of the key findings

in relation to the literature and ends, implications of the findings, and recommendations

for policy, practice, and future research.

CHAPTER SIX

FURTHERING THE CONVERSATION: DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR

POLICY, PRACTICE, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to explore the pedagogical beliefs and practices of two highly regarded African American educators. In order to gain new insights into their pedagogical approach, this study also examined students' perceptions of their teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices. This chapter is organized thematically with a discussion of the major findings in relation to the Acosta et al.'s (2018) framework for African American pedagogical excellence as well as a discussion of the major findings concerning racially hostile teaching environments. In addition, implications are offered for policy, practice, and future research. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study and a brief summary.

Advancing Conversations in Urban Education

African American Pedagogical Excellence

Guided by Acosta et al.'s (2018) framework for African American pedagogical excellence, this study investigated the pedagogical beliefs and practices of two highly regarded African American elementary educators teaching in similar contexts within a large, Midwestern urban school district. Although their journeys to teaching were unique, Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas carried a heightened awareness of the educational injustice that African American and Latinx often experience. Findings revealed both educators shared similar beliefs about teaching in urban schools including the critical need to develop strong relationships with students, view students from asset-based perspectives, and express care and concern for students' academic growth and socioemotional

development. When discussing their pedagogical beliefs, both educators shared stories of their experiences with everyday racism as African American students and teachers revealing the ways in which these experiences shaped their philosophical approach to teaching. Findings revealed both teachers understood the ways in which institutionalized racism created obstacles for African American and Latinx students. Both teachers' awareness of the racialized experiences of their students not only informed their pedagogical beliefs, it deepened their commitment to teaching in schools they perceived as racially hostile. These findings demonstrate how their beliefs about teaching were undergirded by their *political clarity*, or critical race consciousness of teaching and learning (Acosta et al., 2018).

Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas shared similar beliefs about teaching and learning; however, findings revealed each educator enacted them in unique ways. Because they believed strong relationships with students was a critical aspect of teaching, both educators strove to socially engage with their students in authentic and meaningful ways such as sharing personal stories, making jokes, and playing games. These pedagogical enactments fostered an *emotional connectedness* (Chowela et al., 2012) between Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas and their students as well as among their students. By enacting practices that affirmed students' identities and human rights, both teachers communicated *affirmative messages of students' racial and cultural backgrounds* and, consequently, cultivated cultures of community in their classrooms (see Figure 14).

Findings also revealed the distinctive pedagogical enactments that cultivated cultures of love in each teacher's classroom. Assuming the role of "other mother", Ms. Edgars fostered a loving, familial learning environment within which students felt

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comfortable and worked together cooperatively. Embracing his position as a "role model," Mr. Thomas enacted pedagogical practices that demonstrated mutual respect with students such as admitting his mistakes and apologizing to students. These pedagogical enactments created *interdependent learning communities* in which students felt comfortable talking candidly with their teachers and teachers expressed care and concern for their students' well-being. These findings build upon existing literature documenting African American educators' culturally specific conceptualizations of care (Acosta et al., 2018; Irvine, 2002; Ware, 2006). Unlike Western middle-class conceptions of care, effective African American educators often demonstrate an *ethic of care* that encompasses more than just concern not just for students' academic growth but their social and emotional development as well (Acosta et al., 2018) (see Figure 14).

Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas viewed themselves as highly capable professional educators who were responsible for students' academic achievement. Consequently, both educators enacted pedagogical practices that focused on student learning. When discussing their pedagogical beliefs about teaching in urban schools, each teacher exhibited *an oppositional consciousness* or rejection of mainstream deficit-based perspectives of students in urban schools that perpetuate in American discourses (Acosta et al., 2018). Grounded in their beliefs that teachers should view students from asset-based perspectives and communicate high expectations, Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas insisted their students participate and give their best effort every day. Their *insistence*, or commitment to student success, manifested in a "*do whatever it takes approach*" (italics in original) to teaching (Acosta et al., 2018, p. 343). Within their classrooms, both

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teachers set high expectations for student learning and behavior and respectfully, yet firmly insisted that students meet those expectations.

