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Colleges for Teacher Education

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**The Journal of the Association of
Independent Liberal Arts Colleges
for Teacher Education**

**Special Issue
2021**

**Bearing Witness, Speaking Truth, Taking Action:
Creating and Centering Transformative,
Responsive, Healing Spaces of Resistance to Enact
Anti-Bias, Anti-Racist Teacher Education**

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Notes on APA Style in this Special Issue

In its guidelines for bias-free language, the *APA Publication Manual* (7th Edition) emphasizes to authors that “terms used to refer to racial and ethnic groups continue to change over time ...when describing racial and ethnic groups, be appropriately specific and sensitive to uses of labeling” (APA, 2020, p. 142). For this reason, the reader will note variety in language use throughout this volume. The authors’ choices for capitalization and spelling are intentional and meaningful. When further guidance was warranted to supplement APA guidelines, *The Diversity Style Guide* and *The National Association of Black Journalists Style Guide*, as well as an opinion piece from the *Columbia Journalism Review* (Perlman, 2015), informed editorial decisions.

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**Special Issue Introduction:
Bearing Witness, Speaking Truth, Taking Action
Creating and Centering Transformative, Responsive,
Healing Spaces of Resistance to Enact
Anti-Bias, Anti-Racist Teacher Education**

Where were you on May 25, 2020? How and what did you hear about the life and extrajudicial murder of George Floyd? Have you felt the length of eight minutes and forty-six seconds? Do you know the desperation of gasping for air, of pleading for help from those forsworn to protect communities, while you feel your life slipping away from you? What did you feel in your body when you heard? If you watched? As people argued over the value of George Floyd's life, how did you connect the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, or our transgender kin Tony McDade to larger systems of inequity? To your work in teacher education? Did you make these connections? What commitments did you make in the wake of this day? How have you followed through with your commitments as you read these words?

As a nation, the United States is at a precipice brought about by the growing support for abolishing systemic racial oppression and the economic and educational conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. This context deepens the responsibility of teacher educators to commit to establishing a more equitable and socially just society. The need is especially compelling for those responsible for shaping the critical thinking and educational attainment of our children. White-Smith and White (2009) summarized the dilemma educators face in the quest for equity and justice for their students and communities: "'You've got to take a stand' toward those people or policies that get in the way of this work" (p.273).

This special issue of the *AILACTE Journal* encompasses many voices united in exploring what anti-bias, anti-racist teacher education might include. It is intentionally non-traditional, blending poetry, conversation, reflections on practice, and auto-ethnographic self-studies. The poems in this special issue remind us that our work is never done in a vacuum. There are consequences if we are not purposeful in following through on our commitments to address inequities and racism in K-12 and

teacher education. The poems remind us that we are not only those impacted by racism, but those who can make a difference. We have a great responsibility in our work of teacher education. These poems are love songs to the folx of color who have spent endless nights crying over the souls of their lost Black and Trans sons, daughters, and kin. They are used to ground the context of this special issue, underscore its necessity, and substantiate the work we hope takes place in response to it.

We offer authentic and earnest voices of teacher educators reflecting on their identities and practices as counternarratives to normative discourses that perpetuate racism and inequality in our schools. Each text speaks to visions of transformative, responsive, and healing spaces from which we can take up anti-bias and anti-racist teacher education practices. To make space for such practices, we highlight the transformational work currently happening in our colleges and schools of education, including teacher educators of color who draw from their own experiences and positionalities (Navarro et al., 2019) to engage in coalitional forms of resistance (Hsieh & Nguyen, 2020). We stand witness to the consequence of a White citizenry miseducated to believe that white hegemony, intelligence, ingenuity, and colonization are the foundation of a just American society. Continuing to conceptualize white racial hegemony solely as a privilege or unearned societal advantage minimizes the intentional and systemic destructive power leveraged by White society to dismantle the histories, achievements, and lives of folx of color. Particularly, given the prevalence of anti-Black racism in the United States, centering counternarratives of Black educators and teacher educators can transform the profession in their practices of healing, resistance, and transformation.

The work of anti-racist teacher education requires the intentional development of critical consciousness within the profession. It is done in community with many other voices along teachers' developmental trajectory, including the undergraduate, preservice, professional development, educational leadership, and teacher educator levels.

We begin with Daniel T. Byrd's powerful poem, "Another One Down," which reminds us of the prevalence of racial violence that

once seen, cannot be unseen. He reminds us of our responsibility to bear witness, to remember those we have lost, and to acknowledge how short we fall from our ideals and how costly the loss of Black lives is for all of us.

The first article in this issue is a case study of the impact of an undergraduate teacher education major. Even before prospective teachers may enter formal teacher preparation programs, undergraduate education majors can provide a foundation that centers justice, community & leadership, working in community partnerships with educators and other justice-focused community members. In their piece, Tamara Spencer and Monica Fitzgerald examine the question of how independent liberal arts colleges respond to constantly evolving social contexts and a constantly evolving field (education) as they discuss their work in establishing an undergraduate liberal studies major grounded in anti-racist principles, the importance of shared liberation and community support.

In the next article, Nancy T. Walker, Christian Bracho, and Marga Madhuri examine how teacher educators can push back against systemic contexts of high stakes standardized testing (at the teacher credentialing level) that have, for many years, driven teacher education program curriculum. The pressures to meet state accreditation requirements have narrowed the focus of course work and limited humanizing practices in teacher education. Transformation of the curriculum can begin by acknowledging the trauma that teacher candidates and teacher educators face in this present moment of remote learning and drawing from the rich experiences that both groups bring into teacher education spaces. However, this requires reflection, prioritizing the humanity of those in teacher education spaces, and recognizing that we cannot grow and develop if we do not have and hold space to breathe.

Kimberly A. White-Smith's poem, "I Can't Breathe," reminds us that authentic anti-bias, anti-racist work is not accomplished in a moment of convenience but through a lifetime of actions. Her words remind us that allyship is an enduring commitment to transform toxic systems and to come together in recognition of the humanity of Black lives at all times.

White-Smith's poem leads into two powerful pieces that highlight the voices of authors who unpack their positionalities, identities, and personal connections to the work of anti-bias, anti-racist teacher education. To engage in a resistant and responsive practice that promotes anti-bias/anti-racist discourse and action, teacher educators must be aware of the contexts in which we operate. We must also know who we are, recognizing our identities and roles within contexts that were not meant for Black, Indigenous, People of Color, folx with disabilities, or people who identify as LGBTQ+.

Finally, we must know who we serve and how we can best work alongside our constituents and communities to navigate oppressive educational and social systems. In their piece, Angel Miles Nash and Quaylan Allen discuss the importance of intersectional leadership in preparing educators and leaders to work with Black students in school. They unpack their positionality as Black scholars and educators working in a predominantly white private liberal arts university and the ways their positionality informs their investment in this work. Mary Candace Raygoza, Aaminah Norris, and Raina Léon also unpack identity and role in context. In their text, the authors draw from deeply personal experiences to expose the impact of structural inequalities in their lives, and those of family members and students. They share with us an example of a reflective conversation on disruption, transformation, and healing in teacher education that acknowledges teacher educators' full humanity.

Our final poem, "Waiting," by Patricia Arahann Taylor, reminds us as teacher educators that we are the ones called to do this work. She reminds us that the undergraduate, preservice teacher candidates, and teachers we work with are also the ones we have been waiting for to engage in this work. We must do the work to support the development of anti-racist teachers and transform oppressive schooling spaces.

Engaging in dismantling racist and oppressive systems sometimes necessitates that we find spaces outside of the university. Our final two articles explore spaces beyond university classrooms. While looking beyond the university does not exempt institutions' from responsibilities to provide inclusive, anti-racist

spaces, it reminds us to broaden our notion of where and how teacher education occurs and the importance of considering how we can support counterspaces. In their piece, Mariah Harmon and Ilana Seidel Horn examine a counterspace intentionally created for Black women preservice teachers. Within predominantly White spaces, thoughtfully constructed Black women counterspaces can provide much-needed room to breathe, exist, reflect, and grow professionally. In these spaces, Black women can be seen and affirmed by one another, through both shared experiences and insider knowledge, and as individuals who defy the racializing stereotypes and roles so often put upon them in White-dominated spaces.

Lastly, Niki Elliott extends anti-racist work into ongoing teacher professional development. In today's classrooms, where children are suffering from elevated levels of anxiety due to high stakes testing environments and the over identification of Black, Native American, and Latinx boys in Special Education, you will not find a curriculum that is rich, critical, diverse, or even accurate (Allen & White-Smith, 2014; Losen & Gillespie, 2012). Thus Elliott offers a description of lessons learned from implementing a mindfulness-based approach to uprooting unconscious bias that centralizes the primary need for safety and empathy that can be felt among educators engaged in diversity, equity, and inclusion trainings. Using a healing-centered approach to equity work, she provides a glimpse at what is possible for the field when educators engage in critical conversations about embodied experiences of bias and racism in schools and are able to confront their own internalized biases in powerful ways.

Across the pieces in this special issue, we see recurrent themes of the importance of critical reflection as a tool for teacher educators to promote anti-bias and anti-racist teacher education. Bringing who we are, both personally and professionally, into our teacher education work allows us to push back against reductionist curriculum, to hold sacred space in and away from dominant institutions as we acknowledge trauma, and to work, in community, for something different, something transformative. We also see themes of responsiveness to local, national, and global contexts with reminders that true responsiveness is a commitment to

dismantling oppressive systems that continue to harm our Black colleagues, educators, teacher candidates, and K-12 students.

Co-editing this special issue has been a distinct honor and privilege that could not be done without community. We extend our gratitude to the contributing authors, peer reviewers, and to the AILACTE Board of Directors for their commitment to the work of anti-bias, anti-racist teacher education and for engaging us with the responsibility to uphold this work. We invite you to breathe deeply in gratitude for the sacred work with which you are entrusted, to renew your commitment to anti-bias, anti-racist teacher education, and to learn with and from the authors in this special issue.

In solidarity,
Kimberly A. White-Smith and Betina Hsieh, Guest Editors
University of La Verne

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Another One Down

Daniel T. Byrd, *University of La Verne*

A glance at the headlines,
Another one down
Black body in the street
Stained with guiltless blood
One body, nobody
Subdued, removed
Like litter at our feet

Looking down,
Looking away
Do I see? Really see?
Should I see?

When the one is just a number
Distance lies between it and me
But if the one is given a name
And becomes a man seen
mirroring God's image, my image,
I am trapped, bound to him forever

Each day, I can no longer unsee
Unsee the fruits of racial history
Bitter poison in America's veins
Unsee the brutality that lies in wait,
For my brother, my sister, perhaps me
Preview of my own murder, on repeat

While there is pain in seeing
To not see, to not name, to not mourn,
Would make me an accomplice, a thief
Robbing the one, the nobody of humanity
As if it were mine to take or give
A Divine gift that must never be stolen

Another one down,
Somebody to be forgotten,
Cloth-draped, stepped over,
In pursuit of the American Dream,
The lie veiling the eyes, affording
Sweet slumber, sweet comfort
of not seeing, not lamenting,
No liberty, No justice for All.

Centering Justice, Community, and Leadership in Undergraduate Teacher Education

Tamara Spencer and Monica Fitzgerald

*Justice, Community, and Leadership Program,
School of Liberal Arts, Saint Mary's College of California*

Abstract

This paper offers a case study of how Saint Mary's College of California developed an undergraduate teacher education pathway that focuses on equity and social justice. Responding to the needs of students and families in California, Saint Mary's sought to cultivate an anti-racist pedagogy and cultural humility for future teachers. To do so required faculty to reimagine the traditional Liberal Studies curriculum that has historically been the route for undergraduates pursuing careers in teaching and to develop an entirely new curriculum. As the sphere of K-12 and higher education changes, and the demand for teachers continues to grow in the state, it is critical that teacher education programs are dynamic and responsive. They must be leaders in training for social justice.

Keywords: social justice education, community engagement, undergraduate teacher education, curriculum development

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If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time.
But if you have come because your liberation is bound up
with mine, then let us work together.

—*Lilla Watson*

As students in the undergraduate major Justice, Community, and Leadership enter the program offices at the university, a poster with this quotation from educator and activist Lilla Watson serves as a daily reminder of their collective work as future teachers. A liberatory education praxis grounds the program and its commitment to developing transformative teachers with cultural humility, anti-racist pedagogy, and an equity lens that fosters humanizing classroom spaces. This approach to an undergraduate major, combined with the state licensure coursework, provides a comprehensive framework for teacher preparation that provides practical teaching techniques alongside theories for social change.

In 2020, as the public grapples with the ongoing impact of societal inequity and systemic racism, a clear need for collective action towards social justice remains. K-12 teachers play a central role in advancing this commitment. Against this backdrop, today's generation of new graduates face unique economic, political, and COVID-19 related challenges that lead to uncharted paths towards professions. Institutions of higher education must scrutinize the curriculum to ensure that programs in teacher preparation deliberately center equity, justice, and advocacy in institutional and pedagogical ways. At our Californian, mission-based liberal arts college, we strongly advocate for a program that can move forward with the urgent and complex landscape of today's educational systems.

Preparing and retaining the teaching workforce perennially faces challenges. Both the most populous state in the United States and one of the most diverse, California remains a center stage for educational policy and reform in the United States (Public Policy Institute of California, 2020). Indeed, California's vast geographic, linguistic, and economic variability makes it one of the most complex states in which to envision curricular innovation and reform. Thus, as California shows clear signs that the state is unable to

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keep up with the current demand for new teachers, attention is once again on the ability of teacher education programs to stay in sync with the needs of the field (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

While the states grapple with demand for K-12 teachers, higher education is also struggling with how best to serve college students in today's unforeseen landscape. The purpose and value of liberal arts undergraduate education has become highly contested, as increased attention challenges the value of higher education for workplace preparation and success (Decatur, 2016). Historically, this journey has been particularly long and fraught for K-12 teacher education, as colleges and universities have siloed this work in schools of professional education. and in doing so, "institutions of higher education [have become] complicit in trends that continue to make public education more separate and unequal" (Mucher, 2014, n.p.). Also, looming federal and state professional teaching standards, standardized teacher performance assessments, and an increasing disconnect between student populations and those who will go on to teach them, results in a workforce that is largely disconnected from the undergraduate liberal arts program from which teacher preparation was once derived.

It is well established in both research and policy on social justice and teacher education (Mills & Ballantyne, 2016), that preservice teachers require "knowledge about diverse communities, in addition to subject matter expertise and pedagogical knowledge, to be effective" (p.18, Mule). Indeed, this is underscored in the mission of the California Commission of Teacher Credentialing, which is to "ensure integrity, relevance, and high quality in the preparation, certification, and discipline of the educators who serve all of California's diverse students." (n.p. 2018). As Darling-Hammond observes:

In classrooms most beginning teachers will enter, at least 25 percent of students live in poverty...from 10 to 20 percent have identified learning differences; 15 percent speak a language other than English as their primary language (many in urban settings), and about 40 percent are members of racial/ethnic 'minority' groups, many of them recent immigrants from countries with different educational systems and cultural tradition. (Darling-Hammond,

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cited in Mile, 2012, p. 12)

Thus, understanding the facets of diversity and inclusion, including the impact of systemic inequity, must be a priority in teacher education.

And yet, as issues of teacher retention linger, Darling-Hammond (2010) points out an unsettling relationship between teacher turnover and the teachers' self-assessment of performance and readiness for the profession that returns to considerations of the efficacy of the educator preparation program. To prepare teachers for lifelong careers, a teacher education program must be supported by a vision and institutional structure that values equity, democracy, and diversity, and holds these principles to be central to the purpose of schooling. In that sense, how might a small liberal-arts college have the capacity to deeply inform the nature of teacher education in a rapidly changing field and society?

In this article, we describe our Justice, Community, Leadership major, a pathway that all undergraduate teacher educators pursue at our mission-driven, liberal arts college in California. We seek to describe how a small-liberal arts college can develop an undergraduate teacher education pipeline that is rooted in an interdisciplinary core-curriculum undergraduate major while simultaneously preparing and credentialing high-quality teachers to work in diverse California public schools. As such, teacher education faces the immediate charge of orienting preparation in a perspective that works towards the common good.

Preparing Teachers for Careers in a Rapidly Changing Field and Society

Preparing and retaining high-quality teachers in the most populous state in the country remains a top priority and concern for the state of California. According to the California Teaching Commission (2020), 2014-2015 marked a critical time, as the projected need for new hires exceeded supply by approximately 6,000 teachers, with particularly pronounced needs in the areas of math, science, and special education. At the same time, enrollment in teacher education programs was at its lowest. Over a two year period, this lack of supply and increased demand resulted in nearly double the number of teachers hired on “substandard

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permits and credentials” to total “more than 7,700, comprising a third of all the new credentials issued in 2014–15” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016, n.p.). Darling-Hammond et al. (2016) go on to report:

As in previous years when California has experienced a shortage of qualified teachers, low-income students of color and students with special needs are disproportionately impacted by the shortage. According to California’s educator equity plan, in 2013–14, nearly twice as many students in high-minority as in low-minority schools were being taught by a teacher on a waiver or permit (a teacher not yet even enrolled in a preparation program). (p. ii)

Up until 2017, the customary path to a teaching credential in the state of California had largely relied upon “fifth year” postgraduate educator preparation programs in which a prospective teacher completed teaching requirements after completing an undergraduate bachelor’s degree. In 2016, however, the state adopted a series of financial incentives to increase the support of teachers, targeting undergraduate pathways as a viable route to the teaching profession (Freedburg & Fensterwald, 2016). To address this need, institutions across the state have reintroduced the undergraduate “4-year pathway to the profession,” which in turn, for us carved a deliberate space to expand our undergraduate pathways and to ensure an orientation towards social justice, community leadership, and equity defined them.

In addition, high-quality teacher preparation must not only attract students to the field of education but also provide a program of study that prepares teachers well and qualifies them to remain in the profession. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2016), “Non-retirement attrition is an even larger factor, typically accounting for two-thirds of teachers who leave...Turnover for beginners—who leave at much higher rates than other teachers—is influenced by how well novices are prepared prior to entry” (n.p.). Thus, those that prepare teachers are left with at least two pressing questions to address: 1) how can the state increase the number of qualified teacher candidates to enter the workforce and 2) in today’s changing landscape, how can teacher preparation programs still attract educators committed to long-term careers in the state?

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Simply acknowledging and valuing diversity is not adequate to address the needs of California classrooms. As Cochran-Smith (2004) aptly notes, “When teacher education is regarded as a political problem, all the policies related to the preparation of teachers are problematized and interrogated, particularly with regard to ideology” (p. 20). Mule (2010) further states that “critics of the status quo have emphasized the need for coherent, institutionalized ways of thinking about educating for diversity, and integrating this thinking not just in the curriculum but also structurally in the core values, beliefs and norms” (p.13) Rather, it is the reckoning that diversity is multifaceted and interconnected—i.e., race and ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic difference, dis/abilities, or linguistic backgrounds—that is interrelated with ongoing systemic inequities. Thus, teacher education that centers social justice and equity is grounded in a theoretical orientation that deconstructs power, privilege, and systemic oppression.

In K–12 settings, classroom teachers are central to the enactment of social justice pedagogy. Picower (2012) describes social justice in classroom settings as “trusting relationships [that] lay the foundation for democratic environments based on care, respect and liberation” (p. 6). Dover (2009), drawing from Carlisle et al. (2006), further defines social justice education through the enactment of the following five principles: “Inclusion and Equity; High Expectations; Reciprocal Community Relationships; System-Wide Approach; and Direct Social Justice Education and Intervention” (in Dover, 2009, p.509). Rather than characterizing social justice pedagogy as an addition to teacher preparation, teacher educators need to develop a deep understanding of how it might be integrated fully within the undergraduate academic programs of a university major for all future teachers

Mills and Ballantyne (2016) synthesized the past ten years of research on social justice and teacher education; their review identified four central components: 1. Teacher preparation programs where students frequently examined beliefs and attitudes on social justice and diversity; 2. Documented shifts in students' beliefs over the lifecycle of an academic program; 3. Extensive field experiences and service-learning that build upon and deepen

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a strong social justice focus and; 4. Coursework and preparation that did not shy away from critically examining the challenges and opportunities present in centering social justice and equity within the teaching profession and in teacher education (p. 264).

Liberal Arts Education and the Professional Landscape for College Graduates

The Association of American Colleges and Universities conducted a comprehensive employer report (2006) to identify the essential skills and outcomes required of employees in today's complex global economy. Above all recommendations, the report cited that the skills, knowledge, and disposition developed through a liberal arts education were most essential for today's complex and competitive global workforce. Employers prioritized the balance of a broad range of knowledge with the technical skills needed for any field. In addition, employers cautioned against overlooking the importance of this broad and comprehensive approach to higher education by focusing solely on the discrete skills required of a specific professional field. With this emphasis on the liberal arts, we are particularly interested in the relationship between a liberal arts college's commitment to social justice, high-quality teacher preparation for a complex professional landscape, and the intersection of that learning and discovery through community-based learning experiences. Community-engagement within a liberal arts program can be understood as the alignment of core academic outcomes and learning experiences within a course that partners with a community-partner. Brukardt et al. (as cited in Mull, 2010, p. 19) characterize community engagement as a method to "renew the civic mission of higher education and to expand the learning and discovery that has been at the foundation of the academy." Mull (2010) further aligns community engagement and teacher preparation when she writes, "Community-based pedagogy can increase preservice teachers' engagement with course content, enhance participants' civic and social responsibility, encourage innovative pedagogy among faculty, and contribute to the development of quality education for diversity" (p. 23). While teacher preparation programs have long required field-based teaching

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experience to meet state licensure requirements, we distinctly consider those community experiences that occur outside of classrooms so that students can examine the “interconnections between their experience and their responsibilities as members of social or professional communities (St. Mary’s College of California, 2020).

By prioritizing the value of a liberal arts education, we developed an undergraduate major/teacher education pathway that aligned the hallmarks of a liberal arts education with the needs of today’s teaching landscape. Roose and Zande (2005) align excellence in teacher education with the liberal arts as “preparing preservice teachers who are broadly educated, have a strong command of content knowledge and pedagogy, and are thoughtful and discerning professionals. Students from such an institution are active learners, critical thinkers, problem solvers, decision-makers and risk takers” (p. 5). Furthermore, we argue that the liberal arts teacher preparation is particularly poised to offer a nuanced and comprehensive program to develop social justice when institutions leverage the following: a vast array of content-area coursework through a core curriculum, a commitment to community engagement and field-based experiences, and a social justice and equity framework to situate the major through which students are credentialed.

A Justice, Community and Leadership Framework for Undergraduate Teacher Education

Critical theory is a key component of student learning. Utilizing the Freirean pedagogy of co-education and theory to praxis, faculty and students collaborate on creating knowledge in the classroom and working in the community. Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970, 2018) is revisited by students several times in the program, as they get deeper into analyzing what it means to create liberatory spaces and the radical potential of education. Students read feminist theorist hooks (1994) to understand intersectionality, feminism, and black feminist thought as well as to explore oppression and liberation. Students are exposed to scholar-activists, such as Ginwright (2009), who writes about urban education and the need for what he calls radical healing.

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Ginwright offers a window into how to empower young students to create change in the world, recognizing the need for teachers to help heal the trauma experienced by racism. Throughout the program, students are exposed to authors with a multicultural education framework (i.e., Gay, 2018; May & Sleeter, 2010; Oakes, 2015), that challenges them to evaluate their own internal biases, examine the structures of oppression, and understand how teachers play a critical role in deconstructing racism, sexism, ableism, and homophobia.

Students take multiple community engagement classes. However, as research shows, without proper preparation to work in communities, this sort of service-learning can actually inflict harm on the partner communities and reify existing biases in students (Stoeker, 2016). Pre-service teachers must have an asset-based approach to their school communities and families, which we foster through targeted community engagement experiences. From comprehensive research on collaborative community engagement Mule (2010) notes, “Teacher education for diversity should involve a combination of university/college, school and community-based activities” (p. 121). Thus, community engagement is multifaceted, fully embedded in the curricula of a liberal arts program. Institutional level commitment and sustained support are the critical mechanisms required for its enactment.

The Teachers for Tomorrow Program at Saint Mary’s College of California

Founded by the Christian Brothers, a Catholic order founded over 300 years ago by John Baptiste De La Salle to teach the poor, Saint Mary’s College of California has a long history of supporting teacher education and its mission of educating the whole person. The Teachers for Tomorrow program (TFT) first began in the 1980s as the Diversified Liberal Arts major to align with the mission. The program changed its name and curriculum twice in the 1990s, first to Liberal Studies and then to Liberal & Civic Studies. For many years St. Mary’s program mirrored others across the state as a 4 year Liberal Studies program with a 5th year to complete the credential and optional Masters in Teaching. TFT was a signature program of the College and produced

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students with successful long term teaching careers (Brunetti & Marston, 2018).

