

BLACK TEACHER LEADER NARRATIVES: CREATING LEGACY THROUGH AN
ETHIC OF CARE AND JUSTICE

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BLACK TEACHER LEADER NARRATIVES: CREATING LEGACY THROUGH AN
ETHIC OF CARE AND JUSTICE

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DEDICATION

For my parents, two outstanding Black teacher leaders

Mom

Jodie Jenkins Oliphant

34 years as a teacher and administrator

&

Daddy

Lou Oliphant

43 years as a teacher

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My grace is sufficient for you: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.
II Corinthians 12: 9

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ABSTRACT

BLACK TEACHER LEADER NARRATIVES: CREATING LEGACY THROUGH AN ETHIC OF CARE AND JUSTICE

by

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SUPERVISING PROFESSOR: CLARENA LARROTTA

This study documents the narratives of four Black teachers and their journey in becoming teacher leaders using a framework rooted in Siddle Walker and Snarey's (2004) matrix of care and justice primary values. The research questions guiding the study are: How do four Black teachers teaching Black students utilize and demonstrate an ethic of care and justice as described by Siddle Walker and Snarey (2004)? What are the journeys of these four Black teachers in their becoming teacher leaders? What ontological perspectives do they hold, and what is the effect on the work they do? What are their experiences working with schools, colleagues, administrators, Black students, and community members? What stories illustrate their successes and challenges advocating for the education, learning and achievement of Black students?

The data sources for this study include individual interviews, a group interview, and the researcher's journal. Chapters four and five present study findings. Chapter four introduces the four Black teacher leaders; their stories are presented using their own words and are narrated in first person. Chapter five provides an analysis of the participants' practice in light of Siddle Walker and Snarey's (2004) ethic of care and justice framework. Finally, chapter six highlights important aspects of the learning that took place as a result of implementing the study. It discusses the commonalities in the participating Black teachers' narratives followed by a section that highlights important themes for the reader. It also provides the researcher's personal example applying the study framework as a tool to reflect and learn about self and daily practice working in schools. In addition, this last chapter presents the tensions and challenges encountered during the research process. Finally, the chapter outlines implications for school improvement, ideas for future research, and concluding thoughts.

CHAPTER I

CONFORMING TO THE NORM VERSUS INTERRUPTING THE SILENCE

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A BLACK TEACHER LEADER?

The director of a local Black history program asked me if the elementary school where I was assistant principal would send 15 girls to participate in an event honoring the achievements of some prominent Black women. Our students were to welcome guests by holding signs with the name and picture of each of the honorees who included elected officials, professors, writers, entrepreneurs, and artists. My school's leadership team (in which I was the only Black educator) discussed this exciting opportunity and determined the date would not interfere with testing or other curricular demands for girls in 3rd thru 5th grades. I then created a list of girls I thought would benefit greatly from such an activity, which included the only Black girls in our school in these grades. I believed these seven students should participate on this historical program because they rarely saw depictions of Black achievement in our curriculum. However, I was shocked and disturbed when I realized the leadership team felt my rationale for automatically choosing these seven Black girls was unfair. One member insinuated I was practicing reverse discrimination because in her words, "I marched during the 60's and I thought we had come so far." It was clear I was outnumbered. A series of tense emails and verbal exchanges ensued with me explaining how it would be a travesty to deny these students an opportunity to participate especially when there were eight other spots. The

ordeal was painful for me because I felt ostracized by my colleagues for speaking up for the interests of Black students.

This experience prompted me to consider how other colleagues, specifically Black teachers currently working in the classroom, navigate the public school system when color blind and color neutral politics collide with the specific needs of Black students. As Bonilla-Silva (2006) explains, color-blind is a sociology term referring to the disregard of racial characteristics when selecting which individuals will participate in some activity or receive some service. Thus, when educators claim to treat everyone the same regardless of their race, they are implementing color-blind racism. These educators do not take into account the depreciating effects that racial and socio-economic inequities have on Blacks and other students of color (King, 1991).

The goal of this study was to create a space for Black teachers to voice their successes, as well as their frustrations and challenges faced throughout their journey becoming teacher leaders openly and actively advocating for the well-being and education of Black students. To this effect, I build on York-Barr and Duke's (2004) definition of "teacher leadership" in order to provide a working definition of what it means to be a Black teacher leader:

Teacher leadership is the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement. Such team leadership work involves three intentional development foci: individual development, collaboration or team development, and organizational development (pp. 287-288).

The teacher leaders in this study embody this definition of leadership as it relates to the work they do in their classroom, school, and community. Therefore, a Black teacher leader exhibits the following characteristics:

- Is a Black teacher currently working in the classroom
- Is knowledgeable about the culture and attends to the specific educational needs of Black students
- Exerts agency and s/he is not afraid to speak up and advocate for Black students
- Is respected as a teacher, has vision, and exhibits leadership capacity
- Is learning oriented and maintains a focus on teaching and learning
- Works in collaboration with others (e.g., colleagues, children, parents and community members) seeking Black students' well-being, learning and achievement

These Black teacher leader characteristics are critical for improving educational practices for Black students and are depicted in the study through the participants' narratives.

Milner (2006) posits that "Black teachers often have a commitment to and a deep understanding of Black students...because both historically and presently these teachers experience and understand the world in ways similar to their students" (p. 94). Milner also states that Black teachers have a unique commitment to Black student achievement due to the direct impact on the African American community. That is to say, Black teacher leaders share common knowledge with their students and have probably undergone similar barriers in the educational system (see Appendix A for a glossary of relevant terms). Study participants were Sharon Dunbar, Jackie Reese, Raymond

Watson, and Malcolm Wright, II (pseudonyms), four black teachers identified by their colleagues and community members.

Statement of the Problem

The voices and experiences of Black teachers are underrepresented or disregarded when issues related to the educational practices for Black students arise. My experience feeling ostracized for speaking to the needs of Black students is not unique. Black teachers have learned to keep quiet as they struggle to do their work in a school system where decisions are made without their input. As hooks (1995) notes:

To perpetuate and maintain white supremacy, white folks have colonized black Americans, and a part of that colonizing has been teaching us to repress our rage... many of us were taught that the repression of our rage was necessary to stay alive in the days before racial integration, we now know that one can be exiled forever from the promise of economic well-being if that rage is not permanently silenced. (p. 14)

For a long time Black teachers have been indoctrinated to conform to the norm, rather than challenge the status quo (Anderson, 1988). Black teachers are not isolated in this regard as the voices of teachers in general are often silenced in the educational settings (Delpit, 1995; Ingersoll, 2003).

Black teachers should be able to speak to the needs of Black students. Yet, these teachers often find themselves in precarious positions when they advocate for the interests of students who look like them. Collins (2009) describes such tension for Black Americans as a catch-22:

Group-based, black political solidarity is recast as a similar relic of past anti-racist social movements, leaving little room for collective black identity to provide cultural explanations for black disadvantage. This context creates a catch-22 for black Americans. Blacks might experience group-based disadvantage stemming from contemporary forms of racism yet be discouraged from deploying race-based, collective political strategies to deal with it.

Conversely, Tillman (2004) maintains that African Americans must be the authors of the education agenda for their children. According to this researcher, it is the Black educators who must “use their talents to reclaim the tradition of African American excellence in leadership and chart a new course for African American education” (p. 3). In other words, the work of Black teacher leaders should draw from the legacy of those before them to inspire and empower their community and advance Black student scholarship. For this reason, my research contributes to the body of work that specifically examines how Black teachers’ wisdom, pedagogy, and cultural connections are important for bringing out the best in Black student learners (Delpit, 1995; Foster, 1997; Irvine, 1999; Lipman, 1995; Milner, 2006; Siddle Walker, 1996; Tillman, 2004). Furthermore, this research created a space for Black teachers to openly voice their successes as well as their frustration in ways that they may have been reluctant to discuss publicly.

Many educational decisions and practices are designed around the assumption that if it works for Whites, it is universally sound for Blacks (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Perry, Steele, & Hillard, 2003). However, within the current educational landscape, some sixty years since the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) legislation which sought to address

inequities in education, there are still deeply rooted disparities and discriminatory practices (Bell, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2004). For example, Black students are more likely than their White counterparts to attend schools where they do not see educators who look like them (Irvine, 1990), endure pedagogical practices that are not grounded in their culture (Boykin, 2000), consume curriculum that distorts their historical legacy (Hilliard, 1995), and undergo testing for special education programs (Kunjufu, 2004).

With such blatant inequities existing for Black students, Carter (2008) argues that it is problematic to insist they shoulder full responsibility for their successes and failures. She contends such thinking “fails to account for the structural conditions that might constrain or even impede students’ abilities to achieve their maximum potentials in school and life” (p. 467). The idea that American schools are places where fairness and democratic ideals reign is also rebuffed by hooks (1994) who recounted her experiences attending desegregated schools: “The classroom was no longer a place of pleasure and ecstasy. School was still a political place, since we were always having to counter racist assumptions that we were genetically inferior; never capable as white peers, even unable to learn” (p. 4). Sadly, Black students and Black teachers continue to face a plethora of challenges in schools. School improvement is daunting, complex, and multilayered work (Comer, 1999; Portes, 2005). Unfortunately, with so many failed school reforms and broken promises, there is a prevailing pessimism that “improving public education is simply too big, too complex, and too intractable for the United States” (Noguera, 2003, p. xi). Yet, the very strength of America depends on improving educational practices in schools; so abandoning the work is simply not an option.

Rather than the continual focus on the “one size fits all” school reform measures of the past, Harris (2002) suggests that for school improvement measures to be successful, they must be designed for the context, circumstances, and developmental needs of the students and teachers they serve. She advocates for a commitment to creating and sustaining learning environments where both “teachers and students develop and learn together” (Harris, 2002, p. 5). Similarly, Darling-Hammond (1997) posits school improvement is contingent upon policy makers “developing capacity among schools and teachers to be responsible for students’ learning [by being] responsive to student and community needs and concerns” (p. 6). For this purpose teachers need to have more freedom to practice and organize pedagogy. They need to be able to become creative and reflective instead of just implementing the measures, policies, and procedures handed down to them. Moreover, Darling-Hammond hopes that students learn in an environment where: “Education helps them locate who they are and how they can make a contribution to the world – that stretches them to achieve very high standards yet affirms their basic humanity and right to pursue what matters most to them.” (p. xiii) The creation of such learning environments can only be possible when teachers are provided a true opportunity to teach and exercise their creativity and talents.

Research Questions

Using a framework rooted in Siddle Walker and Snarey’s (2004) matrix of care and justice primary values, the goal was to explore and gain a better understanding of the experiences of Black teacher leaders who strategically work within the school system to address the specific needs of, and bolster educational practices for Black students.

Therefore, the research questions guiding the study were:

1. How do four Black teachers teaching Black students utilize and demonstrate an ethic of care and justice as described by Siddle Walker and Snarey (2004)?
2. What are the journeys of these four Black teachers in their becoming teacher leaders?
3. What ontological perspectives do they hold, and what is the effect on the work they do?
4. What are their experiences working with schools, colleagues, administrators, Black students, and community members?
5. What stories illustrate their successes and challenges advocating for the education, learning and achievement of Black students?

Why Document the Journeys of Black Teacher Leaders?

It was important to gather, document, and make sense of the narratives of the participating teachers as related to their personal and professional journeys to gain understanding of how these Black teachers navigate the school system and to what extent they have been able to embody an ethic of care and justice in their praxis (i.e., reflection and thoughtful action in order to change the status quo, Freire, 1970). The study aimed to reveal insight for other teachers, administrators, and policy makers committed to promoting change for equity and social justice. The expectation is that through presenting these teachers' narratives, other educators, administrators, and stake holders will gain deeper understanding of the work of Black teacher leaders and the far-reaching impact they have on Black students, thus adding to the body of literature in the field of school improvement.

My Narrative: Student, Teacher, Administrator, and Leader

I was born during the summer of '64, ten years after the Brown v. Board of Education ruling (1954). My parents, both of whom are now retired teachers, were the first in their immediate families to attend and graduate from college. Seeing how committed my parents were to their professions and often hearing former students sing them praise, I grew up respecting and appreciating the role Black teachers played in our community. Reflecting on my journey as a student, I realize how much I flourished in academic settings where Black teachers' expertise and vision were embraced, and as an educator, I have also witnessed Black students thrive when their unique contributions were valued and celebrated. This section highlights main events from my elementary school years up to now.

School Years

I attended kindergarten at a segregated school in Houston's Third Ward where I felt loved and cherished. The expectation that I would grow up to do great things was clear from my family and my teachers. In the early 70's, my parents purchased a home in an established middle class neighborhood in Houston. While enrolling me in the neighborhood's predominately White school, the principal announced in my presence that because I had attended an all Black kindergarten program, the school had no choice but to place me in the lowest level first grade classroom. Of course, my parents were distraught by the principal's rationale regarding my class assignment. At six years old, I was introduced to the cruelty of an educational system that would continue to follow me for years to come. The stark contrast between my kindergarten and first grade classroom experiences are evident in the traditional class photographs. As a kindergarten student

where I have been affirmed and celebrated, I am in the photo displaying a movie star smile. However, in the first grade photo, I appear tense and unsure. I attribute my demeanor in the first grade photo to the fact that in this classroom setting, I am not celebrated as a learner; I am ignored. I also realized that each time I approached my first grade teacher with a question, she took a step back.

I still see the sadness in my parents faces the evening the principal announced I would be placed in the lowest class. Having been affirmed and celebrated as a student by my family in my previous school, I told them not to worry about the school putting me in the bottom class. I told them I would be in the top class by the time I was in 6th grade. And so began my resistance against racism and discrimination as a student. Each year, I methodically worked to get A's and B's in all my classes. I loved learning and challenged myself even when some teachers did not embrace me or support my ideas. When I saw that I had been promoted to the top of the sixth grade class, it was an exciting time for my parents and most especially for me.

Much of what I learned about Black history, I learned at church or in other community activities. As a student, I began to question the lack of representation of Blacks in our textbooks and assignments in terms of our culture, history, and presence. Thus, I invariably sought to study topics about Blacks and their contribution when given the opportunity to write or read about topics of interest. Also, during junior high and high school, I learned poems by Langston Hughes and Margaret Walker and was encouraged by my pastor to recite them for our church congregation. This appreciation for Black history followed me as a teenager.

My first year in high school represented an academic achievement because I had been accepted at a prestigious performing arts school. The plan was to study toward my goal of one day becoming a broadcast journalist. However, the daily bouts with overt racist acts from several of my core teachers proved too much for me to endure. As one of only two Black students in the entire radio-television-film (RTF) program, I often felt excluded and humiliated. Once, the RTF teachers planned a field trip without my knowledge. As the other Black student and I walked to class, we saw our classmates loading into the teachers' cars. When they realized we were approaching them to question where they were going, they sped off without even acknowledging us. I knew it was time to consider other options after complaining to the administration and the principal who was apathetic to the situation. By the time I explained to my parents what I felt were injustices, I already had a plan for the school I wanted to transfer to. My parents supported my decision. The following year, I was accepted to a communications magnet school housed in a predominately Black school. This setting was a good fit with both Black and White teachers committed to the student body. Again, photographs bear witness to these experiences and emotions at school. In a picture taken of me in one of my classes at the prestigious performing arts school, I appear dispirited. On the other hand, photos of me in the high school where my thoughts and ideas are embraced depict me as blissful and confident.

Higher Education Years

As a freshman in at a predominately White university, I excelled in courses that afforded me an opportunity to be creative and expressive, but floundered in the more analytical classes. Miles away from the encouragement of my family and community, I

struggled to stay afloat. Having felt like I had lost my agency and motivation as a student, it was my faith in God, and the support of a Black professor that ultimately helped me realize the need to not give up. The Black professor, Dr. Warfield, for whom the African and African American studies department at the University of Texas at Austin is named, taught the first class I took solely devoted to Black history. Class lectures, readings, and assignments mainly focused on the resiliency of Blacks in America rather than the oppressor. This was an invigorating experience for me and I enjoyed the class immensely. Yet, there were times when the pressures of attending a predominately White college caused me distress. In one particular instance, I remember seeking Dr. Warfield's advice. As if placing me at the center of his lectures, he encouraged me to celebrate my individual differences and to strive to be resilient in spite of difficult situations just as Black men and women had done before me.

It would be twelve years after my college graduation that I would journey back to the classroom as a student and later as a teacher. After a five year stint in state government as a ghost writer and then another seven years as an independent bookseller specializing in Black literature and literary events, I found myself in a college classroom working toward my teacher certification and a master's in education. Initially, as a graduate student at Southwest Texas State, I was timid and lacked confidence in my abilities. However, several college professors took a special interest in me. These professors, all White, were training our cohort to specifically work in urban schools. On many occasions, they spoke to the urgency for me as a Black woman to teach and connect to urban Black youth in ways that were uniquely mine.

Professional Years

I entered the classroom, as a certified teacher at age 30-something, with maturity and prior work experience; I worked for seven years as a high school teacher in an urban setting. With a renewed sense of agency, I sought to facilitate a classroom environment where students felt empowered to achieve. As with any venture, at times I was successful and other times, I failed miserably. Yet, I am grateful for all the teachers who shared their knowledge and wisdom about the teaching profession so that I could become a better educator. There was, however, a special connection among Black teachers as we shared our experiences. I noticed that certain aspects of these conversations about working with students, dealing with other teachers, and administrators were often exclusive and reserved for talk just among Black educators. This system of support and shared wisdom was crucial to my survival as a classroom teacher.

Even though the classes I taught were diverse, a large percentage of Black students were often under my charge. From this perspective, I witnessed how whenever there was talk about addressing Black students' needs, the main interventions revolved around measures to address their low socio-economic status. Furthermore, I realized that Black students' needs were often overshadowed by the demands of testing and other school wide referendums. Moreover, at times it seemed politically incorrect to suggest or discuss the specific needs of Black students.

Often silencing conversations about the specific needs of Black students came in the form of push back and rebuffs from colleagues who argued that kids were kids and the focus should be on educating them all the same. In this context, a Black teacher could be accused of reverse discrimination or not being a team player if the topic of

Black student achievement became too prevalent. Despite this phenomenon, I continued to explore ways to address the specific needs of Black students. For example, I organized a book club for all students which focused on literature by Black authors. Additionally, I worked to include multicultural perspectives within the school curriculum and gave my students the necessary support to incorporate their culture through reading, writing, and presentations.

After seven years in the classroom, I worked as an assistant principal in an elementary school. In this capacity, I worked closely with parents and teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse learners, as well as learners from low socio-economic background. As an administrator, I saw the debilitating effects low expectations can have on Black student achievement and behavioral issues. This difficult experience reminded me of my very own experience as an elementary school student and it saddened me. Many of the tense discussions I had with teachers and other school personnel about race and culture served as reminders of how quickly many educators sought to hide behind race neutral and colorblind politics when it came to educating children of color.

Summing up, my work as an administrator placed me in the position to see how schools operated from a deficit point of view. As an administrator, I found myself somewhat removed from the day to day needs of students. On the other hand, working as a classroom teacher gave me an up close opportunity to interact with students, an advantage often obscured by the bureaucratic demands of working as an administrator. It was then that I realized classroom teachers are in a better position to be more attuned to the students' reality, culture, idioms and language, music preferences, and philosophical and political ideologies than anyone else in a school. This positioning of the Black

teacher is strategic to influence reform measures needed in order to improve schools for Black students.

Dissertation Road Map

In chapter one I introduce the study detailing a professional encounter that served as the impetus to consider further research. This chapter also includes a working definition of what it means to be a Black teacher leader, the problem under study, the study research questions, and my narrative as a student, teacher, administrator, and leader. Chapter two provides a review of the literature of Black teachers in education and includes: The history of Black teachers in education, Black teacher roles, the ethic of caring in education, and school improvement. Chapter three, the methodology, details the study design, data collection and narrative analysis procedures. Chapters four and five present study findings. Chapter four introduces the four Black teacher leaders; their stories are presented using their own words and are narrated in first person. Chapter five provides an analysis of the participants' practice in light of Siddie Walker and Snarey's (2004) ethic of care and justice framework. Finally, chapter six highlights important aspects of the learning that took place as a result of implementing the study. I briefly summarize the pedagogical approach of the participants as Black teacher leaders. I discuss the commonalities in their narratives followed by a section that highlights important themes for the reader. Then, I provide my personal example to encourage other teachers to use the study framework as a tool to reflect and learn about their personal journeys and their daily practice working in schools. Finally, I present the study tensions and challenges, implications for school improvement, ideas for future research, and concluding thoughts.