These findings provide insights into a culturally specific perspective of teaching as *racial uplift* that often undergirds the pedagogical practices of effective African American educators' who view their work as teachers within a larger cultural tradition of strengthening the community and, therefore, demonstrate a deep commitment to student learning (Acosta, 2018; Acosta et al., 2018; Dixson, 2003; Ware, 2002). Both teachers worked tirelessly to ensure that students grasped new concepts. In these classrooms, students felt supported and, consequently, worked hard to meet their teachers' academic demands. Consequently, Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas were able to foster a culture of achievement in their respective classrooms (see Figure 14).

Building on existing literature that has documented the ways in which African American educators' pedagogical beliefs and practices are often shaped by their experiences with racism (Foster 1993; 1997; Siddle-Walker), these findings contribute new understandings of the ideologies that undergird them (Acosta et al., 2018). Findings revealed that Ms. Edgars' and Mr. Thomas' pedagogical perspectives, beliefs, and practices not only fostered classroom cultures of community, love, and achievement, they were consistent with those outlined in Acosta et al.'s (2018) framework of African American pedagogical excellence. By providing specific examples of pedagogical beliefs and enactments, this study offers new insights into the pedagogical enactments of effective African American educators (see Figure 14).

African American Pedagogical Excellence		
Beliefs	**Practices**	**Enactments**
Develop strong student-teacher relationships	Emotional connectedness	*Cultures of Community* • *Engaging in authentic and meaningful social interactions* • *Affirming students' racial and cultural backgrounds* • *Affirming students' rights*
Express care and concern for whole child	Interdependent learning community	*Cultures of Love* • *Facilitating critical dialogue* • *Creating familial environments* • *Admitting mistakes* • *Apologizing to students*
View students from asset-based perspectives	Insistence	*Cultures of Achievement* • *Breaking down concepts* • *Insisting students participate* • *Pushing students to persevere*

Figure 14. Pedagogical enactments of African American pedagogical excellence

Findings also illuminated students' perspectives of their teachers' pedagogical

enactments. Students overwhelmingly described teachers' use of insistence, or

pedagogical practice of insisting "student meet established academic and behavioral

standards (Ross et al., 2008, p. 142), as the reason they experienced success in Ms.

Edgars' and Mr. Thomas' classrooms. Students believed their teachers "pushed" them

because they wanted them to be academically successful. Students explained that,

although their teachers challenged them to participate and work hard, they also felt

supported by their teachers' pedagogical enactments. Explaining why they enjoyed being

students in their teacher's classroom, students described their practices of "breaking

down" concepts, explicitly demonstrating new concepts, reteaching when students

expressed confusion, continuing to teach until they displayed understanding, and

expecting all students to participate as the most significant factors in their academic

success (Acosta et al., 2018; Ross et al, 2008; Ware, 2006). These findings contradict

many of the deficit-based perspectives common in American schools that position

African American and Latinx students as children whose families and communities do

not value education (Valencia & Black, 2019).

Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas exhibited an insistence often associated with African

American educators who incorporate a moral authority with "high expectations, a no

excuses approach, and belief in the ability of students" (Acosta et al., 2018). Findings

demonstrated that their use of insistence created "a supportive psychological environment

that scaffolded student engagement and achievement" (Ross, Bondy, Gallingane, &

Hambacher, 2008, p. 142). Ross, Bondy, Gallingane, & Hambacher (2008) clarify:

> Insistence for its own sake or in the service of rules that are not linked to
> creating a psychologically supportive environment in which students can
> succeed would create a culture focused on teacher power and control, a
> non-supportive environment that would increase student resistance and
> undermine engagement and achievement motivation (p. 143).