Like other Liberal Studies programs, the required courses for TFT across the sciences, humanities and social sciences offered a breadth of exposure to fields of study but did not address the growing and distinct needs in California for teachers who had a much greater understanding of the multicultural context of their students, families and school communities. As the College changed its general education requirements, or core curriculum, to explore global perspectives, American diversity, and community engagement, the Liberal and Civic Studies Program began to reimagine its major with more of a critical grounding in social justice and equity. As a mission-based Catholic Liberal Arts College, the program had the advantage of a mission with the core values of concern for the poor, addressing the whole needs of the student, respect for all persons, and social justice. The faculty wanted to strengthen the program by reducing some of the interdisciplinary requirements (reducing breadth) while adding more depth. The program faculty rewrote the mission statement, learning objectives, and course offerings to focus on equity, leadership, and justice. These changes also aligned with the College's Academic Blueprint of curricular programming that responded to societal needs and characterization of students as servant-leaders.

In 2014, LCS became the Justice, Community, and Leadership Program (JCL), developing a deeper focus on critical pedagogies, with a commitment to equity and liberatory education. In a year-long process, the faculty surveyed current and former students, invited key partners throughout the campus from different schools and units, and researched other programs throughout the country. Working-groups were tasked to develop new courses, learning goals, curriculum maps, and pre-service teacher community engagement experiences. We created courses and experiences that educate students on histories and critical theories about systems of oppression (e.g., race, class, gender, sexuality, abilities, environmental) on a local, national, and global scale. Using counter-narratives and stories, critical self-reflection, and an intentional learning community, the program helps develop empathy, cultural humility, and allyship. Creating a strong department culture is

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critical, and JCL faculty regularly conduct assessments, collect student feedback, and hold workshops and retreats to evaluate our strengths, areas of development, and student needs. This ensures consistent evaluation, growth, and change.

In the U.S., approximately 83% of the teaching workforce is White (Colby & Ortmon, 2015), and the JCL program demographics tend to mirror national averages, with the vast majority of our students also identifying as women. Consistent with the research on race, social justice, and teacher education (e.g., Picower, 2012) many students enter the major with little to no experience examining teaching as a political act, rooted in systemic inequity and oppression. In addition, consistent with the JCL program's theoretical orientation, is a coordinated effort to diversify the teaching pool to better represent the demographics of the state of California, which is 59% White, 39% Latinx, and 5.8% Black (Census, 2018). To recruit more students (and future teachers) of color, we also created targeted transfer program articulation agreements with local community colleges identifying as Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI). With the growth and expansion of the major, the college also went from one full-time faculty member to five. JCL has added four tenure-track faculty, all faculty of color. Through ongoing meetings, the development of symposia, speaker series, and maintaining an active and present voice on the campus, the JCL faculty and staff continually evaluate actions based on the mission of the program and college, understanding our focus and commitment to social justice as both embodied and ongoing.

Teaching and Learning in the Justice, Community and Leadership Major

Justice, Community, and Leadership (JCL) is an interdisciplinary program in which students learn how to analyze and engage with some of the most pressing social, educational, and environmental justice issues of our times. While the teaching credential programs and pedagogy are offered outside of the JCL major within the Teacher Education Department, the JCL program courses interweave foundational theories and perspectives on schooling, equity, and society into all major courses. Through

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training in critical theory, leadership studies, policy and education, and with an emphasis on humility and self-reflection, we prepare our students to participate in and lead collective endeavors to make the world a better place.

One of the challenges to create an integrated program in a liberal arts school is managing the major requirements, CTC standards, and the general education requirement (core requirements at Saint Mary's). In revising the major, we aligned classes with the core. For example, our Introductory class meets 3 requirements: community engagement, common good, and American diversity. The Environmental Justice course meets global perspective, and our theory and methods class meets the university's social/historical/cultural core requirement. We have also embedded some of the Teacher Performance Expectations (TPEs) in JCL courses. We also created partial credit courses to enhance some of their applied learning, for example, Outdoor Education, Using the Garden as a Classroom; or Mini Math and Science Games for the Classroom. We have three capstone courses on critical self-reflection, community engagement, and research that are designed for students to demonstrate their growth in our learning outcomes. The program learning outcomes reflect the need to develop teachers who are engaged critical thinkers committed to the common good (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Justice, Community, and Leadership Major Learning Outcomes

- Knowledge.** Demonstrate an understanding of engaged pedagogy, critical theory, and social systems as related to justice and leadership studies and be able to apply theoretical explanations to empirical examples.
 - Research.** Use data analysis and interpretation, appropriate library and information literacy skills, and field research to articulate and interpret the complexities of significant social issues.
 - Application.** By using leadership studies and critical theory, assess a complex social or community issue and develop multiple viable strategies that contribute to a more just social order.
 - Communication.** Effectively use oral, written, and new media formats to educate, advocate, and collaborate with multiple audiences.
 - Reflection.** Demonstrate, through written and oral self-assessment and reflection, an understanding of the impact of their own academic learning experience and how it prepares them for a life of active citizenship.
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Many of our courses include working with community members and organizations to learn from their expertise on both the impact of and ideas for addressing structural inequity. Together with these community experts, we grapple with the complexity of policies, laws, and cultural practices that disadvantage some groups of people while benefiting others and consider how we can be a part of leading for social change. Students in our program go on to work in diverse fields—education, the non-profit sector, law, social entrepreneurship, government, and public health—yet they share a common aim to make the world more socially just.

As another example, in the introductory course, JCL 10, students learn about community engagement theories and best practices while conducting direct service with an agency or school in the Bay Area. In the capstone community engagement class, student groups work collaboratively with a community partner on a project. Past projects have included an array of outcomes such as a gap analysis for a local homeless shelter, a college resource website for first-generation college students, training videos for parents with special needs children, institutional histories, and co-created curriculum on diversity for school districts.

When the pandemic altered the semester in spring 2020, students pivoted to help their partners cope with new and urgent needs, helping to develop websites, wellness resources, and community outreach strategies. This capstone class on community engagement also uses theory to praxis by asking students to interrogate systemic oppression and apply their leadership theory to an anti-racist agenda. To be in community and in collaboration with its members is a much different type of service than “volunteering” to “help” or “save” a community. It’s critical that teachers see themselves as partners in the communities in which they serve and value the assets and strengths the community and families bring. Working with Komives’s *Leadership for a Better World, Understanding the Social Change Model of Leadership Development* (2016), students reframe leadership from a top-down approach to a collaborative, community-centered theory that fosters capacity building spaces to create change. This theory to praxis approach enables students to see their classrooms as a microcosm of the larger social, political, economic, and cultural

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structures of our society and see themselves as agents of change.

Since its inception, the JCL major has become the fastest-growing major in the School of Liberal Arts, seeing a 40% increase in students, with a 100% job placement rate. The Association of American Colleges and Universities recognized JCL along with 21 other colleges for innovative curriculum design, and the program was chosen as one of 9 departments to be featured case studies of civic learning programs (Longo et al., 2017). This recognition spotlights the growing demand and importance of rethinking the liberal studies model of undergraduate teacher education programs for a deeper focus on equity. With an increase in the ethnic, linguistic, and economic diversity in the population, and amid a national conversation on racism, sexism, and homophobia, it is more prescient than ever that teacher education programs respond to the call to educate for justice.

Towards Embodied Justice, Community, and Leadership in Teacher Education

While elementary education undergraduate majors still remain the most common path to the profession, liberal arts colleges often prioritize a major outside of the credential area that supports a cross-disciplinary approach to entering the teaching profession (Datawheel, 2020). Lederhouse (2014) contends that liberal arts preparation provides a means to prepare teachers who are agents of change, embodying justice, making ethical and reasoned decisions, and acting in a Christ-like manner. We concur with this assertion and believe that critical thinking, concise writing, teamwork, and strong verbal communication skills are integral in the art and science of effective instruction. We strive to train culturally-responsive teachers for students with diverse needs and backgrounds—teachers who are prepared to make thousands of moment-by-moment decisions with a breadth of knowledge to make connections across content areas. We believe that we have an opportunity to repair this divide with liberal arts, mission-driven education that both coexists with and complements teacher preparation, simultaneously improving teacher preparation processes and elevating the profession.

Liberal arts education and teacher preparation programs are

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increasingly attending to the need for a more deliberately inclusive curriculum, however, the JCL model shifts this priority to the foreground. McDonald and Zeichner (2008) assert:

The term social justice will simply highlight existing practices such as a course on multicultural education or placements with students in diverse schools, and may do so without significantly considering how such offerings support a programmatic social justice mission. . . . If social justice teacher education is to become more than rhetoric and more than merely a celebration of diversity, we argue that it must strive to take a different path. (p. 595)

Studies relevant to an undergraduate major are highly formative in the life cycle of a student and the student's subsequent professional path. Thus, integrating the principles of equity and justice within an undergraduate major, separate from but central to the credential teacher preparation, presents unique possibilities for how we aim to prepare teachers sensitive to the realities of the profession who hold deep conviction to improve them.

As we write, the nation struggles with a global pandemic—COVID-19; however, the widespread pandemic of racism and systemic inequity long precedes and will endure beyond the year 2020. In that sense, the liberal arts program provided in JCL feels more urgent than ever. Kumashiro (2015), describing social justice teaching, writes that it “involves preparing students to succeed in whatever context they find themselves, including contexts that privilege and value the dominant narrative, the mainstream culture, the ‘traditional values,’ and the rules for succeeding that are often unspoken and taken-for-granted” (p. xxv). Thus, to ultimately transgress the systemic inequities pervasive in schools and communities, requires future teachers to engage in a comprehensive interdisciplinary study of justice, community, and leadership that is all too often siloed into just a handful of courses.

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Less Test-Taking and More Care-Taking: Teacher Educators Explore Identity in a Changing World

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Abstract

Through a collaborative self-study of course redesign, we examined the process of restructuring our courses within a socio-cultural context of teaching. Specifically, we explored the shifts we made in course transformation as we reconsidered dominant frameworks while reflecting on our practices, an exploration that allowed us to reconfigure our teacher educator identities. Our experiences as teacher educators during this unprecedented COVID 19 crisis, in conjunction with racial, political and economic challenges, spotlighted the necessity for trauma-informed pedagogy work. This work is significant, as it documents how the ongoing stress with remote teaching has dramatically intensified, for both ourselves personally and as teacher educators, and naturally, for our teacher candidates (TCs), many of whom had families to care for at home and jobs to juggle alongside coursework. Through our self-reflections and dialogues, we observed how the traumas and conflicts that our communities experienced urged us to shift and create space for mindfulness, socioemotional learning, and trauma-informed pedagogy. This self-study empowered us to begin necessary change and provide mutual support for each other as teacher educators.

Keywords: Teacher identity, caring, trauma, course transformation

Less Test-Taking and More Care-Taking

In the Spring of 2020, just prior to the COVID-19 crisis, we, the authors, had begun an examination of our courses with an eye to transforming them to meet the needs of our teacher candidates (TCs) who will be entering 21st century classrooms. We were already critical of our courses that had been recently rewritten to address new Teacher Performance Expectations (TPEs) as required by the State Credentialing Commission, because we felt there was too much emphasis on standards that were not responsive to meeting the learning needs and differences of either our TCs, or of the children in their future classrooms. The call for this work was intensified when schools closed in March 2020, people were quarantined, and remote teaching became a requirement. Social and emotional learning (SEL) needs moved to the forefront as children and their families, teachers and teacher educators, all struggled to grapple with new learning and teaching challenges amidst uncertainties such as business closures, shortages, and difficulties meeting basic needs. Learning opportunities and gaps were spotlighted as children from low income families dealt with the lack of technology to support remote learning, and schools scrambled to provide even the basics like meals, learning materials (sometimes in the form of packets delivered to families' homes) or Internet connectivity and tools (such as hotspots, Chromebooks or laptops) for their communities. As teacher educators, we struggled to provide relevant learning opportunities for our TCs—many of whom also lacked sufficient tools to learn in a fully-remote environment—while grappling with our own personal challenges. This paper explores the changing priorities and identities of three teacher educators as they transformed their courses in a time of multiple societal challenges.

Conceptual Framework

Calling on Wertsch et al. (1993) to elaborate on why socio-cultural lenses are valuable for educational research, Lasky (2005) notes that, “what individuals believe, and how individuals think and act is always shaped by cultural, historical, and social structures” (p. 900). Similarly, Shepard et al. (2018) draw on the work of Vygotsky to argue that sociocultural theory “goes further in acknowledging how it is that one’s cognitive development and

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social identity are jointly constituted through participation in multiple social worlds of family, community, and school” (p. 23). In that regard, we locate our self-study within the specific social and cultural context of the United States in 2020, as the country grappled with various crises that fundamentally altered our day-to-day lives and called into question dominant frameworks for doing teacher education work. Significantly, the sociocultural context compelled us to consider our own identities as human beings belonging to various communities as we struggled to stay afloat and simultaneously adapt our courses. As a result of our varied social interactions, our team learned from one another and contended with our ways of knowing and doing the work of teacher education (Wetzel et al., 2019).

In a study of teacher educators’ identities, Webre (2020) uses the concept of *curricularizing* to explore how teacher educators make choices in their courses and programs within the context of various and often conflicting forces. For example, argues Webre, sociocultural factors such as national environments—including ideologies, policies, and structures—might run counter to factors in the professional field, such as relationships, networks, and discourses prevalent in communities of practice. However, Webre (2020) reminds us that “the teacher educator is an individual, who brings all their experience, expertise, and personal beliefs to their practice” (p. 17); this accounts for the different ways that teacher educators curricularize—how they make choices about what will be taught and how it will be delivered. In other words, individual teacher educators mediate sociocultural factors in macro and micro contexts through the filters of their own lived experiences. Erickson et al. (2011) suggest that when teacher educators examine their own practices, and the meanings they attach to those practices, they become more aware of the “boundaries and definitions” of their own identities as teacher educators— a distinction the authors encapsulate as “doing teacher education” versus “being a teacher educator” (p. 106).

Research on teacher educator identities has expanded considerably in the last 15 years, building off the broader body of research about teacher identity in K-12 contexts (e.g., Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004; Smit et al., 2010;

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Zembylas, 2010). One of the first major explorations of teacher educator identity emerged in 2011, in a special journal issue that specifically attended to “the complexities of lived experience and theoretical plurality” of teacher educator identity-making (Erickson et al., p. 105). Indeed, both within the special issue and in studies since, studies of teacher educator identity highlight the ways teacher educators manage conflicting roles and expectations (Clift, 2011), as well as real-world challenges and emotional tensions (Izadinia, 2014). More recently, in another special issue, a collective of teacher educators addressed the theme of “transforming teacher education” (Baker-Doyle, 2019); some articles emphasized how teacher educators’ own identities shaped the nature and transformation of their teacher education practices (Quan, et al., 2019; Navarro, et al., 2019). These recent studies further Webre’s notion (2020) that individual life histories and identities are brought to bear as teacher educators “curricularize,” making choices about what to include in their teacher education courses while also working within dominant frameworks or standards for the profession, such as Teaching Performance Expectations (TPEs).

Breault (2013) calls for teacher educators to reflect on their beliefs and identities as they build their professional identity as teachers, and the present context reminds us that identity develops as a result of experiences and situations that provide opportunities for reflection (Quezada et al., 2020). In that regard, it is notable that many teacher educator identity studies in the last decade have used self-study as a meaningful and productive methodology. Chang et al. (2016) claim a key role for self-study methodology:

This type of research is critical in the field of teacher education, as what university faculty say, do, and model has a tremendous impact upon future educators. Teacher educators taking on a self-study inquiry become actively engaged in the research and reflection process, rather than acting as passive evaluators. (Chang et al., 2016, p. 156)

Furthermore, “self-study research is an effective approach which significantly impacts on teacher educators’ identity development” (Izadinia, 2014, p. 438). Put differently, when teacher educators engage in self-study, they become more aware of their identities

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as teacher educators, which can activate their sense of agency (Martin, 2018).

In our self-study, we looked to the changing educational landscape over the last 15 years, as researchers and practitioners have called for holistic approaches to teaching that emphasize concepts such as social and emotional learning (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013), restorative practice (Mirsky, 2007), and mindfulness (Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2016). Likewise, the nation's ongoing reckoning with racism has led to educational interventions such as cultural responsiveness (Sleeter, 2011), antiracism (Kendi, 2019), abolitionist teaching (Love, 2019), and equity literacy (Gorski, 2018). Given the sociocultural context that has necessitated such approaches, trauma-informed pedagogies have also become essential, as teachers must take into account how trauma influences student behavior and performance. Lawson et al. (2019) argue that a trauma-informed approach aids educators in supporting the “mental, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being” of their students (p. 424). The authors lament that trauma-informed teaching has not been widely prioritized in educational policies or in preservice education of teachers. In their view, failure to integrate this approach has led to further *secondary traumatic stress* (STS), defined as “the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person” (Figley, 1995, p. 7).

The various crises in 2020 highlighted the individual, collective, and generational traumas students may bring to the classroom and caused teacher educators to face additional challenges in their work with teacher candidates. During this time of substantial trauma, it is critical for teacher educators to reflect on their role in the shaping of future teachers, especially since “personal factors play a large role in shaping one's teacher professional identity” (Hsieh, 2016, p. 94). Thus, the traumas we experience, and the secondary trauma we face in our work with preservice teachers, compel us to rethink the dominant frameworks that have shaped teachers' professional identities and to confront the realities the current sociocultural context has unearthed.

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Methods

Our purpose for this qualitative collaborative self-study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was to explore how our identities as teacher educators acted upon and were impacted by the transformation of our courses. We had begun the process shortly before the COVID-19 lockdowns and other national crises moved to the forefront; our priorities necessarily shifted as the move to remote teaching changed the way we "do" education. Through individual planning and collective discussions via Zoom, we examined our courses for opportunities to co-construct curriculum with our teacher candidates, prioritize their identities and individual needs, and authentically serve them; all of these reflective and constructive acts contributed to this self-study.

Data Collection

The post-baccalaureate teacher education program in which we work is housed within a non-parochial, private Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), located in California. During the summer of 2020, we examined the courses prior to transformation through three data sources: course syllabi, journal entries, and transcripts of seven Zoom meetings among the three of us. Zoom meetings were utilized to discuss the status of our courses prior to the pandemic and to provide the point of departure for the transformation process. These sessions were also used to discuss ongoing issues amongst us as teacher educators. During this time, previous course syllabi were reviewed with the lens of course transformation. Identity work contributed to our conversations as we moved forward with this shift. We used personal journal entries to reflect after Zoom sessions, in which we discussed our transformation process, to consider interesting points of conversation with our TCs regarding identity work, and to record analytic notes during the reading of our transcripts. This writing practice allowed us to reflect throughout this phase one cycle. Transcripts of our Zoom meetings assisted us in this reflective process as we began the shift in focus of our three courses. Analytic notes which emerged from journaling were then shared collectively, discussed, and reviewed.

Data Analysis

We applied process coding (Saldana, 2016) and focused coding (Charmaz, 2014) to analyze and interpret data sets. This analysis involved examining transcribed meeting notes, course syllabi, and self-reflective journal writing related to course transformation. We met several times to discuss and code the transcripts, artifacts, and journal writing which were cross-referenced to determine patterns. We began with process coding of journal entries, course syllabi, and transcripts of Zoom conversations. Utilizing verbs during the coding process captured our doing in teacher education. “*Doing* teacher education involves engaging in practices that are characteristic of participation as a teacher educator” (Erickson et al., 2011, p. 106).

Initial categories of this first cycle coding included questioning credential requirements, allowing ourselves to prioritize self-care, and critically examining assignments and expectations in courses. Second cycle focus coding (Charmaz, 2014) developed these initial categories into themes: content and pedagogy, our identities as educators, and responding to needs of teacher candidates. Emic codes that arose from the data highlighted our ongoing trauma. These codes include: straining under tensions from outside forces, engaging in ongoing identity work, and disrupting the dominant course narrative. All three researchers met regularly to discuss and refine codes, determine categories, and develop themes using the focused coding method. Reflexivity was supported by coding all data individually and then meeting as a group to discuss our two cycle coding process.

One of the most essential aspects of research is the positionality of those involved in designing, conducting, and reporting on it. In our case, we are three teacher educators at a Hispanic-Serving Institution 35 miles east of Los Angeles. Christian is a gay, cisgender Latino male who worked as a high school teacher and teacher trainer in Los Angeles County for 10 years. His research agenda explores teacher movements, teacher activism, and teacher identity in both the United States and Mexico. Marga is a white, middle class, heterosexual female who taught middle school for 13 years and has now been a teacher educator for 19 years. The heart of her work centers around literacy and

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supporting all students through an understanding of neurodiversity, particularly the ways that an understanding of neuroscience and education can support teachers in creating positive, engaging learning spaces, and the impact of social emotional learning for teachers and their students. Nancy is a white middle class heterosexual female who has worked in middle school for 8 years and in teacher education for 23 years. She focuses on the intersection of literacy, identity, and autobiographical work as a teacher educator in support of teacher candidates becoming change agents in the contexts of teaching and learning.

Findings

Our data revealed congruence across our work and within ourselves as teacher educators. In this section, we describe tensions that we felt in our sociocultural contexts, shifts we noted in our personal and professional identities, and possibilities we identified for disrupting dominant narratives and frameworks in our courses.

Straining Under Tensions from Outside Forces

A common theme in our course transformation work is the tensions from outside forces that impact our roles as teacher educators. One of the most dominant forces in California is the influence of the Teacher Performance Assessments (TPAs) and TPEs, which detail nearly 40 different skills/capacities across six main standards. In 2017, with the recognition that our program accreditation would rely in part on how well our courses aligned with all those standards, our teacher education program launched a reconfigured set of courses largely determined by the TPEs. This included ensuring that each standard was introduced, practiced, and assessed across our credential program of eight courses. We mapped this scaffolded approach via an extensive matrix that was submitted to the California Commission of Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) prior to our February 2020 accreditation visit, just one month before the COVID-19 lockdown.

Over the last few years since our program re-launch, our team had expressed critiques about the new curricular structure and alignment. For example, Christian was concerned that the TPEs

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were dominating the curriculum too much, making it difficult to address the unique needs and perspectives of his students. He wrote in a journal entry, “Covering so much loses the holistic perspective of teaching and modeling best practices. To engage kids, we need to show care.” In other words, in trying to teach to all the various TPEs, teacher educators lose the capacity to adapt and respond meaningfully to the needs of our TCs, making the learning experience fragmented and disconnected. In one session with the research team, Christian asked, “When you spend time covering all of these requirements, when do you address care and how to survive as a teacher educator?” His comments reflect how teacher educators contend with dominant frameworks that may not include what they personally know or believe to be essential to good teaching.

These dilemmas emerged for Marga and Nancy as well. In a journal entry, Marga wrote:

I could write about tensions all day. Where to begin? I feel like a puppet with multiple strings: we have university requirements about how to teach and what tools to use, commission requirements about standards we have to cover, and preparing our candidates for the TPAs and assessments that they have to pass.

These dominant frameworks led Marga to feel pressured to teach to the tests by focusing on test-prep strategies as well as content that specifically related to test questions or themes. Nancy noted that these pressures affected TCs as well:

I felt that my TCs were so consumed with trying to pass the state examinations that they missed learning opportunities in my courses. I realized that I needed to shift the priorities in the course and focus on the bigger picture of literacy instruction. I also was sensitive to the stress of my students trying to pass the state exams, and that has taken its toll on me.

Nancy’s desire for her students to have a well-established foundation in literacy led her to focus on strengthening and diversifying her teaching methods in both in face to face and remote settings to achieve this goal. Alongside the TPEs, however, are various other frameworks that shaped the nature of our courses.

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For example, Marga talked about having also to introduce students to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), as well as disciplinary standards such as the NGSS.