CHAPTER II
BLACK TEACHERS IN EDUCATION
A TRADITION OF CARE AND JUSTICE TO IMPROVE SCHOOLS

The present chapter provides a review of literature relevant to the study divided into five sections: The background and context for the study, the history of Black teachers in education, Black teacher roles, the ethic of caring in education, and school improvement. First, *the background and context for the study* section briefly suggests that despite the many treaties and reforms that have been passed, Black students still continue to be underserved in the educational system. Second, the section on *the history of Black teachers in education* looks at the evolving role of Black teachers at different stages in history, from the enslavement of Blacks to the time when the Brown vs. Board of Education ruling mandated the desegregation of public schools. Third, *Black teachers' roles* explores the unique contributions these teachers have made and continue to make educating Black students on the basis of their shared history and background. Fourth, the ethic of caring in education briefly reviews the origins and foundational principles of this theory. It also examines the work of several authors in view of the need for the theory to encompass important aspects such as race, culture, gender, religion, and justice. Lastly, the school improvement section highlights reform measures enacted as a result of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. This section also includes multiple philosophical

and theoretical perceptions of these reforms. Finally, a discussion on the gaps in the literature is provided.

Background and Context for the Study

Centuries before President Obama's executive order launching federal initiatives to advance educational achievements for Black students, there were Black activists working (Douglass, 1845/1968; Washington, 1901), researching (DuBois, 1899/2002), and calling (Cooper, 1930/1998) for such improvements. For example, two years before George Washington was elected America's first president, eight free Black men assembled privately to discuss the status of Blacks in the colonies (DuBois, 1938/2002; Bennett, 1982; Quarles, 1987). Calling their alliance "The Free African Society," these men created a Black social compact to establish churches, schools, lodges, businesses, and cultural organizations (Bennett, 1982). These first leaders of Black America initiated a movement of self-creation and self-definition (Bennett). DuBois (1938/2002) called them "men of intelligence and real leadership" (p. 148) and Bennett (1982) declared that "There were no precedents and no models for what that they were trying to do and the pressure from all sides was almost overwhelming" (p. 56). Even with the tribulations brought on by slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, segregation, and discrimination, Bennett asserted that "neither hooliganism nor discriminatory laws" have been able to weaken the resolve many Blacks have for a rigorous educational movement. Historical and contemporary figures who have propelled this work can be noted in the contributions of Black teachers such as Fanny Jackson Coppin, Booker T. Washington, Anna Julia Cooper, Mary McLeod Bethune, WEB Du Bois, Marva Collins, Lisa Delpit, and Gloria Ladson-Billings.

Despite the efforts of early activists and scholarship of Black educators, the problems facing appropriate educational measures for Black students continue to rage on (Hale-Benson, 1982; Irvine, 1990; Kunjufu, 2004). Desegregated schools did not offer the fix proponents had hoped (Bell, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Tillman, 2004). Moreover, fifty years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, Bell (1980) wrote that advocates of racial justice should rely less on judicial decisions and more on tactics. The 1954 *Brown* decision was monumental legislation for America's race relations, but its promise for equal educational opportunity remained elusive (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lipman, 1995; Noguera, 2003; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). Even with some gains, most public schools continued to perform below state accountability ratings in their efforts to effectively reach masses of Black students (Erickson, 1987; Kozol, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Despite this stark reality, President Obama's initiative once again drew national attention to an age-old perplexing problem for many of our nation's schools – how to reach masses of Black students (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings; Perry et al.). Even with increased educational opportunity by way of the *Brown* ruling and other recent initiatives, Anyon (2005) asserts that this has been a century of disappointing educational policy and reforms.

Furthermore, scholars (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Greene, 1995) explain this phenomena occurs because policy makers without the benefit of a diverse body of educational stakeholders mandate policies that determine the standards and norms for the way schools should operate. These decision makers at the federal, state, and district level rarely experience what takes place behind classroom doors. As such, Ladson-Billings (1995) calls for more research conducted by teachers to inform education practice,

especially because of the classroom teacher's unique perspective and personal investment. And without culturally responsive contributors, according to Delpit (1995) substantive change to improve educational practices for Black students is unlikely to happen. This is in part because educational policies that have implications for Black students often lack valuable input and cultural perspectives that Black educators can offer (hooks, 1994; Morris, 2001; Woodson, 1933/1990).

For example, Dr. Carter G. Woodson, African American historian, educator, and founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, was an early proponent of Blacks exercising self-determination regarding the matters of educating Black students. Woodson (1933/1990) believed the education of any people should begin with the people themselves. According to Woodson, if school improvement for Black students is to be fully realized, the catalyst for the reform is more likely to happen with Black educators leading the way. In learning about the experiences of Black teacher leaders, it is necessary to consider the characteristics of their work ethic.

History of Black Teachers in Education

Enslaved Africans and Emancipation

The prevailing method used in the literature by 19th century Black writers was the first-person narrative (Brent, 1833/1973; Douglass 1845/1968; Washington, 1901). A popular example is Frederick Douglass' 1845 narrative. After learning to read while enslaved, and at great personal risk to his life, Douglass secretly taught others. At one point Douglass had forty students in a Sabbath school he organized. In his role as a teacher, Douglass recorded, "I taught them because it was the delight of my soul to be doing something that looked like bettering the condition of my race" (p. 90). Douglass

taught and observed students for a year; of the students under his charge, he noted that several learned to read and that he knew of at least one student who had been able to attain his freedom. Douglass made the following observations about his students:

These dear souls came not to the Sabbath school because it was popular to do so, nor did I teach them because it was reputable to be thus engaged. Every moment they spent in that school they were liable to be taken up and given thirty-nine lashes. They came because they wished to learn. Their minds had been starved by their cruel masters. They had been shut up in mental darkness. (p. 90)

Douglass' actions represent an early example of an ethic of care and justice. Though Douglass inherited a legacy of oppression, he used his agency to empower others within the Southern slave system by teaching them to read. Similar examples are present in Black teachers during the Reconstruction period immediately following the Emancipation Proclamation that declared slavery illegal.

Reconstruction

Seminal in scope is Anderson's (1988) chronicle of Black education in the South between 1860 and 1935. This historical research is foundational for an understanding of the role of Black teachers and their role as leaders within cultural, political, and economic contexts. Anderson's work illuminates the influence that Black teachers held in their communities during the stages of emancipation, reconstruction, and segregation.

Anderson described the first Black teacher leaders in the South to emerge from the oppression of slavery as "rebel literates...who had sustained their own learning process in defiance of slave owners' authority" (p. 17). These early Black teacher leaders saw

education as a means for equality and economic gain for their community as newly freed men and women of color.

The powerful role Black teachers played as leaders in society then and now is best exemplified in Anderson's (1988) chilling account of the overt racist tactics used to shape the beliefs of Black teachers. Using newsletters and other historical documents, Anderson details how measures were taken to train and indoctrinate Black teachers with White dominance and superiority ideologies so that they could in turn mold the political consciousness of Black students. The goal for implementing this technique was to maintain racial inequalities in terms of wealth and hegemony. However, there were Black teacher leaders who resisted such practices by walking the tightrope of resistance and accommodation. Examples cited in Anderson's work illustrate how Black teacher leaders sought to implement well rounded pedagogical practices to include academic, agricultural, and industrial education even when Southern and Northern Whites threatened to withhold philanthropic donations if they did not cease or limit academic training.

This contention regarding Black teacher leader practices ushered in a highly publicized clash between two influential Black teacher leaders of the day. During the early part of the 20th century, Washington (1901/1965) and Du Bois (1903/1989) researched and theorized about the best approach teachers should take to educate masses of Black students. Their public debate regarding best practices to educate Black students is well documented (Anderson, 1988; Bennet, 1982; DuBois, 1903/1989). Washington wrote:

Of one thing I felt more strongly convinced than ever, after spending this month

in seeing the actual life of the coloured people, and that was that, in order to lift them up, something must be done more than merely to imitate New England education as it then existed. (p. 92)

Washington is calling for a different kind of training for Black students that will prepare them to work, earn a living and become self-sufficient. Countering Washington's model that mainly taught skills for industrial and agricultural training, Harvard scholar Du Bois (1903/1989) argued it was unnecessarily narrow and did not account for the full spectrum of academic practices needed for Black students. Du Bois researched and published scholarly work for almost sixty years and his work remains relevant in education, social, and cultural contexts (Provenzo, 2002). One of Du Bois' most enduring legacies was his fight for a well rounded education for Blacks in America. His take was that Black students need academic training no matter what occupation or profession they pursue; students need to be able to invent and create. School should equip students with the necessary tools to achieve a well rounded education.

Segregation

Cooper (1930), a respected Black educator of the early 20th century, cautioned segregated teachers not to believe everything they read in books because as she observed, "a white man doesn't always mean all he says in a book, and hardly ever does all he suggests in a speech" (p. 234). She described Black teachers as "ministers of the Gospel of intelligence" and believed the role of Black teachers was to prepare students to face the "most bitter, the most intense, the most unrelenting" prejudice the world had ever seen (p. 250). With a career starting twenty years after the Emancipation Proclamation, Cooper worked as a Washington DC teacher and administrator for more than forty years.

She was also a prolific writer who provided insight into the intellect and practices of Black teacher leaders in the South during segregation.

Likewise, Siddle Walker (1996) found evidence in her research of other Black teachers performing multiple roles to educate Black students including counselor, encourager, benefactor, and racial cheerleader. In another study Siddle Walker (2005) used historical methodology to expand what she described as a “one-dimensional portrait” of Black teachers in Georgia during de jure segregation. Her research exposed the inaccuracy of historical accounts assigning the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) legal team with the exclusive credit for school desegregation. Through newspapers, NAACP interview records, archival documents, and teacher association notes, Siddle Walker chronicled the collaborative role Black teachers played within the NAACP. While her research acknowledges the importance of the NAACP’s legal work to promote equality for people of color, it shows how historical accounts have minimized the contributions of Black teachers. From these historical documents, Siddle Walker (2005) wrote:

Through their organization, Black educators spoke continuously and emphatically on the inequity in facilities, length of school term, buses, teacher salaries, and vocational educational opportunities evident in the educational system. Between 1878 and 1938, their activities may be characterized by working primarily within the Southern educational system, seeking to effect change by reasoning with the White leadership through letters, petitions, and meetings. (p. 358)

This research paints a picture of Black teachers as exercising their agency. These teachers believed in their ability to act and influence change in their community. As

Siddle Walker noted, they fought for desegregation even while facing the daunting prospect of unemployment as a result of the legal victory and implementation of the *Brown* ruling.

Desegregation

The *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling (1954) called for an integration of schools after the courts deemed separate schools for the races were inherently unequal. It was hailed a victory for many in the Black community because it cracked open the doors for equal access to public and higher education. However, with the ruling came many unexpected outcomes that continue to disenfranchise Black teacher leaders today.

To note the 50th anniversary of the *Brown* ruling, many scholars (Bell, 2004; Gay, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Tillman, 2004; Ware, 2004) provided historical analysis, legal insight, and compelling reflections about the unintended consequences of the *Brown* case. Regarding Black teachers during this time, much of the analysis revolves around massive numbers of these teachers along with other Black educators who were either demoted or jobless as a result of the legislation. For instance, during the 1965-66 school year, Ladson-Billings (2004) reported that in Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi, no Black teachers were hired at schools where White teachers worked. For example, Tillman (2004) looks at a letter from 1953 notifying a Black teacher that her services were no longer needed. The reason for this dismissal and thousands of others, Tillman argued, was due to Whites' "fear of being in close physical proximity to Blacks, and the fear of having White children taught by Black teachers." (p. 281) Another prevalent theme found in the literature about Black teachers during desegregation connects to how their decline

in numbers had an immediate adverse impact on Black students. As an example, Hudson and Holmes (1994) noted:

It was during this period (post 1954) that the problems of low self-esteem, decreasing aspirations, ability grouping and tracking, assignments to educable mentally retarded classes and other systematic victimizations of Black youngsters developed. (p. 390)

Holmes puts into words what was happening to Black students at this time.

The *Brown* ruling was well intended in theory but in practice it threatened the “livelihood of Black educators, the structure, values, and cultural norms of the Black community, and ultimately the social, emotional, and academic success of Black children.” (Tillman, 2004, p. 281) As a result of implementing desegregation the Black teachers and students experienced multiple setbacks.

On the other hand, researchers such as Gay (2004) argue there were some gains as a result of this legislation. Gay acknowledges that *Brown* did not solve all the racial inequities in schools; however, she highlights how Black Americans were trailblazers as “the plaintiffs in the Brown case and were the ones to brave racial hatred and hostility as they crossed the Jim Crow lines to enter previously all-white schools” (p. 201). This researcher argues that the Black community led the movement for educational equality and states that their efforts “sparked a number of legal and social changes that laid the foundation for a broader civil rights consciousness movement in which other ethnic minorities, women, the elderly, the poor, the disabled, and gays demanded that prohibition against discrimination and separation extend to them as well” (p. 197-198).

Gay's work portrays the Black community as pioneers of the education equality movement.

A Eurocentric perspective on both the *Brown* case and the history of Black teachers can be found in the work of Fairclough (2007). This researcher dismisses scholars who celebrate Black teachers and segregated schools as institutions providing Black communities with unity and leadership. In addition, he makes reference to problems that existed in segregated schools such as teachers being poorly trained, and inadequate facilities and resources. Fairclough contends it was the NAACP who argued for desegregation on the basis that segregated schools caused Black children to feel inferior. His historical account of Black teachers' practice in the South spans a one hundred year period, and is written in a style that presents a mix of flattery and denigration about the work of these teachers.

Fairclough's (2007) argument that Blacks were romanticizing the past by honoring the accomplishments of segregated schools is nothing new. Delpit (1997) addresses such contention by exposing what she calls a "debilitating myth embedded within the struggle for civil rights that continues to haunt African Americans" (p. ix). The goal of desegregation, Delpit stressed, was not about having access to white culture, white teachers, white schools, and white leadership to adequately educate Black children, but to have equitable resources to provide high quality education for these students.

Even with a plethora of literature on desegregation, the actual first hand accounts of Black teachers' perspectives and experiences are limited. For this reason, Foster's (1997) seminal scholarship is recognized as the first body of research focused entirely on Black teachers. Foster uses narratives from twenty teachers ranging in age and length of

service in the classroom. Through life histories, Foster's research "seeks to understand how teaching has been experienced and understood by Black teachers engaged in the profession" (p. xx). Several of the Black teacher narratives highlight experiences of working in segregated and integrated schools. Of the twenty, the perspective of one Texas teacher, Etta Marks, is recorded. This educator shares a teaching experience during her 1965 assignment as the one of two Black teachers in an otherwise all White school:

The first half of the year we didn't have to do anything, and the second half of the year we taught three remedial reading classes with only nine to twelve students in them. This continued for two years. Eventually, the teachers started complaining again. They separated us, sent my cousin [the other Black teacher] to another school, and I was left alone at the elementary school. The teachers treated me like dirt. I didn't eat with them. I couldn't use the teachers' bathroom; I had to use the students' bathroom. (p. 85)

Etta's story depicts the conditions of a Texas teacher during desegregation and at the same time it illustrates the complex issues that emerged due to an inadequate transition for implementing desegregation. Even today we continue to face the consequences of desegregation. It has allowed students to choose the schools they want to attend and to have access to more resources, but it has also contributed to a decrease in the number of Black teachers working in schools.

Black Teachers' Roles

This section explores the unique contributions Black teachers have made and continue to make educating all students, but particularly Black students on the basis of

their shared history and background. I describe important pieces of literature in chronological order. For example, the work of Ladson-Billings (1995) illustrates a 3-year ethnographic study of successful teachers of African American elementary students. The eight participants, not all of them Black, were chosen based on recommendations from African American parents. These teachers were identified as being successful with African American students. These successful teachers saw their work as art, had a strong identification with the community, and maintained high expectations for all students. Ladson-Billings suggests the need for the study be “replicated again and again...to know much more about the practice of successful teachers for African American and other students who have been poorly served by our schools” (p. 163). Ladson-Billings call to continually study strategies that foster Black students’ success was an impetus for this research. Understanding how to engage and motivate these students can have a far reaching impact for designing, identifying, and implementing reform measures that maximize achievement.

Also, in an ethnographic study of three Black teachers at the junior high level, Lipman (1995), like Ladson-Billings, did not identify any common teaching styles, however, the study did reveal similarities in how the teachers connected to students, families, and community. Furthermore, Lipman’s research called for more dialogue with successful teachers along with promoting the actual leadership of these teachers.

Conversely, the silencing of Black teachers is a theme in Delpit’s (1995) research. In her study, she questioned the marginalized voices of multicultural educators. Minority teachers in her study shared how their ideas were often dismissed by White colleagues who felt they were the ones who knew how to best educate all kids. While Delpit’s work

speaks to how liberal educators should realize there are other voices and other realities, more research is needed that speaks to what Black teachers have done and can do to successfully advocate for Black students.

Contemporary scholarship about Black teachers is often embedded within larger works about Black education in America. Even though numerous empirical studies (Dee, 2001; Hess & Leal, 1997; Meier, Stewart, & England, 1989) have implied or determined a positive correlation between Black student achievement and Black teachers, the qualitative data which speaks directly to this phenomenon is scant. The silencing of dialogue when it comes to race and culture (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2009), a devaluing of Black educator perspectives (Delpit, 1995), and underhanded oppressive tactics to perpetuate the status quo (Bell, 2003) are all plausible reason for the omission of such research.

Irvine (2003), Lipman (1995), Milner (2006), and Tillman (2004) represent examples of a small cadre of scholars who have made specific references addressing educational relationships between Black teachers and Black students. Without question, Black teacher leaders have a responsibility to all students but they also have what Irvine (2003) calls a “cultural eye” to address the specific needs of Black students. Drawing on 20 years of experience as a teacher educator and professional development educator, Irvine stresses the importance of Black teachers:

To acquire an intimate understanding of African American teachers and, hence, a different view of the achievement gap problem, researchers should raise a different set of questions and consider the problem of African American students’ lack of academic success from multiple perspectives. In particular, it is

imperative that they include the perspectives of African American teachers who teach African American students. (p. 34)

In other words, reform measures which fail to include input from Black teachers who teach Black students are inconclusive. These teachers bring an insider perspective because they identify with Black student learners through cultural connections based on their lived experiences.

Similarly, Lipman (1995) and Tillman (2004) address the need for a greater awareness of the perspectives and practices of Black teachers. Lipman concluded from her ethnographic study of successful Black teachers that “if schools...value students of color and support their academic success and cultural integrity, reformers cannot afford to ignore the knowledge of successful teachers of students of color” (p. 207). In the same way, Tillman stressed that “African Americans must bring their gifts, reclaim the tradition of African American excellence in leadership, and chart a new course for African American education” (p. 301). That is to say, Black teachers who know their legacy of scholarship and achievement are in better position to forge new pathways to improve educational practices for Black children.

Likewise, Milner (2006) describes the unique contribution Black teachers can offer to the decision making process as it pertains to school improvement for Black students. The purpose of his study was to examine teachers’ experiences and successes both pre and post desegregation. Rather than interview Black teachers, Milner talks with six education experts about their perspectives on the experiences and impact of Black teachers. The findings revealed similar themes already noted in academic literature which include the need for more Black teachers and more culturally responsive curriculum and

instruction as a way of engaging and motivating Black students. Of course, Milner's work could have been more revealing and instructive had he included interviews with Black teacher leaders working in public schools.

The role of Black teachers is important in public schools for all students "because they are role models for all children and they [can] provide positive symbols that counteract negative radical stereotypes" (Tillman, 2003, p. 53). For instance, Hawley (1989) as quoted in Tillman, maintains "The only opportunity many young people will have to experience the lessons that can be best taught in racially integrated learning environments is to be taught by a teaching corps that is racially integrated" (p. 34). It is important to note these scholars are not suggesting other educators shirk their responsibility to Black students; but rather value Black teachers' successes with Black students and learn from them.

The Ethic of Caring in Education

Scholarly writings often recognize Noddings (1984) as one of the early advocates for an ethic of care framework for educators and their practice (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Bass, 2012; Bergman, 2004; Owens & Ennis, 2005). However, historical documents and oral accounts depict Black teacher leaders exercising models of an ethic of care as early as the 19th century (Siddle Walker, 1996). Goldstein (2002) explains that foundational to understanding "caring" is the realization that this is not something you are, but something you do; there is more to an ethic of care than "gentle smiles and warm hugs" (p. 9). Caring teachers have value systems that go beyond the disciplines they teach (Ladson-Billings, 2009). These teachers have a strong work ethic and are conscientious about the work they do; they believe in the home and community connection to the

school. Teachers who demonstrate care for themselves, their students, the subject matter, and the public good should be the rule and not the exception for every child.

With all that encompasses being a teacher who demonstrates care, scholars acknowledge that constructs for an ethic of caring can be complex (Noddings, 2007; Thompson, 1998). Noddings' (2002) model of ethic of care encompasses several procedural requirements: a) there must be a relationship between the one-caring and the cared-for, in the classroom, the teacher is the one-caring while the students are the cared-for; b) a relationship qualifies as caring when specific objectives are met by the one-caring and the cared-for; c) the one-caring, the teacher, exhibits engrossment, commitment, and a motivational shift. Likewise, the cared-for, the student, plays a role through receptivity providing a response to the teacher.