These findings add critical insights into relationship between students' perceptions of

their teachers' pedagogical enactments, their subsequent engagement, and continued

motivation to persevere when faced with challenging academic material. African

American and Latinx students overwhelmingly perceived their teachers' pedagogical

practices of insistence as a demonstration of their care and concern for them.

Build on existing literature that has documented the success African American

educators experience with students from all backgrounds (Acosta, 2018; Foster, 1997;

Irvine, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994/2009; Ware, 2006), this study also contributes new

understandings of the success that African American educators experience with their students. Findings suggest that Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas' pedagogical enactments mitigated African American and Latinx students' racialized experiences by creating psychologically safe learning environments within oppressive schooling conditions. Referencing their AAPE framework, Acosta et al. (2018) explain, "teachers who embrace this philosophical approach view teaching as a way to help children resist and transcend oppression and learn to instantiate change" (p. 342). Because they enacted ideologies, beliefs, and practices associated with African American pedagogical excellence, Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas were able to create *counterspaces* (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solorzano, 2012), or racially safe learning environments within otherwise racially hostile schooling environments.

This study highlights the pedagogical enactments of highly effective African American educators, who despite teaching in challenging conditions, were able to create psychologically safe learning environments in which students thrived socially, emotionally, and academically (Ross et al., 2008). Although Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas were observed utilizing instructional strategies commonly conceptualized as "best practices", it was their unwavering belief in their students, profound willingness to support students, and sense of duty that created the racially safe learning environments in which their students thrived socially, academically, and emotionally. Findings suggest the ideologies, beliefs, and practices outlined in Acosta et al.'s (2018) framework for AAPE have the potential to alleviate oppressive schooling conditions. Practitioners must reframe their conceptions what it means to be a "good teacher" (Hyland, 2005; Vaught & Castagno, 2008) in urban schools and adopt pedagogical frameworks that focus on

providing students with racially safe learning environments. African American pedagogical excellence as a field of study for practical implications remains a "discrete practice, marginalized from the main and common canon of literature on effective teaching for *all* students" (Acosta et al., p. 343) often relegated to discussions of practices needed to reach African American students; however, these findings indicate that the pedagogical ideologies, beliefs, and practices outlined in the AAPE framework created environments in which African American and Latinx students thrived.

Given these encouraging and consistent findings, professional development for preservice and in-service teachers should focus on developing teachers' capacity to enact African American pedagogical practices with students from various racial and cultural backgrounds. Future research should build upon this study's findings by documenting the pedagogical enactments of other effective African American educators that create racially safe learning environments as well as the pedagogical enactments of educators from other racial and cultural backgrounds.

Racially Hostile Schooling Environments

First of all, findings revealed the omnipresence of racism in the schooling experiences of students and teachers at both schools, Eastside Elementary and Deer Creek Elementary. Data illuminated the ways "new racism" manifested in the experiences of African American and Latinx students; however, students' experiences were far from monolithic. For instance, Ms. Edgars described the binary from which her white colleagues viewed students at Eastside; one that positioned Latinx students as "good" and African American students as "traumatized" and "acting crazy." She felt

teachers' deficit-based perspectives of African American culture undergirded their everyday interactions with students.

Deficit perceptions about African American students when held by white teachers and administrators serve as racial microaggressions within K-12 schooling contexts because they prevent educational stakeholders acknowledging and leveraging their students' strengths and cultural capital in their schooling experiences. Racial microaggression send messages to students that reinforce racial and cultural hierarchies rooted in white supremacy in both overt and underlying ways (Perez Huber et al., 2002). These findings are significant as recent studies have documented African American students' experiences with racial microaggressions produce feelings of isolation, self-doubt, and frustration (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000) and, over time, negatively impact their self-image, academic performance, and social navigation skills (Hotchkins, 2016). While they may not have used overt racial slurs, teachers' subtle slights still cause long-term effects on students' psychological, socioemotional, and intellectual development (Allen et al., 2013).