As a result of the pressure felt from dominant frameworks such as the TPEs, state examinations like the Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA®), requirements for TCs to pass the TPAs, and standards in the different disciplines, we felt that the way we were teaching about teaching reflected a technical approach that did not prioritize enough of what we believed to be the most crucial aspects of the teacher's role. This includes caring and responsiveness, which can positively impact K-12 students, particularly those who come from traumatic backgrounds (Cozolino, 2013). We also felt that these technical frameworks were decontextualized from the changing social and political climate in the United States and neglected more contemporary approaches that made space for antiracism, neurodiversity, and trauma-informed teaching. Nancy wrote, "The TPEs feel like a reflection on an older time, an outdated idea that significant inequities in our schools could be resolved through mandated processes and procedures. The standards don't reflect on what teaching and learning needs to be." Nancy's initial concerns about the TPEs led her to create conversations and applications using a funds of knowledge lens (Moll et al., 1992) where teacher candidates draw from their knowledge and the knowledge of their students. Though each of us had made minor changes to our courses—or what Marga called "rearranging pieces on a chess board"—we did not feel a real sense of collective effort to meaningfully transform our classes in ways that challenged dominant narratives or frameworks.

Ongoing Identity Work

Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) explain that "a teacher's identity shifts over time under the influence of a range of factors both internal to the individual, such as emotion...and external to the individual, such as job and life experiences in particular contexts" (p. 177). We previously noted how standards, frameworks, and examinations inhibited our sense of teaching from a holistic and responsive point of view. COVID-19, the Black Lives Matter

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movement, and the economic crisis deepened these concerns and caused emotional turmoil as we tried to adapt to new national and global contexts for both our home and work lives. We realized that our course transformation called for self-reflection with new lenses and a deeper examination of our goals for the courses, particularly our roles within them. We began to feel the strain of trying to adapt courses for remote teaching, while acknowledging the needs of our traumatized students, supporting our colleagues, and struggling with our own senses of self. The awareness of this strain allowed us to be more open about considering and validating other types of trauma, which in turn has reshaped our understanding of our identities as teacher educators.

One way that our personal experiences with trauma changed our identities was through the prioritization of care and social emotional well-being. Nancy said:

I think now more than ever, relationship building is critical in our teaching. For the first time in teaching this class, I noticed students showing up to the class early and staying after class to talk to myself and each other. There seems to be a need to connect and share both the positive and negative updates in our lives.

Nancy identified that her role had shifted into that of a caregiver providing space for honest conversations about the impact of the pandemic as well as discussions about how to prioritize care as a key dimension of the classroom environment. Christian concurred with this idea:

The pandemic revealed that we were not talking about how to care enough in our courses. Our courses talk about RTI and PBIS, and these systems are necessary, but they appear as add-ons and don't reflect the holistic picture necessary to demonstrate care. This fall, we need to ask ourselves if we are modeling care for our students, so that they can show that same care for their students.

Marga noted a unique level of challenge at the start of the fall session:

This was *the* hardest beginning of the semester. Ever. It was the perfect storm of remote teaching, larger class load, recruiting and supporting adjuncts to cover new classes,

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and providing support for them as they got added to the University's systems. I am feeling stretched thin. As a result, Marga realized that she needed to be very particular about prioritizing time for self-care, and to be even more explicit about teaching her TCs how to balance their own needs with the pressures they were facing during the pandemic and will face as classroom teachers. Marga's statement aligns with Beauchamp and Thomas' (2009) argument that particularly emotional periods in teachers' lives affect their senses of self, and shape how they feel about the profession.

The shifting priorities and emotional turbulence brought on by the dual pandemic deepened Christian's sense of identity crisis. In a journal entry at the start of the fall semester, he wrote:

I recognize that I am experiencing a lot of trauma and so are my students. I need to consider my own needs and how I will survive the year ahead. I cannot help my students if I don't take care of myself. That means setting up healthy boundaries and being willing to say no to things or recalibrate my capacities to do certain tasks.

Christian's comments align with Zembylas (2003), who defines emotions "not only as matters of personal (private) dispositions or psychological qualities, but also as social and political experiences that are constructed by how one's work (in this case, the teaching) is organized and led" (p. 216). In this instance, the social and political context of the lockdown, the civil unrest across the nation, the tensions around the presidential election, and the ways teaching was reconstructed in the remote environment all shaped Christian's need to redefine his personal sense of self and his professional identity. As a result of these emotions, Christian had to reconcile that, in the context of the "new normal," he must change his sense of responsiveness to include forgiveness, flexibility, and experimentation. This included resigning from committee and leadership positions to provide more time for self-care.

As we grappled with how to adapt to rapidly-changing conditions, some of them positively impacting our TCs, such as the postponement of high-stakes credential assessments, we realized that being able to focus on our students' well-being would

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fundamentally change the kinds of pedagogy we were modeling. In other words, by focusing less on tests, we were able to elevate aspects of the TPEs (2016) that had not been prioritized, such as “fostering a caring community” (2.1), “opportunities for students to support each other” (4.4), or exhibiting “positive dispositions of caring, support, acceptance, and fairness” (6.2). For example, Nancy noted that pulling back on the RICA “allowed more space to learn more about my students and how they see themselves as teachers moving forward in their careers.” As she dedicated more time to building connections with students, she made some adjustments to her curriculum to incorporate discussions of teacher identity, recognizing that teacher candidates needed to better understand not only the students they teach, but themselves as well. Nancy observed:

Many of my students realized how their current situation will continue to shape how they see themselves as educators and consider the support that they will need to be successful in the classroom. They are just beginning to understand how the identity of school can conflict with their personal identities.

Nancy realized that these discussions with her TCs would not have occurred without the shift in curriculum and her re-prioritizing the role of identity in the shaping of a teacher. Nancy continued to provide opportunities for teacher candidates to deconstruct, reflect and consider how their own experiences inside and outside of school can be utilized to enrich their instruction and inform their navigation of school culture.

Marga’s work in the neurosciences and the implications for how current research in learning and the brain can shape teaching was also highlighted by the shift to remote learning as the world went into lockdown. Marga recognized that it was essential to share the research on the negative impact that both short and long-term stressors have on learning, especially in regards to her TCs who were challenged by any combination of the following: 1) managing their own children’s schooling at home; 2) struggling economically; 3) dealing with their own illnesses, and/or their family members’ illness or deaths; 4) a sense of helplessness and isolation. Furthermore, Marga realized the importance of sharing

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the work by Cozolino (2013) in regards to the social nature of learning, and Shankar's (2017) work on "limbic contagion." These concepts are important. As TCs recognize the importance of their own emotional state and the impact their level of wellness has on their students, they can become—through self-care—fulcrums for more emotionally balanced students in the classroom, thus supporting increased learning outcomes. Therefore, time was spent every week to address SEL. This included different self-balancing techniques such as mindful moments (e.g. Five Finger breathing, or GoNoodle Empower Tools 2016), uplifting activities and check-ins such as a shared Google doc in which TCs post links to sites they enjoy when they are taking a break, and playful activities like Kahoot! games to review content.

Overall, the complex societal shifts we experienced as a nation reshaped our teaching and reconfigured our teacher identities. We prioritized social-emotional well-being, care, and reflection as essential components of teaching and learning and allowed ourselves some grace when we became overwhelmed with expanded responsibilities and expectations. Our conclusion was that, in modeling pedagogies that focused less on test-taking and more on caretaking, we were challenging dominant narratives about what it means to be a teacher.

Disrupting the Dominant Course Narrative

Over the course of the Spring 2020 semester, the three of us revised our course syllabi to respond to the changed environment. While we knew that our courses needed to remain standards-based, we felt able to prioritize responsiveness and personal care for our TCs. The continued postponement of state examinations for credentialing through Fall 2020 opened up further space for transforming our curriculum in ways that spoke to the current moment, in which the country grappled with the massive trauma of the COVID-19 crisis, a depressed economy, increased violence, reckonings with systemic racism, and shuttered schools. The dominant narratives of the past, which aimed to professionalize teachers via technical frameworks that deprioritized elements like care, healing, or activism, needed to be set aside as we reimaged our curriculum and pedagogy for the present and future.

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For Christian, “meeting the moment” meant overhauling the themes and topics in his Foundations of Teaching course. As a gay Latino educator, he wanted students to develop vocabulary about systemic racism, antiracism, trauma-informed pedagogy, mindfulness, and care and to cultivate the “ability to self-reflect on how these ideas relate to their own personal experiences and the professional practices/identities they will manifest in the classroom/school setting.” To achieve these goals, Christian added new articles and resources into the course, starting the first week with Tatum’s “The Complexity of Identity” (2000). Paired with an article on teacher identity, the focus of that initial session was for students to acknowledge that their personal and professional identities are dynamic and informed by one another. To maintain the throughline of teacher identity, Christian then incorporated articles about diverse teachers in American history to examine how they grappled with social and political tensions of their respective eras, e.g., Eurocentric curriculum in Native American schools (Gere, 2005), the roles of women teachers (Preston, 1993), and the injustice and inequities in African-American schools during Reconstruction (Fultz, 1995). To follow up on the ways that these teachers negotiated their personal and professional identities, TCs then read an article defining equity, in the “Glossary of Education Reform” (2016), as a precursor to writing more extensively about the ways they have experienced privilege or inequity in their own lives. Later in the course, Christian added new readings about antiracism that offered discipline-specific ideas for educators, overviews of abolitionist teaching (Love, 2019), and a resource on trauma-informed pedagogy. These texts speak explicitly to the ways teachers can teach from an antiracist stance and actively work against systemic racism to cultivate their students’ capacities, in an effort to redress historical and contemporary traumas. Pedagogically, Christian also included short breathing and stretching exercises at the beginning and middle of live synchronous sessions and explained how these strategies aimed to reduce stress and promote wellbeing. He located this work within the framework of *border pedagogy* (Ramirez et al., 2016), a culturally-sustaining approach that emphasizes holistic teaching and learning grounded

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in *cariño*, or authentic care.

As Marga reflected on how she transformed her syllabus, she was moved by the question, “How can schools be places where students want to be?” (Milner et al., 2019, Introduction). She kept coming back to that question as a central theme in her discussions with students. In the first few weeks of the semester, students were introduced to and explored Moll et al.’s (1992) article on funds of knowledge (FOK), to examine how their lived experiences shape and are shaping their evolving teacher identities. TCs then read an article about “funds of identity” (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014) which furthered conversations about their own background and life experiences, allowing them to reframe how they might perceive their students’ FOK. To that end, TCs completed an activity created by a colleague called, “Adding Up Assets: Considering Cultural & Linguistic Funds of Knowledge” (Personal Communication, 2020), which validates experiences such as translating for a family member or having had one or more extended family members play a significant role in raising them. This task allowed TCs to practice turning skills traditionally considered as “deficits” into assets, which they then reflected on in journals where they connected personal and professional identities to their own lived experiences. To extend this dialogue, and provide strategies TCs can apply in their classes, TCs chose to complete either a “Self Portrait” activity or a “Significant Circle” activity (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). Both of these activities support TCs’ exploration of how their identities are enacted, and how their experiences connect to their learning and discipline; these activities can easily be implemented in TC’s future classrooms to similarly build asset-based mindsets grounded in funds of identity.

Reflecting on these assignments and students’ responses, Marga found increased support for her holistic view of teaching and learning, which coincides with the research in the neurosciences for whole-person engagement. Marga’s teaching history has been founded largely on building relationships with students and demonstrating caring for them as individuals (Noddings, 2013), and this self-study process supported Marga’s personal view as an educator, allowing her to bring this level of teacher

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care to the forefront. Another significant change to Marga's course was the addition of *"These Kids are Out of Control: Why We Must Reimagine 'Classroom Management' for Equity* (Milner et al., 2019), which replaced a more general classroom management book. Through the new text that specifically applied the lens of equity to classroom management, Marga wanted to give students a framework for creating classroom environments that are engaging and collaborative. Her students also participated in literature circle discussions (Daniels, 2002) with transformative texts about learning through a neuroscience framework (e.g., Whitman & Kelleher, 2016), or through culturally responsive lenses (e.g., Muhammad, 2020). These revisions in the course established a framework for conversations around equity in public schools. Candidates used these texts as leaping off points for a Social Justice in Education assignment. This assignment replaced a more general paper on disciplinary literacies, designed to give TCs the opportunity to merge their identities and target their research on an underserved group highlighted in the texts. In this three-part assignment, TCs found a video to watch related to their chosen topic, then explored research articles and online sources to write a paper that highlighted an issue and included recommendations for classroom practices to support success for all students. This work is exactly the reason Marga became a teacher—to empower students (or TCs in this case) to pursue topics of interest and partake in personal and engaging assignments that serve the needs of both the individuals and the community as a whole.

In her course, Nancy also made significant adaptations to better meet the present moment. She noted that the pressures of covering so much content to meet standards and prepare TCs for required credentialing assessments had limited her capacity to build connections with students. When the assessments were postponed, she realized she could finally give relationships more energy and focus. One way Nancy now cultivates stronger connections is through socioemotional check-ins at the beginning of every class. She observed that, "students share their daily struggles balancing demands of the course, their jobs, and overseeing their children's education plan for that day. The stress

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and anxiety is palpable.” In further reflections on her students’ emotional wellbeing, she suggested that, although it can sometimes be overwhelming to hear about the struggles and traumas of our students—leading to our own secondary trauma—it was essential to model for students what it means to be supportive and caring. Like Marga, Nancy also integrated a funds of knowledge article (Moll et al., 1992) to generate discussion about how teachers can draw on students’ assets and knowledge to cultivate stronger relationships, demonstrate a caring disposition, and reflect on their own identities. She used a textual lineage exercise borrowed from Tatum (2009), to have her students reflect on the ways text and identity are interwoven. In that vein, Nancy added critical literacy discussions, feeling that, “my students struggle with shifting information about COVID and the current political climate. This is giving us many opportunities to discuss strategies for validating credible news sources and how we will work with students to do the same.” It was apparent to Nancy that she needed to increase her skills in evaluating online sources in order to deepen her TC’s understanding of digital literacies so that they, in turn, could model becoming skilled consumers of information for future students.

To conclude, our course transformations were specifically designed to challenge former or normative ways of teaching our classes. This included removing texts to make space for newer, more complex approaches to teaching and learning, especially those attuned to equity and inclusion at a time of great societal discord. Our curricular innovations also emphasized the importance of identity and the ways that reflection on our identities can lead to greater understanding and stronger community bonds in and outside the classroom. Pedagogically, we elevated care and empathy to the forefront of our practices, making space for our TCs to reflect on and care for their emotional well-being through our recognition that the various, overlapping traumas we were all experiencing to various degrees needed to be addressed. These choices also activated our personal sense of professional agency; our capacities to be creative and responsive shifted our own identities as teacher educators and empowered us to make choices that reflected our commitments to healing, care, and activism.

Discussion

When we first began this study in early 2020, many of our course transformation conversations emphasized the need to dismantle systemic barriers to the success of our TCs, and provide guidance for supporting the typically underserved students they will teach in K-12 schools. With the onset of the pandemic, our shared work intensified as we grappled with stay-at-home orders, racial and social unrest, and the need to support students who did not have equitable access to resources needed to engage in online, remote learning. We recognized that our course transformation work was inextricably linked to the paradigmatic shifts in our everyday lives, as well as in our conceptualizations of K-12 and higher education practices.

As we reflected on our data, we found three key themes that surfaced in all of our journals and conversations. The first, tensions from outside forces, has been present for all of us as educators for many years. We have all felt constrained by the requirements to teach to standards imposed on us by remote commissions and policy makers, coupled with the need to “teach to the test” to prepare our TCs for the multiple assessments required for credentialing. Each of us identified practices or components we felt were missing or undervalued, and in many ways these pieces reflected our own personal trajectories as educators. While Christian felt that the program courses failed to adequately address the theme of care, Nancy felt that funds of knowledge needed to be meaningfully incorporated into her classes, and Marga wanted to deepen the focus on how what we learned through the neurosciences impacts literacy development and social emotional learning. As a group, we concurred that dominant frameworks such as the California TPEs, while helpful as a starting point for describing best teaching practices, were missing the kinds of holistic or culturally-relevant pedagogies we knew our TCs needed to experience so that they could better address the sociocultural contexts of their own teaching in the future.

The second theme, identity, came from our own need to examine who we are as teacher educators, and reflect on how our identities have shifted throughout our careers, especially in the present context. The move to remote teaching forced us to

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consider how we built relationships with students in ways that were empathetic and humanizing, in recognition of the multiple traumas we were all feeling and bringing with us to the virtual classroom space. This led to shifts in practice, such as making more time for social-emotional check-ins, both in class and through individual conferences to learn more about students' lives. In changing the ways we did teacher education, we inevitably looked inward and reconfigured our identities as teacher educators, elevating dimensions like care to the forefront of our remote interactions with students. Our analysis surfaced the ways that our beliefs or emotions shaped our practices, which in turn, reflected aspects of our personal and professional identities.

Finally, we recognized a need to disrupt dominant narratives that define K–12 teaching, as well as teacher education. Through our shared work, we realized that in spite of the privileges we each have as tenured faculty members, we nevertheless felt challenged to confront normative thinking in our field. Working as a team allowed us to engage in creative and critical thinking that cultivated a shared sense of agency. We empowered one another to make changes best suited for the new sociocultural contexts of our teaching. Each of us felt that our work was missing a holistic approach, but how we addressed that gap varied considerably. Christian looked to culturally-sustaining frameworks like border pedagogy, which aligned with his personal identity as a Latino educator, while Nancy and Marga focused on concepts like funds of knowledge and funds of identity that reflected their commitments to asset-based teaching. As we reflected on our experiences, we recognized that a trauma-informed approach was necessary, not only to address the traumas our students were sharing with us in and outside of class, but also to take better care of ourselves as teacher educators.

These major themes provide further evidence that teacher educators' practices are intertwined with their teacher identities, and both are shaped by the sociocultural contexts of teaching and learning. While we had already identified major concerns with the dominant frameworks that underpinned our teacher education courses, the crises we experienced in 2020 generated deep traumas that compelled us to lean in to our desire to adopt more

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holistic and humanizing pedagogies that we knew to be at the heart of good teaching. Moreover, working together revealed to us the benefits of collaborating in a self-study, namely “the availability of a variety of perspectives on an area of concern or interest related to teacher education, the opportunity for collegial dialogue around teacher education practices, and the space... for community building” (Chang, et al., 2016, p. 156).

Implications and Future Research

In our combined 87 years in the field of education, we have never met anyone who became a teacher because they wanted to help students learn standards or pass tests. In our experience, teachers are drawn to the field because—like us—they are passionate about wanting to support the students in their classrooms and give them the tools they need to be successful in their lives. In order to do that, we need to equip our TCs with the skills, know-how and dispositions to connect effectively with their students so that engaged teaching and learning can happen. We concur with Quezada et al (2020) that “as teacher candidates expand their sense of identity, they become empowering influencers for K-12 learners and advocates for social justice and cultural relevancy” (p. 5).

As we move forward, through and beyond the current COVID-19 crisis, we need to consider the implications for teachers and teacher educators post-COVID. As individual faculty, we recognize the need for continued focus on FOK and building relationships with our teacher candidates. Taking these discussions back to our teacher education unit, we plan to reconfigure how our courses apply standards in order to meet accreditation requirements with an eye for maximizing and centering students’ individual identities. We want to model how to build relationships and honor our TCs so they are equipped to do the same in their classrooms. One approach is to target key standards for each course that would take our content deeper instead of broader, designing assignments and activities that are scaffolded throughout the program. Personally, we need to continue to honor our own needs as teacher educators. Taking the pressure off by reducing the sheer number of standards (and assignments) covered per course is a good beginning. Continuing to have conversations,

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such as during department meetings, about self-care and mutual support, is another step we will take. As individuals, we all bring different strengths and expertise to the program, and we can better maximize on each other's FOK to build our revised courses, rather than working independently as "course leads."

As far as assessments go, we will continue pushing at the state level to create new policies that allow programs to get waivers for gatekeeper credential assessments. Our college is already working with our Arts and Sciences colleagues to design alternatives to high stakes teaching to prove subject area competency. Giving TCs alternate pathways to earn their credentials is paramount for us, and our university is working to provide these opportunities at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

We realize that we need to continue exploring our own identities as teacher educators and document the ways we are shifting the sociocultural contexts of our classrooms and our work in schools. As we continue this journey, we acknowledge the importance of utilizing a trauma-informed pedagogy lens, as it prioritizes care for ourselves as teacher educators and for our teacher candidates. Our future research will include more self-examination with lenses of gender and racial identity as well. As we address conversations about who we are and who are our TCs and their students, we humanize the field and bring the focus of teaching and teaching education back to where it belongs—the people.

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I can't breathe

Kimberly A. White-Smith, *University of La Verne*

I can't breathe

I can't jog

I can't shop at Target

I can't sleep in my own bed

I can't stand in my own backyard

I can't watch birds

I can't breathe

You see context is important

Because when you say these words, they don't ring true

The context of your life experience says it's not so

But I have documentation, actual footage that reminds me that I can't breathe

Wearing a #BlackLivesMatter t-shirt is not enough

Having a black lives matter bumper sticker means nothing when

You have to start a sentence with I am not racist but...

When you condone and rationalize the words of friends that cut down and dehumanize black and brown bodies

You see, if you are my ally, standing up for me with a meme of Kaepernick kneeling alongside the picture of a black man being murdered by the knee of a police officer is easy

If Black lives really mattered to you then they would matter when you hate me, when I piss you off, even when we disagree

Because Black lives should matter ALL the time, not just when it is convenient for you, because regardless of how you feel about me, my sister, my nephew, my cousin, my kin, my brother, our students still need to

BREATHE

**Caution, Approaching Intersection:
Black Educators Teaching in the Crossroads of
Resistance and Responsiveness**

Angel Miles Nash, Ph.D. and Quaylan Allen, Ph.D.

Abstract

As a powerful institution of social reproduction, schools are locations in which racial inequalities and anti-Black racism play out in ways that contribute to the larger racial disparities that many Black communities experience. The way race informs the experiences of Black students in schools justifies the need for anti-racist and anti-bias teaching in education programs. In this paper, we argue that anti-racist and anti-bias education should be rooted in intersectional leadership and pedagogical approaches. We do so by first describing why intersectional leadership matters, particularly in preparing educators and leaders in working with Black students in school. We then describe our own positionality as Black scholars and educators working in a predominantly White private university and how our own positionality informs why this work is important to us. In particular, we focus on the ways in which we prepare future educators to engage in resistance and responsiveness on behalf of Black students and conclude with implications for anti-racist and anti-bias discourse development.

Keywords: anti-racist education, Black educators, intersectionality, leadership

Black Educators Teaching in the Crossroads

Introduction

Within the current moment, there is a national awakening to the reality of the enduring effects of White supremacy, anti-Black racism, and racial inequality on the lived experiences and social outcomes of Black communities across the United States. Stoked by national leadership that continues to promote fear, hatred, and violence towards communities of color, we have witnessed an increase in White supremacist organizations and racial attacks towards communities of color (Giroux, 2017; U.S. Department of Justice, 2017). In particular, national conversations continue regarding the nature of policing, the murders of unarmed Black citizens at the hands of law enforcement, and the lack of justice afforded Black communities who disproportionately experience both physical and symbolic violence at the hands of state institutions (Alexander, 2012; Garza, et al., 2016; Weissinger & Mack, 2018). Furthermore, we are witnessing a global movement, inspired by Black women, that is calling for the recognition that Black lives matter and for a renewed liberation movement that seeks an intersectional approach to racial justice on matters related to not only police brutality, criminal justice reform, and economic justice, but also to justice in educational opportunity for Black students (Garza et al., 2016; Howard, 2016).

As a powerful institution of social reproduction, schools are locations in which racial inequalities and anti-Black racism play out in ways that contribute to the larger racial disparities that many Black communities experience. For instance, Black students still largely attend racially and economically segregated schools that in many cases are more segregated now than before *Brown vs. Board of Education* (Orfield et al., 2016; Reardon, 2016). Black students attend schools that are inequitably funded; they are regularly provided a curriculum that is culturally irrelevant and renders Black histories and experiences invisible (Morgan & Amerikaner, 2018; Reardon, 2016). Additionally, Black students are denied educational opportunity when educators (a) assume that Black students are less intelligent or anti-intellectual; (b) lower their expectations for their Black students and use these racist assumptions to justify tracking Black students into lower ability courses; and (c) disproportionately place Black students into special education programs

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(Gregory & Roberts, 2017; Kalogrides & Loeb, 2013; Lynn et al. 2010; McGrady & Reynolds, 2013).

The general fear of Black bodies that informs the type of physical and symbolic violence experienced at the hands of law enforcement and criminal justice systems is similarly experienced within the disciplining nature of the school. Within the school, the behaviors and cultural practices of Black students are perceived as threatening, intimidating, or foreign, and the cultural incompetence of educators contributes to Black students being disproportionately disciplined, surveilled, and pushed out of school (Allen, 2017; Bryan, 2017; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017; Morris, 2016). Black students are more likely to attend schools with heavy police presence, to be disproportionately punished with harsher offenses, and be subjected to what is widely known as the school-to-prison pipeline (Carter et al., 2017; Nolan & Willis, 2011; Pigott et al., 2018).