The teacher is *engrossed* when she validates students by recognizing and valuing their experiences. Through *commitment*, the teacher shows persistence by going beyond the call of duty to care for the student. The teacher must also practice *motivational displacement* in which his/her internal reasons for problem solving are replaced by an understanding of the experience and motivation of the student. Noddings (2002) believes true motivational displacement is not achieved through emotional empathy but through moral obligation to do what is right.

In addition to Noddings (2007) one-caring and cared for roles, she also created a model to ensure the ethics of care are taught in schools. The model for teaching an ethic of care includes four components: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. Modeling calls for teachers to demonstrate through their behavior how one should care for others. Through modeling, dialogue should emerge to engage students in

conversation and critical analysis about what it means to care. Noddings posits, “if we want to produce people who will care for another, then it makes sense to give students practice in caring and reflecting on that practice” (p. 228). For Noddings, this dialogue is also an opportunity to practice engrossment, whereby the one-caring fully listens to the needs and motivation of the cared-for. Lastly, the one-caring confirms the cared-for by affirming their talents and skills and then encouraging them to grow and develop in these areas.

While Noddings (2007) maintains there is no universal paradigm for an ethic of caring because “cultural and personal differences will result in different manifestations of care” (p. 223), she and others (Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1975) have frameworks that are often positioned as the standard for morals and ethic of care models. However, their work does not consider the experiences of Blacks in America (Siddle Walker & Snarey, 2004).

Much of the work on contemporary Black teacher leaders practicing an ethic of care is told through a Black feminist lens. For example, Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) uses historical and contemporary information to view Black women teachers who practice an ethic of care. From her study, she found three major characteristics of these women. First, they accepted maternal roles by acting as other-mothers during the school day. Collins (1990) explains how in the Black community, other-mothers are women who share mothering responsibilities with biological mothers. Secondly, these teachers were clear about the challenges Black students faced in school and society. Third, these teachers understood that with their commitment to social justice came an ethic of risk. In

other words, these teachers took deliberate risks to care even when challenging realities offered no assurances for success.

Bass (2012) also examines Black teacher leaders' practice of an ethic of care, by conducting a qualitative study of five African American women. Bass used a Black feminist theory framework to examine how the ethic of care was implemented among these school leaders. She collected data through interviews, questionnaires, a focus group, and telephone conversations. Like Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) findings, Bass research found these Black women to be maternal and nurturing when interacting with students, and she found these teachers so committed to their work; they often made decisions to help Black students that could potentially cause them to lose their jobs and professional reputations.

The epistemological stance for this qualitative study draws from Siddle Walker and Snarey's (2004) matrix of care and justice. This alternate view of an ethic of care encompassing both care and justice accounts for a multiplicity of Black ideologies. The matrix of care and justice primary values include: 1) race and gender are balanced for liberation; 2) resistance and accommodation operate concurrently for pluralism; 3) religion and ethic merge to foster hope; 4) agency and legacy result in empowerment; and 5) community and individual coalesce for uplift (See figure 1)

Siddle Walker and Snarey (2004), disillusioned by the omission of the Black perspective in Gilligan's (1982) ethic of care and Kohlberg's (1984) ethic of justice paradigms, sought to rework the theories to encompass "African American voice" (Siddle Walker and Snarey, 2004, p. 3). In their research, Siddle Walker and Snarey found the

Black community deemed both care and justice as essential for their children's educational needs. These researchers note:

Unlike the either-or construction of care and justice that has polarized the moral education debate, for many in the African American community, justice and care are equally yoked and, in effect, form a unified and overarching care-and-justice ethic. An African American ethic seeks both care-fullness and fair-ness, both hand-in-handedness and even-handedness. (Siddle Walker & Snarey, 2004, p. 131)

This objection to “separate care and justice into exclusive stratospheres” (p. 6) resulted in Siddle Walker and Snarey construction of an ethic of care and justice paradigm to include five major virtues, each the result of combining a care and a justice basic value. These care-and-justice values are not presented as binaries but rather as working in tandem to create a union of significant outcomes. These five major virtues include liberation, pluralism, hope, empowerment, and uplift.

School Improvement

In a room full of educators, school improvement can have multiple meanings. Much of what is characterized and implemented as school improvement reform often constitutes a one size fits all approach (Harris, 2002; Sarason, 2004) oblivious to the needs of specific student populations. hooks (1994) envisions classrooms where students are empowered to be better scholars and live more fully beyond the classroom.

Efforts by the Black community to improve schools for Black students are reflected in the literature to some extent since the passage of laws granting Blacks access to the public school system (Anderson, 1988; Bennett, 1982; Quarles, 1987). Although

these measures have not been specifically labeled school improvement, the goal has been to improve schools for Black teachers and students.

A Black community collective of researchers, teachers, professors, students, preachers, parents, and others have traditionally advocated for social justice and change to support and strengthen educational practices related to Black Americans. Immediately after the Civil War, Perry (2010) described how Blacks organized to establish schools to educate their children and petitioned to make education a protected right. Of these measures, she noted:

They took the issue to African American conventions, wrote articles and editorials in newspapers, held forums, created educational organizations, gave speeches, and eventually, in alliance with radical Republicans at the Southern Conventions, wrote the right to an education in state constitutions... (p. x-xi)

This early advocacy shows how Black Americans have a historical precedence for actively working to improve schools and educational practices for Black students.

During post-bellum, Anderson (1988) recorded how northern White missionaries purposely came south to civilize and educate Blacks who had been recently emancipated from slavery. However, these missionaries were stunned when their efforts and services were rejected. Anderson asserts, "...many ex-slaves had established their own educational collectives and associations, staffed schools entirely with black teachers and were unwilling to allow their educational movement to be controlled..." (p. 8). This early resistance demonstrates how Blacks organized schools, exercised autonomy, and understood the significance of Black teachers educating Black students.

Blacks held a firm commitment to education even as they encountered widespread opposition and obstacles to establish and maintain quality educational programs. Black teachers, scholars, and community members rallied together to address issues relating to inadequate school facilities, sub-standard teacher training opportunities, and a limited curriculum. Black communities pooled their resources and talents to build and improve school facilities (Anderson, 1988). Washington (1901) and Du Bois (1968) addressed teacher training through their work in higher education and their public dispute over the best course of action in this area. Furthermore, to address what he found missing in school textbooks, Du Bois wrote and published a Black history magazine for children. Of Du Bois' work to improve schools, Provenzo (2002) wrote:

Du Bois was ever the innovator and attempted to not just affect the policy of Negro schools, but also the content of their education. On an informal level in 1920, he began publishing a children's magazine, *The Brownies' Book*. He did so because of his belief that black children were introduced in their textbooks, to the world too much in terms of white culture and society. (p. 15)

Du Bois' creation of the *Brownies* publication in 1920 to address the dearth in Black history he saw in schools is a pre-cursor to the push for more culturally relevant and responsive educational practices.

In the 60s, Gay (2004) explained some Blacks engaged in the fight for equal rights "turned their attention away from the courtroom and street protests to the classroom and the curricula that were being taught" (p. 198). She maintained these activists focused on drawing attention to school curriculum which often omitted or inadequately represented Blacks and other racial groups. The work of these 60s activists

and the aforementioned early examples of school improvement solidify what Watkins (1996) described as “the rich intellectual tradition and practices in the protracted battle to provide, reform, and improve the schooling and education of African Americans” (p. 5). Hence, Black Americans commitment to improve schools for Black students has roots that date back more than a century.

At first sight, literature by Black authors regarding school improvement may seem scarce, however, these researchers often describe such initiatives using terms like culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1990), engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994), teacher voice (Delpit, 1995), multicultural education (Banks, 2001), and culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2000). These scholars and others offer a plethora of research and literature addressing successes and challenges of Black students and Black teachers. However, many of these views highlighting culturally specific approaches for Black students are often ignored in mainstream school improvement policies.

Gap in the Literature

This literature review examines research and scholarship focused on Black teacher narratives in America. Concerns about the missing voices of Black teachers in educational reform emerge in the literature in the 1990’s and have remained a recurring theme among scholars. This gap reveals the need for ongoing research to document the voices, knowledge, and practical experience of Black teacher leaders to bolster educational practices for Black students. Contemporary scholarship about Black teachers is often embedded within larger works about Black education in America, therefore, studies that give space to document firsthand accounts of contemporary Black teacher

leaders are relevant. By focusing on Central Texas Black teachers, the study also addressed a gap found in narratives missing from this geographic region.

In addition to building on current scholarship by studying the voices, knowledge, and practical experiences of Black teacher leaders, the study examined the role of educators through an epistemological lens that draws from Siddle Walker and Snarey's (2004) matrix of care and justice primary values. Chiefly, ethic of care research has focused on the work of female teachers; however, this research looked at how both Black male and Black female teachers practice an ethic of care and justice.

Summary

The present chapter outlined a review of literature relevant to the study. The literature was discussed in five sections: The background and context for the study, the history of Black teachers in education, Black teacher roles, the ethic of caring in education, and school improvement. The gap in the literature was identified by highlighting the need for Black teacher narratives to document their voices, knowledge, and practical experience to bolster educational practices for Black students. In the following chapter, chapter three, I provide a detailed description of the methodology for this study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND OVERALL STUDY DESIGN

This dissertation followed a *case study* methodology for data collection and analysis, and for writing study findings (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). A “case study is defined by interest in individual cases... It draws attention to the question of what specifically can be learned from the single case...” (Stake, 1994, p. 236). Qualitative case studies seek to chronicle descriptions of a particular aspect of a phenomenon, in this case what it means to be a Black teacher leader and the type of work it entails. The goal was to uncover meaning and create a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the four Black teacher leaders participating in the study, Sharon Dunbar, Jackie Reese, Raymond Watson, and Malcolm Wright, II (pseudonyms).

As Merriam (2009) explains, “The case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon. Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of the phenomenon...” (p. 50-51). Delving into the personal and professional journeys of the four participating teachers was a complex task. In exploring what it means to be a Black teacher leader and the work these teachers do, it is important to consider not only their practice in schools but also the forces that affect their work. In addition, the case study can be a *multisite case study* (Merriam, 2009) when the participants come from different institutions but share a common bond and common

characteristics that allow for cross-comparison, similar to the participants in the present study.

Using a framework rooted in Siddle Walker and Snarey's (2004) matrix of care and justice primary values, the research illuminates the experiences of Black teacher leaders who strategically work within the school system to address the specific needs of, and bolster educational practices for Black students. The research questions that guided the study include:

1. How do four Black teachers teaching Black students utilize and demonstrate an ethic of care and justice as described by Siddle Walker and Snarey (2004)?
2. What are the journeys of these four Black teachers in their becoming teacher leaders?
3. What ontological perspectives do they hold, and what is the effect on the work they do?
4. What are their experiences working with schools, colleagues, administrators, Black students, and community members?
5. What stories illustrate their successes and challenges advocating for the education, learning and achievement of Black students?

By exploring answers to the aforementioned research questions I was able to recreate the narratives of contemporary Black teacher leaders as a case study (Denizen and Lincoln (2008). The qualitative researcher implementing a case study can use a variety of data collection techniques to “uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem” (Merriam, 2009, p. 86). In this case, individual

interviews, a group interview, and the researcher's journal served as data collection sources.

Care and Justice Primary Values Framework

The epistemological stance for this qualitative study draws from Siddle Walker and Snarey's (2004) matrix of care and justice primary values. These researchers envision the ethic of care through a lens that takes into account the Black lived experience. The care and justice primary values presented in the matrix are: 1) race and gender are balanced for liberation; 2) resistance and accommodation operate concurrently for pluralism; 3) religion and ethic merge to foster hope; 4) agency and legacy result in empowerment; and 5) community and individual coalesce for uplift. Within each component of the matrix, there are two values – one representing care and one representing justice. These care-and-justice values are not presented as binaries but rather presented as elements working together. Liberation, pluralism, hope, empowerment, and uplift are the result of the collaborative care and justice values (See Figure 3.1)

This matrix of care and justice primary values served as the framework to analyze the narratives of four Black teacher leaders and provide answers to the research questions. According to Merriam (2009), the names of the categories to present study findings can come from three sources: The researcher, the participants, or sources outside the study such as the literature and theoretical framework. In this case, the ethic of care and justice primary values framework served as the lens to recreate the participants' narratives and report study findings.

Community <i>a</i>					Community + Individual <i>Uplift</i>
Agency <i>b</i>				Agency + Legacy: <i>Empowerment</i>	
Religion <i>a</i>			Religion + Ethics: <i>Hope</i>		
Resistance <i>b</i>		Resistance + Accommodation: <i>Pluralism</i>			
Race <i>b</i>	Race + Gender: <i>Liberation</i>				
	Gender <i>a</i>	Accommodation <i>b</i>	Ethics <i>b</i>	Legacy <i>a</i>	Individual <i>b</i>

Figure 3.1. Matrix of Care and Justice Primary Values: Five Developing Virtues

(*a* Care theme, primarily; *b* Justice theme, primarily)

Liberation: Race + Gender

Race and gender are balanced for liberation; by realizing race and gender are not subordinate to one another, the Black community collectively seeks liberation. Black teacher leaders understand the importance of sharing their knowledge about how to gain freedom from psychological and other oppressive tactics. These teachers work in schools and communities to help Black students become critical thinkers and problems solvers in order to claim their personal freedom.

Pluralism: Resistance + Accommodation

Resistance and accommodation operate concurrently for pluralism; Blacks in America have relied on both resistance and accommodation to challenge dominant culture ideologies and practices. Sidle Walker and Snarey (2004) maintain that Blacks

have learned to simultaneously oppose and accommodate in order to survive and make gains. Likewise, Black teacher leaders recognize that to successfully navigate school politics, they must employ both resistance and accommodation strategies. These teachers collaborate with others and work as advocates to advance caring and fair relationships and practices for Black students and their school community.

Hope: Religion + Ethics

Religious beliefs and ethics merge to foster hope. Historically, most Black Americans have been resolute in their religious beliefs and convictions (Milner, 2006). Therefore, attempts to grasp the Black lived experience without recognizing religious views are rendered incomplete (Siddle Walker & Snarey, 2004). As such, in Siddle Walker and Snarey's (2004) ethic of care and justice framework, religion is not subordinate to moral ethic as presented in mainstream ideology. Combined, religious beliefs and ethics represent hope. This hope symbolizes their vision for creating and implementing better educational practices and settings for students. Hope anchors Black teacher leaders staying power to educate future generations of Black Americans in sometimes hostile and oppressive environments.

Empowerment: Agency + Legacy

Agency and legacy result in empowerment. Persons with agency have the capacity and ability to act and influence their lives and environment (Bray, 2011). For Siddle Walker and Snarey (2004), even though Blacks have been handed a legacy that includes oppression, they have used their agency to empower themselves and their community. Although school politics and other demeaning legacies may threaten to derail the learning environment for Black students, Black teacher leaders exert agency

and are not afraid to address the needs of Black students. This work empowers Black students directly and the Black community indirectly.

Uplift: Community + Individual

Community and individual coalesce for uplift. As Siddle Walker and Snarey (2004) put it, “to care for the group is to care for the self, and to care for the self is to care for the group” (p. 136). Together individual values and community coalesce to uplift the Black race. Traditionally, Black Americans have been taught to help their communities and the community is encouraged to celebrate the uniqueness and accomplishments of the individual. Black teacher leaders have a special stake in the well-being of Black students because each individual success contributes to community uplift (Milner, 2006).

Four Black Teacher Leaders and Their Schools

This study took place in a major city and surrounding suburban area located in Central Texas. The population for the area under study is estimated at 870,000 people (U.S. Census, 2011). Of this total, approximately 11% of these citizens are Black Americans. This setting is characterized by a robust business and technology community, eclectic art venues, an abundance of resources aimed to support physical fitness, universities, and environmentally green values. Specifically, the participating Black teacher leaders’ classroom and community experiences in relation to their work at four schools served as the setting for the study. It is important to highlight that the study participants, the institutions, and places for the study were assigned pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participating Black teachers.

During informal conversations with administrators, teachers, and members in the community, I was able to identify four teachers as potential participants for the study.

These teachers were often described and observed exhibiting the characteristics of a Black teacher leader. As explained in chapter one, a Black teacher leader embodies characteristics conducive to addressing the specific needs of Black students. These teachers are respected educators, knowledgeable about Black culture, and known for openly advocating for Black students. Black teacher leaders work in collaboration with others seeking Black students' well-being, learning, and achievement. The teachers identified to participate in the study served as key informants for the research. Patton (2002) describes key informants as those who are knowledgeable about the topic under study. Furthermore, this qualitative methodologist maintains that key informants are able to speak to their experiences in ways that will provide insight about the emic perspective, the insider point of view and experience. The selection process for identifying the key informants is what Patton (2002) calls "intensity sampling"; with intensity sampling, information-rich cases are selected to "elucidate the phenomenon of interest" (p. 234). Two male and two female Black teachers participated in the study. At the time I conducted the study, these participants were teaching in the classroom working at different educational levels in the public school system, elementary, middle, and high school settings. The teachers' service ranged from six to eighteen years of classroom experience. They have firsthand knowledge and experience and understand the need to address specific issues related to Black students. These teachers have demonstrated leadership in their schools and communities to advance Black culture.

Sharon Dunbar

Sharon and her family came to Texas from Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina. She is a stylish petite woman who exudes confidence. She is in her mid-forties and has taught

at both the elementary and middle school levels. She has been teaching for 17 years and was working at Canyon Creek Middle school at the time the study was implemented. This is a suburban school that has seen significant growth in the last ten years. In the 90's Canyon Creek residents organized and retained a lawyer to block developers wanting to build apartments and affordable homes surrounding their neighborhood. Residents were ultimately unsuccessful and zoning changes resulted in a proliferation of low-income apartments and duplexes. An influx of low-socio economic students, mainly Black and Hispanic has meant an increase in teacher and staff job postings. However, Black and Hispanic parents complain that the school's administrative team does not do enough to diversify the staff in order to meet the needs of the changing student population.

Jackie Reese

Jackie grew up in a rural Texas town and is in her mid thirties. She was a Teaching Assistant (TA) for 10 years and has taught elementary for 6 more years. Jackie has a dazzling smile and warm personality. She grew up as a middle child in a family of six kids. She was working as a 1st grade teacher at Tillman Elementary, which was established during the fifties to educate the city's Black student population. The school boasts many successful graduates. The area surrounding the school is the prototype for many gentrified neighborhoods in this country. Once a predominately Black area, the neighborhood is now home to many White urban professionals. Tillman has seen a decline in enrollment over the years because White neighbors do not allow their kids to attend school with the 300 Black and Hispanic kids who live in the projects near the

school. The once predominately Black school now has about 25 percent Black students and 75 percent Hispanic students. The school grounds are beautifully maintained.

Raymond Watson

Raymond is in his forties and has been coaching high school football for almost twenty years. Ray attended college on a football scholarship. Although his stature bespeaks that of a tough linebacker, he has a very easygoing demeanor. In addition to his varsity coaching duties, Coach Ray teaches art at Ridge Pointe, one of the largest suburban high schools in the state. The school is located on a major thoroughfare and is surrounded by restaurants and businesses. The student body is diverse with 40% White, 25% Hispanic, 20% Black, and 15% Asian. Many students receive sports and academic scholarships. The mainly White teaching staff works hard to implement a rigorous curriculum refusing to succumb to repetitious drills that mimic state accountability measures. Even so, recent student surveys indicated students found classes boring and irrelevant. School officials have also noticed a spike in school suspensions for fighting and vandalism.

Malcolm Wright, II

Malcolm is tall, wears glasses, and often punctuates his serious demeanor with witticisms that bring about much laughter. He goes to the gym every day, loves to read, analyze movies, and engage in social media. He is thirty-five, has been teaching for twelve years, wants to be a writer and has strong opinions about education. At the time of the study, he was working at Armstrong High School where the strutting Lions are known for their athletic programs and their energetic marching band. Named to honor a Confederate soldier, Armstrong High has mostly Black and Hispanic students. Trophy

cases filled with awards pay tribute to the school's award-winning athletic and extra-curricular programs. However, recent news reports have focused on the school's consistent struggles to meet state testing accountability measures. The majority of the students failed recent math and science state mandated tests. The neighborhood surrounding the school is known for gang activity and drugs.

Data Collection Sources

The data sources for this study included: individual interviews, a group interview, and the researcher's journal. These sources helped document the perspectives and experiences of the four Black teacher leaders participating in the study.

Individual Interviews

I followed the three-interview format proposed by Seidman (1991) in order to capture the perspectives and experiences of the teacher leaders enacting an ethic of care and justice in the work they do with schools, children, and community. I interviewed each participant three times for a period of 30 to 90 minutes each time. The three-interview approach gave the informants an opportunity to create meaning by placing the questions in a past, present, and future context of their lived experiences (see Appendices B, C, and D for sample questions for the individual interviews). About the character of this model, Seidman (1991) explains:

In the first interview, the interviewer's task is to put the participants' experience in context by asking him or her to tell as much as possible about him or herself in light of the topic up to the present time.

...The purpose of the second interview is to concentrate on the concrete details of the participants' present experience in the topic area of the study. We ask them to

reconstruct these details... We do not ask for opinions but rather the details of their experience, upon which their opinions may be built.