Data illuminated the ways equity-based education reforms focused on improving achievement outcomes with African American students, such as trauma-informed instruction and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), can become coopted in urban schools when educational stakeholders are unable to recognize their positionality and examine its influence on their pedagogical beliefs and practices (Kohli et al., 2017). Kohli et al. (2017) explicate how equity-based education reforms can serve as mechanisms of new racism because they are "a superficial response to changing demographics in public schools, additive frames of diversity that maintain Whiteness as

central often serve as substitutes for concrete discussion of race or racism, thus maintaining or exacerbating racial inequity in schools" (p. 187). These findings illuminate the ways in which *new racism*, a more covert and hidden racism that that of the past, continues to marginalize the learning experiences and opportunities of African American students in elementary schools (Kohli & Solorzano, 2012; Perez-Huber & Solorzano, 2014).

Data also illuminated the ways in which each teacher experienced their school as a racially hostile teaching environment. Throughout the study, Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas shared several stories that illuminated their experiences as targets of white colleagues' racial microaggressions. Whether or not these racial microaggressions are intentional or not, these counternarratives shed light on the ways in which teachers of Color endure daily interpersonal forms of racism in their work environments. Teachers' stories also illuminated their paradoxical positionalities within a school with an overwhelming white teaching staff (Jackson, Boutte, & Wilson, 2013). While teachers of Color often work within schools that primarily serve students of color, Kohli (2018) explains that these schools "operate as sites of whiteness . . . [meaning] they are staffed by mostly White teachers and administrators, the curriculum mandates typically reify Eurocentric frames, and the school culture espouses middle-class, White values (p. 308). Although each teacher was highly regarded, both teachers' pedagogical success was narrowly attributed to their racial identities as Black teachers by their white colleagues. Within these "sites of whiteness," Ms. Edgars and Mr. Thomas' pedagogical expertise was marginalized by their white colleagues. In this way, the institutionalized nature of racism in schools not only narrowed teachers' view of students and their capabilities, it

also disregarded and dismissed the pedagogical excellence of these two African American educators. Expecting African American educators to assume roles as default disciplinarians and superheroes not only adds to the day-to-day workloads they are expected to carry, it also alleviates white teachers of their professional responsibility to develop the types of meaningful relationships necessary to effectively teacher students from racial and cultural backgrounds different from their own (Jackson et al., 2013).

While they are consistent with previous research has documented the ways in which racially hostile schooling environments serve as sites of frustration, isolation, and alienation for teachers of Color (Acosta, 2019; Kohli, 2016; Kohli & Pizzaro, 2016; Milner & Hoy, 2003; Pizarro & Kohli, 2018; Rausher & Wilson, 2017), these findings are troubling. Research has documented that racially hostile teaching environments that take a tremendous toll on teachers of Color (Kohli, 2018). Collectively, teachers' experiences with racial microaggressions can lead to feelings of self-doubt and anxiety, and, eventually, result in many teachers of Color questioning their roles as educators (Pizarro & Kohli, 2018). Pizarro & Kohli (2018) explain:

> Be it micro or macro, racism is not confined to a specific moment in time. Those who endure it carry it with them; and those who challenge it expend a great deal of personal energy, often throughout their professional lives (p. 298).

In this way, these unaddressed acts of racism serve as significant obstacles in the growth and retention of teachers of Color in the teaching profession (Kohli, 2018).

Considering the documented pedagogical excellence of African American educators, their systematic disenfranchisement or "push out" of the profession requires immediate attention to the ways that African American teachers are supported in our

schools. Recent efforts to diversify the teaching workforce has focused on the recruitment pipeline of African American educators; however, less attention has been paid to the ways that the racial climate of schools marginalize the experiences of African American educators and, in effect, have served as mechanisms to push them out of the profession (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Kohli, 2019).