The way race informs the experiences of Black students in schools justifies the need for anti-racist and anti-bias teaching in education programs. In this paper, we argue that anti-racist and anti-bias education should be rooted in intersectional leadership and pedagogical approaches. We do so first by describing why intersectional leadership matters, particularly in preparing educators and leaders in working with Black students in school. We then describe our own positionality as Black scholars and educators working in a predominantly White private university and how our own positionality informs why this work is important to us.

Theoretical Framework

Intersectionality

The anti-bias and anti-racism work we do separately in two different academic programs spawned our conceptual consensus to ground this article in intersectional leadership (Miles Nash & Peters, 2020; Peters & Miles Nash, 2021). This (nascent) leadership framework is rooted in intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991), a theory that has long outlined the simultaneity of marginalization individuals face, including racism, sexism, ableism, and classism. Since intersectionality originated amidst critical legal studies' efforts to acknowledge the "problematic consequence of the

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tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139), it has been used as a theoretical treatment specifically to document the lived experiences of women of color across sectors, including educational (Haynes et al., 2020; Ireland, 2018), community (Tan et al., 2018), governmental (Hamidullah & Riccucci, 2017), and business (Steinfeld, 2019) contexts.

Dill and Zambrana (2000) proffer that beyond being a theoretical treatment through which researchers explore their intellectual concerns, intersectionality-centered work reflects our actions and “effort[s] to improve society, in part, by understanding and explaining the lives and experiences of marginalized people and by examining the constraints and demands of the many social structures that influence their options and opportunities” (Dill & Zambrana, 2009, p. 3). Accordingly, research that privileges students’ and educators’ experiences with intersectionality helps teacher and leader educators understand how to develop, improve, and sustain anti-bias and anti-racist pedagogies.

In education, the multiple ways that intersectionality influences the lives of students (Grant & Zwier, 2011; Morris, 2007), teachers (Jones & Wijeyesinghe, 2011), and leaders (Agosto & Roland, 2018; Horsford & Tillman, 2012) have been documented across scholarship. The prevalent usage of intersectionality in explications centering each of these groups has helped scholars and practitioners understand how and the extent to which multiple oppressive forces influence them. The usage of the theory in research focused on students shows how the compounding influences of racialized and class-based marginalization can affect student access to educational opportunities (Becares & Priest, 2015). This literature suggests that understanding students’ dispositions based on these facets of their lives can be useful in developing curriculum and programming that supports their navigation of schooling contexts. This development is the responsibility of educators, whose professional interactions are also explored using intersectionality.

Intersectional Leadership

Research detailing educators’ experiences interrogates how

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their race and gender can influence their teaching and leading (Jean-Marie et al., 2009). While most teachers are women (U.S. Department of Education, 2020), experiences of women of color differ from those of their White colleagues (Fairchild et al., 2012). This reality mirrors how, in education, as in other contexts, there are long-standing dangers in focusing on singularity in efforts to interrupt oppression. Further, as teachers aspire to and secure school and district leadership positions, they disproportionately face challenges because of their limited access to professional development and opportunities, in addition to those challenges due to their race and gender identities. While their professional trajectories can be fraught with these multi-layered trials, their intersectionality also informs the empathy with which they work to remedy the same challenges their students traverse. As intersectionality ineluctably apprises leaders of what their students experience and inspires their commitments to support students, we responsively substantiated our work through the construct of intersectional leadership—leaders’ operationalization of visionary strategies that privilege the experiences of constituents (e.g., students) who live the realities of multiple historically oppressive identifiers—to name the pedagogies we use to create anti-bias, anti-racist instruction in our independent liberal arts college of educational studies.

A Black Woman Educator’s Positionality Statement

As the first author, I identify as a Black, cisgender, heterosexual woman. My research is informed by my experiences teaching and leading in K-20 institutions and privileges the emboldening of Black girls and women in the K-20 education, the professional intersectional realities of Black women in education, and the ways that educators and educational leaders support underserved students in STEM education. My research endeavors mirror my awareness of and interest in the strategies educators use to engage, uplift, and prepare students for the future lives they will lead in a world steeped in a historicity of racialized, gendered, and class-based marginalization. Aimed at combating oppression and normalizing anti-racism’s emancipatory strategies, I develop and carry out research and instruction that reifies the theories and

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frameworks that acknowledge students' intersectionality.

The paramountcy of intersectionality has recently become palpably evident across society as more visible examples of racism, sexism, and classism have permeated the spaces where we live and learn. Throughout this change, I have remained committed to using my research and instruction as mechanisms for informing students and educators about how they can combat these levers of discrimination.

As an Assistant Professor in a Masters of Arts in Leadership Development program at a predominately White institution, I am responsible for preparing graduate students to lead in educational, community, corporate, and governmental contexts in ways that promote a socially just world. In my instruction of courses that focus on foundational leadership theories, leadership in nonprofit organizations, leadership across social issues, and of a doctoral-level course in diversity in higher education, I address the oppressive effects of discriminatory practices through assignments that empower students to assess the critical role of leadership in disrupting biased policies and practices. Through this form of agential pedagogy, I teach students how to expand their abilities and capacities to lead with equity, courage, and empathy at the forefront.

A Black Woman Educator's Teaching Experiences

My identity, the nexus of my Blackness and my womanhood, is the bedrock of my teaching approach. As an amalgam of both racial and gendered experiences that are influenced, and in many cases dictated by historized exclusion, this identity is a unique disposition from which I plan and deliver instruction that equips students with the skills necessary to think critically about the past as they prepare for their professions in the future. As one of the few Black women faculty in our private, Southern California institution, I understand that my very presence and my commitment to teaching from an asset-based perspective towards students and communities of color are acts of anti-racism and endurance. By being part of the small ratio of Black faculty on campus, I counter the hegemonic norms represented by the majority faculty demographic in academe: White men, who are

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54% of full-time faculty (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). The diversity of thought based on experience that academicians of color add through their research and teaching expands and improves higher education contexts because it offers more than a single, prototypical perspective.

The simultaneity of ostracization resulting from both my race and gender influence the reasons and ways that I develop and conduct courses. The racialized and gendered realities I face influence why I navigate teaching commitments and experiences with an understanding of their compounding effects. In turn, this positionality informs why I readily am able to seek and include examples in my teaching of educational leaders in ways that reflect the intersectionality and additional identity factors that are prevalent in communities they will go on to serve. While the lenses of Blackness and womanhood influence my life most evidently, I unapologetically acknowledge the equally impactful influence of similarly aligned facets of life that impact others' lives, including ethnicity, socioeconomic status, ability, and educational attainment. Moreover, the range of nuanced experiences I have had because of my race and gender reifies the continuum of effects each identifier can have on individuals' lives.

I employ intersectional leadership by considering my students' resources, talents, and needs, as well as those of the communities they will go on to serve. I subsequently engage these considerations as I create and employ courses in which I teach students about leadership theories, leadership enactment across different community contexts and social issues, and diversity in higher education. Intersectionality informs several facets of my pedagogy in these courses, including curriculum development, assignment flexibility, contextual responsiveness, and technology usage. Developing an amalgam of instructional techniques, I intentionally foster learning experiences that reflect students' aspirations of leading in a diverse array of societal sectors and illustrate the social justice issues I know they will face in those sectors, all within the context of their leadership development.

My intersectional leadership fructifies my pedagogical approaches in each course I teach. The foundation of these intentions rests on my commitment to decolonizing existing

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curriculum by expanding the texts, assignments, and resources used to develop courses. When selecting texts, including textbooks and research articles, I am mindful of the authors, and subsequently, the perspectives, represented in the material in which we engage. Acknowledging the historicity of marginalization in the academy via scholarship publishing practices, preferential treatment of research topics, deficitized positioning of demographics and results, and the prioritization of research methods, I choose books and articles that demonstrate an array of perspectives. Further, to strengthen the curricular offerings and the instructional delivery, I include additional mediums, including websites, art, music, government documents, social media, film, television, and theater. The coalesced presentation of these resources provides a well-rounded bedrock that reflects an in-depth diversity of thought and underpins our class discussions. Simultaneously, these perspectives inform the course assignments students complete during the semester.

To model responsiveness to societal contexts and to students' professional and personal interests, I offer flexibility in the assignments they are required to develop. I use this approach to hold up mirrors to students so they can identify the agency they have in developing projects that make a difference in the world that envelops them. For example, to teach about leadership in our Images of Leadership in Pop Culture course, students are given the opportunity to watch a contemporary or historical film and subsequently develop a website that displays their identification of leadership examples in the characters and the ways their traits align with leadership theories we have studied. Most recently, when teaching this course in Summer 2020, I demonstrated responsiveness to the heightened awareness of racialized injustices present in the policing of communities of color and in the criminal justice system by offering students the opportunity to base their leadership websites on the limited film series, *When They See Us*, produced by Ava DuVernay, and on the accompanying interview, *When They See Us Now*.

Based on the 1989 wrongful arrests, convictions, and incarcerations of five boys of color in New York City, the series reflects the realities of communities of color and, as four of

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the boys were Black, the particular histories of discrimination that have been detrimental. By guiding students through the identification of leadership evidenced in the characters portrayed, including the teenagers, their parents and families, their attorneys, prosecuting attorneys, police, prison personnel, and community members, in the context of a high-profile case, I was able to help students understand the nuanced racialized influences readily evident in communities. Many students expressed appreciation for bringing this story to their attention, as they had not yet seen detailed and accurate depictions of the ways racism is embedded in societal systems. This exploration prompted in-depth discussions centering the role of leadership in driving change across these systems, including educational, non-profit, and governmental entities.

In another course focused on non-profit leadership, I deliberately included resources from a knowledge base that is often represented in the academy as a subject focus in research, but not as often positioned as a wealth of capital—the community. To counter this practice in a meaningful way that benefited students, I included in-class speakers from a diverse range of non-profit perspectives, including medical services, STEM education enrichment, out-of-school programming, and international relations. To further reflect the communities' needs as they learned about them, students had the option to develop grant proposals based on their knowledge and research regarding organizations' financial and programmatic needs, or applications to establish non-profit organizations based on identified gaps they wanted to address. Students were required to conduct interviews with non-profit organizational leaders to support students' development of grant proposals and non-profit organization applications. The informational interviews supported students' full understanding of the breadth and depth of leaders' responsibilities. Collectively, the experiences taught students about social contexts and the range of issues communities face within them, including bias and marginalization. Simultaneously, to counter deficitized narratives about the communities they explored and endeavor to eventually serve, the assignments guided students to identify cultural capital that communities possess.

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A Black Man Educator's Positionality Statement

As the second author I identify as a Black cisgender, heterosexual male, who researches educational policies and practices that contribute to the educational achievement of Black boys and men. As a scholar who examines the intersections of race, gender, class and sexuality in the schooling of Black boys, and as a Black man who has experienced raced-gendered discrimination within educational contexts, I draw upon both research and personal experience to inform how I engage in approaches to anti-racist and anti-bias education that emphasize the intersectionality of racial oppression that Black students encounter.

I currently teach in an undergraduate education program that prepares students to work in both school and community-based educational settings. The program curriculum is rooted in progressivist and critical approaches to education, and students are regularly engaged in critical discussions on race, social justice, and educational activism throughout the program. The students in this program will work in local Southern California communities that serve a culturally diverse student population. It is critical that these students are prepared to understand the significance of race in shaping educational policies and practice, and how the intersectionality of race matters in understanding and responding to the experiences and outcomes of Black students. It is also critical that they reflect on their own positionalities and privileges, understand how they might contribute to anti-black racism, benefit from white supremacy, and how they can enact agency in working to dismantle systems of racial oppression in their own work.

A Black Man Educator's Teaching Experiences

As a scholar-educator, my approach to anti-racist education is rooted in/informed by my research agenda that examines the intersections of race, gender, class and sexuality in the educational achievement of Black boys and men, as well as my own experiences with racial discrimination. As a Black man, I know too well how race and gender intersect in the surveillance, discipline and ascriptions of intelligence that were imposed upon me in school. This embodied experience informs why it is critical that I convey to these students at a private, predominantly White

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institution (PWI) that intersectionality matters in educational settings, why “other people’s children” (Delpit, 1995) matters in educational settings, and how they can create education environments where Black students feel supported, validated and provided equitable opportunities to succeed.

Additionally, the act of preparing future educators to work with Black students is a matter of social justice and act of resistance. Education is not a neutral activity, but is indeed a political activity. It is imperative that we prepare our students, who are predominantly white middle-class women, to possess the dispositions, knowledge, and skills needed to engage in transformative practices in their communities, to approach the education of Black children as if those children were their own. Furthermore, it is important that our students understand the specificity of racial marginalization and the particular ways in which race and gender intersect in how Black students access educational opportunity.

I teach courses on the sociology of education, community-based education and undergraduate research methods. In these courses an intersectional leadership approach informs how I help students understand the implications of systemic racism in education and how it impacts Black boys specifically. This involves critically reviewing the history of race and education, including an examination of the history of racially segregated schools, the policies that led to racial segregation and the dilemmas of racial integration for Black students and Black educators. We also examine school policies related to racialized academic tracking and school discipline. In particular, we examine data that highlights the way that Black students are disproportionately tracked into lower ability courses and are over disciplined in school. This involves looking at both local and national data related to school tracking and school discipline and examining how and why Black students experience such outcomes at greater rates than their white counterparts.

We also spend time examining the assumptions that go into explanations of Black school failure. For many students, the educational outcomes for Black students are explained through cultural deficits—that is, students often assume that the reasons

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for the poor educational outcomes for Black males is due to poor family involvement, deviant behaviors, or assumptions that Black males are anti-intellectual (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Howard, 2013; Ogbu, 1998).

These assumptions are rooted in larger racial stereotypes that pervade educator practices and are problematized by examining the history of racial discourse and ideology that assumes Black male deviance and criminality and identifying the ways such discourse has been used in the marginalization, exclusion and violence toward Black men at large. Certainly, these historical constructions and fear of the Black male are connected to current examples of violence toward Black bodies. Similar discourses of Black deviance and criminality are still used to justify anti-Black racism.

In my classes we examine how these ideologies play out in schools and how educators draw upon such ideologies in ways that contribute to lowered academic expectations, assumptions of deviance, and disproportionality in how Black boys are disciplined and denied educational opportunity. In doing so, we think critically about how race, gender and class intersect for Black boys in how they are perceived by predominantly white educators, and in the way that white fear and anxiety of the Black male body contributes to the specificity of Black male oppression in schools. We also challenge dominant deficit-based discourses by reading literature that acknowledges the strengths, resilience and cultural wealth of Black communities (Allen, 2013; Bonner, 2014; Brooms & Davis, 2017; Harper, 2015; Moll et al. 1992; Watson, 2011; Yosso, 2005). This includes literature focusing on Black student success, Black student counterstories regarding their educational experiences, and anti-deficit research that describes the myriad of ways in which Black families support the education of their children through their school involvement, advocacy and activism (Allen & White-Smith, 2018; Cooper, 2009; Kaplan, 2013; Oakes et al., 2008; Roxas & Gabriel, 2017; Vincent et al., 2012).

With this knowledge, I hope to prepare my students to become anti-racist advocates whose own educational practices will be rooted in an understanding of intersectionality, guided

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by an ethics of care and motivated by the goal of racial justice for their students of color. For me, this work is done by engaging students in projects that embed them in the local community context and help students develop the tools to think critically about racial inequality, to acknowledge how they might benefit from their racial and economic privilege, but also to articulate how they might engage collectively in the struggle to dismantle systems of oppression in their own educational practices.

For instance, I teach a community-based education course that is held at an after-school program serving the culturally diverse community. In this course, students are immersed in the community context, work with the youth of the program, and learn about the social ecology of the community. The students are expected to teach, coach or lead activities with the youth at the program as part of the field experience; this provides opportunities for students to develop relationships with the youth, engage in critical listening practices with them, and learn how to respond to their realities.

As part of the curriculum of the course, the students engage in readings that problematize deficit-based discourses and thinking. They learn about the theories and practices of community cultural wealth as well as culturally responsive and culturally sustaining practices (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2017; Yosso, 2005). They also learn to read and critically analyze local school and census data both to understand better the education, economic and political reality of the community, and to identify potential equity gaps as the first step in identifying solutions. For instance, students examine data related to income inequality and housing insecurity as well as data related to school discipline and school funding. Students identify how race, class, and gender might intersect in particular ways in the experiences of the students they are serving and how certain school and social policies might contribute to the reproduction of racial inequality. I also require students to spend time in the community, attending local events, following local news, and engaging in dialogue with the local community members who are involved in the after-school program.

Students are also guided through a community mapping project, where they identify the resources available in the community

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such as non-profits, churches or libraries. This information is collected through online searches, community walks, and discussions with local community members and participating youth. Furthermore, as students are engaging in their fieldwork with the youth, they are asked to identify the types of community cultural wealth the youth might possess and the assets the youth exhibit. Students then consider how they might draw upon the strengths of the youth to support their learning.

As the instructor of the course, I also participate in the fieldwork activities and see the youth attending the after-school program as my own children who deserve the same opportunities to succeed and be recognized. Teaching this course provides me an opportunity to enter into community spaces with my students and model what it might look like to engage in culturally responsive and anti-racist educational practices. I am also able to engage in an ethic of care in these spaces, demonstrating love, compassion and advocacy for the youth, while also challenging deficits or discriminating assumptions my students might display about the children and the community.

Throughout the course, students have opportunities to reflect on their initial assumptions, biases, and fears of the youth, to consider how these assumptions are rooted in racist ideologies, and to examine how they might perpetuate and benefit from racial inequalities. In particular, students often compare the local community to their own communities; many notice the stark racial and economic segregation and the way such inequalities greatly impact the opportunities and outcomes for the youth of color they are serving in the program.

It's also important that students begin to see themselves as advocates for their youth and to care deeply about their well-being, but also to understand why their own racial advocacy is necessary and important in the struggle for racial equity. Based on the knowledge obtained throughout the course, the students are asked to describe how their new knowledge might inform their practice and to provide recommendations that can address the racial equity gaps that were explored throughout the course. This is done to help students see their role in the greater project for racial justice and begin to develop the habits of an anti-racist educator.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have argued why intersectionality matters in understanding and responding to the needs of Black students in schools. We have articulated how intersectional leadership informs why and how we engage in anti-racist and anti-bias practices in preparing future educators and leaders. In particular, we've emphasized the need for future educators to be responsive to the communities they will serve and have tried to model what such responsiveness might look like in support of Black girls and boys specifically, and of students of color in general.

As Black faculty researching and teaching in a private, predominantly White liberal arts university and preparing a predominantly White middle-class population to serve in the communities we aim to protect and uplift, we are mindful of the context in which we do this work. We recognize how our presence in these spaces is in itself decolonizing. Our bodies, epistemologies, lived experiences, and racialized scholarly agendas are acts of resistance within an institution that has historically contributed to anti-blackness, racial marginalization, and racial stratification. In other words, as Black faculty we exist in a privileged space where our presence is critical to the disruption of anti-Black racism. Our lived experiences and scholarly knowledge are important contributions to the diversity of thought students are exposed to on campus and in the classroom.

As Black educators teaching predominantly White students, we are also mindful of the various ways in which students might receive and/or reject our identities and the knowledge we provide regarding the intersectional experiences of Black students. Like many future educators, our students might resist discussions regarding race and racism and might reject both the knowledge we are sharing as well as the messenger who is delivering this knowledge (Milner, 2008; Picower, 2009; Smith, 2004). Students might also appropriate such knowledge as a form of capital to be used to demonstrate their own "wokeness." This means that students might learn the language of social justice, anti-racism, and anti-bias discourse, and employ such language largely as a performative act and to their personal benefit without truly embodying anti-racist and anti-bias practices in their personal

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and professional lives (Watson, 2020). However, we hope that through our own practices as anti-racist and anti-bias educators, in concert with the work of other colleagues on campus engaging in similar social justice efforts, our students will develop a critical consciousness regarding anti-Black racism and intersectional marginalization. Through this critical consciousness, we aim to prepare future educators who can embody intersectional leadership and engage in emancipatory practices that are rooted in both an ethics of care and a motivation for social justice.

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**Unhidden: The voices of teacher education scholars
on disrupting, transforming, and healing
toward an antiracist world**

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Abstract

This counternarrative is an homage to the work of abolition in teacher education and a call to humanizing liberatory praxis as collective healing from racism and anti-Black hate. We, three critical teacher educators, interrogate our positionalities and the experiences within and beyond schooling that have shaped us. We recognize that our identities were informed by our individual memories of growing up in a racist United States. We therefore make space for disruption of practices that continue to (de)humanize us, our students, and their students. We say their names— Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Aubery, George Floyd—as we replace dehumanization with rehumanizing praxis and a commitment to the journey of seeking freedom through finding joy in our work and in our lives. Our voices are unhidden as we join the resistant and transformational voices of youth and adults in the movement for Black lives. Together we change the world.

Keywords: Antiracist teacher education, social justice teacher education, teaching for transformation, praxis, counternarrative

Introduction

In the midst of the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and ongoing anti-Black racism, we offer what we can as teacher educators to the many teachers and professors navigating the crises of our time. On March 11, 2020, five days before the Shelter in Place directive was issued in the San Francisco Bay Area, we wrote an article together entitled “Humanizing Online Teaching.” What does it mean to teach for a more just, antiracist, humanizing world when we must be physically distant from our students, when we are grieving a world on fire, when we are mourning the loss of our own loved ones, the lives of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and the many other Black lives taken by white supremacist, state-sanctioned violence? What lessons does the inspiring national and international resistance brought on by the movement for Black lives teach us? What do our own lived experiences teach us? What do our students teach us? What can “social justice education in the classroom and in the streets” (Picower, 2012) teach us?

Questions born from a place of radical love for humanity, resistance to all forms of oppression, and a belief in our education system as a vehicle for social change fuel our work. Before the coronavirus pandemic, the three of us had worked together, driven by shared justice-oriented ideologies—discussing program curriculum, supporting our students, and getting to know and hold deep admiration for one another’s work. It was through collaborative work over the past eight months, though, that we dove into extended conversations with one another on our lived experiences, revealing and interrogating our histories and positionalities in our work as teacher educators. Time was now more sacred, more precious. Zoom fatigue was growing more real. Two of us were now suddenly caring full-time for young children alongside our paid work. Instead of spending less time in meetings with one another, we found ourselves spending more time in conversation—storytelling, inspiring one another, and learning what drives us, what we dream for the future, and how we can collectively manifest those dreams into existence in our work together as teacher educators. We were engaging ourselves in what we strive to teach in our teacher education praxis seminars—that we cannot do

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this work alone, that we must disrupt educator alienation through transformative communities of praxis (Martinez, et. al, 2016; Navarro, 2018; Picower, 2015).

Most notably, Dr. Aaminah Norris's own invitation to Dr. Raina León and Dr. Mary Raygoza to participate in her new podcast, (Un)Hidden Voices, created a space for the three of us to engage in praxis together on our experiences with racism, the impacts of white supremacist violence on our lives and families, our visions for a more just world, and how all of this connects to and fuels our work as teacher educators. The conversation we had during the (Un)Hidden Voices podcast (Norris, 2020) serves as the basis for this article. As we consider our identities and lived experiences, the overarching questions we seek to address are: How do we strive to disrupt oppressive dominant narratives? How do we lead to transform teacher education? How are we guided both by rage and radical love to create healing spaces?

Antiracism and Social Justice in Teacher Education

We draw on and honor our teacher education colleagues who have shifted and are presently shifting the landscape of teacher education through disruption, transformation, and healing. We resist transforming terms such as “social justice” and “culturally responsive” into meaningless buzzwords co-opted by a white liberal agenda (Ladson-Billings, 2015; Matias, 2013; Sleeter, 2015; Souto-Manning & Emdin, 2020). Therefore, we assert that antiracist, social justice work in teacher education involves naming and confronting injustice in education systems and beyond with an historical and present-day analysis of power and structural inequities (Sleeter, 2015). We also affirm our continuous commitment to antiracism as humanizing liberatory praxis. This vision for teacher education is both an homage to the work of our colleagues and a call to praxis as collective healing from racism and anti-Black hate.