...In the third interview, participants are asked to reflect on the meaning of their experience... (p. 11-12).

Therefore, during the first interview the study participants were asked to share as much as possible about their backgrounds and what/who has influenced them to work as teachers. I also asked them about their past life and professional experiences. The second interview was designed to concentrate their current lived experience as related to the topic. I asked them questions related to the work they do with their students, the community, the parents, and about any initiatives they pursued during after school hours connected to their beliefs about what quality education looks like for all students and for Black students. In the final individual interview, I asked the participants to reflect on the meaning of their experiences as Black teachers who have agency and take initiative to go beyond what is required by their jobs working at different schools. According to Seidman, the goal of the last interview is to “address the intellectual and emotional connection between the participants’ work and life” (p. 18). During the last interview, I also asked the participants about the future, what they envision will happen and the work they are planning to do.

Group Interview

After the second individual interview, a group interview was arranged so that the four teachers participating in the study could meet in person and exchange ideas (see Appendix E for sample questions for the group interview). As explained by Patton (2002), group interviews afford participants an opportunity to socialize for the purpose of

listening to others and possibly expanding their initial comments when they hear the experiences of others. The group interview was videotaped and lasted approximately two hours. I also had a tape recorder to capture the conversation. Additionally, I invited a friend, who is also in the doctoral program to assist me with the technology and to help me stay focused. She helped by taking notes about the nonverbal and verbal participation of the teachers. We met before the group interview to agree on the process of note taking and to discuss what to observe. We also met after the session was over to debrief on the experience.

For the group interview we met on what turned out to be a cold and rainy Saturday morning in January. However, our meeting spot, a beautifully furnished club room adjacent to Malcolm's condo was the perfect setting to relax. Four wonderfully soft and comfortable leather chairs, up beat music playing softly in the background, a variety of breakfast pastries, and the exquisite lighting seemed to have settled the participants in for a morning for sharing stories. The participants, as is customary, immediately began talking with one another to find personal connections.

Researcher's Journal

I started out recording my notes in a spiral notebook, but later transferred my notes to a small binder. Because I found myself reflecting and recording my thoughts and ideas in a variety of places, a binder proved to be more flexible for adding additional information. Keeping a researcher's journal was beneficial for recording and tracking my thoughts and ideas about steps in the research process, the participants' responses and my interactions with them. I wrote in this journal daily and recorded aha moments,

reflections, and other happenings that occurred during the implementation of the study (Glesne, 2011).

Data Analysis

Siddle Walker and Snarey's (2004) ethic of care and justice matrix served as the philosophical underpinning to analyze the narratives of four Black teacher leaders. The goal of this qualitative study was show what an ethic of care and justice theory looked like in reality. As a novice researcher when I started this journey implementing research, I did not know if it worked or how it would work.

I conducted the interviews and transcribed them almost immediately. I transcribed the individual interviews and for the sake of time contracted a local service to transcribe the group interview. The data from each of the individual interviews which lasted between 30 to 90 minutes and the group interview which lasted two hours resulted in an excessive amount of data forcing me to become strategic on how to go about the data analysis and data reduction. I also had to be very organized and careful with the data collected once it was transcribed and on paper; for example, I made files for each participant and put their interviews in a binder with a section for each teacher.

Once the interviews were transcribed, I read the data and listened to the recordings multiple times to immerse myself in the information (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2011). As a qualitative researcher I was flexible and carefully listened to what the data were telling me (Merriam, 2009). Continually reading, thinking, and reflecting on the teachers' stories allowed my understanding of their experiences to evolve and deepen over time. As Yin (2011) points out, "a successful inductive stance permits the events in the field to drive the ...development of categories, propositions, and eventually, meaning,

based on the actions in the field and not preconceptions” (p. 124). Yin reminds researchers to strive for authentic representations of the findings rather than approach the data with fixed ideas.

As I read the teachers’ responses I wrote notes in the margins to describe what I saw going on in the data. A few of my initial comments included short phrases such as *likes school, wanted to be a teacher in 3rd grade, resilient in the face of challenge, encourages student to strive for success, and challenges a colleague*. Specifically, to build the narratives, as presented in chapter four, I assembled pieces of data provided by the participants during the different interviews in order to create a profile of their journeys becoming Black teacher leaders. These profiles were constructed by splicing together excerpts from their responses to various questions to include information about their family growing up, success and difficulties as students, as well as factors that influenced their motivation and path becoming teachers. This process of disassembling and assembling the data together required multiple attempts in order to create a congruent introductory narrative; the main goal was to weave a profile which flowed as one seamless narrative and would be interesting to read (Merriam, 2009). More importantly, I sought to preserve the participant’s intended meaning and verbatim contributions.

In order to build chapter five I analyzed the data in light of the ethic of care and justice framework and I focused on each value individually. Based on my preliminary understanding of the values in the ethic of care and justice matrix, I coded the data by highlighting chunks of data describing the experiences where I thought a particular value was reflected. This process was more than simply categorizing; it required analysis in light of how the situation reflected the value, and it also required constant inquiry on my

part as I struggled to gain a better grasp of the framework. Because the interview questions did not specifically ask participants to relay how their work reflected values from the framework, I examined specific scenarios provided to show how they exemplified a particular value.

In order to follow a systematic process to analyze the textual data collected, I followed the five steps described by Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003): 1) get to know the data, 2) focus the analysis, 3) categorize the information, 4) identify patterns and connections within and between categories, and 5) interpret the data to bring it all together. While I adhered to these steps for performing narrative analysis, I followed a deductive analysis process and utilized the existent categories provided by Siddle Walker and Snarey's (2004) matrix of care and justice primary values which are: liberation, pluralism, hope, empowerment, and uplift.

I questioned and examined the meaning, importance, and lessons revealed in the data. I found that my understanding of the framework and the data deepened through my continual reading and interaction with it. Analyzing the data for each value presented its own set of challenges. For example, my initial codes to exemplify pluralism mistakenly identified examples where the participants' reactions to situations could be viewed as either resistant or accommodating. However, a deeper understanding of pluralism as a balance of resistance and accommodation caused me to reframe my search and analysis to determine if there were more accurate representations of this value in their work. When the data were organized within each of the five values, I wrote descriptive summaries to show how the teachers' actions were reflected within the values in the ethic of care and justice matrix framework.

Ethical Considerations

In order to implement the study, I followed the procedures and guidelines required for ethical research (Patton, 2002) and submitted a request for approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) which was granted two weeks after the proposal defense. Also, with each teacher, I discussed every aspect of the informed consent; they knew they could discontinue participation in the study at any time, and they received a paper copy of the consent form for their personal records during our initial meeting. (See Appendix F for the interview consent form). I assigned pseudonyms for the teachers and their schools to protect the privacy and identity of all involved. In this case, protecting the participants' identity was paramount with so few Black teachers in the profession.

All data collected was carefully coded using the assigned pseudonyms. Transcripts were stored in a binder and secured in a location for safety purposes. Additionally, I utilized member checks (Merriam, 2009) to provide the participants with the opportunity to input their feedback and agreement on the written report. Thus, the participating teachers received a copy of their individual accounts (narratives) to read and offer feedback regarding my interpretation. As explained by Merriam (2009), with member checks, the researcher solicits feedback from the participants to make sure the data interpretation "rings true" for their experiences. Following one round of member checks, Sharon notified me how one sentence in her profile gave the impression she had grown up in a rural area when in fact she was born in a rural area, but grew up in a more metropolitan area and I corrected this fact to incorporate her feedback.

During the group interview, I also shared with participants how their voice and experiences could potentially influence practices to improve schools for teachers and

students of color. As a result, each teacher reported how helping teachers and students influenced their desire to participate in the study.

Though there was very little risk associated with participating in the study, I kept in mind that participants could become emotional due to recollections of uncomfortable memories related to challenges they faced in the past such as racism and discrimination. Therefore, I shared information about the city free of cost counseling services and told them that I would assist with arranging and securing counseling services along with additional support if needed.

Summary

This study represents an opportunity to add to the historical canon of the narratives of Black America. Black teachers, past and present, have unique experiences that need to be told and recorded. Hopefully, these Black teacher leader accounts of their lived experiences will be significant now and for future generations. These narratives told through their voices offer Black cultural perspectives that reflect authentic representations of their values to create a care and just society for our schools, our community and our world.

The present chapter explains how the study was implemented. I have described my process of data collection and analysis and the steps taken to conduct ethical research. The next two chapters of the dissertation present study findings; chapter four profiles each participant using their own words and narrated in first person. Chapter five presents the Black teacher leaders' pedagogical practices using Siddle Walker and Snarey's (2004) ethic of care and justice framework to analyze their work. The concluding chapter provides insight and closure.

CHAPTER IV

PROFILE OF FOUR BLACK TEACHER-LEADERS

This chapter presents the outline of the four Black teachers who participated in this dissertation study. I present their stories using their own words and narrated in first person to provide the reader with the opportunity to imagine their journey becoming teacher leaders. A foundational question guiding this dissertation related to how the participants' lived experiences impact their work and the students they serve. As Pang and Gibson (2001) explain, "Black educators are far more than physical role models, and they bring diverse family histories, value orientations, and experiences to students in the classroom, attributes not found in textbooks or viewpoints often omitted" (p. 260-261). Often, Black teachers are living examples of tenacity and are resilient individuals in the face of a history of systematic oppression. The following pages provide a glance into the personal and professional beliefs and background of Sharon, Jackie, Ray, and Malcolm. As illustrated in table 4.1 the four teachers were currently working in the classroom and were active contributors in their respective campuses at the time when I implemented the study.

Table 4.1 Four Black Teacher Leaders

Pseudonym	Age	Teaching Position	Experience as Certified Teacher	Honors and Awards
Sharon Dunbar	40+	Middle School Math	17 years	Campus Leadership Team Nominated for Teacher of the Year
Jackie Reese	30+	Elementary 1 st Grade	6 years	Nominated for Teacher of the Year
Ray Watson	40+	High School Football Coach and Art Teacher	18 years	
Dr. Malcolm Wright, II	40+	High School English	15 years	Teacher of the Year

Each participant's account appears in first person; they are the narrators. As explained in chapter III, I constructed the narratives by splicing together excerpts from their responses to various questions. To create a profile of their journeys becoming Black teacher leaders, I focused on excerpts from the data that included information about their families growing up, success and difficulties as students, as well as factors that influenced their desire to teach. The teachers' responses to questions asked during the first and second interview provided the data used to build these narratives (see Appendices B and C). After each account I discuss the highlights of the findings and make connections to the literature. Finally, in the discussion of the chapter, I analyze the information provided by the four teachers in light of the literature of what it means to be a Black teacher leader.

Sharon Dunbar

I am the third child of five children. My mother and father were married up until I became an adult and then they divorced after that. I was born in a very, very rural area in Mississippi. If I was poor when I grew up, I didn't know it because we had everything that we ever needed. Never had anything turned off. Never was put out. We were pretty stable people.

I was in third grade when I realized I wanted to be a teacher. It was the year that I learned the most and I enjoyed it. We had show and tell, we learned the multiplication table, and we had the round robin reading group. Even at recess, I remember running out and trying to be the first one to get on the monkey bars. My teacher was Mrs. McNeil. She was a Caucasian lady. Her husband was a coach at the high school, and she was very encouraging. If anyone asked me as an 8-year-old, what do you want to do when you grow up? I would say, "I want to be a teacher!"

In the late '70s desegregation was like a wildfire in different spots. That was when we moved to a bigger town, still in Mississippi, and it was the first time I experienced segregated education. Vernon Dahmer fought for civil rights in Mississippi and was instrumental in getting voting rights for African Americans.

Mrs. Edith Lofton, a tall African American woman, was my sixth grade teacher. She made such an impression on me. She nurtured us to be leaders. There were a lot of things she entrusted us to do. She would say: "If you want to help, I'll let you do it." She didn't stand over us; she gave us the tools and let us go with it.

About five years later a tall man and his wife joined our Church. Come to find out, it was Mrs. Lofton's son. I just fell in love with that family. They were like the

Cosby's. They were a great family! Here is this prominent charismatic man who looks like he loves his wife. I was in a fantasy; love really does exist. I begin to see Mrs. Lofton at a lot of functions and she helped me get my first job. I worked in the teen room at the country club during the summer. Mrs. Lofton was an awesome person, a very beautiful and kind person. She taught me to be a leader!

From junior high on, I can remember going to school with other racial groups. I went through high school with that same group of kids and it was mixed the entire way. Our tactic in terms of getting people elected in high school was to let the White people get as many people as they wanted to run so that they split their vote. We put one Black candidate in and we all voted for that one. Our senior class president was a Black boy! That was the strategy we put in place. However, at our high school, we had segregated proms. We had a Black prom and a White prom. I sat on the planning committee because we were concerned that we would not be recognized in terms of the kind of music we liked and what we wanted to do for our prom.

I got married before I finished college. I married after I had gone into my third year of college. By fall '91, here I am – I'm a mother, a wife, and an employee. I am trying to go to school and do all of this stuff. I remember I would write down my goals. I remember writing this out... "I don't want to just go to school, I want to excel." In the spring of '93, I get this letter from the College of Education inviting me to the school's awards ceremony. I went to the awards ceremony and the greeters at the door who were seating people asked for my name. I told them and they escorted me all the way to the front row. I sit through the ceremony and then they start acknowledging people. They announce the senior with the highest grade point average...Sharon...Dunbar! Chills just

ran through my body. You know it was really hard getting married young, being a mother, and working a job getting paid minimum wage. I just said, “God, you are so awesome to take something I had written down on paper and make it come to fruition.” It was one of my most amazing moments in life. Oh, my God! I wrote it down, I put in the time in terms of studying and you made it happen!

I taught elementary in Louisiana. I had no desire to ever teach in a middle school. Because I know the growth and development of that particular group of kids, elementary was my passion and my heart. But when I relocated here to Texas, it was like we were evicted. We were visiting my husband’s cousin and we watched the whole hurricane unfold on television. We’re looking at everything and we are absolutely devastated because our house was where the levees broke. All of our personal things were in that house. So, we’re watching all of this unfold and we’re just absolutely devastated by what we are seeing. Then, we get an email from my employer stating wherever you have evacuated to, seek employment. Our school district had already filed for financial bankruptcy and they didn’t even know if they had enough money to pay our first paychecks. We went into the school year not knowing how we would get paid. So, I’m in Texas, watching all this devastation and the only thing I know is to work in order to survive.

I was offered an educational assistant position with my twelve years of teaching experience... I was certified 1st through 8th grades with a lifetime certification in Louisiana, but I had never worked above the 5th grade... and here I was... about to teach middle school...

Moving from teaching at the elementary level to teaching in middle school was like a change of profession; every day I was at home studying! I refused to have a kid asking me a question and not knowing the answer because I had never taught that level before. I worked late hours and made sure I was prepared. My first year ever teaching middle school math, my test scores were the second highest in the district...

*Also, I stay late because I know somebody is sitting there looking to see if I have dotted every "i" and crossed every "t". That's the way I live... even if some may not be thinking that. It is the way I live... feeling like I am being critiqued **all the time**. I don't know who is going to walk into my room and look to see if this is being done just right or just so. Speaking with some of my Black co-workers I realized we think the same way. We feel that somebody is critiquing us at all times even if it may not be true, but that is the way we live.*

Sharon liked school and learned from teachers who she remembers as encouraging and nurturing. Her story illustrates how positive school experiences can shape Black students' view of the teaching profession (Stanford, 1998). Her desire to become a teacher was fueled by educators such as Mrs. Lofton, her sixth grade teacher. In this teacher Sharon saw someone who looked like her. Perry (2003) maintains that such connections are far-reaching in the identity formation for how African American students' view themselves as "learners and intellectual beings" (p. 50). Mrs. Lofton's role as an outstanding Black teacher served as a powerful counter-narrative to those images depicting Blacks as inferior and subservient. Through her story, Sharon describes herself as a goal oriented individual; she believes in being strategic about reaching one's goals. She also speaks to the importance of hard work to be rewarded with success and

explains the need to be resilient when tragedy strikes. When Sharon expresses that she feels like she is being watched and judged all the time, her sentiments reflect what Du Bois (1903/1989) identified as double-consciousness. Du Bois contended that for Black Americans double-consciousness represents “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. 3). In addition to her own critical self-reflection, Sharon also carries the burden of feeling she is being constantly assessed by the dominant culture. Despite the obstacles, Sharon’s narrative illustrates how she has always strived to do her best. Sharon’s determination to excel in life is reflected in the high expectations she maintains for herself and for her students. Furthermore, her resilience in the face of obstacles like Hurricane Katrina bespeaks an unwavering optimism for what Black youth are capable of achieving.

Jackie Reese

My dad died when I was four years old, so basically I grew up in a single parent household. I had five sisters and two brothers; one of my brothers died when I was about 10. At first he was helping to raise us but then when he was gone, it was just my mama working to take care of six kids. It was really hard. We grew up in poverty. All that low socio economic stuff...it was us! Even though we grew up poor, it didn't stop me! For the most part, I think it made me stronger. It made me want to come out of it and made me want something different. I always thought... when I grow up and have kids...they will never experience anything like this and they haven't! Growing up in poverty made me want to do something different. I think it made be a better person...coming from nothing to having something.

I see a lot of people who lack ambition now and it is a repeating cycle over and over and nobody ever breaks out. Even my sisters and my brother are just content with being a janitor, a bus driver, or working in a kitchen. This is not to say I am better, but I wanted more for my life. I always considered myself the black sheep of the family because I just did not fit in. There was something in my brain that told me there was something better out there. There is so much more than this.

When I saw Black people on television for the first time, it really inspired me. This fact pushed me even more because it meant things could change... Even though we're in this bad situation, we don't have the stay here! These people were not born on TV. If they can do it, I can make something of myself too!

As far as being poor, there were a lot of poor people around. I do remember times when we were made fun of and teased because we were wearing the same clothes this week that we wore last week. It was typical kid stuff, nothing major to drop my self esteem because I knew where my head was. It didn't matter what I wore, it mattered what was in my head. Also, people who grow up in poverty are looked at as being bad or dumb... For me, I can't understand how growing up poor means you're dumb. It just doesn't make sense to me.

I remember in first grade, the teacher wrote S-H-U-T on the board. Nobody else raised their hand so I raised my hand and I said, "shet." The teacher said, "No, that's not it." I said, "Yes, it is!" and she said, "No, that's not it." I was adamant... "That's it!" So she told me to use it in a sentence. I said, "Will you shet the dowe?" Of course, I was very embarrassed at that moment, but half the class spoke like that. Well, the teacher corrected me on the spot. She said, "You are using it correctly, but you are not saying it

correctly. It's not shet, it's shut....it's not dowe, it's door." *From that moment on, I was determined to learn to say all the words right. It was a real challenge for me, but it was a big success at the same time. This teacher would actually help me on the side to make sure that I said the words correctly because she knew I wanted to learn so she would give me extra help to do that.*

This made me even more of an outcast at home. My family wanted to keep talking the way they wanted to talk. They didn't want me correcting them. I was just trying to help them be better by speaking correct English, but they didn't take it like that so I stopped doing it. As far as friends go, they said I was trying to talk proper and be White so it just alienated me even more from Black people at school.

As a very young kid, I wanted to be a teacher...I liked learning...I liked teaching people. When I was in middle school, I had a sister and brother in high school and a sister that was one grade under me. I helped them with their homework even the high school work. We would always play school; I would be the teacher and I liked it. So I thought I would graduate high school, go to college, get my teaching certificate, and be a teacher. Well it didn't work out like that. Having a baby in high school is not the thing to do. Because of that, I had to miss a lot of school. Sometimes my mama would keep the baby, sometimes she wouldn't; when she didn't, I had to stay at home myself. That was hard for me and I dropped out of high school. I had my life planned out in my head and having a baby in high school was not a part of that plan. It threw my life off course. I could have settled for that but I didn't. I actually went and got my GED and went on with my life. Even though I didn't have a diploma, I had a GED and I was very proud of that.

When I moved here, I started working at a middle school as a teaching assistant, and... I fell back into the love of teaching. A math teacher there was real impressed with the way I interacted with kids and the way they responded to me. When she was diagnosed with breast cancer and was out for three months, she wanted me to sub for her! I mean, she had that much faith in me ...that I could handle her class while she was gone... I wasn't a teacher. I wasn't a sub...you know, I was just a TA. Having that experience to actually be a teacher, I thought WOW, I can handle this! That's what really made me decide to go ahead and be a teacher.

My co-workers can tell that teaching is a passion for me...it's not just a job with benefits... we all know there's no real good money in it... I think that those around me can see that I teach because I want to teach; it's in me! I'm on this earth to help people through teaching...that's my talent. I teach because I know I can relate to these kids. I was one of them once... They need to be given a fair chance to learn because we all have the right to learn.