Undoubtedly, students in urban schools need and deserve teachers who are committed to their social, emotional, and academic success. Although they have been documented as effective educators for students from all backgrounds, urban schools report difficulty retaining their African American educators. In fact, African American educators leave the profession at significantly higher rates than those of other teachers in the U.S. (Carter-Andrews et al., 2019). Given these findings, it is imperative for education stakeholders to intentionally address the racial climates of K-12 schools in urban contexts. Survey data is often employed to address school climates; however, survey data cannot reveal the evasive nature of deficit-thinking, colorblindness, and racial microaggressions marginalized the schooling experiences and learning opportunities of students of color. Addressing racial climates in schools requires critical input from various educational stakeholders including community members, students and their families, and school staff.

Professional development initiatives focused on creating racially safe schooling environments need to provide opportunities for education stakeholders' (i.e. administrators, teachers, and support staff) to develop their racial literacy (Kohli 2019). Kohli (2019) describes racial literacy as the "ability to see, name, and unpack the enduring racism embedded in our society" (p. 40). Findings in this study suggest critical

professional learning opportunities should focus on developing staff's capacity to reflect on their own positionality as well as the ways in which their positionalities influence their interactions with students and inform their pedagogical beliefs and practices. Critical inquiry groups among a small group of educators, preferably a diverse group, can provide opportunities for developing staff's capacity to recognize racial microaggressions inside as well as outside the context of a classroom. Critical inquiry groups also offer spaces for educators to engage in critical dialogue about racial microaggressions and other evasive aspects of racism that marginalize the schooling experiences of students and teachers of Color (Darvin, 2018).

Critical professional learning opportunities focused on racial literacy can increase the cultural responsiveness of white teachers while also providing crucial professional support for teachers of color (Kohli, 2019). Critical professional learning opportunities, such as racial affinity groups, can afford teachers of color access to personal and professional support as they mitigate their racially hostile teaching environments for themselves and their students (Mosely, 2018; Pour-Khorshid, 2018). Racial affinity groups can provide nurturing spaces within a community of like-minded teachers to support teachers as they "navigate, persist, and transform the racialized context of schooling" (Kohli, 2019, p. 40). Critical professional learning opportunities have the potential to sustain and nurture African American teachers' pedagogical development and commitment and, thereby, may serve to "pull" them back into the profession. An important direction for future research would be to study the influence of critical professional learning opportunities such as those mentioned above on the pedagogical beliefs and practices of educators teaching in elementary and secondary schools.

Limitations and Future Research

While the use of case study methodology allowed for a focused, in-depth look into the pedagogical beliefs and practices of these two teachers, there are some limitations in this study's design. This case study investigation was limited to two African American elementary teachers and, in this way, missing the critical perspectives of teachers of Color who do not identify as African American. Robust understandings of pedagogical beliefs and practices that foster racially safe learning environments calls for future research to explore the culturally specific pedagogical beliefs and practices of teachers from a variety of cultural and racial backgrounds. Second, this study focused on the teaching practices and classroom interactions of two African American educators early in their career, and, thus, are not representative of the full spectrum of culturally specific pedagogical practices African American educators enact in schools across the nation. Future research is needed to investigate the pedagogical practices of African American educators across the intergenerational continuum from newly inducted teachers to veteran educators.

Reflections from the Researcher

Writing my dissertation has been the most demanding, exhausting, yet highly rewarding endeavor in my life. Looking back, this research project represents a culmination of my learning experiences in urban education both as a teacher and as a doctoral student. Having reflected on my time as an educator in various urban contexts, I am grateful for the opportunity to teach in schools in which teachers and administrators worked to create racially nurturing schooling environments for students. I am also extremely grateful for the teachers who participated in my study. Their willingness to

share their classroom, their students, and their time provided me with crucial understandings of the ways their pedagogical approach to teaching created racially nurturing learning environments for their students. Knowing what is possible when we ensure students have access to racially safe learning environments has inspired to push through the dissertation process so that I might research might further the conversations concerning education reform in urban schools.