We begin by making space to deeply interrogate our positionalities and the (de)humanizing experiences in schools and society that shape us (Aronson, 2020). We resist the reproduction of historical trauma as we create spaces of healing and reconciliation (Souto-Manning & Emdin, 2020). We foster a culture of lifelong

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learning and praxis as we support teachers to be dialogically-oriented (Hsieh, 2015). We integrate humanizing liberatory practices in all facets of teacher education from recruitment and admission to orientation and community building; teaching our courses, assigning students to field placements, and advising them through our programs, humanizing liberatory praxis must permeate our work (Raygoza et al., 2020).

We learn about, center, and draw on Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color (BIPOC) teachers' funds of knowledge (Navarro et al., 2019) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), as we support and model for our teacher candidates how they can do the same. We explicitly name and interrogate "racial equity detours" often perpetuated by white teacher candidates and teacher educators alike such as "pacing for privilege" (prioritizing comfort and interests of white people instead of racial justice), propagating deficit ideologies, focusing on diversity and not justice, relying on a program or trend to be a fix-all for racial justice, individualizing racism, or arguing that classism is the problem rather than racism (Gorski, 2019). Educators must be willing to name and take a stand against racism and intervene on "tools of whiteness" that pervade education (Picower, 2009).

Furthermore, our pedagogy and activism as teacher educators is more than a response to current manifestations of racism and anti-Blackness, misogyny, classism, heterosexism, xenophobia, ableism, and ageism; our work is rooted in an understanding of "the original violence that made way for this particular political moment: the theft of labor and of land, and the systematic project of dehumanization that justifies and allows such theft" (Valdez et al., 2018). Bettina Love (2020, June 12) argues that instead of reforming the existing social order in schools, we must abolish and uproot the conditions that produced the original violence.

There is great possibility to uproot the existing social order. Teacher educators and teachers can play a role in dreaming another way into being despite inequities that include ongoing anti-Blackness, white flight, resource hoarding, disinvestment in public schools, disproportionate stress, and overreliance for the work of childcare on women and women of color (Turner, 2020). At the foundation of our work is the critical hope that Bettina

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Love captures:

The impossible is becoming possible. As we all stand in the midst of a world crisis, those of us who can dream must dream. And after we dream, we must demand and act ...When schools reopen, they could be spaces of justice, high expectations, creativity, and processing the collective trauma of COVID-19. (Love, 2020, para 1, 6)

We look to young people who demand justice. For example, Xavier Brown a youth organizer who rallied 15,000 people to come together in Oakland following George Floyd's murder, posted on Instagram:

It is a march to say: Oakland Stands With You... This is to show we aren't letting shit slide. There's an agenda against us. We cannot let incidents like this happen, and move on to the next 'viral' social media event. (BondGraham, 2020, June 2, para 4)

Akil Riley, fellow organizer, emphasized in a follow-up post, "We're saying if there's no justice, we will continue to disrupt" (BondGraham, 2020, June 2, para 6).

As we charge our teacher candidates to engage with young people from the perspective that they will change the world, we see our students as the teachers who will dream and act alongside youth and communities in solidarity for educational justice, for the humanizing schools, children, and families deserve. Thus our work is to create schools as community institutions that resist individualism and the privileged status quo, that value collective learning (Norris, 2020) and collective care for community health (Kelly, 2020).

Together, we plan, reflect, organize, speak, and write, rooted in an understanding that by "collectivizing often individualized experiences, larger patterns emerge of how teacher education as an institution contributes to the permanence of racism, as well as strategies of resistance that can inspire and embolden other teacher educators working to confront racism in their settings" (Picower & Kohli, 2017, pp. 4-5). To this end, we engage in teacher educator counternarrative, joining critical scholars who highlight how our intersecting identities and the social, political, and historical contexts of schooling deeply inform our lived

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experiences and how we embark on our transformative work as teacher educators (Mayorga & Picower, 2018; Milner & Howard, 2013; Picower & Kohli, 2017; Pour-Khorshid, 2016).

Critical teacher educators, particularly those of non-dominant positionalities, have documented the insidious impacts of white supremacy culture—alongside top-down, market-based neoliberal reform; the privatization and high-stakes standardization of schooling (including teacher education); and the de-professionalization of teachers (including teacher educators)—on their bodies, minds, spirits, and efforts to teach and transform teacher education. Our critical teacher educator colleagues across institutions write to these injuries:

- hearing teacher candidates doubting their Black male professor’s experience teaching (Howard, 2017),
- wrestling with advising teachers of color to go into the profession because of concern for their moral injury, “I just did not want one more public school educator to have to feel what I feel” (Banks (Roberts), 2017),
- being sometimes the only one to denounce racism of teacher candidates and colleagues alike to preserve one’s own humanity (Cortés, 2017).

Our colleagues also write to the power of transformation within and beyond teacher education through system-shifting work such as: racial literacy roundtables (Sealey-Ruiz, 2017), critical racial affinity spaces (Strong et al., 2017), Freirean culture circles (de los Ríos & Souto-Manning, 2017), the Pin@y Educational Partnerships (Curammeng & Tintiango-Cubales, 2017), the Institute for Teachers of Color Committed to Racial Justice (Pizarro, 2017), and current K-12 teachers as teacher educators themselves in People’s Led Inquiry (Martinez, 2017). In describing ongoing efforts to transform teacher education at his institution, Camangian (2017) describes the relentless persistence—the strategizing and organizing—that is required of critical teacher educators to dismantle oppressive teacher education programing, which resonates deeply with us in our ongoing struggle to create and fight for our program. Camangian reminds us that “socially transformative teacher education does not come *after* the contradictions have been confronted—it comes hand

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and hand with it” and that our responsibility is “to work collectively to transform our institutions so that they are less hostile to our humanity, our practice, and our purpose.” (Camangian, 2017, p. 34). We are on this road to transform together, amidst much challenge and contradiction. We embrace the complexity of this work, recognizing the power of our praxis, the power of learning about and being informed by our individual and collective counternarratives.

Methods

In this collaborative piece, we fully claim our subjective selves as an invitation into acceptance of the postmodern power of critique and counternarrative creation. This centering pushes us to consider the multiplicity of identities, the disruption of the mainstream, intertextuality, social and cultural pluralism, and unity and disunity. Lyotard (1992; 1984) calls attention to the metanarrative, the idea that one particular narrative can be the overarching framework for all; he also dismantles this idea, claiming that objective truth is a farce. It is the subjective narrative that reveals the intricacies and complexities of the sociopolitical, interconnected relationships in which we live. The counternarrative, as framed through Critical Race Theory (Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998), which challenges the falsity of the metanarrative, is interwoven into rationale for our choice to emphasize collective and individual storytelling. The counternarrative reads the world as it is with precision, insight, and nuance; it is rooted in who we are (León & Thomas, 2016). It reveals structural inequities and dismantles hegemonic propaganda that seeks to preserve itself; the idea of this small piece of existence reveals what is. The counternarrative pushes back on any falsities within stories that complicate and agitate towards liberation and justice.

We draw on Valdez et al.’s (2019) conception of *human being*, which acknowledges both our varied intersectional identities and unique lived experiences and also how we collectively struggle for a common purpose. Valdez and colleagues explain:

We offer a conception of educator activism as the struggle for the inalienable right of all people to *human be*—to be

liberated from any project of violence that treats persons as property, persons as things, persons as disposable, or persons as in any other way less than fully human. (Valdez et al., 2019, p. 247)

As human beings, we are called into story; story is what helps us to cultivate *conscientization*, a critical consciousness defined by Paulo Friere (1968) as whole human beings. Rather than engage in the conspiracy of silence that threatens to strip race, ethnicity, and, indeed, all other characteristics of self from explorations of identity in the creation and analysis of our work as teacher educators, embracing a Freirean approach challenges us to bring to light systems of oppression and counter with our stories, perhaps in the creation of counter-narratives (Williams, 2004; Dominguez, Duarte et al., 2009). We are using the method of counternarrative creation to expand upon our own experiences with racism as people and as educators and through this collaborative process work to disrupt and challenge dominant narratives of white body supremacy (Menakem, 2017). Through our counternarrative creation, we agitate for change in teacher education and also dig deep into our own individual and collective healing (Milner & Howard, 2013). Like Dover et al. (2018), we engage in the “heart work” at the intersection of counternarratives and critical hope as we examine our realities as people and teacher educators and imagine and work to co-create more humanizing realities.

We are also in conversation with the work of Dr. Farima Pour-Khorshid (2016) who incorporated the counternarrative in her framing of the collective *testimonio* in which three educators of color reveal the power of critical professional development groups in agitating for educational transformation. The collective *testimonio* in her work also served, at its core, as a tool for building solidarity and unity within the group. While that was not our aim initially through this interview, we have found a similar bondedness has arisen from our interview, collective transcript review process, and writing together that has grown from and extended back to our work as teacher educators. This is a confirmation of the transformational power of intermingling stories, the humanizing power that extends from vulnerability and strength in love.

After our interview process, we then collaborated on

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identifying particular themes that emerged: liberation that extends from lived experience; healing through storytelling; the power of collective dreaming and strategizing; the importance of reclaiming one's rage as a change mechanism; and the power of love as a galvanizing force. We expanded upon these themes in order to create a text infused with personal narrative and scholarly context. Each of us combed through the interview transcript, identifying passages that illustrated our emerging themes and illustrative sections of the interview that most strongly explored the shared concepts, while also staying true to the linearity of the conversation (Erickson, 1986; Saldaña, 2013). We shared in our meetings what we learned from one another in the moment of the interview and after reading the transcripts again. In our collaborative work, we additionally sought to explore how we encoded and decoded meaning from our narratives.

What follows incorporates excerpts from our conversation; the excerpts support the themes that emerged organically. The conversations have been slightly altered to clarify meaning and omit the connective language endemic to spoken discourse. Each unit of discourse begins with the honorifics of the persons speaking, in recognition of our expertise and with specific acknowledgment that our intersectional identities matter here, most especially that women of color in academia too often are not respected as holding the expertise they do. While we are on a first name basis as colleagues, when talking about and citing each other's work, we highlight that we are professors and hold doctorates, which is standard practice in the field.

Introductions: Tell us a bit about who you are

Dr. Mary Raygoza: I'm an assistant professor of teacher education at Saint Mary's College. I grew up in Concord in the East Bay Area in a white, middle class family. I went to public schools in the Concord area and did my undergraduate at the University of California, Berkeley and went to the University of California, Los Angeles for my teacher education and doctoral work. I was a high school math teacher in East Los Angeles, home of the Chicano Power Movement, and was inspired by that as I designed curriculum and thought about how to connect math with the

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social and political world. My work as a teacher educator is driven by a commitment to a more just world and understanding how I can interrogate my own privilege and work alongside other folk to do that work, striving to bring who we are and why we're called to the work to the forefront in everything that we do. I have a newly turned three-year-old daughter, Rose Esperanza. In addition to being a STEMInist and teacher educator, I'm a motherscholar. And I should say, too, I'm married to a principal. Our household is an educators' household - I'm in higher education, my husband in high school education, and we're pre-schooling our toddler now at home. We're talking all the time about the role of schools in this moment and movement and doing everything we can in our roles to be there for teachers and youth. It's quite a time.

Dr. Raina León: I am a full professor of education, only the third Black person at St. Mary's College in over 157 years to achieve that rank, and the first Afro-Latina that I can find in any kind of record. I'm a teacher educator, poet, writer, and writing coach. I co-founded The Acentos Review, which has published over 800 Latino voices in our 12-year history, and the senior poetry editor for Raising Mothers, which focuses on non-binary parents and mothers of color and our stories. I'm originally from Philadelphia. I have been doing this work as a teacher educator for nine years. I believe deeply in the liberatory power of education and that of writing. I'm now coming into the teacher education department chair in January, so super excited about that. I've got a punk rock toddler and a very happy newborn. My husband is Italian. So when the folks in Italy were going into quarantine, we were watching very carefully, particularly as shelter in place here began as I was over 7 months pregnant. Giving birth in a pandemic is not for the faint of heart.

Dr. Aaminah Norris: I am an associate professor in teaching credentials at Sacramento State University. My mom and my dad were both college educated. My mom has multiple masters' degrees. My dad had a doctorate degree, but they both came from working class families, which did not, for the most part, go to college. My dad grew up in the segregated South. His family lived in Texas. He attended a one room school and his mom sent him to college. My dad's father, Johnny White, actually worked

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for Buick Motor Company as a janitor. Then he started a general store. When my dad was nine years old, his father had a heart attack in front of my father. My father was on the side of the road doing these distress signals trying to get people to help him and his father. They were in this town called Greenville, Texas, which had a sign that said “the blackest land and the whitest people.” You couldn't get medical attention in the hospital if you were Black. My Dad watched his father die because he was a Black man in America. In 2016, my father was in his 80s and Muslim. Dad traveled to Mecca for Umrah. He flies home through Los Angeles International Airport. He slipped and fell down the escalator and suffered a major brain injury. The Emergency Medical Technicians denied him medical attention. What happened to my grandfather in the 1940s happened to my dad in 2016. Dad deteriorated over the course of a year to the point where he lost a lot of his ability to communicate. The story of his dad? I find that out, because extensive brain trauma tapped into his suppressed memories. I never knew how my grandfather died until 2016 when my own dad was dying. Dad died in June 2017. In 2020, I see George Floyd die at the hands of the police and I wrote this piece called “Wonder Twin Powers Activate: Form of An Ally.” I wrote down this generational trauma, my granddad, my dad, to me, and the impact of that on me in my bloodstream.

Disrupting, Transforming, and Healing

On Disrupting

Dr. Mary Raygoza: When I was a high school senior at a school in a well-resourced neighborhood I transferred to, I went back to the Title I middle school I attended to do a senior project on educational inequality. This is right after No Child Left Behind was implemented and the school was on the road to state takeover. I wanted to talk to my middle school teachers to learn about what was going on. There was only one teacher left who taught when I was there. That was just four years later. The turnover was alarming. She was my eighth grade English teacher. She said, “I have a scripted curriculum. I can't teach my autobiography project anymore. I can't teach my poetry project anymore.” She had tears in her eyes. That was a moment for me

that crystalized how top-down, deficit-oriented school reform is clearly harmful. That's when this fire built up inside me to want to commit myself to joining others in disrupting the inequitable status quo of schools.

I experience a lot of privilege. In my work as a white teacher educator, I benefit from not being questioned when I raise issues of inequity and racism. We are given pats on the back. We benefit from our privilege and also are in this position where we don't even see those benefits all the time. And so I'm trying to work to see them. I think that is a lifelong journey.

Thinking about the movement for Black lives, the societal trauma, the racial violence that's impacted Black folks everywhere, and for you as my colleagues, I feel a lot of anger around that. This cannot continue. I'm thinking about the piece that you wrote, Aaminah, about what it means to be an ally, or be a co-conspirator and stepping back and making space to learn from and be accountable to calls to action from Black people.

Dr. Raina León: I start from my subjectivity. Racism influences so many parts of our lives. And when it most negatively impacts me in academia, that filters into how I interact with my family. It filters into how I function as a mother, as a partner, as a community member and so on. I think of my mother, for example, living in a very racially divided and contentious community in rural Western Pennsylvania, a very small town where my family has been for over 200 years and actually moved there because of racism. The family story is that they moved in the 1800s from Virginia, because they were a mixed family and that there were folks who were free Black people and white folks partnered with them. When Virginia put into place a law that said it doesn't matter if you're free or not, after this law you will be considered enslaved. That's when the whole family left. They moved to the frontiers of Western Pennsylvania to preserve their family. That being part of the history still continues in these divisions, as far as race, in families and communities. I see that very clearly in her experience as well as how folks function still within the haven that is the Black community, but also at the edge of concern and violence and threat. At the same time recognizing that the person that you may fear may also be related to you just a few

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generations back. Racism comes into everything. Even thinking about my father's side of the family where I've got folks who would say things to me—like one of my titis when I was considering graduate school—she said, “You need to go to Miami and find yourself a nice Cuban to marry, because there's too much Black in the family. All these León men, they marry Black women.” Of course, to her, as Puerto Ricans, we're not Black. Even though we are. There's a tension there. There's this tradition of resistance, even in birth certificates, of claiming indigenous ancestry, claiming our blackness within baptismal records when many folks were denying. This push to whiten the race by marrying outside. Yes, racism can be clear, even in the family dynamic at a dinner table.

Dr. Aaminah Norris: Certain things that are happening are triggering other things including suppressed memories. For me, my fury, I would say has really forced me into a sense of urgency, particularly around the fact that I am very much aware that our lives are in danger and mine is in danger, people that I love, their lives are in danger. People are dying. We are in a temporal space. What is the contribution that we can make in this time that can actually provide some source of healing, some source of support, some sort of forward motion? That can also be a benefit. It's just a situation where life is very fleeting. The things that we can do in terms of the contribution and the work I think is really important. That's one of the reasons why I really value this opportunity to have this conversation with you and to learn from you about your experiences as well. Particularly for people of color, racism doesn't just inform our work. It's absolutely very much intertwined to everything, our everyday existence in this society.

On Transforming

Dr. Raina León: I am very aware of racism all the time. As a teacher educator, as a professor, as a person walking in the world. I'm also very aware of the toxicity that can invade my body and the bodies of Black and brown people, folks who experienced racism. Viscerally, how that impacts us and changes our very makeup through generational trauma. And so while I am aware and thoughtful and as much as I can, I enact ways of resistance, holding space for the telling of our stories and pushing back

against racism, I'm also in a space of constantly saying to myself: this is the real thing. How can we undermine that? And how can we also be free and joyous? How can I make sure that I am not perpetuating white supremacy and also internalizing racism? We all have our internalized racism. I'm not saying that we don't or that I don't. I am trying to challenge, interrogate, push back against that, for the sake of me, and the sake of my children, and my communities of which I am apart. I am conflicted thinking about holding that space for freedom, because freedom is complex. It is also joyous, and I want to be in the space of visioning for transformation, rather than always living in the pain of today.

Dr. Aminah Norris: Yeah, I think about that concept of freedom that you mentioned, too, because earlier in our history as a people and I'm speaking specifically of Black people in this country that when we initially conceived of freedom, we thought of it as a goal that we would achieve from slavery. Right. We become free and then things are just going to be different for us. Now I think it's a continual journey. There are moments that we might experience a true freedom, that joyous thing that you mentioned, that kind of transcendence and transformation. But then we have to keep going, keep that happening, and to become free. We are never free. We are in the act of becoming free.

Dr. Raina León: Yeah, my mom and I started StoryJoy, centered on stories and fostering that joy in the journey for BIPOC human service providers and creatives. She tells a story about where she's from in western Pennsylvania. There's a church called John Wesley AME Zion Church. It's actually at the site of a tunnel that was part of the Underground Railroad. They used to have a bell at the top of the tower and eventually took it down to preserve it. That bell was rung every time someone who had been previously enslaved became a free person whose movement and labor and all these things and life and children were taken away or stolen away. Every time they reached freedom, every time that they reached the ability to make those decisions for themselves as the full human beings that they were, that bell was rung. I think about that as what you're talking about, that journey, that the bells rang when someone got some place. But, the bell has to keep ringing, because we're always getting to another point of evolution on

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the journey toward liberation.

Dr. Aaminah Norris: We have been in such a corporatized system of creating education as a factory. That factory model doesn't work and hasn't worked, does not work for the community we were really trying to serve. It works for the people that it was designed to work for, but it doesn't work for us.

Dr. Raina León: We (Aaminah and I) went to that speculative education conference a few months back. And I think, what would it be for teacher educators to have one course where you just use as your primary text a science fiction novel?

Dr. Aaminah Norris: I've been thinking a lot about redesigning the Ed Psych syllabus because there are these four things that are very pressing in our psyche and in our society right now. One is we're all in this global pandemic. It's not being handled well. We're seeing instances in other countries where they keep the numbers down, people are not dying, the resources are distributed, and people have survived. Then we come to this country. People are dying. More than 250,000 people have died. The deaths are astronomical and unbelievable. That is obviously very pressing on society and psychology. Then there's also this anti-Black pandemic where people are literally dying. We're being shot and killed, knees down on our necks. These different aspects of the movement for Black lives have arisen out of this notion that this country does not value our lives. This is global genocide. How do we address the issues that we're experiencing if we don't specifically target the particular communities and say this is what's happening in this community. What does this community need? Then the third thing is, we are in this election cycle. We're going to have an election. That is not just a referendum on Trump, but also all the other layers of these governors and these people who have really empowered the destruction of people within their states. Reopening schools when there's no resources for that and decisively telling people: get out there and die or live. The fourth is this economic crisis. Loss of jobs. The price of food is going up. Businesses are closing. That is terrifying. When you think about the fact that the things that we thought we could rely on; maybe you thought you could rely on your job and now you don't have one. There's unemployment, money is going, gone and these

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things are pressing. Think about that in ways that it impacts and reimagines. How do we support our students, ourselves, and our communities?

Dr. Mary Raygoza: I wanted to notice in the conversation that what preceded you naming all of the different profound moments that we're in and how people are impacted, Aaminah, is you bringing up that you're planning for your Ed Psych teacher education class right now, how you plan to re-envision that class. And I want to appreciate that. I think that really captures what we strive to do as teacher educators in our own practice. How do we genuinely try to understand what's going on in the world? What does it mean for schools? How do we hear young people's voices and lived experiences? And then: what does this mean for our classrooms as teacher educators? And continuously going through that process for our own classes but also doing that in community in our program meetings. I think that it pushes us collectively to continue the work, knowing that we never have arrived at the perfect transformative teacher program. We're on this journey, always reimagining.

I'm thinking about courses a lot at this moment too, because I'm teaching our Foundations of Urban Education class right now, which is the summer intensive course for our program. You have also taught it, Aaminah and Raina. I want to give a shout out to Cliff Lee, who in many ways, designed and re-envisioned the course, and Chris Junsay, G. Reyes, Whitneé Garrett-Walker who have all taught it. I want to be really intentional about acknowledging the work of my colleagues of color who dreamed, envisioned, and designed this class and the program. This class is about building community. It's about getting into the foundations of education through this critical lens, looking at inequitable systems, the foundations of education in this country connected to colonization and slavery, and the work of social justice educators (within and outside of school systems) who have been working to undo that, abolish that, and create something different. Another part of the class is beginning work on teacher positionality. The culminating piece of this class is to write a critical positionality paper where the students are invited to reflect on their intersecting identities and how that's connected to their worldview and

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their experiences moving through Pre-K through 12 schools. They read a number of pieces on teacher positionality, intersectionality, solidarity. For white educators, including myself, it's important to learn about the experiences and respond to the calls of BIPOC teachers and youth, so that we don't go into schools and perpetuate racism.

On Healing

Dr. Aminah Norris: If we continue to separate ourselves from groups of people because of stereotypes we may have of them and their children, then our society is never going to actually reach any kind of freedom. Any of us could simply say we have resources. But what's the difference between that and the Greenville thing? What is the difference? There is none. My grandfather died, because he wasn't allowed in your hospital. You're saying these kids aren't allowed in your pod. That's not okay. We can't keep doing that. I want to be able to reclaim rage for Black and Brown people. We have been conditioned that we are not allowed to feel that or experience that. What we're dealing with is outrageous. It's outrageous. Rage is something that we should acknowledge and claim. Bring back into our vocabulary and expression.

Dr. Mary Raygoza: Aminah, within your piece about how this time should not be distance learning but rather collective learning, you write about looking to Black women, centering your ideas about how we need to engage in this time and beyond. Reading your piece made me think about my work with teacher education students. How can we understand the moment and the movement that we're in? So we read your piece, Erica Turner's (2020) Equity Guide to Pandemic Schooling, a piece by Bettina Love (2020) called "Teachers, we can't go back to the way things were," and Lisa Kelly's (2020) blog, which is about remote emergency education for community health. Then we stepped back and thought about: What does this time that we're in mean for how we can radically dream schools differently in ways that are just and antiracist and anti-oppressive? And what can they do right now coming into student teaching?

Coming back to "pandemic pods" and all that families are

grappling with, it's really terrible that we don't have a bigger system-wide approach to make schooling happen in ways that are empowering and liberatory and support everyone's basic human needs right now and protect people, from the virus, from dying, especially communities of color. It's putting all these individual people in really unfathomably difficult positions of trying to figure out how to navigate schooling and childcare. But for people who have all kinds of privilege, people with many of the same intersecting identities as myself, I ask: "Why are you resource hoarding and hiring credentialed teachers just for yourself? Why is that what you care most about right now?" We have to care about the collective, like you say in your work, Aminah.