Jackie's story of survival and resiliency is a powerful narrative; she overcame a life of abject poverty, a language barrier, teenage motherhood, and dropping out of school. Rather than stifle her ambition, Jackie's low socio-economic status seemed to have motivated her to find a way out of her meager circumstances. Becoming a teenage mother turned out to be a temporary setback for Jackie. During her junior year, she dropped out of school but later she earned her GED and felt proud that she did not give up her dreams for obtaining an education. The support of teachers, especially her first grade teacher served as inspiration for her early desire of becoming a teacher.

Jackie is aware of the stigma placed on poor children and can relate to issues that can come with being raised in poverty. As an educator, her experiences can provide substantive insight to other teachers about the dynamics of educating students growing up in poverty. In this way, Jackie is more than a role model, she is in a position to inform and shape school initiatives to motivate and engage students (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Tillman, 2004). Although ninety percent of the students at her school qualify and depend on free breakfast and lunch, Jackie is aware of what students in poverty are capable of accomplishing within an engaging and supportive learning environment.

Jackie describes a transformative experience in first grade when she is corrected by her teacher and that sets the wheels in motion for a pledge to learn to say all the words correctly. Jackie, like so many youngsters found herself having to make a choice between her cultural language patterns and society's norms. Sometimes she felt like an outsider at home and among school friends. Black students would benefit from learning to embrace their home language while learning the language of power-standard English (Delpit, 2002; Smitherman, 2002). Jackie's commitment to her academic goals despite growing up poor undergirds a pedagogical approach that believes, teaches, and advocates for her students achievement regardless of their financial status.

Coach Ray Watson

I grew up in a single-parent household with what I just thought was two brothers. Later on, it would end up all together with my mom and my dad...a total of 11 kids. I would say I grew up early on going from middle class to poor. I found out who my father was when I was a sophomore in college. The funny thing is he was always around, but my mom called him my godfather and he didn't know. At first, it was a big shock. Once I

got over being upset with my mom about the whole thing, I think it has made me more understanding with some of the single parent households I work with. It gave me a little more insight. It gave me a little more patience.

Elementary school, with my mom we always bounced from school to school. We spent one year at a different school until I was in junior high. The teacher who stands out for me was my 7th grade math teacher, a Black woman. She would not, would NOT let me go with, "I can't do that." I did not like to read and they labeled it as a reading disability. I was in remedial classes. However, in math class I excelled because I liked math. So I did well in her class. There were things I liked to read, manuals and sports books. I could read the mess out of those, but novels or history, "No, I'm not reading that!" She would not take it. She would not sit there and say... "Ok, I am going to let you get away with this. Oh, I'm just going to teach you math because that's my job." No! What she would do is say... "I'm going to teach you math and you're going to do math, but for the reading portion, you are going to also come to my class." In the morning instead of going to my reading class, I went to her class and she taught me reading until it was up to par. She would not accept me being a young Black male and playing dumb to just get through. She would not accept that! She was very instrumental in getting me to understand I needed to take my education into my own hands. She told me, "You are not a dumb kid; you just need to apply yourself."

I graduated from High School. I was recruited to play football! I got a full scholarship to College. I was offered scholarships to several other places but I was too scared to leave the state. The first time I made the "A" honor role in college was humongous for me. It was like, alright, I'm working my butt off here! I started out with a

criminal justice major and I worked as an intern for a juvenile facility. I saw these kids in situations where they were in for aggravated assault, drugs, violence. I started thinking, what can I do for these kids before they get to this point? Where can I be a better influence? That's when I decided I wanted to go into education. Maybe I can help these kids at that point where they are almost slipping up under the wire and going to jail because they're doing things they shouldn't do. I decided I wanted to work with kids on this side of the law instead of the other side of the law.

...I'm a coach, former athlete from way back. I also teach AP art. Football makes our money for us, gets a lot of privileges. However, the biggest portion of my check is still from the classes I teach. Art is an elective course, not a core subject. I show my students how to apply it to all their other classes, how it rolls into history, how it rolls into math, and how they can use this stuff they love to help them pass their other classes. We find a lot of problem kids who are really good artists.

I try not to focus on just the Black kids. There are other kids that also need help. However, at the same time, I know I will step outside the box a little bit for Black kids to help them understand the situation they've been put in because some people had already labeled them as bad kids, even though they haven't done anything wrong. I teach them that just because you're in this situation it doesn't mean you have to stay in it. There is a way out. It comes through education. It comes through hard work. I am hoping this opens doors and possibilities for kids. I hope what I'm doing and by showing that I care that it will go on with them caring about others and caring about themselves.

Ray strongly expressed that his upbringing allowed him to be more understanding of the children and families he works with as a teacher and coach. He talked about how

growing up poor, not knowing the identity of his dad until college, and being bounced around from school to school had given him insight and patience as an educator.

Ray described his 7th grade teacher as a Black woman who would not let him fail (Irvine & Fraser, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2002). This math teacher orchestrated a plan to teach him to become a better reader and taught him to take responsibility of his learning. He credits this teacher for refusing to just let him get by and helping him find a way forward in life. Milner (2007) explains that when a teacher speaks possibility into the life of a Black male student, s/he empowers the student to speak possibility into his own life.

Ray's desire to be a teacher is grounded in helping young people stay out of trouble with the law; seeing kids locked up for drugs, aggravated assault, and other violent crimes caused him to think deeply about what he could do for these kids before they got to this point. His reasoning for entering the teaching profession is consistent with the research and findings on motivations Black men have for teaching (Lewis, 2006; Lynn, 2002; Pabon, Anderson, & Kharem, 2011). Growing up without his dad, financial instability that resulted in his being moved from school to school, and a life changing encounter with a 7th grade math teacher all mold how Ray is able to empathize and have compassion for his students. Moreover, his desire to steer young people away from destructive choices motivates his vigorous efforts to pass the education torch to future generations.

Dr. Malcolm Wright, II

I grew up in large city in Texas and was an only child. My parents divorced when I was 5 years old, so I was taught at a very young age to be self sufficient. My mother worked at the post office and had to be to work at 4 o'clock in the morning. So, as young

as 8 years old I was at the house by myself at 4 in the morning... I had to get dressed, cook for myself, lock the door and walk a mile to get to school... I never used that as an excuse not to go to school. It would be raining and cold, that didn't matter! I loved school and I loved learning. I loved the reading part of school. I had truly good teachers, especially in third grade. I also had a teacher in 5th and 6th grade who really encouraged me to be a learner. She was tough on me about learning. I think that's what made me love school the way I do and be passionate about learning.

I have been reading since I was three years old and that is something my mother encouraged. Some of my greatest successes in school revolved around me performing. I was always in oratorical contests, giving speeches, and winning stuff like that. I was almost like the nerd kid in "The Planet of Junior Brown" where that fat kid was friends with the janitor. I was like that with the librarians. Once author Mildred Taylor came to our school; I was in 5th grade. She asked me... "What is it that you want to do?" I said, "I want to be like you!" She said, "If you want to be like me, you need to write every day."

A librarian introduced me to what I still consider one of my favorite books, "Ramona the Pest," by Beverly Cleary. I remember reading that book over and over. In intermediate school my librarian also cultivated the reader in me. I wanted to be a writer, but people talked me out of that saying you aren't going to make any money doing that. So I said, "I like kids, I can be a pediatrician" not really knowing what that meant. So for high school I signed up for health magnet, got in, got accepted....when in actuality I should have gone to the arts magnet. I would have been going to school with Erykah

Badu and Roy Hargrove! Sometimes I wonder if I had gone to that school, what my life would have been like.

I went the whole four years to the health magnet; I just thought I am here and I can't go any place else. I did not know how to advocate for myself. I graduated from high school with a "B" average, but I remember making "F's" in math because all I wanted to do was read and write.

I never wanted to be a teacher! My plan was to be a writer and to make movies. I was heavily influenced by Spike Lee and John Singleton. The way I got into teaching is interesting. I was working at a credit card company as a customer rep. and I hated the job. A very good friend of mine who was working as a teacher for the Wynne school district at the time talked to the man who worked with new teachers. He got me into teaching at a school there. I got into a certification program and started teaching elementary school that October... in 1996; it was the best experience ever! They were so supportive of me, so... nurturing, and...it really helped me to become a good teacher. Later on, I came to Central Texas and started teaching middle school which was also a good experience; but then, I started teaching high school and I noticed it was more distant and a little less notion of family. I found teaching high school to be cliquish.

The biggest change, the one that has affected me the most in my attitude about teaching has been less about children and more so the administrative part of what teachers are being asked to do. I feel like I am no longer being charged with teaching; I'm not educating students anymore. I'm not doing what's best for students in that respect. I am doing whatever the academic dean says I need to do. That's how I feel about it. I'm not naïve; I know how it works. I feel stifled as a teacher. Creatively, I

don't feel like I can bring to my classroom the things I should be able to bring to it and that's what I feel has changed the most.

Being a Black male with a Ph.D, coming from a single parent home, coming from a home where my father wasn't involved in my life and where my mother had to work all the time, I want my students to understand that I'm not far removed from who they are. I tell them: "I do in fact understand who you are. I understand what you're going through and I understand what things might be like for you; despite that, you have to take care of your business."

It is a challenge staying in a profession where I know children are being miseducated. Maybe it's an ego thing, but these children are leaving, going out into the world and somebody is going to say who was your English teacher? They are going to say my name and it's going to look like thirteen years of schooling was my fault. I can't have that. I can't have that for myself and I don't want to have that for them. However, I'm being forced into that position to have that for them even though I don't want to.

My biggest hope for the Black community is that we work to get our children foundationally solid, and academically ready, so that they can function the rest of their school career and they're not six grades behind where they should be. That and for people to stop feeling sorry for them because they're Black. Help them, don't hinder them. That's what I really hope happens. And when I say help them, I mean to hold them accountable, hold their feet to the fire, challenge them, make them do work because they can do it. These kids can do it, they honestly can. I believe they can. I just think nobody has made them do it.

Malcolm revealed how he had to be responsible at an early age. He also remembered school as a pleasant place to be. He recited the names of all his former teachers and associated lifelong lessons and books he read at each juncture of his early school experience. Malcolm loved school especially the 'reading' and considers his teaching philosophy to be heavily influenced by the great teachers he had. This fact is supported by the literature, since teachers spend many years as students watching teachers; their practice is often shaped by these experiences (Stanford, 1998). Malcolm also credits his school librarians as cultivating the reader in him.

Malcolm was emphatic when he talked about never wanting to be a teacher. Graham and Erwin (2011) wrote that a litany of reasons exists why Black men do not think about teaching as a career. Their research indicated salary, the profession seen as a woman's job, being confined to a boring job, and students' bad experiences in school as some of the reasons Black high school boys did not contemplate teaching as an option for them.

Malcolm still dreams of writing novels and screenplays; he remains unwavering in his commitment to connect with students and maintain high expectations for them. Malcolm has strong ideals about pedagogy and practice, but does not feel his philosophies and experiences are valued at his school (Delpit, 1995; Milner & Hoy, 2003). He openly discusses how testing mandates and institutional policies dictate the way he is forced to teach students. Malcolm struggles with this tension because he does not like the idea of contributing to the miseducation of students. He is frustrated about the constraints he faces in his role as a teacher; there is no room for him to use creativity in his work. As an educator, his love for learning, his admiration of former teachers, and his

racial pride guide his pedagogy for teaching young people. Malcolm has high expectations for what Black students and the Black race can achieve because of his lived experiences and his awareness of Black history through reading and research.

Chapter Discussion

In telling their stories, these teachers openly shared their challenges and successes growing up, obtaining an education, responding to familial responsibilities, and devoting their lives to the teaching profession. Sharon, Jackie, Ray, and Malcolm's identities are forged by the social, cultural, political, economic, and historical forces from their lived experiences (Kincheloe, 2003). All four teachers are linked by the descriptions of financial struggles they faced as children. Sharon, the only participant raised in a two parent home, recalled that her family was poor, but she was not aware of it because she always had the basic needs to make life comfortable. The other participants strongly expressed how their family's economic status impacted their experiences. For instance, Jackie was acutely aware of her family's money problems and vowed during elementary to make a better life for herself and her children. Ray described how being bounced around from school to school created gaps in his learning. Malcolm talked about having to take on adult responsibility at an early age because of his mother's work schedule. Milner (2006) posits that "Black teachers often have a commitment to and a deep understanding of Black students...because both historically and presently these teachers experience and understand the world in ways similar to their students" (p. 94). Black teachers share common knowledge with their students and have probably undergone similar barriers in the educational system.

Through different examples and stories, these teachers credit the characteristics of their upbringing with helping them relate to the struggles some of their students face. This idea resonates with the work of Kincheloe (2003) who explains that the ways teachers see themselves are reflected on their teaching in terms of what they teach children beyond subject matter and the curricular purposes they pursue. In each case, the participating teachers exercised agency and resiliency to overcome setbacks. Subsequently, these teachers bring high expectations to the classroom for what they and their students can accomplish.

All participating teachers reported being influenced by exemplary educators in the past. This is consistent with Stanford's (1998) finding that former teachers can shape our viewpoint and pedagogy. The teacher leaders in the study align their practices with instructors they encountered as students. For instance, Jackie's strong commitment to literacy for her students echoes her encounter with the first grade teacher who took special care to teach phonics, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Malcolm's no-nonsense approach with his students reflects his experience with teachers who held him to high standards and did not accept excuses. The work of Siddle Walker (1994) identified behaviors of Black teachers during segregation such as exhibiting the role of counselor, encourager, benefactor, and racial cheerleader as commonalities among caring Black teachers. All study participants play these roles while educating the students they serve. None of them allowed their students to use being poor or being Black as a justification for not achieving their goals. With their lived experiences and struggles toward becoming teachers, they all set the example for their students to follow. They make every effort to encourage their students to follow the education path and to become responsible for their

own learning regardless what other adults who do not believe in them may tell them. In Malcolm's words "work to get our children foundationally and academically solid." However, Carter (2008) also explains that student success does not only depend on the work of the teacher but the structural conditions that at times constrain or impede students' abilities to achieve their maximum potentials in school. The four participating teachers reported being aware of the limitations that the institution and society impose on the work they do. They are aware but this fact does not stop them from continuing to do their work in the classroom. Research also supports the need for Black teachers to "bring their gifts, reclaim the tradition of African American excellence in leadership, and chart a new course for African American education" (Tillman, 2004, p. 301). Sharon, Jackie, Ray, and Malcolm are aware of this need; they keep doing their best and keep working toward the well-being of their students as we will see in the following chapter.

CHAPTER V
STUDY FINDINGS IN LIGHT OF THE
MATRIX OF CARE AND JUSTICE PRIMARY VALUES

The epistemological stance for this qualitative study draws from Siddle Walker and Snarey's (2004) matrix of care and justice primary values. These researchers envision the ethic of care through a lens that takes into account the Black lived experience and the following five values: Liberation, Pluralism, Hope, Empowerment, and Uplift.

In this chapter the participants' practice is analyzed with the ethic of care and justice primary values serving as the philosophical underpinning. From each participant, a statement was identified to exemplify how they demonstrated the values in their practice. The chapter is arranged with each value serving as a header and includes a relevant example from each teacher to reflect that value. Table 5.1 provides a preview of the findings highlighted in the chapter.

Table 5.1 Findings in light of study framework

MATRIX VALUE	NARRATIVE SELECTED FROM THE DATA
LIBERATION	<p>Sharon visits and counsels Chaz about her expectations for him to make the right decisions.</p> <p>Jackie motivates Alyssa by fostering liberation through literacy.</p> <p>Ray discusses racial inequities Black students may encounter.</p> <p>Malcolm teaches a student entrepreneur to be strategic about following the school rules.</p>
PLURALISM	<p>Sharon questions her principal about Black student discipline referrals.</p> <p>Jackie notifies a student that high expectations continue with or without his meds.</p> <p>Ray offers colleagues strategies for building connections with Black students.</p> <p>Malcolm challenges the language arts specialist's deficit thinking.</p>
HOPE	<p>Sharon grounds her expectations for student behavior in a Bible verse.</p> <p>Jackie believes God's purpose for her life is to teach.</p> <p>Ray uses Jesus life as a lesson for student believers.</p> <p>Malcolm brings God into class discussions.</p>
EMPOWERMENT	<p>Sharon teaches her students math and self-control.</p> <p>Jackie offers advice for Black teachers.</p> <p>Ray works to empower a volatile student.</p> <p>Malcolm advocates for grammar instruction for his seniors.</p>
UPLIFT	<p>Sharon points to President Obama as a role model for her students.</p> <p>Jackie is motivated by her students' success as an example for others.</p> <p>Ray uses John Biggers' artwork because of the positive imagery.</p> <p>Malcolm addresses Black achievement despite poverty.</p>

Liberation

Liberation is the first value in Siddle Walker and Snarey's (2004) ethic of care and justice framework. For these researchers liberation is summed up in how "one can escape, one can be free, and one can help others also realize liberation" (p. 133). The following paragraphs illustrate acts of liberation and are closely connected to the participating teachers' ontology as presented in the previous chapter. The first example comes from interviewing Sharon.

Chaz, one of my challenging kids, was sent to the alternative school during the time I had to take off a few days for my husband's surgery. So, I went to the alternative school to see him. I told him: *With the choices you're making, there are two places where society feels you are going to be, dead or in prison. That is what society has for you and we are going to prove them wrong. So, while you're here, you do what you need to do so you can go back to school to get your education and become the best person you can be. Don't let anybody ruffle your feathers when they push those buttons because guess what, they're bringing you down. I know you made a decision that landed you here, but this is not the place for you. I care about you and I want you to be successful in spite of what society is saying.*

Sharon makes time to pass along advice that can liberate Chaz from making choices that could land him in prison. She seeks to empower the student by relaying tactics that will help him manage his behavior and rise above the negative images society has for young Black males. Sharon's actions are akin to those of Harriet Tubman who after escaping slavery to freedom journeyed back South to help more than 300 others.

Tubman (1869/1993) declared, “But to dis solemn resolution I came; I was free and dey should be free also” (p. 32). Though not required to visit Chaz outside the traditional school setting, Sharon bypasses her contractual duties and drives to the alternative school. While there, she seeks to inspire the student regarding his future. In Sharon’s narrative, examples of strategizing for success are evident as early as high school when she and her Black classmates organized to elect a Black student body president in their predominately White school. Another example is found in her determination to make the honor roll in college despite the demands of being a wife, a new mother, and working a full time job. Sharon’s lived experiences are indicative of a teacher leader who knows the value of having a game plan for progress and who understands the importance of liberating her students by helping them create their own blueprints for success.

Next, in Jackie’s narrative, we see her as a young girl determined to rise above poverty through education. Reminiscent of her first grade teacher’s efforts to help her enunciate words, Jackie’s work with Alyssa illustrates a teacher leader committed to liberating her students by laying the foundation for substantive reading instruction.

At the beginning of the school year, I was reading individually with each student to see where they were, what they knew. I called over Alyssa, who told me she didn’t want to learn how to read because reading was too hard. I asked her why she thought reading was so hard. She said: “it just is and I don’t want to do it.” To which I replied: “well too bad, we’re going to do it.” I opened the book for her and there were words in the book she could read. And the ones that she couldn’t read, I would help her decode. I said to her things like, “you just read that word but you told me reading is hard. Why is it hard, you read three words on that

page? ” I kept pumping her up and the more I pumped her up, the more she wanted to read. I was planning to do a few pages and that’s it, but she wanted to keep going. She was that into it. I think from that moment on, she really started to like me.

By refusing to concede to Alyssa’s disregard for reading instruction, Jackie works for liberation through literacy. An often cited early example of one teaching to others liberation through literacy is Frederick Douglass who risked his life and the lives of his students by instructing them during Sabbath schools where they secretly resisted laws prohibiting enslaved Africans the right to read. So bleak were the learning conditions relegated to Blacks during slavery, Douglass (1845/1968) stated, “Their minds had been starved by their cruel masters. They had been shut up in mental darkness” (p. 90). Like Douglass realized so many moons ago, Jackie knows illiteracy can render her students to a life of intellectual, artistic, and economic deprivation.

The following is an interaction Ray reserves for his Black students. This is his attempt to prepare the students for the inequities they may encounter in life as related to racial discrimination.

There are a lot of hurdles that we have to jump through, just to be seen as an equal. I tell African American kids, male and female; we’re in as long as we’re working our way up. But when we get to that point where we can make that big jump there are a lot of folks in different avenues who don’t want to see that. Some people think racism doesn’t exist any more, but having had recent experiences with it, let me tell you it still happens. I tell them, “You’ve got to work twice as hard, twice as hard as the next person of a different ethnicity

because you are already seen as being lazy. No matter how smart you are, you're still going to be seen as being lazy. You can have a 4.0 all the way through college and you can work in that field and work your way up to where you want a top position as a board member. Even then, you still have to work twice as hard as someone who has less experience who may not be as smart as you are to make sure you get that spot then, it's still an "if."