Conclusion

While Americans espouse a "post-racial" nation believing we have moved beyond race as a society, one-third of our nation's children attend schools in large urban districts that are more racially segregated than ever before (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Noguera, 2003; Omi & Winant, 2015). Decades of school reform movements have done little to disrupt the pervasive inequitable schooling experiences afforded to African American and Latinx students in our nation's schools. Far too often, students attend school in racially hostile schools in which their opportunities for academic, social, and emotional development are greatly hindered. Within these racially hostile schooling environments, the immense amount of intangible violence afflicted upon students prefaces the slow murder of a child's spirit (Love, 2014). Love (2014) asserts "spirit murdering within a school context is the denial of inclusion, protection, safety, nurturance, and acceptance because of fixed, yet fluid and moldable, structures of racism" (p. 2). Not only does this intangible violence cause a debilitating impact on the academic achievement of the students who attend racially hostile schools but, more importantly, their social and emotional development as well (Ginwright, 2016).

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However, cases of teachers in urban schools who create and sustain learning environments in which their students thrive academically, socially, and emotionally exist and need to be studied. Understanding the pedagogical beliefs and practices of teachers who mitigate racially hostile schooling environments by creating racially safe learning environments that support student success provides a compelling rationale for this study. Given that African American pedagogical excellence as a field of study for practical implications remains a "discrete practice, marginalized from the main and common canon of literature on effective teaching for *all* students" (Acosta et al., p. 343) relegated to discussions of practices needed to reach African American students, the purpose of this research project was to expand the knowledge base needed to center AAPE in discussions of best practices for teachers in urban schools. Therefore, in order to understand the ways in which these teachers' pedagogical approach supported student success, this study investigated the pedagogical beliefs and practices enacted by two highly regarded African American educators in two urban elementary schools.

Too often, education research aimed at "fixing" the problems that beset urban schools fail to include analyses of the broader sociopolitical and economic structures that reproduce relations of power and privilege (Noguera, 2003; Nygreen, 2016). In other words, decontextualized and depoliticized analyses obscure the role of race in the schooling experiences of African American and Latinx students as well as the African American educators who participated in this study. Consequently, the use of case study methodology allowed for a focused, in-depth look into the pedagogical beliefs and practices of these two teachers. Using a case study approach required collecting multiple

forms of ethnographic data through a systematic and detailed method of data collection (Dyson & Genishi, 2005).

To answer the research questions for this case study, I conducted semi-structured teacher interviews, critical incident discussions, student focus groups, and multiple teacher observations over a five-month period in second semester of the school year. Because of the profound consequence of race in the daily experiences of those exist within a racist society, critical race methodology was employed during data collection and analysis to uncover the situated meanings of my participants' experiences as students and teachers of olor in racially hostile schools. Examining the everyday lives of my participants necessitated a critical alternative methodology that not only contextualized but politicized the ways in which race and racism systematically impacted their experiences (Nygreen, 2006). Lastly, using constant comparative analysis, inductive data analysis provided opportunities to compare findings within and across both cases revealing the ways in which both teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices fostered cultures of community, love, and achievement within their classrooms.

Findings in the data illuminated the ways in which both students and teachers experienced their schooling contexts as racially hostile. Findings revealed both teachers enacted pedagogical ideologies, beliefs, and practices associated with the framework for African American pedagogical excellence (Acosta et al., 2018) that created racially safe learning environments for their African American and Latinx students. These findings present significant implications including the critical need to address the racially hostile climates experienced by students and teachers of Color in urban schools across our nation.

Appendix A: Teacher Interview Protocol- Beginning of Study

Tell me about yourself.

- Family life

- Schooling background

- Work experience

What influenced your decision to become a teacher?

- Childhood dream?

- Inspiration?

- Continue in teaching?