Dr. Aminah Norris: We can't keep perpetuating these deep seated hateful things that are destroying us individually, communally, societally on every level. It's a problem. We can't keep doing that, at some point we have to break it. We have to say, "This is enough. I have resources. I'm a capable educator. Why would I give those resources to people just for money?" That's not why, we went into the educational field in the first place. I need to make our society better. So therefore, I want to make sure that every child has access and the people who don't have access are the people that we keep talking about and so we need to change some things you know for sure.

Dr. Mary Raygoza: Healing practice doesn't just inform one particular class or unit in our teacher education program, but is one of the themes that runs throughout. We have two seminars in our program that we call Praxis. We have envisioned them as spaces that are trauma-informed and healing-centered, so that we're always centering how everyone is as a human being, making sense of their experiences in the classroom and holding that and honoring that. That is part of the process of teaching. How do we engage in teacher self-care? And what does teacher collective care look like, and how is activism and resistance and action actually part of our care, part of healing us all?

Dr. Aminah Norris: This reminded me of this Audre Lorde quote. She says, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare." It's this idea of preserving ourselves so that we don't burn out, so that we

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can continue to do the collective work. That's the political warfare piece, too. You have to take care of yourself, especially, particularly when there are people trying to detract from you, being able to contribute to the students in the community.

Dr. Raina León: I think this piece around self-care first and starting with where we are, what we believe. We need to engage in interrogations of our beliefs and also opening up space for folks to invite us into interrogating that belief. Calling in, if you will, is important. I always start with the self and subjectivity. How do I hold space for others? I need to make sure that I'm doing that for myself. That if I tell my students about the importance of self-care, well, I need to remind myself that actually, I need to do that too. I need to take my walk. I need to spend some time in my garden. I need to play with my son on the ground. I don't know about anyone else, but I also recognize that I have a lot of childhood trauma stuff. Part of what I carry is sometimes I get really, really stressed, and I don't realize until I'm about to blow up or shut down. I don't realize that my body was showing all the signs of "You are under siege and you need to stop." I consciously have to check in with my body and check in with how I feel about things. The channel for reckoning, revolution and antiracist practice starts in that self and then extends into how we do this work together. I do believe that the most powerful and sustaining change happens in connection with the community. Finding people to be in community with and to have those critical conversations so that you're not just talking to yourself in a closet somewhere is important. Being able to talk with people and strategize and build and vision together. Whatever that vision is for transformation may happen five years or more down the line. I tell the story that there were a few of us who literally met in secret for a long time, visiting and strategizing and having meetings before "the meeting" so that we could bounce off one another in a way that seemed organic during the larger meeting. That's what we had to do, recognizing the system in which we work. We now have a critical mass of folks who are on the same page and can advocate together within our teacher education program. What does that mean within a school? I think it might mean the same thing: how do you vision together and make change happen?

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Here's an example: we got into a little issue with one of our colleagues about some classes. As a way of pushing back, I asked for more data and our placement coordinator, Chris Junsay, did the research. He called all of our candidates of the previous five years and discovered our work is highly successful. When we have 95% plus who stay in the profession after five years; that is highly successful because the rate of teachers who leave the profession within five years is more than 50%. For our candidates to have come through and to have done that work of interrogation, to feel overwhelmed with all the things that they're learning and all the planning that they're doing, and yet be sustained in how they grow as teachers and community organizers and people and in connection with one another as human being. That's phenomenal.

Conclusion: Reflecting on Our Praxis

Consistent with stories across the book, *Confronting Racism in Teacher Education, Counternarratives of Critical Practice*, our experiences include “incredible trauma, as well as resistance and resilience, that teacher educators face in working toward racial justice” (Picower & Kohli, 2017, p. 10). Thus, we recognize the importance of sharing what we have learned through our collective work to provide implications for racial justice in teacher education, teaching, and learning.

In our work together, various themes arose: those of freedom and liberation and what that means in our personal experiences as well as in social and educational landscapes; healing through storytelling to draw on memory to illuminate the current time; the power of dreaming and strategizing together; and the importance of reclaiming one's rage as an activating mechanism for change. We proudly found ourselves celebrating the effectiveness of our teacher education program and the resultant retention of our students in the field of education over time. We additionally realized that over and over again we emphasized the centrality of love in our work. It is not a trivial act to locate our energetic work in creating resources for and holding space in love for our educators. bell hooks (2006) reminds us:

A culture of domination is anti-love. It requires violence to sustain itself. To choose love is to go against the prevailing

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values of the culture...Awareness is central to the process of love as the practice of freedom...Choosing love we also choose to live in community, and that means that we do not have to change by ourselves. (hooks, 2006, p. 246)

In framing our work as emerging from and being animated by love, we resist the metanarrative that says that a structure stained in racism, toxicity, and domination is what must be, because it is what has always been; through our community storytelling and counternarrative co-creation we disrupt, transform, and heal both individually and collectively. While the pandemic has been devastating across the world and has been isolating, it has also drawn peoples more closely together to interrogate what truly matters. How can we more fully honor and nurture connections and thrive? In our conversation, we center praxis that draws on love, sees clearly where we have been, where we are as teacher educators—as humans in a decidedly divisive world—and moves toward a daring future. It is a future we are just about to make.

The implications for the field and practical applications are many. In our conversation and examples, we model ways to manifest rehumanizing praxis of teacher education. In this section on implications, we provide practical suggestions that teacher educators might employ in an effort to transform teaching and learning. We recognize that we are all on the journey towards freedom. Therefore we must engage in these practices to collectively heal. Therefore, we suggest these implications as guideposts on our journey toward becoming free and experiencing joy.

Teacher educators must begin instruction by interrogating our positionalities and asking our students to do the same. We must explicitly recognize, name, and frame ways that our intersectional identities inform our commitment to anti-racist work including disrupting anti-Blackness within and beyond schooling. It is through this recognition that we might transition from simply engaging in philosophical discussions of ideology to participation in a radical transformation of our educational thought and praxis. For our classes, we can begin by ensuring our syllabi include the work of BIPOC abolitionist teacher educators and critical race theorists. Across our work, we must interrogate our identities as we strive to answer questions such as, “How do my intersectional

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identities inform my contribution to the movement for Black lives?” And, “How do we ensure that anti-racism is an interwoven thread that connects our pedagogies, practices, policies, and systems?” As teacher educators, we can engage in such questions powerfully as a collective, as revealed through our work together. What does it look like for teacher educators to regularly engage in the kind of critical inquiry spaces—forefronting our identities and lived experiences and hopes and dreams—that we hope our students engage in themselves as teachers? How can we extend and model the practice of more explicitly being in community with one another, whether at the same institution or not, benefiting as people and professionals from the beauty in camaraderie and the praxis and the organizing that takes place within such spaces?

We have a vision and you are a part of it. We ask you to dream with us an interconnected, humanizing educational future. We ask that you consider the questions throughout this piece to agitate your own (teacher) education practice. We ask you to build with us a new teacher education practice. We started this work together guided by questions that themselves arose from a radical love for humanity, resistance to all forms of oppression, and a belief in our education system as a vehicle for social change. We know we cannot do this work alone. We have set a call. We hope you will answer it. Our futures and our now depend on that answer. Together we find joy, become free, and change the world.

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Waiting

Patricia Arahann Taylor, *University of La Verne*

The universe was waiting for you.
The earth was waiting for you.
The world was waiting for you.
The United States was waiting for you.
The community was waiting for you.
The family was waiting for you.
And you showed up.

Even though some may not be able to express their appreciation because they have yet to recognize their own genius and passions...no matter.

You are here in your full genius, passions, and talents and it is your work to love, care for, and support YOU.

We waited and you showed up.

**Seeking Healing through Black Sisterhood:
Examining the Affordances of a Counterspace for
Black Women Pre-Service Teachers**

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Abstract

Calls to increase diversity in the United States teacher workforce emphasize benefits to students without strategic consideration of minoritized teachers' needs. In this ethnographic study, we investigate the affordances of a counterspace for Black women pre-service teachers in a predominantly white institution to support their development as educators. Using a grounded theory approach, we analyze fieldnotes from one meeting to understand how the counterspace offered participants a space to reconcile with contradictions experienced working in schools. The counterspace contributed to participants' healing in three ways: (1) it *made space* for participants to interrogate their own experiences in U.S. schools; (2) it offered *insider connections*, a fundamental sense of belonging and legitimacy; and (3) it *busted the myth of the monolith*, by inviting the breadth of Black women's stories and histories. These findings suggest that building community through shared identity markers can foster a rich environment for teacher development.

Keywords: Black women teachers, pre-service teachers, culturally responsive teacher education

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I am a Black Feminist. I mean I recognize that my power as well as my primary oppressions come as a result of my [B]lackness as well as my womaness, and therefore my struggles on both of these fronts are inseparable.

—Audre Lorde

Black women preservice teachers...Although stereotyped to be similar, come in all shapes, sizes, and personalities. They are the Pikachu of teachers, a true, rare Pokémon. I am proud to be in the number. I am proud to do this work too. I am proud to work with and create with other Black women. Bingo. When I get the chance, and sometimes it's rare, I love collaborating with Black women. That's what brought me through my teacher prep program at [Historically Black College]. It is amazing to see Black women teachers who will connect, share, and love on one another.

—Collaborative Writing from BWT Participants, January 2020

Introduction

The second excerpt above is from a writing activity completed by four Black women pre-service teachers. In the activity, they were given the prompt, “Black women pre-service teachers...” They had a minute to write whatever came to mind. At the end of the minute, they passed their papers to the next woman and received a new paper to continue writing. In this way, the collectively constructed text represents one collaborative take on what it means to be a Black woman educator. They understand the ways that others stereotype them, but they are proud to be in this historically important group and excited to share and collaborate with other Black women. They do not always get such opportunities, but when they do, they are eager to connect to and love one another.

This connection and love are important because the journey to becoming a teacher can be difficult. Not only must pre-service teachers learn what to do in a classroom, but they also must learn how to think about the work of teaching (Horn & Campbell, 2015). Teacher education programs are ostensibly designed to support this development among teacher candidates. However, historically, teacher education programs have primarily focused on challenges white teachers encounter entering schooling

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contexts, ignoring the unique developmental needs of Black teachers (Sleeter, 2001; Gist, 2014; Brown, 2014).

Not surprisingly, this focus on white teachers reflects the current teacher demographics in K–12 schools. In the school year 2015–2016, 79% of public school teachers were white, and 76% were female (Condition of Education, 2020). Exacerbating this, attrition among Black teachers is high: one study showed that in 2012–2013, 22% of Black teachers left the profession or moved schools compared to 15% of white teachers (Deruy, 2016). These statistics become even more troubling when compared to the demographics of students in U.S. public schools. In 2016–2017, the top three racial groups of public school students were white (48%), Hispanic (27%), and Black (15%); (Condition of Education, 2020). Researchers predict that in coming years, student demographics will shift even more towards students of color. If the teacher demographics do not shift, the U.S. will have an even larger racial mismatch between teachers and students.

One proposed approach to bridging the demographic divide between students and teachers has been *racial matching*—ensuring teachers of color work with students of similar racial backgrounds—to support racially minoritized students’ achievement (Cherng & Halpin 2016). There are compelling arguments for racial matching: teachers of color “may be perceived more favorably” by students of color due to greater cultural alignment (Easton-Brooks, 2014); more Black and Brown students are placed in gifted education programs when more Black and Brown teachers are present (Grissom & Redding, 2016). By looking at the outcomes of these studies, the solution seems clear—increase the number of Black and Brown teachers. However, there are other preliminary issues that need to be addressed in the quest to increase the number of teachers of color and to sustain them in ways that support their initial purposes for entering the profession (Achinstein et al., 2010; Santoro, 2011).

In this paper, we focus on questions of what it takes to support the development of Black women teachers in particular. To do so, we interrogate the reasons Black teachers are underrepresented in the teacher workforce, with an eye toward nurturing their development as educators in ways that attend to their social-historical

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position in schools (Gutiérrez & Jurow, 2016). Importantly, all Black teachers started as Black students. School environments often mirror oppressive systems found in broader society (Dumas, 2014), doling out what Love (2019) has referred to as “slow violence” against Black children. Black teachers have to reconcile with systems that have often pushed Black children out (Dumas & Nelson, 2016; Love, 2016; Morris, 2016) in their quest to become professionals in these settings.

Undoubtedly, all teachers must navigate the contradictions of public education as they develop their practice, especially when the institution’s needs sometimes conflict with teachers’ obligations to support children’s development (Britzman, 2012). If this is complex terrain for *all* pre-service teachers—what Beach (1999) called a *consequential transition*—it becomes even more fraught for those whom schooling has too often marginalized. Thus, an essential question for Black teachers becomes: *How do you become an agent of power in a system that has historically done harm to people like you?*

Black women as multiply marginalized teachers

Black pre-service teachers need to have opportunities to learn, be supported, have their identities and experiences affirmed, and explore the answers to this essential question. Given their socio-historical position in relation to U.S. schooling, Black teachers, specifically Black women teachers, have unique work to do in order to step into the role of teacher with their whole, authentic selves. They are assumed to be the “right choice” for supporting Black students because of the perceived cultural match described above. These assumptions can be particularly dangerous, if the prospective teachers’ own full humanity is not recognized in this often fraught professional transition (Britzman, 2012), and they are not provided with educational opportunities to understand their potential to perpetuate oppressive systems and mindsets (Cherry-McDaniel, 2018).

As the Audre Lorde quote in the epigraph suggests, Black women experience multiple forms of marginalization in U.S. society. As a result, the essential question for Black teachers above has its own intersectional meanings (Crenshaw, 1991) for Black

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women teachers, who experience both racism and misogyny—what has been termed *misogynoir* (Bailey & Trudy, 2018)—in U.S. society. Throughout history, Black women have been oppressed, excluded, and ignored in numerous ways, yet, because of the rich resolve for resilience at the core of Black culture, they have persisted. In this article, we focus specifically on the development of Black women pre-service teachers (BWPSTs) through a counterspace group called (B)lack + (W)oman + (T)eacher (BWT). Counterspace refers to a “safe space” that lies in the margins outside of mainstream educational spaces (Ong, Et al., 2018). The first author, who herself comes from a family of Black women educators, co-developed this group to create space for BWPSTs at a predominantly white institution so that they could bring their whole selves to a community that shares key identity markers. This group served as a space of healing, as participants laughed, shared a meal, built community, and critically analyzed their experiences throughout teacher training. The second author, a white Jewish woman teacher educator and researcher, mentored the first author in this work. Her expertise in qualitative research allowed her to support the first author through all research phases from data collection, analysis, interpretation, and write up. At the same time, acknowledging the second author’s positionality as a cultural outsider, the authors tapped into this difference as a resource for co-authoring this piece, as when she helped identify cultural forms that might not be understood by outsiders (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Villenas, 1996). The paper is written in Harmon’s voice, since she led the study design, data collection, analysis, and writing; this is especially important in the findings section when she narrates Black women’s experiences using the first-person plural (“we”).

As one of the creators of the group, the first author’s goal was to bring BWPSTs together outside of classes, removing participants from both the white and male gazes (Morrison, 1992) to critically analyze their shared position as Black women in education. We found that this group, even from the first meeting, built community through 1) making space, 2) offering insider connection, and 3) busting the myth of the monolith. As such, the community showed potential to help BWPSTs *heal* their

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relationship to U.S. schooling in ways that supported their development as teachers. Our goal is to help Black teachers who can work authentically and thrive in this work as they work toward the thriving, education, and liberation of Black children—and all children—in their classrooms.

Conceptual Framework

To understand what it means to become a teacher in a system that has done historic and ongoing harm to people who share the aspiring teacher's identity, we draw on several key ideas from critical race studies, cultural studies, and the psychology of racism. As we elaborate, we view the importance of understanding Black women's *intersectional* identities as they reconcile what it means to teach in U.S. schools; the emotional toll of paying the *Black tax* (Burrows, 2016) in predominantly white spaces; and *coping with racism vs. healing and being whole despite racism* to allow them to enter the work of teaching in authentic ways.

Intersectionality

We conceptualize the BWT counterspace as a space that supported BWPSTs' healing in relation to an often inhospitable school system and thus supported their authentic development as teachers. To understand BWPSTs' social position in relation to schooling, we use the frame of intersectionality (Hill-Collins & Bilge, 2016). Intersectionality pushes for a fuller view of how "race, class, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, and age operate not as discrete and mutually exclusive entities, but build on each other and work together" (p. 4). Intersectionality highlights that Black women's experiences are not additive. They are not Black first and women second or vice versa; their experiences are unique to their Black *womaness*. Intersectionality situates the ways Black women are continuously positioned in different spaces and times throughout their lives. Generally, Black women were first Black girls. Our participants were Black girls and students in K-12 schools in various regions around the United States. As Black girls, they may have often been adultified (Epstein et al., 2017), had their hair criticized by authority figures (DeLongoria, 2018), and been disciplined more harshly or even pushed out of

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educational spaces (Morris, 2016). Intersectionality is essential in understanding, unpacking, and navigating the transition from a Black girl student to a Black woman teacher and the ways that oppressive systems, as well as personal and cultural resilience, have played a role in this process.

The Black Tax

As Burrows (2016) explains, the Black tax is the toll paid by African Americans to enter and participate in white institutions. Black women preparing to be teachers within the same educational system that pushes out Black girls have to reconcile with that contradiction, since even schools with majority Black students exist within a society dominated by white supremacist logics. Throughout U.S. history into the current era, schools have not welcomed Black girls and women. Gist (2017) describes this experience of working in an inhospitable setting as a *double bind*, as teachers need to reconcile tensions between *personal* and *systemic ties*. Personal ties include cultural, linguistic, familial affiliations, and connections that play a critical role in shaping individuals' thinking and choices. Systemic ties include written, spoken, hidden, and/or invisible institutional policies and practices that have direct power and influence over individuals and groups. Oftentimes, Black women teachers have to navigate multiple double binds to complete formal teacher training and develop as teachers in often oppressive school systems. Not only are these women dealing with the double bind, they are also having to manage their *double consciousness* (DuBois, 1903/2008). DuBois outlines this double consciousness as "a peculiar sensation, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (p. 9). Looking at oneself, as a Black woman, through the eyes of the American education system can be incredibly painful.

In contrast, spaces designed for Black women can reduce the Black tax. Black people in the U.S. have known the unique healing that is only possible in spaces of belonging, what authors have referred to as *homeplaces* (hooks, 1990) or sister circles (Allen, 2019; Neal-Barnett, 2011; Croom et al., 2017), places where Black

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women can be seen and belong, where they can rest and recover from ongoing experiences of oppression. Community can be especially powerful for Black women as they navigate white spaces, sharing experiences and coping strategies, and finding laughter and humor in some of the absurdity of their stories (S. Davis, 2019).

Coping with Racism vs. Being Whole Despite Racism

The Black women who have “made it” through the system typically have excellent skills at *coping* with racism. In order to support their development as teachers, BWT was designed to help them *heal* from some of the racism they have experienced despite their ostensible success. Coping is the process of minimizing stress or conflict, often involving the regulation of emotions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to Suls and Fletcher (1985), there are two types of coping: *approach* and *avoidance* coping. In approach coping, the individual actively attempts to solve a problem. For example, after experiencing racial microaggressions, educators might facilitate discussions on race in the workplace. Avoidance coping, however, is a passive approach where individuals avoid the issue, such as when individuals pretend that they did not experience a racial microaggression (Decuir-Gunby & Gunby, 2016). As suggested by Mellor (2004), coping with racism requires coping skills beyond those needed for dealing with everyday emotions or situations because these experiences are so often invisibilized or diminished by people from the dominant culture (Sue et al., 2008) in what is known as *racial gaslighting* (A. Davis & Ernst, 2019). Specifically, Mellor asserts that coping with racism requires protecting the self, engaging in self-control, and confronting the racism that was experienced (Decuir-Gunby & Gunby, p. 393). The last, confronting racism, is difficult to do in predominantly white spaces such as most teacher education programs, which vary in the Black tax they place on teacher candidates. Harkening back to the intersectional oppression Black women experience, we assert that dealing with both racialized and gendered issues only adds to that psychic burden. As a part of the double bind, Black women navigate white spaces with the constant burden of weighing out which issues of

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racism to confront and which to let slide, and whether to risk the emotional drain of racial gaslighting.

Collectively coping together in the BWT counterspace can be an important step to healing racial wounds. As Ginwright (2015) argues, “structural oppression harms hope”; “healing is a critical component in building hope”; and “building hope is an important political activity”(p. 2). By sharing experiences, individuals can build hope by better seeing the systemic nature of the racism they encounter, helping to depersonalize it. They can also share strategies and insights. In this way, the BWT group provided a political space for BWPSTs to explore not only everyday examples of racism or sexism (or its combination in misogynoir), but to deeply explore their experiences as Black students transitioning into Black women educators. This helped them reconcile and critically consider their double binds by exploring what the institution of U.S. education does to Black girls, even if they personally did not experience all of that violence. There is a need to recognize the inherent contradictions of being an agent of power given this social and historical reality. Black women need a space to interrogate these contradictions to figure out how to do the liberatory work of teaching children without incurring additional harm to students or themselves. This type of intentional work can help these Black women move past coping and move towards healing. BWT is a potential design for teacher education programs to better center the needs of BWPSTs, *see* and *hear* them, as they become teachers. In this study, we explored the question: How can a counterspace foster healing for BWPSTs?

Study Design

Participants and Setting

Study participants were Black women enrolled in a teacher education program at a prestigious private university located in the southeastern region of the United States. Their programs varied across grade bands and subject areas. The first author and another Black woman colleague, Micaela Harris, who is also a former teacher and current researcher, recruited for the BWT group by sending out fliers and email invitations to email lists, along with distributing fliers to professors to share. Once

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a few participants showed interest, we used snowball sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997) to recruit additional participants. The group ultimately consisted of eight Black women; however, for the first meeting, which is the focus of this paper, seven were in attendance.

Focal Data and Analytic Methods

The focal data for this analysis is a two-hour BWT meeting in January 2020. Participants gathered at a local Black-owned cafe in a private meeting room. As we further explain below, we chose this location to have our own space outside of the typical university spaces. Harmon and Harris designed activities to support collective reflection and sharing of experiences as Black women teachers navigating predominately white spaces in teacher education. These were: conversation over dinner, ice breakers, collective text generation using a prompt, video analysis, sharing artifacts that reflect salient pieces of each woman's identity, and collective brainstorming of norms and goals for the group. Meeting activities are detailed in Table 1 (facing page).

All of the participants identify as Black women, and represent different teaching specializations which we choose not to share for reasons of confidentiality. However, to give a sense of who they are, we include this list of pseudonyms and a description of the artifact they brought (see Table 2).

Harmon and Harris collected written artifacts produced by the participants and took detailed ethnographic fieldnotes during the meeting (Emerson et al., 2011). We combined both sets of fieldnotes to create a compilation of both researchers' observations. Since it was our first meeting, and we intended this space to be built around trust, we did not utilize audio or video-recording equipment to capture the meeting. We had a discussion with the group at the end of the meeting to discuss recording options for future meetings, and all members agreed to permit recording, which we interpreted as a sign of meeting some goals of trust building.