Ray's comments may appear harsh and enervating; however, his warning to Black youth about the injustices they will face in society represents a once robust tradition of liberation conversations among Blacks in America. According to hooks (1995) "Nowadays most black folks are taught by rhetoric of liberal democracy...that they can expect to be treated equally" (p. 60). Furthermore, she argues that when Black students are not prepared for the inequities they encounter, they do not have the "inner resources to confront and cope effectively" (p. 60). Her point of view agrees with Ray's practice. The premise is that by failing to talk to Black students about the inequities they will confront teachers actually do their students a disservice. Ray seeks to liberate his students in a similar way that his 7th grade math teacher did while pushing him to be responsible for his learning and not settling for mediocrity.

In another instance, Malcolm describes how he empowers a student entrepreneur. He encourages the student to be strategic about following the school rules even as the student works to contribute to his home's economy.

The school is busy trying to stop kids from doing certain things. I have a kid whose grandmother bakes a lot of cookies. They're good cookies too, real good cookies! He sells them around the school for a dollar. A lot of teachers are

turning him in and giving him a hard time. I said to him, “Come to my room and sell your cookies. As long as you do it during the passing period and you get to class on time you’re good.” Why would I kill that entrepreneurial spirit in him? Why would I kill that and just kill it without teaching him certain things? I tell him, “It’s ok for you to sell your cookies, but you have to know when you sell your cookies. Don’t be late to class selling cookies.” I think little things like that, making connections with them like that, understanding things like that, they know I care about them.

Malcolm uses liberation thinking to defy a rule prohibiting students from selling items at school. In seizing a teachable moment to encourage a budding entrepreneur, Malcolm’s work is aligned with Woodson’s (1933/1990) philosophy that Blacks “must be taught to think and develop something for themselves” (p. 159). When Malcolm laments how he can not imagine killing the entrepreneurial spirit in this kid, his actions may be undergirded by the pain he describes in high school when his dreams of being a writer were temporarily dashed by adults who told him there was no money in that profession. Malcolm plants seeds of liberation in his student by showing him alternative strategies to pursuing his best interests.

Discussion

Siddle Walker and Snarey posit that “a liberated person regards justice as an inherent element in the care of those who are oppressed and regards caring for the defenseless as an inherent element in creating a more just society” (p. 134). The teachers demonstrate the value of liberation by having high expectations as related to the students’

power to make the right decisions, by developing literacy skills for life, and by teaching the students to take responsibility for their learning and behavior.

These teacher leaders' stories are powerful examples of the wisdom that can have profound implications beyond the classroom. In Jackie's interaction with Alyssa, hopefully this student will learn to transfer the experience of building on what she knows as a way to boost her confidence for future learning. Likewise, Malcolm's exchange with the young entrepreneur could result in a future understanding of following the rules while also being strategic to accomplish one's goals. Of liberation, Freire's (2001, p. 45) asks "Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society? Who suffer the effects of oppression more than the oppressed? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation?" As shown in the examples, these teachers' words and actions educate Black students on crucial lessons about the hardships they may face and how to face social oppression. Black teacher leaders work to guide their students to identify and embrace their own liberation.

Pluralism

According to Siddle Walker and Snarey, pluralism emerges when resistance and accommodation are working in tandem. Black teacher leaders exemplify an ethic of care and justice by collaborating with colleagues, students, and community members so that caring and fair relationships will become a continual practice. Siddle Walker and Snarey posit that pluralistic tactics pose questions, open and extend conversations, and are manifested through dialogue rather than arguments.

The tendency for either a resistance or accommodation approach to school improvement for Black students can be found as far back as the 1890s when Black

teacher leaders Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois championed different ideologies regarding educational practices for Black students. Washington's curriculum mainly focused on agriculture and technical training and was seen by opponents as limited and safe route for those not wanting to ignite the jealousy and wrath of Southern Whites. Conversely, Du Bois' philosophy challenged Washington as well as the oppressive culture by advocating for a more intellectual and artistic curriculum for Blacks. Black Americans opposing Du Bois' ideology called his program elitist and argued it excluded the working class and created hegemonic practices within the race. However, Siddle Walker and Snarey's work reframes the resistance or accommodation debate by calling for pluralism which they consider a healthy balance of both values.

Pluralism in the study relates to teacher leaders working in collaboration with others (e.g., colleagues, children, parents and community members) seeking Black students' wellbeing, education, and achievement. The first example is with a question Sharon raises with her principal.

I went to my principal and said, "I want to see the data because I'm concerned why African American kids are always on the top of the discipline referrals list. We need to find out what we need to do to address the gap that we're seeing. We need to put some things in place to where we look at this data and see what we need to do to bring these numbers down.

During the interview, Sharon explained when she was having the interaction with the school principal, she was also thinking the following: "I don't feel like it's so much the kids. I feel like it's because a certain group of people with a lack of experience are working with our kids. You can't tell me these kids are just driving this entire school."

Although, Sharon has a hypothesis for Black students' high incidence of discipline referrals, she does not share this information with her principal. This is a political move on her part and represents a strategy for greater gain on behalf of the Black students they serve. This decision helps her keep the door open for opportunities for collaborative inquiry and problem solving with her colleagues. Sharon's idea to study Black students to improve their learning is corroborated by Ladson-Billings (2009) assertion that:

Given the long history of poor academic performance of African American students one might ask why almost no literature exists to address their specific educational needs. One reason is a stubborn refusal in American education to recognize African Americans as a distinct cultural group. While it is recognized that African Americans make up a distinct racial group, the acknowledgement that this racial group has a distinct culture is still not recognized. (p. 10)

In essence, teachers and administrators can improve their practice by working in collaboration to understand the students they serve.

Next, Jackie recounts a conversation she had with a student and his mom. Her conversation with the student and later with his mother shows that she cares enough to have an honest talk about the implications of Trae's behavior in and beyond the classroom.

A student, Trae, who told me, "I didn't take my medicine." What does that mean? What does not taking his medicine have to do with his behavior? He still better control himself. I told his mom, "I don't want this to sound ugly but the fact that he didn't take his medicine does not excuse inappropriate behavior. If he was out there in the real world and he robbed a store, is he going to tell the police,

I didn't take my medicine and they're going to say, oh, it's okay because you didn't take your medicine. No, he is still held accountable for his actions. Trae has to control himself and be responsible because he can't use that as an excuse." I am not one of those teachers that thinks it's okay for him to sit in the corner and color all day because he didn't take his medicine. I told him, "You're at school to learn. Even if you didn't take your medicine, you're still going to be a part of the class."

Jackie expresses to both parent and student that in her class, expectations for learning continue with or without medication. Some readers may think that Jackie's example reinforces the negative stereotypical view that Black males have tendencies to get involved in criminal behavior. Another point of view could be that her example was effective in communicating a sense of urgency to the parent about the need to address the situation. Jackie shows she cares about the student's well-being by addressing him and his mother using a possible real world consequence and at the same time her example illustrates her demand for high expectations.

Ray, respected on campus as one who connects with students, elaborates on a strategy he shares with his colleagues. Ray addresses a disconnect he observes with teacher-student relationships and offers input to colleagues as to how they can develop an understanding between them and their students.

The teachers who have the most success with African American kids are the ones who show them it's not about a paycheck or making their grade book look good, but they actually care. When kids understand you care about them, they will work hard for you. I tell teachers instead of just jumping down a kid's throat and then

just moving on, come back around and tell them why. Let them know, “It upsets me that you’re not trying to be successful; you’re not trying to move forward. If you don’t understand, let me help you! Let me help you so you can move forward, so you can be successful. Let me help you get the tools that you need.” That might be the whole conversation. And as you’re walking off, they may surprise you and ask for help.

Ray’s suggestion that teachers at his school make intentional efforts to connect with Black students is consistent with Comer’s (1999) philosophy that “...too many policy makers and practitioners do not understand the need to create supportive social contexts” (p. xxiii). Furthermore, Comer theorizes, “The best instructional methods, curricula, and equipment are not going to produce outcomes in bad relationship environments...” (p. xxiv).

Ray does not ignore the problem nor does he create a hostile environment by highlighting teachers’ inadequacies with Black students. Rather, he offers advice and uses an example to show what improved relations with Black students would look like and sound like in practice. Ray puts the focus on valuing the feelings and experiences of Black students to develop caring and empowering relationships with Black students.

In the following example, Malcolm recounts a conversation with the language arts content specialist at his school.

Malcolm: Some of my students are not turning in work like they should.

Content Specialist: Tell them to at least turn in something, even if it is just one

Malcolm: No, I don’t want one page. The assignment was a three page paper. I want three pages.

Content Specialist: Now you’re not getting anything.

Malcolm: Actually I am getting something. I'm just not getting as much of what I want.

Content Specialist: "Just because I'm White doesn't mean I don't understand how to deal with Black children."

Malcolm: I said I never said that. My point is that as a Black male, I know what it is like out there. I can't tell them to turn in one page when the assignment is three. If you asked me for a report and I turn in half the report to you instead of all of it, what you going to do?" "You're going to get mad at me. You're going to turn me in. I'm going to have someone on my head." We can't teach children that it's okay to turn in less than what's required. They are going to take that lesson out into the world and get fired or put out of school.

Malcolm's conversation with the content specialist reflects an effort on his part to reframe her thinking to include the consequences of having low expectations for Black students. His courage to engage in the discussion, his use of a real world example to make his point, and his demonstration of high expectations for his students, are all important elements which can work to create a shift in thinking for his colleague. Because a school content specialist can have a major effect on teachers and students campus wide, Malcolm's argument hopefully pushes her to rethink her position regarding expectations for the students.

Discussion

Siddle Walker and Snarey's (2004) posit pluralism overcomes unbalanced resistance or accommodation tactics because it "allows educators to connect with others who are different from them so that the likelihood of fair and caring relations within

schools and communities is increased” (p. 134). Thus, the examples selected illuminate situations where the participants’ actions seek to establish caring and just practices related to improving schools for Black students.

As Black teachers are in unique positions on their respective campuses to bridge their cultural ways of knowing with their understanding of the way schools operate, the Black teacher leaders’ bicultural status necessitates tactical responsibility. On one hand, if their work advocating for the needs of Black students is seen as too resistant, these teachers run the risk of being dismissed as angry troublemakers. For example, while Sharon shared with me her thoughts for the reason behind so many Black student referrals, she did not run the risk of openly sharing this with the principal as it could alienate potential problem solving opportunities. Similarly, Ray reaches out to teachers on his campus in a non-threatening way by sharing strategies they can implement to build meaningful relationships with students.

Conversely, Black teachers who make a practice of accommodation by just looking out for their individual interests can unwittingly become complicit in dominant culture oppressive tactics (hooks, 1995). Jackie’s conversation with the parent is an act of resistance as she defies conventional ideology in schools regarding medication. Yet, she strategically tempers her conversation with the student’s mother with facts about the criminal justice system and what it will mean for the student if he falls into the trap of using his medication as an excuse. Likewise, when Malcolm challenges the language arts specialist at his school, he challenges her thinking by showing her how low expectations can result in damaging outcomes for Black students. Hence, these Black teacher leaders

seek to operate using a healthy balance of resistance and accommodation tactics that coalesce for the pluralism needed to bolster education practices for Black students.

Hope

Hope is the vision of what Black teachers want for their students. It drives their work as they aspire for a more caring and fair society. Of the five care and justice values, Siddle Walker and Snarey (2004) position hope at the center of their framework and maintain that it holds the other primary values together. Although some mainstream care models situate religion and ethics as binaries, Siddle Walker and Snarey argue that such a dichotomy is inaccurate for African Americans and they contend that:

For most African Americans, religion supports, but is not subordinate to, ethics.

Thus, contrasting religion and ethics creates a useless dichotomy. Moreover, any effort to understand the moral dimension of African American life will be diminished without an understanding of the historically central role of religion in African Americans views of care and justice. (p. 9)

Thus, the Black American lived experience elucidates how individually and collectively religion remains an anchor of hope “in the face of a world that is largely uncaring and unjust” (Siddle Walker and Snarey, 2004, p. 135). Similarly, the teachers in this study expressed hope in their work and humanity in ways that included religious and spiritual expressions. In keeping the Black tradition of showing reverence and honor to a risen Saviour who restores our hope, the examples highlighted here show how this value is manifested in the data through the participant’s spirituality. For example, Sharon discusses her expectations for children’s behavior based on a biblical scripture:

When I was a child I spoke as a child, but when I became a man I put away childish things. I live by that because when a child throws an airplane across my room, I don't persecute him. I don't feel like it's the end of the world. He's a child and that's a thing a child would do. I can't expect a child to think at my same level as an adult. He hasn't had the experiences that I've had. I think that's where a lot of problems come in because some teachers expect children to act an age and in a manner in which they are not mentally equipped to do. And when they don't do it, the kids are punished and criticized for it. We have to always remember that these are children who we're dealing with and their experiences are limited by their age and level of development.

Sharon uses her understanding of the Bible to empathize and respond to student behaviors in her classroom. She explains that classroom management can be improved if educators kept in mind that children's experiences are limited and that they require patience and understanding.

Another example is provided by Jackie when she discusses how she believes God called her to teach.

I believe in God and I treat people how I want to be treated. I don't think that I am thinking about religious things all day or how it's going to play a role at school. Maybe it's not religion, but I do believe that God put me on this earth to help people. Sometimes I get frustrated. I think about a student who was having trouble adding 2 plus 3. She can do it while I'm sitting there, but as soon as I walk away, she can't do it. I get really frustrated, but then I remember that it is my job to help her. So I take a deep breath and say, ok! ...let's try this a different

way. I believe I am on this earth to help kids. I think about how I want to be treated by the kids and I treat them the way I want to be treated.

Using her own personal values on what her purpose in life is, Jackie expects her students to reciprocate her effort by caring for their own education. Her belief that teaching is a call from God inspires her work in the classroom. Through her spirituality, Jackie maintains hope that she will treat children in her class the way she wants to be treated. Jackie recounts how her work can be frustrating, but regroups when she remembers that her call to teach comes from God. She gets frustrated with her students but ultimately does not give up on them because she does not want anyone to give up on her.

Similarly, Ray explains about the commonality he shares with his students who attend the same church he attends. Ray discusses his spirituality is used to connect and inspire students.

A lot of kids I deal with actually go to my church. I think it's something they can fall back on. It gives them a strong background. Those kids seem a lot more balanced. And of course, it's easier for me when those kids who do have a spiritual background get out of line, to speak to them. They know it's a greater punishment besides what's here. They know that even though they have to strive through things, they understand that's a part of life. You know Jesus suffered for us so therefore in this life we're going to struggle. It's what you do in that storm or in that struggle that dictates how you come out of that struggle. I try not to preach to 'em but I try to make sure I tell them that the storm can't last forever. He's not going to let it last forever. It's how you come out of that storm, how you handle that storm what counts, so stay focused on the task at hand.

Ray is open with students he knows are spiritual. He says he tries not to preach, but openly uses Jesus as an example of hope for their lives. Ray believes his students who are spiritual have a strong foundation and are resilient. Ray is a man of faith and uses this connection to extend hope in their lives.

Malcolm capitalizes on how many of his students go to Church and uses this as a way to bring God into their literary discussions.

We read all this literature and the common theme of religion always came up particularly when we talked about life in general. What role does God play in your life? I make it very clear that I'm teaching the Bible as literature. I'm not changing anybody's religion. Don't go home and tell your mama, I'm trying to make you out a Christian. But I really do like to talk about that because it is an important part of their lives. A lot of our students go to Church. I like to take that and say based on your spirituality or what you believe, how do you think that works in a situation like this? And so we have these big conversations about God.

By knowing his students, Malcolm realizes the importance religion and spirituality plays in their lives. He adds to the classroom discussions by asking their input based on their understanding of God.

Discussion

Although spirituality in the academy can be viewed as inappropriate, Siddle Walker and Snarey (2004) understand that Blacks have been able to persevere through racism and discrimination because religion and spirituality has sustained them. Black Americans' reverence to God is found in numerous historical representations including *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, a song written by 20th century Black educator and composer

James Weldon Johnson. Known as the Negro National Anthem and proudly sung in segregated schools, Black Churches, and still today, the lyrics remind African Americans to “forever stand, true to our God, true to our native land” (Songs of Zion, 1981).

Empowerment

The fourth value in Siddle Walker and Snarey’s (2004) ethic of care and justice framework is empowerment. For these scholars, empowerment occurs when African Americans use their personal agency to confront a legacy of oppression. They describe empowerment as having the fortitude to advocate for civil rights and social justice. Data from the teachers in the study reveal how they stand up for themselves and their school communities in a myriad of ways. This first example of empowerment takes place in Sharon’s classroom as she works to reframe a group of Black students’ self-concept regarding their behavior.

One day in class, some kids were being very talkative, playing, and off task. Before the bell rang for lunch I announced, “I have a list of students I need to talk to after class.” As soon as I dismissed the other children to lunch one boy said, “Ms. you’re prejudiced, you kept all Black kids!” I looked around the room and said, “Oh, my God, you are all Black! Why is that? What are you all doing in here?” One student spoke up and said, “It’s because we don’t know how to act.” I told the students, “That is NOT true. You know how to act, but you choose to do otherwise. You know how to come in here, follow directions and do what is expected of you. There are some people who think you are less intelligent because of the color of your skin and when you go in a classroom and misbehave, it makes them believe that even more so. Don’t buy into that!”

In this conversation with her students, Sharon demonstrates an understanding that her role as a teacher requires more than teaching math; it also calls for teaching values (Kunjufu, 1984). When the bell rang Sharon could have easily ignored these off task students by opting to simply get rid of them. Instead, she addressed their infractions and held them accountable. In response to the self-appointed spokesperson who rationalized that Black students didn't know how to act, Sharon refutes this and works to empower these kids by creating a shift in their thinking. Sharon does not allow her students to exit the class believing they are predisposed for off task behavior. Instead, she speaks agency into their lives by assuring them they control their actions.

The second example of empowerment is reflected in Jackie's answer to a question about advice for new Black teachers. As Jackie points out, Black teachers are needed and what they bring to the table is too important to be in spaces where they are made to feel unwanted.

I have a friend who recently started working at a predominately White school. She is the only Black teacher over there and it's been a difficult year for her. From the start of the school year, many White parents did not want a Black person teaching their kids. If at all possible, I think Black teachers should try to teach in schools where they are embraced. Black teachers are needed to hold Black students accountable and under no circumstances let them slack. We have to help our kids grow up to be somebody positive. We have to constantly look for ways to inspire our kids.

The accounts of Black teachers during desegregation chronicle ominous conditions where slights from colleagues, students and parents sought to undermine their work as educators

(Foster, 1997; Siddle Walker, 2005). For example, in Foster's (1997) seminal work highlighting narratives of Black teachers' experiences, Etta, a teacher in an east Texas community recounted her experiences in a predominately White school in 1965:

There were only two black teachers in the school, my cousin and myself. Neither of us had a class because the townspeople didn't want us teaching their lily-white kids. But the superintendent had to have some black teachers because he didn't want to violate the law. So we went to school every day, sat in a room and did whatever we wanted to do (p. 85)

The almost fifty year span between Etta's experiences and those of Jackie's friend give credence to the adage, *the more things change, the more they stay the same*. For this reason, Jackie cautions Black teachers if at all possible to exert agency by choosing to work in schools where they are embraced.

Next, Ray relays a story about Kendrick, a student known for volatile outbursts. Ray empowers Kendrick by showing him how exercising agency can improve one's situation and help chart a different course for their life.

Kendrick's mom was a drug user, ex-con, ex-gang member and she didn't give a damn about him and would tell him that. He went through life seeing and hearing this so much that by the time he got to high school, I had to spend a lot of time helping him focus on how to take control of his anger outbursts. He didn't have any other outlets. I had to step way out the box with this kid by working to remove him from that situation and into a positive place with people who cared about him. He's in college now and I always make a point to call him to make sure he is moving forward with his life.

While Kendrick's circumstances may not have been the direct result of a legacy of oppression handed down from the dominant culture, his predicament and angry disposition made him a prime candidate for a student labeled at-risk. From her research, Ferguson (2001) found that children with such codes are more likely to be reprimanded and punished. When Ray meets Kendrick, this young man has lived an uneasy life marred by insults from a troubled mother. By advocating for this student and not giving up on him, Ray's example illuminates the path by helping Kendrick learn to advocate for himself. Ray's one-to-one interactions with Kendrick to quell his angry outbursts are in line with Kunjufu (1984) who concluded school-wide systematic reforms to improve discipline were often too detached to develop a student's individual needs and fail to nurture the intrinsic motivation needed to build up self-discipline.

The final example selected to demonstrate how Black teacher leaders work to empower students is Malcolm's pedagogical practices to improve his students writing skills. Malcolm seeks to empower his students through curriculum and instructional practices.