What are your beliefs about classroom management?

- Most important aspects

o What works well?

- Least important aspects

o What doesn't work well?

- Aspects of classroom management at the beginning of the year

- Aspects of classroom management at the middle of the year

- Aspects of classroom management concerning student-teacher relationships

What are your beliefs about teaching in urban schools?

- In IPS?

- In this particular school and context?

- Why did you choose to teach in this particular context?

What knowledge, skills, and/or understandings do you think that teachers should have before they begin teaching in an urban elementary school?

Appendix B: Teacher Interview Protocol- End of Study

 What do you feel were your biggest challenges this year?

What do you feel are your biggest accomplishments this year?

What does it mean to be a Black teacher in this district at this moment in U.S. society?

- What does it mean for you?

- What does it mean for the students?

What advice would you give new Black teachers? What would you want them to know

about teaching in a large urban district?

Appendix C: Critical Event Protocol

During the observation today, I noticed _____.

Can you tell me more about this interaction?

Appendix D: Student Focus Groups Protocol

What do you like about being in your teachers' classroom?

What does your teacher do that makes you think that she/he is a good teacher?

What does your teacher do that helps you learn better in their classroom?

What does your teacher do that makes you think that she/he cares about you?

What does your teacher do that makes you think she/he believes that you are smart?

What do you like/not like about how your teacher runs the classroom?

How would you describe your teacher?

Would you describe her/him as a 'good teacher'? Why or why not?

Describe how is she/he different from other teachers that you have had?

Describe what do you wish your teacher did differently?

I noticed _____

in class today. Can you tell me a little more about this?

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> heteropatriarchy in the life histories of Black male educators. *Equity & Excellence*
>
> *in Education*, *49*(1), 57-71.

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> and ethnic identification on African American adolescents' school and
>
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>
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> curriculum: An exploration into a high school history teacher's construction of
>
> teacher–student relationships. Urban Education.
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> makes-changes-after-mock-slave-auction/1278308001/

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CURRICULUM VITAE
Sara Elizabeth Bangert

EDUCATION

Ph.D. Urban Education Studies, *Indiana University-Purdue University*, Indianapolis, Indiana (2020)
M.S. Elementary Education, *Indiana University-Purdue University*, Indianapolis, Indiana (2013)
B.S. Elementary Education, *Indiana University*, Bloomington, Indiana (1998)

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Teacher learning and development specifically focused on preparing educators to enact culturally responsive pedagogy in diverse contexts; anti-racist teaching; teaching for social justice; urban education; critical literacy in elementary and middle school contexts

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

January 2020- present **Adjunct Instructor**, Education Program, Ivy Tech Community College, Indianapolis, IN

August 2016- present **Associate Faculty**, Department of Urban Teacher Education, School of Education, Indiana University, Indianapolis, IN

August 2015- May 2018 **Associate Instructor**, Department of Urban Teacher Education, School of Education, Indiana University, Indianapolis, IN

August 2014- May 2015 **Graduate Research Assistant**, Great Lakes Equity Center, School of Education, Indiana University, Indianapolis, IN

August 2016- May 2018 **Literacy and Math Facilitator**, Title I, Metropolitan School District of Perry Township, Indianapolis, IN

August 2008- June 2009 **Literacy Instructional Coach**, Indianapolis Public Schools, Indianapolis, IN

August 2005- May 2008 **Classroom Teacher**, Indianapolis Public Schools, Indianapolis, IN

August 2003- May 2005 **Classroom Teacher**, Owensboro Public Schools, Owensboro, KY

August 1999- May 2001   **Classroom Teacher**, Flowing Wells Unified School

District, Tucson, AZ

SCHOLARLY AWARDS, FELLOWSHIPS, AND HONORS

Awards
    WFYI B.E.S.T Volunteer Award (2016)
Fellowships
    Research Fellow for IUPUI Center for Research and Learning (2014)
    Clinical Research Fellow for Association of Teacher Educators (2018)
    Scholar for IUPUI Preparing Future Faculty and Professionals Program (2018-2020)
    Scholar for IUPUI Center for Teaching and Learning Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning Program (2018-2019)
Honors
    Nominated for Indianapolis Public Schools Teacher of the Year (2007)

PUBLICATIONS

Refereed Journal Articles
    Leland, C., Ociepka, A., Kuonen, K., & Bangert, S. (2018). Learning to talk back to texts. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *61*(6), 643-65.