Since this was an exploratory study, the first author initially looked at the data and artifacts with the low-inference interpretive question, "What is going on here?" (Emerson et al., 2011). Using open coding (Charmaz, 2006), she looked for patterns and

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Table 1
Overview of Activities for the BWT Meeting

| Activity: | Approximate Duration: | Description: |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| Dinner | 20 minutes | We started the meeting by sharing a meal and engaging in conversation. |
| Introductions | 10 minutes | Each person introduced themselves by sharing their name, home town, year in the program, and their professional goals. |
| “This or That” (ice breaker) | 15 minutes | For each round, participants were presented with two concepts on opposite sides of the room. They were instructed to walk to one side of the room or the other, depending on which thing resonated with them the most in that moment. |
| Video Analysis | 10 minutes | We watched a spoken word video by Porsho O entitled, “Angry Black Woman.” After the video, we had a conversation about the participants’ initial thoughts and what resonated with them. |
| Artifact sharing | 25 minutes | Prior to the meeting, each woman was instructed to bring one artifact that best represents one salient aspect of their identity. During the meeting, each woman was given an opportunity to show the artifact and explain its relevance. (The artifacts will be shared below in Table 2.) |
| Write Around | 15 minutes | Each participant, including the facilitators, were given the prompt: Black women pre-service teachers... They had one minute to write whatever came to their mind. At the end of the minute, they passed their papers to the next woman and received a new paper to continue writing. The goal was to create a collectively constructed text centering Black women pre-service teachers. Once each woman received her original paper, we talked about their reactions to the finished text. What resonated with them about what was written? Were they surprised? What would they add now? What was still missing? |
| Setting Goals and Creating Norms | 15 minutes | We wrote explicit goals and norms for the upcoming meetings. |
| Exit Activity | 5 minutes | We asked them to write one word, drawing, or any type of representation to show what they want to get out of this group. |

themes as she read and re-read the fieldnotes. As themes emerged, she wrote memos linking themes to different data excerpts. As the first author and second author (the second author did not participate in counterspace meetings) reflected on and refined

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Table 2

Participants' Pseudonyms, Artifacts, and Related Stories

| Pseudonym: | Artifact: | Significance of Artifact: |
|-----------------|---------------------|---|
| Zuri | Family picture | She is very close with her mother and siblings. They all live in different places now, so they often do group video calls to stay connected. |
| Ronda | Running shoe | Discussed how she has recently realized that she really values comfort. She can be the best version of herself when she is comfortable. So she has been working out to also get more comfortable in her own body. |
| Leanna | Keychain from Italy | Traveling has exposed her to many different cultures and perspectives. |
| Valencia | Wig | She uses her wigs to communicate different sides of her identity. She wears a particular wig while working and a different one to do social activities in a more relaxed environment. |
| Kianna | J. Cole CD | She discussed the ways that she and her dad bonded through listening and discussing music. |
| Janeice | Ear pods | Music has been a big part of her life and something she uses to stay sane. She can block out distractions and just listen to her music. |
| Sonja | Father's harmonica | Her mother sent her late father's harmonica to use as a calming tool during stressful times in school. |

the emergent themes, they concurred that three central themes (discussed below) pointed to BWT as a space of healing and support for the BWPST participants. We looked for disconfirming evidence of each of the themes (Erickson, 1986), refining the claims as we accounted for different moments in the data.

A limitation of this analysis is that BWT only met once despite being scheduled to meet four times. Due to a natural disaster and a pandemic, we cancelled the final meetings. This analysis builds on data from one session only, so we are careful not to make general conclusions from this limited data; instead, this is a proof of concept paper to illuminate the potential for counterspaces to contribute to Black women teachers' healing in support of their development. BWPSTs have been heavily undertheorized, so this paper will serve as a catalyst for other researchers to continue to center the needs of BWPSTs.

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Findings

The BWT counterspace supported healing for BWPSTs in three important ways. First, by gathering together, BWT *made space* for participants to interrogate their own experiences in U.S. schools. Second, as a space explicitly for Black women, BWT offered *insider connections*, a fundamental element to a sense of belonging (Porter & Dean, 2015) and legitimacy. Finally, by inviting the breadth of Black women's stories and personal histories, BWT *busted the myth of the monolith*, the assumption that all Black women have the exact same experiences. Together, we saw these as offering a space for healing by providing the infrastructure for the Black women participants to explore their personalities and systemic ties alongside other women who were similarly navigating the transition from student to educator.

Making Space

BWT made space for the participants to be seen and heard in a way that cannot be achieved in most predominantly white spaces. *Making space*, in this context, refers to both literal space and temporal space. This space, in turn, allowed the Black women to begin interrogating their positionality as former students in the K-12 system, as current students in a teacher education program, and as future educators.

Making Literal Space

As mentioned in the research design, we met off campus in a private meeting room at a Black-owned cafe. At the start of the meeting, the owner introduced himself and connected us with a Black woman who had started her own business by making tea cakes. Little did we know, this woman also had a background in education, with a doctorate from a prestigious university. Through this introduction, we got a chance to start this meeting by hearing the story of another Black woman finding her purpose and building a business doing something she loves. This encounter was unexpected, and it was beautiful. She told us the history of tea cakes dating back to American slavery. She spoke of how her ancestors made these treats for the white families they worked for, but could not make them for their own children. Instead, these

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Black women created new recipes specifically for their own families to enjoy, and her family's recipe is the one she uses to this day. The first time the recipe was written down, her grandmother was on her deathbed and wanted her granddaughter to continue the legacy. Now, after a career in education, she runs her own business using the knowledge and expertise of Black women who came before her. These details are important because we, through BWT, heard her story and were inspired to support her business. By meeting there, we disconnected from the historically white university and went to a place created for Black folk. This choice in venue set the tone and allowed us to feel welcome and seen. Once the owner of the restaurant and the owner of the tea cake business left, only the Black women in the group remained.

Making Temporal Space

Beyond the welcome we felt in the physical space, through activities like the video analysis of the spoken word poem and artifact sharing, we made space for each other's feelings and experiences. We took time at the start of the meeting to laugh and share a meal. We did activities that provided each person the opportunity to share experiences in thinking about being a Black woman pre-service teacher. We took time to acknowledge our similarities and differences. We cheered each other on, we empathized with each other, and most importantly, we understood. We made space to hear and see and interact in affirming ways.

In reviewing the data, moments where the participants encouraged each other to make a statement, discussed particular challenges, or utilized additional time (after a timer rang) to continue discussing or finishing an activity were coded as *making space*. One example of making space happened during the artifact activity. Harmon and Harris had asked participants to come with an artifact that represented a salient part of their identity. As Table 2 describes, participants brought items like family heirlooms, personal items, and song lyrics. One participant, Zuri, wanted to show a picture of her family, but had trouble pulling it up on her computer:

Zuri: I just had the picture up and now it's gone.

Ronda: Is it the picture of you all sitting together?

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Zuri: I can't get it [the picture] to show. Y'all know I'm a new Mac user. *[laughter]*

Ronda: Girl, that picture is fire. You need to show it. I can help you.

When Zuri had trouble retrieving her picture, she made a joke, seemingly not wanting to come off as incompetent. By explaining to the group that she had a new computer, and that was why it was taking longer to pull up the picture, she appeared to be defending against such potential judgments. In response, Ronda made space in two ways: first, she reaffirmed Zuri, acknowledging the beauty of her family; second, she made the temporal space for Zuri to find her picture, letting Zuri know that we were not in a rush and not constrained to time limits often present in other spaces. This act of making space is particularly important, because oftentimes in white spaces, speed and efficiency are the key factors of success (Jones & Okun, 2001). Here, Ronda signaled to Zuri and the rest of the group that it was okay to take up space. It was okay to reclaim your time. It was okay to take your time; it was okay to be proud of your family and where you come from.

Making space is important for Black women, because it allows us to bring our whole selves to a space. Black women are often told they are too big for a space (Morris, 2016); they are “expected to be small so that boys could expand and white girls could shine” (Cottom, 2019, p. 7). In a historically white university, many of the classes, policies, and overall expectations, are rooted in whiteness. They reflect white, middle class standards, and often minoritized people have to learn how to operate in this reality. They are taught to shrink to fit into these spaces to be successful. Just as DuBois (1903) states, echoing poet Paul Laurence Dunbar (1895), Black women wear two masks: one reflecting the authentic self and one more pleasing to the white gaze. This becomes increasingly difficult to maintain physically and psychologically, and, we argue, hinders teachers’ development of pedagogy rooted in their whole selves.

Insider Connection

Unburdened by the tolls of the Black tax, BWT helped promote each participant’s connection to other women in the group,

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as the members had unique understandings of each other's experiences and shared an *insider connection*. This refers not only to shared experiences, but also knowledge of potential experiences, decisions, ideologies, and dilemmas encountered by people with a shared group identity. Participants understood each other's intersectional experiences, despite them possibly not being their own, because they understood the cultural references and the complexities of their existence. As Black women, they could tell stories about educational experiences, experiences dealing with race within the teacher education program and placement sites without having to explain ourselves; they could set the mask aside, providing a sense of belonging and wholeness. When someone would speak, the responses reflected Black cultural communication styles: heads would nod or words of affirmation would pour out after their statements (Zeigler, 2001). The insider connection helped to strengthen bonds and build community quickly.

During the artifact sharing activity, Valencia presented her wig as a salient piece of her identity. She said:

Mine is not incredibly deep, but it is this wig. I have a short bob pixie wig for work that makes me look like I have two kids, [am] in my 30's, and teach as my second job. I wear that wig so the people at the school and the kids will not play with me. When I am out, this is my more fun wig.

These show my creativity and my versatility. [*laughter from the group*]

Valencia's narrative is significant in so many ways. First, her way of sharing the wig illustrates insider connection, because, although none of the other women were wearing a wig at that moment, they understood her comment about the need to be versatile in the face of the white and male gazes. No one asked to touch her hair or seemed to be confused by her wearing different wigs, something Black women come to expect in white spaces (Brown, 2018). Second, she felt comfortable sharing her thoughts about her hair, and she did so at a time set aside for participants to share the most salient parts of their identities. The politics of Black women's hair in the U.S. has a long history tied to oppressive aesthetic politics reflecting misogynoir (Lewis et al., 2013; Norwood, 2018; Thompson, 2009). Black women are

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often asked to change their hair to conform with Eurocentric notions of beauty. Valencia reported using these politics to make statements wherever she went. To be taken seriously as a professional, she wore one particular wig; to be perceived as more laid back and creative, she wore another. In school she wanted to be perceived as more experienced and professional, and she did that so that people in the school will “not play with her.” These issues of hair and perception of competence are significant to Black women as something they must think about in their professional world. As hooks (1990) says, “the idea that there is no meaningful connection between Black experience and critical thinking about aesthetics or culture must be continually interrogated” (p. 23). This insider connection, outside of the white and male gazes, allowed Valencia to talk about her aesthetic choices with her wigs without the need to explain herself or to explain the significance of changing her hair to manage those perceptions.

The insider connection provided a sense of belonging to the members of the group. Participants were Black women enrolled in a teacher education program, which, like most, often centered the needs of white teachers and norms of whiteness (Sleeter, 2001; Varghese et al., 2019). Many Black teachers, especially Black women teachers, must learn to navigate these spaces as they prepare to navigate U.S. schools as Black women. We have to learn how to communicate, appear, and interact in ways that make us more acceptable in white spaces, to conform to what has been referred to as *respectability politics* (White, 2010). Black women are constantly dealing with the politics of their existence, whether it is hair or demeanor (e.g., avoiding the Sapphire trope of the “angry Black woman”), or how we are perceived by others while doing our jobs with integrity. This work is exhausting as we pay the tolls of the Black tax. It is exhausting to have to wear a mask or reckon with the double bind to be taken seriously, seen as a professional, or respected for our talents.

Busting the Myth of the Monolith

We identified moments as *busting the myth of monolith* to describe times when participants’ interactions pushed back on stereotypes of Black women that are often used to characterize

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their personality, actions, or appearance. Some of those stereotypes include the *Black mammy* (Hill-Collins, 2000), the faithful, obedient domestic servant of the dominant, white masses, and the *Black Sapphire* (Ladson-Billings 2009), the Black woman as an unyielding, aggressive tyrant. These stereotypes often shape how Black women are regarded in professional settings.

Disrupting the myth of monolith is important because it talks back to stereotypes and embraces the diversity within the Black community. Although the Black mammy trope did not come up in our data, the Black sapphire trope came up twice in the meeting as participants discussed the role of Black women as disciplinarians in the classroom—perhaps because of the video analysis we did of a spoken word poem on this theme (see Table 1). Participants cited times that they felt that assumptions were made about their disciplinary abilities because of their appearance as Black women. The women had issues with these assumptions. Many of them approached teaching through a progressive lens (Philip, 2011), so they did not consider goals for classroom management as a reason to punish or yell. For example, Leanna referenced a time that she felt as though the Black administrators at her placement site assumed that she would lead her class in the same way that they had. When she did not fit their expectations, she felt frustrated and out of place. At the same time, she did not feel comfortable critiquing other Black women in non-Black spaces. Prior to BWT, Leanna did not have a space to say these things out loud with other people, including her university instructors, who may not have understood the specific tensions she was navigating.

Leanna was not the only woman who thought about the ways in which her school, administrators—and even professors—positioned her. During the writing activity, each participant was charged with writing a sentence. The prompt started with “Black women pre-service teachers.” Several participants constructed the following text:

Black women preservice teachers have a different challenge than most. They have a looming expectation to be the expert on Black kids, yet, since we are preservice, still have a lot to learn about aspects of the profession

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that should be natural. While we should be enjoying the learning experiences, we are ever aware of the looming possibility that we'll always have to deal with discipline. Why can't we be the curriculum expert in the building? Why is my worth reduced to being a monitor of behavior? I resonate with this. It feels like the loud stereotype of a Black woman teacher is one type in the media/film and one type in our experience/reality.

Disrupting the myth of the monolith allowed each woman to see other BWPSTs with so many beautiful and diverse backgrounds. In the collectively constructed text, the women discussed how they were positioned as experts on Black children despite still being pre-service teachers; that they saw their future as limited to being behavior monitors instead of offering other kinds of teaching expertise. This presumption of their value in schools could be dangerous if left unexplored. By uncovering it as a shared experience, participants could see the pattern, helping them move past *coping with racism* (as would more likely happen if they viewed this as only an isolated experience) to *being whole despite racism*. Recognizing patterns of how Black women educators are viewed in U.S. schools can uncover such instances of racial gaslighting, clarifying these experiences as a product of racist ideas rather than something about the individual person. As mentioned above, Black women are often placed into particular categories depending on their perceived demeanor or appearance, but this group and exercise illuminated the need for disruption of these tropes.

Discussion

In this exploratory study, we examined how a counterspace for BWPSTs stands to offer healing to participants as they grapple with the essential question for all Black teachers; namely, *How do you become an agent of power in a system that has historically done harm to people like you?* We identified three themes that explained the potential healing of the BWT space. First, by *making space* for Black women's identities and experiences, participants could interrogate their own positionality in relation to U.S. schooling in a way not typically afforded in predominantly white teacher education programs. Relatedly, the *insider*

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connection fostered a sense of belongingness and reduction in the Black tax so often doled out in white spaces. Psychologists remind us time and again that deeper learning requires the emotional safety of belonging (Deci et al., 1991; Anderman, 2003), so to grapple with issues that cut so close to personal histories requires the belongingness that insider connections can foster. Finally, *busting the myth of the monolith* helped identify patterns in participants' experiences as they reclaimed their own within group diversity. Through sharing stories that illuminated how both teacher education and school placements positioned them, the participants understood how U.S. schooling perceives them as Black women educators, a shift from how they were seen as Black girl students. Together, these stood to support BWPSTs' healing and development as their authentic selves as they transitioned into the role of teacher in U.S. schools.

As we stated earlier, this study was limited in scope because this study group only met once. After the start of the pandemic and a natural disaster, the researchers chose to cancel the meetings to allow the participants to acclimate to life after these significant changes. Nonetheless, even this one meeting illuminates some issues that teacher education programs need to more readily address.

Conclusion

Black women are multifaceted, and their unique experiences stand to bring invaluable perspectives to classrooms and schools. To strategically approach the issue of increasing teacher diversity, education scholars, administrators, and policymakers must look more critically at policies, practices, and pedagogies that potentially affect Black women. Mere identity markers, such as race or gender, do not make educators ready to teach—let alone teach in anti-oppressive ways. BWPSTs need to be provided with opportunities to analyze their experiences, confide to others who will understand with insider cultural knowledge and without judgment, understand the structures in schools to be able to dismantle them in order to provide students with the strongest education possible. They need a space to cope and heal and interrogate their place within the education system.

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Teacher education programs must expand their scope and focus on Black women to better serve a more diverse group of future teachers. One approach to centering the needs of Black teachers is providing them with counterspaces like BWT. *Making space* for folks to interrogate their own experiences in U.S. schools, offering *insider connections*, and inviting the breadth of stories and personal histories by *busting the myth of the monolith*, teacher education programs can begin to better support and center the needs of BWPSTs.

Future research should continue to explore the affordances of counterspaces for BWPSTs to survive within the racist and oppressive nature of current education institutions, alongside research on the use of counterspaces to disrupt such oppressions. Future research will also include, we hope, studies that are longitudinal, that follow teachers after their participation in a counterspace group to explore how the growth and healing in the group may shape their practices and ideology in the classroom. Additionally, as we push to disrupt the myth of the monolith, further research will help to illuminate the within-group diversity. In our case, by recognizing the diversity of the “Black experience”—the ways in which Black women are more or less privileged within white supremacist logics by other levels of oppression marked by colorism, class, education, and so on—we can do more as teacher educators to support Black women to heal and regain hope so that they may bring their whole selves to the work of teaching. By fostering BWPSTs’ understanding of their own social positionality in U.S. schools, both historically as students and presently as teachers, such experiences can contribute to Black women’s wholeness as educators and, we hope, help sustain them in the profession.

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Using Mind-Body Practices to Uproot Unconscious Bias in the Education Profession

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Abstract

Many professional development sessions focused on anti-racism have become spaces of defensiveness and opposition to the methods and language used to engage participants, particularly those of the dominant culture. School administrators have reported that many staff either refuse to attend, avoid participation in the space, or even walk out of trainings when directly challenged to discuss anti-racism. Utilizing polyvagal theory as a grounding framework (Porges, 2017), this point of view paper explores why confrontational approaches to equity work are often unsuccessful at producing a long-term transformation of white educators' mindsets and behaviors. The author offers a description of lessons learned from implementing a mindfulness-based approach to uprooting unconscious bias that centralizes the primary need for felt-safety and empathy among all participants engaged in diversity, equity, and inclusion trainings. This healing-centered approach to equity work offers a glimpse at what is possible for the field, and points the way toward moving the needle on critical conversations about embodied experiences of bias and racism in schools.

Keywords: mindfulness, unconscious bias, teacher mindset, teacher socio-emotional learning, polyvagal theory, trauma-informed teacher development

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The brutal police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor gripped the hearts of Americans nationwide in 2020, sparking a dramatic increase in demand for training and professional development in the areas of anti-racism, diversity, and cultural proficiency. In this climate, critical race historian Ibram X. Kendi rose to national prominence when his book, *How to be an Anti-Racist* (2019), topped the New York Times Bestseller list. Leaders across disciplines turned to Kendi and other prominent voices to define exactly what it means to be racist, and how to be an effective anti-racist ally for the Black community during this critical time in history. In the book, Kendi writes:

To be antiracist is to think nothing is behaviorally wrong or right—inferior or superior—with any of the racial groups. Whenever the antiracist sees individuals behaving positively or negatively, the antiracist sees exactly that: individuals behaving positively or negatively, not representatives of whole races. To be antiracist is to deracialize behavior, to remove the tattooed stereotype from every racialized body. Behavior is something humans do, not races do. (Kendi, 2019, p 105)

From this definition, one may gather that the current work of anti-racism is to identify and dismantle the structures of power (embedded in policies and practices) that result in inequities or justify existing inequities based on race. Kendi suggests that racial inequity is a problem of bad policy, *not bad people*. His intention is to keep the focus of anti-racist training on the actions, policies, and ideas that contribute to systemic inequalities, not on condemning any specific group of people. To clarify, he states, “To be anti-racist is to never conflate racist people with White people, knowing there are anti-racist Whites and racist non-Whites (p.129).” If all anti-racist theorists and professional development trainers shared a similar perspective and definition as Kendi’s, I would not have received the distressed phone call from a state-level association of K-12 school administrators that I did.

An Urgent Call for Support

In August 2020, I was contacted by the co-chairs of the diversity committee for a statewide body of special education

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directors. They informed me that the committee was desperately in need of professional development for a group of 200 administrators to address diversity and equity issues within the membership. They had recently experienced significant backlash after several White members of the group walked out of the previous two anti-racism trainings they hosted. In each of the two trainings, the presenters spoke in a directly confrontational tone that many of the participants considered to be “angry and threatening.” More than a dozen White administrators walked out of the second training when the presenter declared to the audience, “If you are White, you are racist, period!” A statement of this nature is in direct opposition to Kendi’s recommendation to “never conflate racist people with White people.”

As the co-chairs filled me in on the details of the previous trainings and what led to them being derailed, they continued to reflect on feedback from the White administrators, who had said they felt publicly shamed by the trainers and ostracized from the larger group, which reflects a diverse body of individuals from all racial groups. Many of those who walked out perceived themselves to be allies of the Black Lives Matter movement. While they were willing to acknowledge and address the presence of unconscious bias that impacts their leadership, they refused to see themselves as racists who were actively working to perpetuate injustice toward students and colleagues of color. More importantly, they refused to remain physically in a space where condemnation, shame, guilt, and division were being used as tools to motivate learning and transformation.

I listened patiently as the co-chairs continued to tell their story. Finally, I found a natural pause in the conversation that allowed me to ask my most pressing question: “I understand you have a serious challenge ahead of you to find a trainer who can help your group of special education administrators address diversity and equity issues, but may I ask why you were referred to me?” The leading co-chair quickly responded, “We were referred to you by a school district that has benefited greatly from your work in educational neurobiology and mindfulness. We understand your work can potentially help us approach this topic in a way that minimizes the shame and fear that keep shutting

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down our attempts to make progress. This work has to move in a different direction. We heard you have a healing presence, and that people seem to listen and respond to hard conversations with you because you teach from a trauma-informed perspective and consider what people's brains need to feel safe. We're hoping you'd be willing to take what you teach classroom teachers about trauma-informed education and mindfulness and help us apply it to bias and equity work for administrators.”

Taking in their request, I sat for a long moment of silence. I absorbed the gravity of what I was being asked to step into and considered if what I had to offer could make a difference for this divided group. My initial thought was to turn down the opportunity and stay in my lane. However, after consideration, I accepted their request and began to envision how my understanding of educational neurobiology, trauma-informed teaching practices, and holistic mind-body wellness strategies could be integrated to overcome the type of stonewalling that often disrupts race and equity conversations among educators.

Polyvagal Theory: Honoring the Biological Need for Felt-Safety

As has been established, professional development facilitators sometimes employ racial guilt, shame, blame, or confrontational language as means to shock white participants into acknowledging white supremacy and making a commitment to dismantle racist structures. However, we know that shame, especially in the context of education, dehumanizes, and often triggers rage as the most common self-protective reaction (hooks, 2003). From a physiological perspective, this reaction is as true for people from marginalized groups as it is for those who benefit from oppressive systems (Menakem, 2017).

When I teach education neurobiology to special education teachers, the most important lesson I must convey to them is the foundational need for students to have a sense of felt-safety in the classroom. They must be set up to learn in an environment that eliminates toxic stress, real or perceived threat, bullying, shame, and unhealthy division or ostracization. My teachers understand that no constructive learning or lasting positive

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behavior transformation is likely to occur if the environment does not provide the learner with a *neuroception* of safety. This term, coined by Stephen Porges, forms the foundation of the polyvagal theory, which establishes the framework I promote, not only for trauma-informed teaching for children, but also for leading adults in trainings that deal with potentially triggering content such as racism and bias.

According to Porges (2017), “safe states are a prerequisite not only for social behavior, but also for accessing the higher brain structures that allow humans to be creative and generative” (47). When assessing a safe and trusting environment, he argues that in addition to physical safety, humans must also feel emotional safety, which is an internal felt sense of being safe. Therefore, feeling safe depends on our interpersonal environment, possibly more than our physical environment. As educators, we understand that when the neurobiology of fear is active, our students’ thinking narrows, turns rigid, and become focused on the perceived threat. At that point, as educators, we must establish mutual trust that is communicated from us to our students. Feeling safe is a nonconscious experience that is assessed by our autonomic nervous system (ANS), through a process Porges refers to as neuroception. If a learner assesses the environment and registers a neuroception of safety, the ventral vagal parasympathetic branch of the ANS is activated, allowing social engagement and optimum learning. However, if the learner assesses a neuroception of danger due to real or perceived threats in the space, the sympathetic branch of the nervous system will trigger a fight or flight response, which explains why shaming often leads to reactions of rage or aggression. In this state, the learner does not have the capacity to engage socially, learn optimally, or transform behavior. This reflects the state of the administrators who fled the professional development by leaving the training. Finally, if the learner assesses the environment and registers a neuroception of hopelessness (nothing I do can make a difference here), their ANS may trigger the dorsal vagal freeze response. In this case, the learner will withdraw, disassociate, or possibly sink into depression. From the perspective of educational neurobiology, we understand that all learners (children and adults alike) adaptively

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respond to danger by stopping the learning process in the brain and prioritizing survival and self-protection. When this happens, our first responsibility as educators or facilitators must be to get everyone back to an emotionally safe place and re-activate interpersonal trust before they can begin to learn or transform behavior (Cozolino, 2013).