I teach about 120 seniors (mainly Black and Hispanic students) and the bulk of them were turning in papers to me with run-on sentences, fragments, and incoherent thought. So, one day I wrote on the board, *Joe ate the ice cream*, and asked my class, "What's the subject of this sentence?" The majority of them said, "ice cream." I realized the reason they couldn't take care of business is because they didn't know how to take care of business. I went to administration on my campus and explained the situation. They all looked at me like I said, the wind was blowing. No reaction. No real urgency! But here I am worried about the

fact, troubled about the fact that my kids thought “ice cream” was the subject of that sentence. I feel like I am the only person who gives a shit. I really do! I know administration is not focused on extra support for these kids because they are seniors and their standardized test scores don’t impact the school’s ratings. I know the game! But, I decided to go back to the basics. I began with a sentence with an article and a subject and broke it down. My kids know that I expect to see correct sentence structure in their papers. They are improving and becoming more confident writers. One thing I realized is that my students grasp concepts better when I teach skills in isolation. When you blend paragraph writing, spelling, and grammar all at the same time, our kids get lost. They don’t know which one to focus on. I learned spelling in isolation and I spell rather well if I say so myself.

Malcolm comes to the startling conclusion that the majority of the seniors in his class (consisting mainly of Black and Hispanic students) could graduate from high school with inadequate writing skills. He advocates for his students by confronting a legacy of curriculum and instructional practices that have failed to meet the needs of Black students. Similarly, Delpit (1995) addressed the politics behind inadequate writing instruction for Black students by observing how White teachers typically prefer a holistic approach to writing because they find the direct teaching of writing skills stifles and restricts the writer’s voice. On the other hand, Delpit found that Black teachers considered teaching writing skills to be essential to their students’ success. The Black teachers Delpit observed and Malcolm understand the potential pitfalls for students who lack sufficient writing skills. This is underscored by Du Bois’ (1960) reflection of his

writing while attending Harvard: “I realized that while style is subordinate to content, and that no real literature can be composed simply of meticulous and fastidious phrases, nevertheless solid content with literary style carries a message further than poor grammar and muddled syntax” (p. 42). Like Du Bois, Malcolm understands how his students are in a better position to succeed if they can construct coherent compositions.

Discussion

Within the findings, the participants never specifically used the word empower to describe their actions. However, empowering others seemed deeply embedded within their practice as there was an abundance of examples to draw from. Sharon and Ray empowered their students by helping to develop self-discipline. Malcolm worked to empower his students through curriculum and instructional practices. Jackie’s advice empowers Black teachers by discussing the significance of working in schools where their talents and skills to help others are embraced and celebrated. Empowering others is a form of advocacy which seeks to help others realize their potential.

Uplift

Uplift, like each preceding value in Siddie Walker and Snarey’s (2004) ethic of care and justice matrix – liberation, pluralism, hope, and empowerment – works to inspire the teachers themselves, the individual students, and the community by drawing inspiration from the success of each other. Siddie Walker and Snarey posit, “...when African American teachers care for the well-being and protect the rights of an individual child, they also see themselves providing uplift to both themselves and the race” (p. 137). Uplift in this context is not synonymous with ousting the oppressors and assuming their tactics, rather it is grounded in a West African value that represents collective

responsibility for the individual and individual responsibility for the group. In this first example, Sharon talks about what President Obama's election and re-election means for Black students.

Educators now have something really powerful to inspire our kids. With our first African American president being elected and re-elected, we have something that motivates our kids to let them know they don't have to buy into the stereotypes of what our people can be or what we have been. With an African American president, our kids know they can aspire to be much greater than the stereotypes. Our kids can see that they can be much greater than just what they commonly see. This shows our kids they can go further than what they have been accustomed to thinking.

Sharon, like many Black Americans, beams when discussing the election and re-election of President Barack Obama. She discusses how Black students can fathom even greater possibilities for themselves because a "brother" has ascended to the presidency of the United States. Black teachers have long relied on using the lives of successful African Americans as models to uphold what Black students are capable of. An example is found in this reflection from Ladson-Billings (2009):

When you sing in our school choir, you sing as proud Negro children" boomed the voice of Mrs. Benn, my fifth-grade teacher. "Don't you know that Marian Anderson, a cultured colored woman, is the finest contralto ever? Haven't you heard Paul Robeson sing? It can just take your breath away. We are not shiftless and lazy folk. We are hard-working, God-fearing people. You can't sing in this choir unless you want to hold up the good name of our people. (p. 10)

For a fifth grade Ladson-Billings, Marion Anderson and Paul Robeson were held up as examples to emulate. Likewise, Blacks individually and collectively are uplifted because President Obama's election confirms that we are a people who are intellectual and charismatic enough to lead the nation.

Next, Jackie discusses that the best honor she could receive is for former students to be successful examples for her current students. She recognizes the impact these stories will have on her students.

The best accolade I could ever receive will be when my students come back and say, "Ms. Reese, I'm going to college!" It would mean that these kids came from the projects, now look at them. They're a doctor. They're a lawyer. They're working in technology. They're starring in their own TV show. They're playing professional basketball. This will be very inspiring to the whole community. It will show my students that they can be successful too!

Jackie considers the best reward for her work as a teacher will be the day a former student can be upheld as an example of success for her current students. This goal represents her understanding of the significance of community uplift. By celebrating the success of their own, Jackie's students are uplifted to believe in their abilities. Moreover, Jackie is motivated as a teacher to work for the prize of this realization above all others.

In this vignette Ray talks about his appreciation of John Biggers' artwork because it depicts community. He purposefully highlights positive depictions of Black Americans that his students may not see in mainstream media or school textbooks.

I like to use John Biggers' work in my art classes because he shows how for Blacks, there is more to our lives than the struggle. We also know how to have

fun! In a lot of his art, Biggers shows how we are a community. They are always trying to make us believe we're dragging each other down, but that's not true; we have a sense of community and we help one another. I love how Biggers shows this in his work.

By exposing students to imagery depicting Blacks as a collective, Ray uplifts his community. Advisor to President Roosevelt and early 20th century educator, Mary McLeod Bethune (1938) felt strongly that if Black students were knowledgeable of the contributions of their ancestors they would have more pride in themselves and greater confidence in their abilities. Bethune urged the Black community to share their story through books, newspapers, photographs, and artwork.

Lastly, Malcolm addresses the Black Americans collective experience and poverty. He forcefully rejects correlations made between financial status and ability.

Poverty is not an excuse. People like Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, August Wilson and Ida B. Wells all grew up poor. Oprah Winfrey didn't have in-door plumbing and now Oprah has more bathrooms in all her houses than she knows what to do with. Learning and achieving has nothing to do with growing up poor.

These people had nothing or had little and they were able to overcome a hard scrabble upbringing. This is not something that just one or two Black folks did.

This is our collective history.

Malcolm, like the other teachers in this study, expressed strong opposition to curriculum initiatives and ideology centered on students' low socio-economic status. Malcolm refutes the notion that Black children in poverty are somehow less capable. His litany of Black Americans who have achieved despite having been raised in poverty symbolizes

his use of their success to represent how other Blacks in similar situations also have it in them to do the same. These beliefs advance Malcolm's high expectations for his students and for himself.

Chapter Discussion

This chapter presented the participating teachers' narratives by exploring them in light of Siddle Walker and Snarey's (2004) matrix of care and justice primary values: Liberation, Pluralism, Hope, Empowerment, and Uplift. In the examples highlighted, Sharon, Jackie, Ray, and Malcolm equip Black students with tactics for **liberation** so they will become critical thinkers and problem solvers in order to claim their personal freedom. The teachers also employ **pluralistic** strategies by balancing both resistance and accommodation methods in an effort to advance caring and justice relationships and practices that place value in Black students' intellectual, emotional, and social giftedness. The data reveals how **hope** anchors these Black teacher leaders staying power to educate future generations of Black Americans in sometimes hostile and oppressive environments. Their hope is sustained in a spiritual recognition that God is ultimately in control, not man. While school policies and other demeaning legacies may threaten to derail the learning environment for Black students, Black teacher leaders continue to press forward. They use their agency to **empower** Black students by confronting and challenging these inequities. Sharon, Jackie, Ray, and Malcolm prepared their students to rise above difficulties they will encounter. Finally, Black teacher leaders are acutely aware that when one Black person achieves, it represents collective success. As such, the data brings to light how these Black teacher leaders took a special interest in the accomplishments of other Blacks because their success contributes to community **uplift**.

When analyzing the narratives it became evident that these teacher leaders went the extra mile for their students. They understood their roles as teachers to include more than instructing students to master math, reading, art, or language arts concepts; these teacher leaders also exhibited an understanding of the specific needs and culture of Black students. An example is their no-nonsense approach to learning and behavior. Sharon, Jackie, Ray, and Malcolm empowered their students by letting them know they had high expectations and encouraging them to make right decisions to forge a better life. Each participant worked to liberate their students by telling them the truth and informing them about the hardships they may face and the social oppression they may encounter as people of color. Not only did these teacher leaders share information about potential hardships, they showed students how to exercise agency to improve their current conditions and encouraged them to be strategic about knowing the rules. The teacher leaders visualize successful outcomes and possibilities for their students' future. They are positive role models and teach by example.

Finally, each teacher demonstrated how they reached out to others to form collaborations that open the door for discussion and action to benefit the students they teach. They worked to strengthen relationships with students, parents, and colleagues. In each instance, the participants transmitted their message of maintaining high expectations for Black students. While these teacher leaders provide commendable service to their school communities, their practice as educators is not faultless or without room for improvement. There are learning gaps that require a commitment to lifelong learning and professional growth.

CHAPTER VI

THE LEGACY CONTINUES

My son is a junior in high school, and making sure that he enrolls in the university that best fits his educational needs has become a family project. Therefore, during a recent college visit with him, we were given an agenda for how the day would proceed. In addition to planned class visits, dorm room tours, and lunch in the dining hall, I sought opportunities outside the itinerary to arrange meetings with professors in his area of interest, as well as an athletic coach. I could sense my child's reluctance; he was wondering why Mom always had to go overboard? However, when these connections proved beneficial with him receiving information about various scholarships and camps he otherwise would not have known, he began to appreciate such networking. I believe had my son heard from a Black teacher leader like Coach Ray: "You've got to work twice as hard, twice as hard as the next person of a different ethnicity....," he would have approached the college visit with a greater understanding of networking outside the planned agenda.

Here I, the dissertation author, describe a personal experience from my point of view as a mother and educator. It is not that my son is oblivious to the double standards in society; my husband and I have spoken this reality to him many times. However, my son is one of the few young Black male students who will attend college (Harper, 2006);

when he leaves the comforts of home and the familiar environment of his high school to experience university life, we (his parents, family, and friends) are committed to every single effort to ensure his success graduating from college and becoming a productive citizen. A study by Harvey and Anderson (2005) reports the growth rate of Black men enrolling in college to be the lowest in the Nation. As a mother, who works in the education field, I was able to advise my son and look for opportunities to provide him with better conditions and opportunities for his college experience; however, many Black students will not have the same good fortune. Specifically, a study by Ross-Gordon (2005) reports that one of the primary factors that facilitates college success for students of color include supportive others such as family members, faculty, staff, and peers. As significant as parents are in a child's life, the teacher also plays a major role in the way students view themselves, their abilities, and the world; this is especially true for Black students who value their teachers' support and guidance (Comer, 1999; Irvine, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Building on scholarship documenting the influence Black teachers have on Black students academic and social development (Delpit, 1995; Hale-Benson, 1982; Irvine, 1990; Milner, 2006) this dissertation focused on how Black teachers teaching Black students utilize and demonstrate an ethic of care and justice as described by Siddle Walker and Snarey (2004). The supporting questions for the study included: What are the journeys of these four Black teachers in their becoming teacher leaders? What ontological perspectives do they hold, and what is the effect on the work they do? What are their experiences working with schools, colleagues, administrators, Black students,

and community members? What stories illustrate their successes and challenges advocating for the education, learning and achievement of Black students?

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight study findings, draw implications for practice and provide concluding thoughts. I briefly summarize the study participants' pedagogical approach as Black teacher leaders. Next, I discuss the commonalities in their narratives followed by a section that highlights important themes for the reader. Then, I provide my personal example to encourage other teachers to use the study framework as a tool to reflect and learn about their personal journeys and their daily practice working in schools. After this I present the tensions and challenges encountered during the research process. The last sections in the chapter outline implications for school improvement, ideas for future research, and concluding thoughts.

Summary of Participants' Pedagogical Approach

Sharon works diligently to provide outstanding math instruction and holds her middle school math students accountable for their learning and behavior. She often engages in private conversations with Black students to refute negative impressions society may have about them. Sharon is action oriented and works in solidarity with her students to strategize for success. She tactfully questions school officials regarding issues relating to Black students. Sharon uses a Biblical Psalm to govern her child development philosophy. She speaks agency into the lives of Black students, assuring them they have what it takes to be successful.

Jackie, a child of poverty, operates from the standpoint that poverty has nothing to do with a person's ability to learn. She is committed to literacy instruction and cares too much about her students to let them fail (Ladson-Billings, 2002). Jackie connects

with students by focusing on their strengths and by showing she believes in them. She has high expectations for her students. She sees her work as a calling (Irvine, 1999) and believes in the Golden Rule – treating students the way she wants to be treated. Jackie recommends Black teachers seek work in places where they will feel embraced, places where they can grow and enjoy their work because they are desperately needed to help Black kids.

Ray teaches because he likes encouraging students to stay on the right path. His motivation to teach is reflected in research findings that show men, like women, are drawn to the profession for altruistic reasons (Lewis, 2006; Pabon, Anderson, & Kharem, 2011). Ray works as an advocate for all kids, but reserves his hard-nosed race talk for Black students, warning them: “...you still have to work twice as hard as someone who has less experience who may not be as smart as you are...” Ray also works with colleagues to advance caring and just practices for Black students; he shares his wisdom of practice with teachers to help them connect with Black students. He is a spiritual man and finds his spiritual students to be more stable. For these believers, he uses the life of Jesus Christ as an example of how they can expect to overcome trials they encounter.

Malcolm, knowledgeable and outspoken, is concerned for the psychological and academic well-being of his students. He schools Black students about the rules of the game and does not miss an opportunity to capitalize on these teachable moments. He never hesitates to confront deficit thinking when he hears it among his colleagues; he uses real-world examples to discuss the consequences of low expectations for Black students. Malcolm seeks to empower students through education. He exhibits race and culture pride by recognizing Black Americans’ accomplishments despite the obstacles.

Highlighting the Commonalities

Race, culture, and profession are acknowledged commonalities among the four teachers in the study. Additionally, the narratives reveal similarities in their childhood socio-economic status, their resilience, and their commitment to advocacy for Black students. All the participants discussed instances of financial hardship; for them the teaching profession represented an entry into America's middle class. Interestingly, Irvine (1991) identified Black children in poverty as ideal candidates to address the Black teacher shortage. She rationalized how these students looking to gain access to the middle class were more open to the teaching profession than middle class Blacks who tended to be more focused on other careers like law, medicine, and business. Because they have achieved professional success despite their economic status as children, the participants maintain high expectations for Black student achievement regardless of family finances. For example, Jackie expects her students' success to inspire other students who live in the projects that feed into her school. Malcolm refuses to allow poverty to serve as an excuse for low expectations: "Learning and achieving has nothing to do with growing up poor."

In retelling their journeys, all the participants encountered multiple challenges. The narratives reveal how they used their agency to counter obstacles and conquer adversity which included: teenage pregnancy, dropping out of high school, growing up in single parent households, being bounced from school to school, and juggling responsibilities as a spouse, parent, and employee. One example of resilience is reflected in Sharon's resolve after Hurricane Katrina: "...our house was where the levees broke...So, I'm in Texas watching all this devastation and the only thing I know is to

work in order to survive.” Lessons from the teachers life experiences were used to counsel and motivate Black students. These findings in the data are corroborated by Milner’s (2006) position that Black teachers have a strong connection and commitment to Black students because “these teachers experience and understand the world in ways similar to their students” (p. 94). In other words, their shared culture and experiences place Black teachers in a unique position to speak to the needs of Black students as well as inform measures to improve schools for these students.

Another commonality is found in the reasons these four individuals became teachers. The two female teachers knew from an early age they wanted to become teachers. In elementary school they wanted to be teachers and never really lost sight of that vision for themselves. However, for both male teachers this realization came later. For Ray, it came through reflection on a desire to inspire young people to choose education rather than juvenile probation. Malcolm entered the teaching profession as a second career.

Additionally, the participants viewed their roles as teachers extending beyond teaching particular disciplines. They not only teach their subject matter, they also teach values and tactics for success. This was apparent in how the teachers stepped out of what is often characterized as their traditional roles and worked with individual students sharing life lessons and strategies to confront challenges. Examples of this commonality among the teachers include: Sharon’s visit to the alternative school to encourage a student, Jackie’s conversation with a parent regarding her expectations for student behavior, Ray’s concern and support of a student being raised in a troubled environment,

and Malcolm's advice to a student entrepreneur. In these cases and others, these teacher leaders were working on behalf of Black students' well-being, learning, and achievement.

Black Teacher Leaders Reflect a Rich Legacy of Black Education Philosophy

It was clear and exciting for me to see how the participants' words and actions often mirrored traditions of historical and contemporary Black teacher leaders. For example, when Sharon creates solidarity with Black students by affirming their capacity to rise above society's negative stereotypes, I was reminded of Hilliard (1995) whose work unabashedly recognized the brilliance of Black students. I saw Jackie's commitment to liberating students through literacy grounded in Douglass' (1845/1968) quest to educate others. Ray's dedication to build agency in Black students to confront discrimination aligned with the practices of hooks (1994). Malcolm's eye on history, his challenge of mainstream pedagogical practices, and his implementation of his instructional practices echoed the work of Du Bois (1899/2002), and Woodson (1933/1990).

What I did not hear in the stories was how the participants saw their work connected to their predecessors. I did not specifically ask such questions or it could quite possibly have been because they were unaware. For the most part, Black historical contributions in public schools, colleges, and teacher preparation programs remain woefully inadequate. I suspect these Black teacher leaders like so many others are doing their work unaware of their collective tradition of education advocacy and achievement.

Learning as Revolution: Black Teacher Leaders Focus beyond the Classroom

In my observations from the individual interviews and the group interviews I witnessed how the participants viewed their work as a mission. Their commitment and

purpose is aptly reflected in hooks' (1994) description of the Black teachers who taught at her elementary school, "For black folks—teaching—educating—was fundamentally political because it was rooted in antiracist struggle" (p. 2). In essence, many Black teachers see their profession as a form of activism to equip Black students to combat racist and discriminatory practices they will encounter in society. From her Black teachers, hooks saw learning as a revolution. Similarly, the findings show how the participants did not describe their work by state standards and passing rates on standardized assessment. Instead, these teachers maintained an urgency to impart knowledge to equip Black students for success in life beyond the classroom.

Applying the Study Framework

In this section I provide my personal example to encourage other teachers to use the study framework and juxtapose their personal and professional experiences to reflect on the work they do in their daily practice in schools. I illustrate how Siddle Walker and Snarey's (2004) matrix of care and justice primary values can be used as a tool to reflect and learn about self and praxis to be able to intentionally promote positive change. I used the following questions as a guide for this reflection process and to make meaning of my experiences in light of the framework:

1. What am I doing to cultivate freedom among Black students?
2. How have I strategized to advance caring and justice practices?
3. What drives my work as I strive for a more caring and fair society?
4. How have I exercised agency to confront a legacy of oppression?
5. How am I inspired by community and how does my praxis strengthen them in turn?

I follow the same format used in chapter five when presenting the participants' practice in light of the framework. Each value serves as a header and includes a professional or personal story from my experience to establish the connection with Siddle Walker and Snarey's (2004) matrix values.

Liberation: What am I doing to cultivate freedom among Black students?

As a classroom teacher (from 2001 to 2007), I taught a required elective for high school graduation. This was a communication course and included strong units on public speaking, debate, and group communication.

While organizing one of our campus cluttered book rooms, I found some class sets of books by Black authors. Classics like *Black Boy* by Richard Wright and *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass*, and *A Choice of Weapons* by Gordon Parks sat in boxes covered in dust. After some thought, I decided to organize a Black book club at my high school to expose kids to Black literature. Students checked out books from me and we met once a month during lunch for a discussion. The book club was a success with many dedicated members. In a yearbook feature on school organizations, a student commented, "I liked *A Choice of Weapons* because it depicted the black man as a stronger more intelligent figure in society." Another student added, "The idea of the book was that education was the best weapon."

Sponsoring a book club to discuss Black literature was an opportunity for me to do more than complain about a curriculum that lacked diversity. By reading and discussing books by and about Black Americans, we focused on literature portraying this group, who looked like the students, as intellectual, activist, and problem solvers. The discussions

challenged students to think about topics that were not typically discussed during their school day. The book club offered opportunities for liberation by creating space for students to view and discuss themselves and their culture as resilient, determined, and capable. The book club provided the students with the tools to identify and discuss literature written by people who understood their culture and who served as an academic role model to inspire the students.

Pluralism: How have I strategized to advance caring and justice practices for Black students?

During the time I was a classroom teacher I went the extra mile to find creative ways to engage students through the curriculum and instructional practices. However, in my work as an administrator, conducting daily walkthroughs, I often lamented the number of teachers I observed teaching exclusively to the state mandated test.