    Leland, C. H., & Bangert, S. E. (2019). Encouraging activism through art: Preservice teachers challenge censorship. *Literacy Research: Theory, Method, and Practice*, *68*(1), 162-182.

AUTHORED CURRICULAR AND INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

Spring 2016   ***Grades K-12 Curriculum Guide*** for *Attucks: The School That Opened A City* (contributor)

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

National Conferences (Refereed)

    Leland, C., Ociepka, A., & Bangert, S. (2015, December). *Reading with and against the text*. Presented to Literacy Research Association 65th Annual Conference, Carlsbad, CA.

    Bangert, S., Leland, C., & Oceipka, A. (2016, November). *Why have words?": College students respond to censorship issues through art*. Presented to National Council Teachers of English, Atlanta, GA.

Bangert, S. (2017, February). *Creating space for critical literacy in teacher education: Using children's books to interrogate dominant discourses.* Presented to Association of Teacher Educators Annual Conference, Orlando, FL.

Bangert, S. & Leland, C. (2017, November). *"Why stop the intellectual conversations before they are even started?": Teacher candidates responding to censorship issues through art.* Presented to National Council Teachers of English, St. Louis, MO.

Al Bulushi, Z., Anderson, K., Bangert, S., Hogue, B., Im, J., Medina, C., Ramirez, N., Scott, J., & Wohlwend, K. (2017, December). *Constructing new imaginaries through literacy pedagogies in contact zones: What does it mean to critically prepare literacy scholars in contemporary times?.* Presented to Literacy Research Association 67th Annual Conference, Tampa, FL.

Bangert, S. (2018, November). *Using art to create new identities as social activists.* Presented to National Council Teachers of English, Houston, TX.

Bangert, S. & Leland, C. (2018, November). *Encouraging activism through art.* Presented to Literacy Research Association 68th Annual Conference, Indian Wells, CA.

Invited Presentations

Bangert, S., Bonds, V., Currie, B., Cannon, M., & Duff, M.C. (2014, Nov. 28). The IUPUI *School of Education's Urban Education Studies Doctoral Program.* Presented to the Indiana University School of Education's National Board of Visitors, Indianapolis, IN.

Anderson, J., Bangert, S., Duff, M., Jordan, P., Flowers, N., McKay, M., & Scheurich, J. (2015, Oct. 15). *Critiquing Our Own White Racism and the "Oppressor Within": Creating Anti-Racist Curriculum at Bergamo.* Panel Discussion Presentation. Conference on Curriculum Theory and Classroom Practice, Dayton, OH.

UNIVERSITY TEACHING

Undergraduate Course
E233: Literacy Development in Children's Literature
E449: Tradebooks and the Classroom Teacher
M304: Field Experience K-2
E345: Language Arts and Mathematics for Young Learners
X470: Psycholinguistics for Teachers of Reading

Graduate Courses
L559: Tradebooks in the Elementary Classroom
L502: Sociopsycholinguistics Applications to Reading Instruction

E506: Curriculum in Early Childhood

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

American Educational Research Association
- *Division G: Social Context of Education*
- *Division K: Teaching and Teacher Education*
- *SIG- Language and Social Processes*
- *SIG- Urban Teaching and Learning*
- *SIG- Writing and Literacies*

National Council of Teachers of English
Literacy Research Association
International Literacy Association
Association of Teacher Educators