Individuals who feel endangered or unwelcomed in any environment experience higher amygdala activation levels than an individual who feels safe and welcomed. The activation of the amygdala affects the sympathetic nervous system (fight, flight, freeze response) which in turn releases adrenaline, norepinephrine, and cortisol in the body (Olson, 2014). These neurotransmitters increase implicit memory encoding (unconscious body-based sensory memory) and hinder explicit memory encoding (cognitive memory consolidation). Individuals who remain alert and in defense mode for extended periods of time experience sustained sympathetic activation and cortisol release, which inhibits access to the higher learning centers of the brain, or the ability to prioritize social engagement. Instead, implicit memories are encoded in the body as emotional memories with behavioral impulses, perceptions, and sensory fragments that are stimulated by both internal and external stimuli. This often occurs outside a person's conscious awareness. In the case of unconscious bias, these implicit, body-based reactions form the basis for automatic fear or stress responses that interrupt a person's ability to sustain challenging conversations about racial trauma (Menakem, 2017).

In *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending our Hearts and Dodies*, Resmaa Menakem (2017) states:

When many white Americans' bodies encounter black bodies, the white bodies automatically constrict, and their lizard brains (amygdala) go on high alert. Most forms of dialogue, diversity training, and other cognitive interventions are going to have little effect on this reflexive fear response, because the white body has been trained to respond in this non-cognitive way. (Menakem, 2017, p. 91)

Menakem, also building on Porges' theory, suggests that

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attempts to advance racial reconciliation must first take these automatic, unconscious, body-based fear responses into account when designing diversity trainings before attempting to move the needle on the cognitive aspects of dismantling structural racism. This perspective of engaging in a body-based or somatic release of fear, anger, trauma or stress energy prior to engaging in talk or cognitive therapy is also held by Peter Levine (2010), a leading psychologist, researcher and trauma therapist. It was through my understanding of Porges' polyvagal theory, Levine's work in Somatic Experiencing, Menakem's teachings on body-based healing of racial trauma, and my personal certifications in Kundalini Yoga and clinical breath work, that I came to see this missing link in creating healing spaces for race and equity training.

Porges' polyvagal theory has become the foundational framework in the field of trauma-informed teaching practices (Berardi & Morton, 2019), as well as trauma-informed therapy among mental health providers (van der Kolk, 2014). This theory, grounding both Menakem and Levine's work, centers the importance of activating the *vagus nerve*, the longest nerve in the body and the most important component of the calming parasympathetic nerves. Activating the vagus nerve is crucial for signaling the body to rest, digest, heal, connect intimately with others, or to learn. Only when the body experiences felt-safety is the vagus nerve able to disarm the body's fight, flight or freeze response. Activities that reduce amygdala reactivity and stimulate and strengthen the vagus nerve include mindfulness or meditation practices (Kral, et al., 2018), breathwork (Brown & Gerbarg, 2012), prayer, exercise, yoga, laughter, human touch, visualization, singing, and connection with nature. Understanding the importance of the vagus nerve in creating a strong mind-body connection that leads to felt-safety for learning, trust and social engagement, I had a clear sense that direct instruction on polyvagal theory, coupled with actual mind-body practices that would help participants become conscious of the body-based fear and stress reactions they hold related to race and bias would help the group of administrators turn the tide on their professional development experiences.

A Framework for Using Mind-Body Practices to Uproot Unconscious Bias

One of the primary benefits of body-mind practices is to help individuals do something I refer to as *cultivate unknowing*. When we face a problem or uncertainty, especially concerning other people, our minds are often quick to find closure. We want an immediate answer or solution to what we have perceived as a problem. Our brains need a narrative to explain what seems out of balance in order to eliminate uncertainty. This tendency is a near-automatic response from our survival brain that is designed to protect us from danger (uncertainty can feel threatening). However, we can use mind-body tools like mindfulness and breathwork to practice cultivating unknowing. The process of unknowing invites us to use mind-body practices to pause before acting, reacting, or speaking. It invites us to become conscious of our body's automatic sensations and experiences, long enough to question our mind's assumptions about others or a situation. It creates space for us to allow a new thought or possibility to emerge as we examine the other, because we have made space for not automatically knowing based on prior knowledge or experiences. This skill is critical for pausing long enough to examine the effect that media stereotypes, social indoctrination, and religious teachings have on our automatic reactions to people we perceive as "other." Cultivating unknowing in the body and mind becomes the core basis for incorporating mind-body techniques to address and uproot unconscious bias and all body-based fears of difficult conversations about race and equity. Since we are only able to cultivate unknowing when we are in a relaxed state of social engagement, implementing intentional practices that stimulate the vagus nerve and maintaining a secure neuroception of safety emerge as the key components of advancing transformative teachings on race, equity, and bias.

This process is intended to bring an explicit awareness of how race and identity-based stress is experienced at a somatic level in the body. Once identified and recognized, participants can be helped to build an understanding of how drawing attention to previously unconscious body reactions, and addressing them specifically with mind-body practices, offers a greater degree of

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self-awareness and self-regulation. The goal of this professional development process is to help individuals make a clear distinction between what is simply an emotional trigger, and what is an actual threat to one's safety during difficult conversations around race and equity. Helping people understand that triggers are not actual threats, and giving them tools to diffuse reactions and cultivate unknowing, creates an opportunity to help them effectively manage nervous system arousal and the intense emotional energy associated with equity work. With continued practice of the mind-body techniques over time, participants are able to increase their capacity to remain engaged in critical conversations about race and other identity-based biases without moving into the fight/flight/freeze survival mode.

The following steps outline the framework I developed for facilitating professional development sessions that use mind-body practices to uproot unconscious bias among education professionals.

Step One: Introduce the Science of the Vagus Nerve and the Impact of the Social Engagement System on Sustainable Equity Work

The most important component for beginning this work is creating an environment that fosters a sense of felt safety within a nonthreatening learning space. In my work, I have found that the best way to do this is to begin the work with an overview of the neurobiology of bias and how our experiences are mediated through the brain, the heart, and the nervous system. I begin all trainings by introducing participants to the fact that our biases are connected to neurobiological mechanisms that can restrict person's ability to be open to multiple perspectives and that affect a person's experience of being triggered into fight, flight or freeze when challenged to examine internal biases (Sukhera & Watling, 2018). Participants find significant value in understanding that our brains and nervous systems were designed to make us rigid in our thinking as a survival mechanism that is common to everyone. When participants understand how their autonomic nervous systems are automatically triggered, and that there are subconscious body reactions attached to those triggers, it disarms

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them and allows them to become curious about their bodies and the role of the body in unconscious bias (Porges, 2017). It also gives them a sense that if they can understand how these physiological mechanisms operate within themselves, that there may be something that they can then do to interrupt those automatic triggers that move them into biased behaviors, thoughts, and actions. Additionally, understanding the science of epigenetics and how our beliefs and emotional triggers for safety are passed down from generation to generation also helps many people understand how they react unconsciously in stereotypical ways that do not reflect their current belief systems and ideologies. This approach—by beginning with an overview of the vagus nerve, how it functions, and our need to establish safe social engagement as a necessary prerequisite prior to launching into difficult discussions around race—is also very effective at keeping people of color in the center of the conversation. It allows BIPOC an opportunity to realize that they too have significant triggers that spark various types of bias across other sociopolitical identity markers. The approach makes everyone an equal participant on the playing field to observe and address the neurobiology of bias, rather than having bias be something that only the white people in the space need to address. Most participants find that receiving an introductory overview of the vagus nerve and the neuroception of safety and danger creates a very solid foundation of openness, curiosity, and collaboration among the majority of participants across diverse identities.

Step Two: Facilitate Exercises that Help Participants Examine Their Intersecting Sociopolitical Identities and Unpack Somatic Experiences Related to Bias

Once the basic neurobiology of the autonomic nervous system and unconscious experiences of safety and danger have been explained, I lead a reflective exercise I created that was inspired by an exercise developed by Elena Aguilar (2018). The exercise (Appendix A: Exercise) invites participants to examine their sociopolitical identity across a wide range of identity markers, including race, gender, ethnicity, religion, marital status, education status, and financial status. The activity is done in two parts.

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In the first part, participants are invited to look across all of their identity markers to determine within which sociopolitical identities they regularly experience a sense of safety and belonging as they move through the world. Next, they are asked to examine and reflect again on that same list of sociopolitical identities and mark which ones create experiences where they have sensed a real or perceived threat, lack of safety, or lack of belonging. Next, they're asked to reflect on which types of emotions and physical or somatic experiences they have in their bodies when they are triggered into feeling a lack of felt safety and belonging within and across their various sociopolitical identities.

After they complete this first section they move on to Part 2 of the process. Here they are asked to reflect on the same questions, but this time, they're asked to identify the emotions and somatic, body-based sensations they feel when they engage in biased behavior either toward or against people of specific sociopolitical identities. This section of the reflective work is very enlightening for many people because, for some, it's the first time that they've begun to associate heart palpitations, eye twitches, stomach aches, headaches, shoulder tension, or back pain with specific instances where they have been made to feel unsafe or unwelcome, or experienced bias based on their identity (Parker, 2020). It's also the first time that many have made a connection that certain constrictions of energy in their bodies, or sensations that trigger a sense of deep fear, or deep affinity, actually drive their biased behaviors toward others, even when they intend to act in equitable ways.

Step Three: Introduce Physical Movements that Discharge Trapped Energy from Identified Bias Triggers to Help Settle the Body

Once participants have been made aware of the ways in which they are affected at the body level by unconscious bias triggers, it becomes important to teach them effective mind-body techniques that help them discharge that energy from the body, settle their nervous systems, and create the mental space that is required to sustain difficult conversations around race and equity. The work of Peter Levine and other somatic therapists point to shaking, tapping, and/or dancing as the most effective strategies

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to help release “highly charged survival energy that lurks in the body.” According to Levine, shaking is a mechanism that helps us reset our equilibrium of our nervous system and to reset after we have been threatened or highly aroused (Levine, 2010). Over time, shaking can help release trauma and PTSD from the body in therapeutic settings. Although this is a non-clinical wellness framework, it can have a similar effect on racial stress (Menakem, 2017; Parker, 2020).

After offering participants an explanation of the therapeutic benefits of shaking, tapping, and dancing, they are led through a seven to ten minute exercise to experience the practice of connecting with unprocessed physical and emotional energy and literally shaking it out of their bodies. I demonstrate basic body shaking, following by using the pads of the finger tips to tap energy points throughout the body while dancing to upbeat music (Brown & Gerbarg, 2012). Once understanding that this exercise is meant to help discharge pent up energy and deep seated emotional triggers, most participants are eager to engage in the activity with an intention of “shaking off their responses and triggers for unconscious bias.”

Step Four: Guide Regulated Breathing Practices that Help Participants Balance Their Nervous System and Move Toward Self-Regulation.

After the shaking and discharge of emotional energy has come to a close, participants are invited to either sit in a chair or lay down on the floor or a yoga mat to practice voluntarily regulated breathing. While there are many effective breathing techniques for calming the body, coherent breathing has been shown by research to be one of the fastest regulated breathing practices for helping to calm and settle the nervous system. Before introducing coherent breathing, I take time to help participants understand that the ways in which we tend to breathe, especially when triggered or upset, can actually exacerbate our feelings of overwhelm and dysregulation. I help participants explore their natural breathing patterns, helping them to notice whether or not they are vertical breathers (people who suck the belly in and breathe up with tight high shoulders) or whether they are horizontal breathers

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(those who inhale and exhale through the rib cage, diaphragm and belly). The goal is to help eliminate horizontal breathing to help manage stress states. I help them draw attention to whether or not they are nose breathers or mouth breathers, because research shows us that nose breathing is calming, while mouth breathing is stimulating to the sympathetic nerves (Brown & Gerbarg, 2012).

It is very empowering to help participants understand that their breath and emotions are bi-directional, and that they can control their emotions by controlling their breath pattern and breath rate. By slowing down the number of breath cycles per minute, people are able to achieve degrees of self-regulation and calm rapidly. This is necessary to activate the parasympathetic nervous system and the vagus nerve. Slow breathing increases GABA, which is an inhibitory neurotransmitter that reduces anxiety. It also increases oxytocin levels, which is supportive of human bonding and compassion. So, giving participants this foundational instruction in the breath provides them with a sense of empowerment—a mind-body tool that they can use going forward at any time that they feel themselves being physically or emotionally triggered by conversations around bias.

The coherent breathing technique was first researched by Stephen Elliott and was refined and taught to me in the Breath, Body, Mind training developed by psychiatrists Richard Brown, MD and Patricia Gerbarg, MD. Coherent breathing requires us to slow the breathing rate down from an average of 12–16 cycles per minute to 5–6 breath cycles per minute. I spend an average of 20–30 minutes teaching basic calming breath and coherent breathing and giving participants time to become familiar and comfortable with the practice. For those who tend to be vertical breathers or mouth breathers, this exercise is challenging, yet liberating. It's also somewhat difficult for those who are prone to stress or anxiety. Yet after completing the calming breathing exercises, many people express a sense of mental peace and regulation that is not normally available to them. Participants are encouraged to utilize these breathing practices on a daily basis, so that they are able to draw upon them intuitively during times when they need to manage their emotional responses to triggers during conversations around race and other identity-based threats.

Step Five: Facilitate Evidence-based Guided Mindfulness Practices with Visualization to Increase Compassion and Social Engagement

After completing the breathing practices, I move the group into a guided mindfulness meditation, the final stage of the mind-body practices that balance the nervous system. A significant amount of research has been conducted on the loving-kindness meditation (Kang et.al, 2014). It has been found to significantly help participants increase a sense of compassion and empathy for others and has been shown to help reduce implicit bias (Todd, 2009). I do not believe that the loving-kindness meditation as it stands alone is a single handed solution for uprooting unconscious bias, but when implemented as one part of an overall strategy of helping others use visualization and mental focus to enhance social connection with others, it becomes a very powerful component as an overall framework. The loving-kindness meditation requires individuals to close their eyes and visualize themselves facing a number of individuals and reciting an affirmation of well-being. First, they address the affirmation to themselves. Next, they visualize repeating it to a person for whom they have deep love and affection. Third, they visualize themselves facing and addressing someone toward whom they have neutral feeling. Fourth, they visualize themselves addressing someone toward whom they have animosity or feel upset toward. Fifth, they visualize addressing their community or the world at large. And finally, they visualize repeating the affirmation to themselves again. The loving-kindness affirmation repeated in each cycle states, “may you be healthy, may you be happy, may you live in peace.”

Research shows that as we engage in mindfulness practices such as the loving-kindness meditation, particularly those that include visualization, affirmation, and elevated emotions such as compassion, gratitude, and love, our bodies produce the neurochemicals oxytocin, dopamine, serotonin, endorphins, and acetylcholine that stimulate the vagus nerve and also increase empathy and compassion. This enhances our capacity for increased social bonding and connection. The increased presence of these neurochemicals can enhance an experience of trust

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and connection among a group of people who are set to engage in challenging conversations around bias. The loving-kindness meditation in a full version averages approximately 15 minutes, although it can be reduced to approximately 5–7 minutes with similar positive effect. After completing the loving-kindness meditation and visualization, participants are invited to reflect on what it felt like for them to wish happiness, health, and peace for themselves and their loved ones, as well as toward others for whom they have hard feelings or toward those who have hurt them.

Step Six: Integrate the Total Experience with Journaling and Small Group Reflection Using the Healing Power of Storytelling to Interrupt Unconscious Bias

The framework concludes with having participants journal answers to six questions (Appendix B: Reflection Questions) that help them reflect on their responses, insights, and personal revelations. After about five to seven minutes of journaling, participants are organized into small groups of three to four people to engage in a discussion about their personal discoveries. Careful agreements around safety, confidentiality, and mutual respect are established within the groups before sharing begins. Creating space for participants to share at this level of depth is extremely eye-opening for members of the dominant culture. Many are deeply impacted emotionally when they hear the stories of other group members who live daily with nervous system stressors and a lack of felt safety due to their identity. The very process of storytelling in a disarming, socially engaged setting is healing to the nervous system and disrupts ingrained social bias. Social neuroscience research shows us that sharing personal stories in a safe environment boosts the levels of the neurotransmitter oxytocin in the brains of both the storyteller and the listener (Cozolino, 2013). Oxytocin has been shown to be the chemical that is responsible for enhancing bonding, trust, and compassion between people. It is when people bond and connect at this level that we provide one another with disconfirming experiences that disrupt deeply held biases. The transformative power of this small group sharing and storytelling cannot be overestimated.

Step Seven: Creating Opportunities to Collect Ongoing Participant Feedback to Assess how the Process Impacted the Group and Whether it has become an Embedded Practice in Their Organization's Ongoing Equity Work

When delivering this work in a virtual classroom space, it's possible to collect the transcripts of comments and questions posted by the group in the chat box. The feedback posted there in real time provides a rich source of in the moment reflection and reaction of the participants to the work. The questions posted in the chat, as well as the depth of the feedback shared by participants, help the facilitator make sometimes minor and sometimes significant adjustments along the way to best support the maintenance of a container of safety and trust. Being responsive to this ongoing feedback in the moment, in real time, is a critical skill set that any facilitator of this work must have. According to polyvagal theory, optimal teaching, learning, social connection, and personal transformation are less likely, if not impossible, to achieve if the participants have been triggered in any significant way into a new neuroception of danger or hopelessness. Remaining attuned to participant feedback and evaluations at all stages of the work makes the difference in establishing the level of rapport and trust that participants need in order to have faith in the facilitator and in the process as a whole. Follow-up feedback after the event in the form of participant surveys conducted one week post-event allows the facilitator to assess the degree to which the participants have increased awareness of the unconscious physical sensations and emotions that trigger their biased actions, as well as their defensiveness to engaging in conversations around bias and equity.

Ideally, when I conduct follow-up assessments and evaluations with a group that I have worked with, I am looking to see whether the participants are now able to notice and name physical sensations as they arise in the body and track those feelings and the associated emotional energies. I hope to see that they're increasingly able to utilize the movement, breathwork, mindfulness and visualization strategies to create more space in their bodies. Also, I read the evaluations to see if participants express that they perceive themselves to have a greater capacity for self-regulation

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in the midst of what would otherwise be triggering conversations. These continual cycles of ongoing feedback, assessment and evaluation, and communication with groups provides the greatest source of input to refine the framework and increase participation and transformation.

In the case of the Special Education administrator professional development I was invited to facilitate, I received encouraging feedback from a white, male director. At the end of the session, he stated publicly to the entire group that in all of his years in education, this was the first time he was not made to feel defensive as the target of a professional development on racism or bias. He reflected that being made to feel safe, and having the science of interpersonal neurobiology as a framework, invited him to feel that he could explore this topic on an equal level with everyone else in the group. He stated that he had never felt so safe and comfortable to discuss his privilege in a group setting, and that he was more committed than ever before to use his voice and power to interrupt bias and inequity in his school district. For him, the work no longer felt like “us vs. them,” but that everyone deserved to walk through the world feeling safe in their identity at the nervous system level. This is the type of transformative breakthrough we look for in program evaluations to determine the efficacy of this approach to bias and equity work.

Conclusion: Healing-Centered Engagement as the Way Forward in Equity Work

There are a number of key takeaways I would like to offer as a way forward for the critical equity work that must be conducted in more sustainable ways in order to transform the hearts and minds of educators nationwide. I am inspired by the work of Shawn Ginwright, Associate Professor of Education at San Francisco State University. As an alternative to hyper-focusing on trauma, Ginwright proposes a model of *healing-centered engagement* (2016). His call to center healing in justice work is timely. He promotes this lens as a way of interacting and engaging with students of color, particularly those who have been highly impacted by traumatic life experiences. Of the four tenets in his healing-centered engagement model, what strikes me most is the

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4th tenet. Ginwright asserts that a continual commitment to self-healing among the adults in charge of the education process is mandatory for creating environments where sustainable healing, justice, and equity work can move forward.

My past experience in teacher education and my current venture into administrator professional development have shown me that a great majority of educators are hungry for safe spaces where they can address systemic racism and begin the long process of uprooting their automatic, embodied reactions (rooted in unconscious bias) that cause them to act against their moral desire for equity and reconciliation. Given the right conditions, and with compassionate facilitation, I believe most educators are willing to stay in the room to understand what they have done, consciously or unconsciously, to uphold structural racism. Many are open to exploring new ways of seeing, of being and of interacting that enable them to provide healing-centered engagement for their students and colleagues.

Most effectively, this work of uprooting unconscious bias and promoting self-healing among educators should begin at the pre-service level. Foundational knowledge about educational neurobiology (including the vagus nerve), mindfulness, and trauma-informed teaching practices should be required for everyone entering the profession. An immersion course of this nature, including a residential immersion retreat for self-exploration, would be ideal for creating enough time and space for the depth of reflection and ongoing processing that is required for lasting personal transformation. While short-term in-service professional development sessions may excite and inspire, they usually don't offer the type of extended accountability and processing that is possible when a bonded group of people create a container of felt-safety over time. For that reason, professional development for in-service education professionals would be delivered continuously over a period of 4 months to resemble the semester model of course instruction. To move the needle more quickly to benefit our current generation of PK–12 students, we need a two pronged approach to move this work into both pre-service education and in-service training simultaneously.

The most critical takeaway is the skill and personal disposition

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of the facilitator or instructor who delivers a course or training on this topic. The facilitator must be someone who is continually committed to their own process of mind-body self-healing practices. The teaching environment they create, and their ability to consistently maintain a neuroception of safety among participants, is the most critical predictor of success in this work. In order to make progress in diversity, equity, and inclusion, it is imperative that we raise up a cadre of teacher educators who are willing to lead the way in this work by mastering this body of knowledge, integrating it into their own teaching practices so as to model this type of healing-centered engagement for the educators they train. It is only by embodying and modeling this mind-body approach to equity work that classroom teachers and administrators will feel the effects of it in their own bodies and minds from the learner's perspective. Only through embodied experience and personal transformation will educators be able to uproot their own unconscious bias, work to dismantle systemic racism, and truly embody the type of healing-centered engagement we hope for them to model for the students and families they have committed to serve.

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Appendix A: Exercise

Appendix A

Impact of Sociopolitical Identities on My Autonomic Nervous System Regulation Part 1

| Sociopolitical Identity | Check the identities where you regularly feel a sense of safety and belonging | Check the identities where you feel a threat to your sense of your personal or safety and belonging | When you experience this identity threat, which emotions do you feel? Which zone does your ANS move into? | Describe the physical sensations connected with these emotions. Where do you feel them in your body? |
|-----------------------------|---|---|---|--|
| Ability | | | | |
| Age | | | | |
| Career Status | | | | |
| Ethnicity | | | | |
| Education Level | | | | |
| Financial Status | | | | |
| Gender | | | | |
| Immigration Status | | | | |
| Marital Status | | | | |
| Nationality | | | | |
| Physical appearance | | | | |
| Political Affiliation | | | | |
| Race | | | | |
| Sexual Orientation | | | | |
| Spiritual/Religious Beliefs | | | | |
| Other | | | | |

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Appendix A

Impact of Sociopolitical Identities on My Autonomic Nervous System Regulation Part 2

| Sociopolitical Identity | Check the identities that you have shown bias toward in your personal or professional life | Check the identities that you have shown bias against in your personal or professional life | When this bias is triggered or challenged by someone, which zone does your ANS move into? | Describe the physical sensations connected with your bias triggers. Where do you feel them in your body? |
|-----------------------------|--|---|---|--|
| Ability | | | | |
| Age | | | | |
| Career Status | | | | |
| Ethnicity | | | | |
| Education Level | | | | |
| Financial Status | | | | |
| Gender | | | | |
| Immigration Status | | | | |
| Marital Status | | | | |
| Nationality | | | | |
| Physical appearance | | | | |
| Political Affiliation | | | | |
| Race | | | | |
| Sexual Orientation | | | | |
| Spiritual/Religious Beliefs | | | | |
| Other | | | | |

Appendix B: Reflection Questions

1. Which sociopolitical identities have afforded you with the greatest sense of safety and belonging, elevated status, or life advantages?
2. Which sociopolitical identities have been your greatest sources of identity threat, exposing you to bias and a lack of felt safety and belonging?
3. Which sociopolitical identity has had the greatest negative impact on your nervous system, affecting your physical/mental health, ability to focus and learn, or to engage socially in trusting relationships?
4. Which sociopolitical identification has provided your nervous system with the greatest source of resilience, healing, or hope?
5. What insights did you glean from examining the sociopolitical identities that you have shown bias toward or against? As a leader, what has been the impact of your bias on the people who hold those identities?
6. What are the most helpful mind-body strategies you can utilize to help you “act aware” when you experience physical sensations and emotions that trigger you into biased words, behaviors, or decisions that impact others?