Ms. Ruiz was sending quite a few Black students to my office because of discipline infractions. I noticed most of the students were sent to see me during her language arts time. I decided to observe her classroom to find out what was going on and why the students were off-task. Ms. Ruiz was a dedicated teacher, but her instruction had fallen into the testing “drill and kill rut” that has gripped many other educators like her. Her instruction was basically a repetitive cycle of dry reading passages followed by questions using the same format of the questions in the standardized test. I asked Ms. Ruiz if we could work together to co-teach her upcoming unit and she was receptive to the idea. We reviewed the forthcoming lesson objectives and brainstormed creative ways to use books, news articles, music, and artifacts with cultural connections that the students would find

interesting. As a result of our collaboration the learning energy in her classroom improved immensely. In view of the positive results, I committed myself to actively helping Ms. Ruiz find resources to engage the learners and bring the language art lessons to life.

Simply reminding teachers to augment their curriculum and instructional practices with cultural resources was not enough. Building alliances based on mutual trust, collaborating with teachers in non-threatening ways, and sharing my cultural capital with them played a huge role in advancing curriculum and instructional diversity that could benefit the education of Black students. Furthermore, I found these collaborative efforts required an on-going commitment in order to build colleagues' confidence and awareness about how to connect with Black students.

Hope: What drives my work as I strive for a more caring and fair society?

In my quest to see more caring and fair schools, I have questioned long held policies that seemingly undermine the goals for creating better educational settings for students. My sense of fairness and hope for a more compassionate world is based on the teachings of Jesus Christ. Here is an example when I used a Biblical principle to make a case against a long held school policy: *treating others the way you want to be treated!*

The following example illustrates this value, hope.

Ms. Atwell came to the office upset that her daughter was assigned to the detention room and would miss a significant portion of the field day activities because of excessive tardiness. She argued, "My daughter makes good grades and has never been in trouble. I don't understand why she has to spend time in the detention room and miss out on field day because she's been late. She's in

kindergarten; it's not like she can drive herself to school. It's just not fair!" The principal countered, "I'm sorry but that's our policy; we sent a note home explaining it." I felt bad for the parent and the student. I immediately requested a private meeting with the principal to share my opinion about the policy and reconsider the points that Ms. Atwell had made. The principal reiterated her position that the policy was the policy and it had been that way for a long time. I asked the principal to think about how she would feel if it were her school aged grandson who missed out on the fun only because his parents consistently brought him to school late. The principal gave some thought to this and later called a meeting to make adjustments to the policy.

Sometimes school officials uphold policies because that is the way it has always been done. These rules and regulations are sometimes rendered without carefully considering how they may adversely impact students and families. Like the participants in the study, my hope for positive change in schools is anchored in spirituality. I believe in fairness and caring for others, appealing to the moral responsibility I have to feel empathy and compassion.

Empowerment: How have I exercised agency to confront a legacy of oppression?

My passion for learning and teaching extends beyond the classroom. For many years I have worked in the community organizing events to promote Black literature. The following example shows how my work with a small community group empowers the community.

After months of confirming authors, ordering books, arranging flights, planning discussion topics, and coordinating a variety of other big and small tasks, the big

day came for the African American Book Festival we host each June. A small team of avid readers and I have been conducting the festival for seven years now. The goal is to encourage a love for reading by focusing on works by historical and contemporary Black writers often excluded from mainstream literary recognition. Hundreds of people came through voicing their opinions on various topics, meeting authors, and purchasing autographed books. By the day's end we were physically and mentally exhausted as we moved chairs and heavy tables back to their original position in the library where we host the event. As one of the featured authors was leaving to catch her flight, she complimented our efforts: "This is more than a festival; this is how you advance a Black literary culture." It was a perspective of our work that we had not considered before.

From textbooks to bookstore shelves, Black literature can take a back seat to the mainstream literary canon. As a result, Black Americans do not always benefit from an exposure to work by and about Black authors. Our book festival counters this omission by celebrating the Black written word. We empower our community by providing a medium for books, author readings and discussions that place value on our culture, our historians and our storytellers.

**Uplift: How am I inspired by community and how does my praxis strengthen them
in turn?**

Uplift reflects how Blacks draw inspiration from the success of each other. Here, I share how I was inspired as a toddler and one of my earliest memories of school.

I'm about three and I am walking with my mom through the main building at Texas Southern University. I watch as nicely dressed young Black men and

women walk in a purposeful stride across the beautifully landscaped campus. I always smile when I see Dr. Bell because he is especially nice to me. He gives me peppermints, asks me questions, and intently listens to what I have to say. He has a hearty laugh and I hear him tell my mom, “Rosalind is smart!” Later that evening, I sit at the kitchen table carefully turning the pages of my parents’ college yearbook. I ask questions about the people, buildings, and happenings in the pictures. I smile when I see Dr. Bell’s picture.

In this community of dedicated learners who look like me, I internalize that I have it in me to be like them. My view of Black Americans as thinkers, learners, and doers was etched in me well before I ever went to school. For many in the Black community our cultural kinship is such that when one excels, it represents a confirmation for what individually and collectively we as a people are capable of achieving. In the same way, members at my Church recognized and celebrated my doctoral accomplishments as an example for what our young people can aspire to accomplish.

In summary, this process recalling, documenting, and juxtaposing my personal and professional journey as an educator with Siddle Walker and Snarey’s (2004) framework was demanding, but it allowed me to learn a lot about myself and my journey. Initially my answers to the reflection questions were more descriptive than narrative. I had to consciously go back to the place of the story and retell it in a way that conveyed meaning and demonstrated the particular ethic of care and justice value. Applying Siddle Walker and Snarey’s (2004) framework as a tool for personal reflection pushed me to think deeply about my work as a practitioner and emerging researcher. As Freire (2001) noted, “Thinking critically about practice of today or yesterday makes possible the

improvement of tomorrow's practice" (p. 44). In essence, by recounting our stories we can raise the level of consciousness in our work as educators. By confronting our actions in particular situations we can use this knowledge to critically assess our practice and improve our work.

Tensions and Challenges

Through informal conversations with administrators, teachers, and community members, four teachers were identified and invited to participate in the study. Jackie and Malcolm readily agreed, but it took several weeks for Sharon and Ray to commit. Their reasons revolved around feeling over extended with already busy schedules. Sharon was caring for a family member who had recently gone through major surgery and Ray was in the middle of football season. I assured both teachers that I would be mindful of their time by conducting the interviews in locations and at times convenient for them; I gave them another week to decide before I felt I needed to contact several other teachers who had also been identified as potential participants. I was sad about the possibility that Sharon and Ray might not be able to participate, because based on conversations about their advocacy for Black students and their length of experience as teachers, I believed their input would be invaluable. Just as I was about to extend invitations to the other teachers, Sharon and Ray called to notify me they would make time to be in the study.

Another source of tension for me revolved around protecting the participants' identity. With so few Black teachers currently employed in schools, I did not want their identity to be compromised in any way. School districts and campuses can be highly political and bureaucratic spaces where those voicing their opinions and concerns can be subjected to professional backlash. Pseudonyms were assigned to all names related to the

participants. Furthermore, member checks were arranged so participants could review the document and provide feedback.

Siddle Walker and Snarey's (2004) framework, which looks at care through a lens that takes into account Black culture, was helpful in keeping the focus for analyzing the teachers' pedagogy in light of the ethic of care and justice framework. However, I contemplated how to best represent aspects of the participants' practice to advance care and justice for Black students that were not outlined in the framework. The teachers use of humor and firm verbal tones were two areas where the data revealed strong commonalities in their practice. Although the teachers' use of humor and firm verbal tones show up in their narratives to reflect the values in the framework, their specific use of humor to encourage cheerfulness and their strict tones to foster respect are not included in the findings.

An example in the data revealing how the participants use humor to build positive relationships with Black students is summed up in Ray's explanation:

I throw jokes in there and punch lines...just crazy stuff! That's how you relate to some kids because that's what they understand. Kids will tell you "*Coach Watson is crazy because he is not going to take any mess, but at the same time he'll also joke around with you.*"

Ray describes his use of humor as the way to reach some students "because that's what they understand." This awareness represents what Irvine (1999) describes as how Black teachers use their "cultural repertoire" to create connections for academic and social growth for Black students. Data from the study depicting how participants deemed humor as an important component of their classroom pedagogy are also corroborated in

Irvine and Fraser's (1998) research describing how Black teachers often joke with students and use dialect or slang to establish personal relationships.

A similar dilemma existed for how to represent the significant amounts of data where participants explained their no-nonsense verbal tone used to foster respectful relationships with students and maintain orderly classroom environments. These experiences are reflected in the speech Sharon says she gives her students at the beginning of the year:

Yes I am stern. Yes I am strict. If I just let you have free rein, no education will take place in here. So when you hear the directness in my voice, it's to bring you all back to attention. It's not to demean. Don't let my voice intimidate you. I may raise my voice but you still have to ask the questions because you need to learn from me.

Sharon's rationale for her strict tone because, "If I let you have free rein, no education will take place here" speaks to a pedagogical approach that places the teacher as the adult in charge of the classroom. This position of authority is not that of a rigid all-knowing educator, but is in line with research that characterizes Black teachers' no-nonsense tone as vital for establishing orderly classroom environments (Delpit, 1992; Irvine & Fraser, 1998) where mutual respect and student learning can flourish.

Implications for School Improvement

School administrators continue to miss important opportunities for curriculum and instructional enhancements that can bolster Black student achievement when they disregard the wisdom and practice of Black teacher leaders. Those genuinely interested in Black student engagement and achievement should tap into the teaching styles of

Black teacher leaders, past and present, known for pedagogical practices that produce results. Watkins (1996) contends “We have all but ignored the rich intellectual tradition of theory and practice in the protracted battle to provide, reform, and improve the schooling and education of African Americans” (p. 5). Pursuits to improve schools for Black students keep missing the mark by overlooking the historical and collective wisdom of Black teachers.

Black teachers as well as other professionals would benefit from teacher preparation programs and professional development opportunities where an expanded view of educational philosophies and theories are presented to include a diversity of great thinkers. As long as universities and school professional development initiatives continue to posit educational philosophy and theory that fails to include a more culturally diverse academic discourse, the current systematic and political inequities in classrooms will remain in tact.

Black teacher leaders, new and veteran, can enhance their professional purpose by taking time to reflect, journal, or participate in small group discussions to determine how the values in Siddle Walker and Snarey’s (2004) framework are reflected in their personal journeys and their daily practice working in schools. Reflection questions provided in this chapter are a great starting point for this process.

Study findings can be particularly useful to novice teachers who can learn how more experienced Black teachers have addressed situations they may encounter and how they have navigated the school system to remain in the profession. Study findings can be of interest to Black teachers working in schools where there are few or no Black teacher mentors as well. However, the narratives in this study do not solely benefit Black

teachers; they can offer insight for other educators as a way to understand Black teacher leaders' perspectives. Study findings can provide the reader an opportunity to reflect on the culture, motivation, and pedagogy Black teacher leaders bring to the classroom. The participants in this study maintain high expectations for Black students; their actions illustrate their confidence on Black students' abilities and represent more than education jargon. When teachers harbor conscious and unconscious negative impressions of Black students, it is difficult for them to teach with the belief that these students have potential for greatness (Delpit, 2005).

Areas for Further Study

This dissertation contributes to the body of work that specifically examines how Black teachers' wisdom, pedagogy, and cultural connections are important for bringing out the best in Black student learners, however it is not enough. Even today, Black teachers' voice and experience continue to be underrepresented or disregarded when issues related to the educational practices for Black students arise. More research documenting the work that Black teachers do in our schools needs to be done. The following are a few ideas for other researchers to continue this study line.

A study using a larger regional and/or cross-national scope focusing on Black teacher leaders can be relevant. In particular, a study on the policies affecting the performance and professional development of Black teachers would be timely considering the many educational policies affecting education practices today. It is important that all teachers in general reclaim their role as professionals and that Black teachers, in particular, exercise their agency in school reform that brings social justice and equity to fruition.

Another study could invite Black teachers to apply Siddle Walker and Snarey's (2004) matrix of care and justice primary values so that they are the ones examining their practice. Such study could include a longitudinal component that looks at the possible transformational learning that can take place as teachers become aware of their role as agents of change and examine their praxis. The researcher can interview the participants and do a follow up on their decisions applying the framework. S/he can also do classroom observations and triangulate data that way. Administrators can also be invited to use the framework at different instances during professional development sessions so that the framework becomes a tool for reflection and improvement.

Finally, implementing a study that includes students' perceptions of Black teachers' praxis is a good way to expand the scope of the study. The students can determine the extent that teachers embody the characteristics of a teacher leader. They can also help to examine the curriculum and identify more effective instructional practices.

Concluding Thoughts

This research builds on scholarship that recognizes and values the important legacy of Black teachers in schools. Just as early Black teacher leaders saw education as a means for equity and economic gain for their community, the teachers in this study also impart knowledge to help Black students be successful in life beyond the classroom. These narratives reveal how Black teacher leaders continue to forge pathways to improve educational practices for Black children. The narratives also offer firsthand accounts and insight to the culture, motivation, and pedagogy Black teacher leaders bring to their work.

I started this dissertation journey describing an experience where I felt ostracized because of several colleagues' attitudes and response to my advocacy for a group of Black students. The leadership team at my school was unwilling to acknowledge how specific cultural and social practices are needed to cultivate Black students' self-esteem and worth which in turn promote learning and achievement. As I reflect on this encounter and on my dissertation journey, I believe my emotionally charged reaction to these colleagues may have been more effective had I utilized pluralism in my approach. Honestly, there was little room for conversation after my scathing email response to the White colleague who told me she could not allow a handful of Black girls to automatically attend the Black history program because it was a racist act. As she relayed to me, "I marched in the 60s for equal rights and I thought we had come so far." My response, somewhat tempered here included, "...just because you marched in the 60s does not make you culturally responsive now..." These words escalated the situation rather than set the stage for collaboration and possible change. Since I am a Black woman in America, I am certain I will have an opportunity for a do-over as I realize I will likely face a similar dilemma in the near future. I hope during this do-over to approach the situation with less emotion, and with the values I have studied for this dissertation in mind to advance an ethic of care and justice for Black students.

As an educational leader committed to school improvement, I know I can have a greater impact on the Black students I work with by identifying ways to empower them through critical conversations and activities that are not dependent on the whims of ill informed educators. Like the participants in this study, my experiences as a Black student and educator offer a crucial perspective for initiatives and practices needed to

improve schools for Black children. If my colleagues do not accept my thoughts and ideas, it does not give me the right to remain silent either. I must continually seek ways to engage educators and colleagues in conversations that magnify the importance of learning from Black teacher leaders, past and present, in order to bolster educational practices for Black students.

As I finalize doctoral studies and this dissertation, I feel empowered to continue “the rich intellectual tradition of theory and practice...to reform, and improve the schooling and education of African Americans” (Watkins, 1996, p. 5). Within this tradition is a legacy of Black teachers before me who have purposefully worked to advance Black student scholarship. Oppressive measures in society and in schools continue to present challenges to Black teacher leaders; however, it is important that we find the strength to carry on our work operating from the premise that Black students have the potential for greatness. The legacy continues with the narratives of the teachers in this study; the legacy continues with me...

APPENDIX A

Glossary of Terms

African American: Term used to describe Black people in America; an ethnic term rather than a racial one connecting descendants of Africa to the continent.

Agency: The expression of our human capacity to contribute to outcomes affecting our lives (Bray, 2011).

Black: Person having origins of the Black racial groups of Africa (U.S. Census Bureau).

Black America: Once seen as a single entity with a unified agenda and agreed upon Black leaders; however, after desegregation, affirmative action, and immigration, Black America can encompass several distinct groups to include those in poverty, the middle class, those of mixed-race heritage, and the elite (Robinson, 2010).

Colorblind: Perpetuating the status quo by overlooking how some people are privileged and others are disadvantaged (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Counter-narrative: Perspectives that run opposite to the presumed order and control (Stanley, 2007); critiques of the dominant group that are not always safe to discuss publically (Bell, 2003).

Critical Consciousness: An expression of social discontents against an oppressive situation (Freire, 1970/2011).

Culture: A way of life shared by members of a population to include customs, emotions, rituals, traditions, values, and norms (Irvine, 1990).

Ontology: Basic assumptions about the nature of reality or how one comes to understand the world (Creswell, 2007).

Race: A racial classification is given to a group of individuals who share a certain number of anthropological traits, which is necessary so that they not be confused with others. Their phenotype which denotes the physical appearance is what counts. So, race, even though it is a relative notion, corresponds to something which allows us to distinguish them from one another. At the level of their phenotype we are able to follow their historical relationships (Diop, 1985).

School Improvement: Process of enhancing education for students; views schools as the center of change and teachers as intrinsic part of the change process (Harris, 2002).

Teacher agency: The cultural, historical, and social structures reflected in district and school initiatives, guidelines, and policy standards which shape what educators believe and think (Vygotsky, 1962).

Teacher Leader: “Teacher leadership is the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement. Such team leadership work involves three intentional development foci: individual development, collaboration or team development, and organizational development” (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, pp. 287-288).

APPENDIX B

Sample questions for the first interview

1. Please tell me about yourself, your family and your personal background.
2. Describe your school experiences. Tell me about your successes and challenges please.
3. Describe your proudest and your most difficult moment as a student?
4. Describe the teachers who specifically stand out in your memory? Please explain.
5. Please tell me about your decision to go into the field of education. Tell me about what made you want to be a teacher?
6. Tell me about a family or community experience that had an impact on your chosen career path?
7. What educational experience has played the largest role in your philosophy as an educator?

APPENDIX C

Sample questions for the second interview

1. Please tell me about your experiences as a teacher?
2. How do you view your work as a Black teacher?
3. Please describe your proudest moment as a Black teacher
4. Describe your most challenging moment as a Black teacher?
5. What do you think is your role teaching Black students?
6. How do you think you are perceived by
 - a. your students?
 - b. your school?
 - c. community members?
7. Talk about a time when you have worked to advocate for Black students?

APPENDIX D

Sample questions for the third interview

1. What changes would you like to see in relation to the education of Black students?
2. Please tell me about your professional goals.
3. What do you see yourself doing in five years?
4. What will be your legacy as a Black teacher?

Note: Additional questions for the third interview varied per participant. These questions were based on answers they provided during the first two interviews.

APPENDIX E

Sample questions for the group interview

1. What are the characteristics and skills of a successful Black teacher?
2. What does the ideal school look like for you? Take a few minutes to jot down ideas in your notepad then we'll discuss.
3. What specific challenges do Black teachers face that their colleagues may not experience? Take some time to reflect and write down a few ideas to focus your discussion. (Have participants first discuss ideas with same gender participant then whole group)
4. If given an opportunity to create a reform measure to improve schools for Black students, what would that be? Please explain.
5. What is the role of black teachers as leaders in their schools?
6. What advice would you give an African American colleague entering the teaching profession?
7. What do you hope will be the legacy of your work as a Black teacher?

APPENDIX F

Consent Form IRB Approval # EXP2012R1742

Please Keep This Consent Form for Your Record

This is an invitation to participate in a study about the leadership role of Black teachers in Central Texas. This document includes information about the study and a written consent requesting your agreement to participate. The goal of the study is to gather, examine, and document the narratives of four Black teachers and their journey in the school system teaching Black students. Please read the information below before deciding to participate. Feel free to ask any questions regarding anything you do not understand. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may choose not to participate at any time.

Title of the Study: Black Teacher Leader Narratives: Creating Legacies through an Ethic of Care and Justice

Researcher: Rosalind M. Oliphant - Doctoral Student in School Improvement
Texas State University-San Marcos - Phone number: (512) XXX-XXX

Supervisor: Clarena Larrotta, Associate Professor for the College of Education
Texas State University San Marcos -Phone number: (512) 245-6288

What is the purpose of this study?

- Document the narratives of teachers like yourself and their journey in as teacher and leaders.
- Create a space for Black teachers to voice successes, frustrations and challenges advocating for the education, learning and achievement of Black students.
- Gain understanding on how teachers navigate the school system utilizing an ethic of care and justice.
- Reveal insight for other teachers, administrators, and policy makers in order to promote change for equity and social justice.
- Reveal a deeper and broader account of the work you do and the effects it can have on Black students.
- Add to the body of literature in the field of school improvement.

What is expected of you as a study participant?

1. Participate in three individual one-hour-interviews and possible follow up questions via telephone or email conversations. Examples of topics for the interviews include:

telling about yourself and your personal background; describing how you became a teacher; telling about your daily work experiences; describing how you advocate for Black students; discussing your views about the significance of your work; and describing what school reform measures you think should be implemented to improve the education of Black students.

2. One group interview of approximately 2 hours. This will be arranged at a convenient time. The group interview is an opportunity to do some networking and learn about other teachers and what they are doing in their schools and communities, as well as, for you to share your experiences. Examples of conversation topics include: Discussing lessons learned, significance of the work you and the other teachers do, share stories about instances that have impacted your life and work, and discuss and share events that have impacted the teaching of Black students.

3. Share documents and artifacts: These are written, visual, and digital material relevant to telling about your life history. Some examples are letters, newspaper accounts, lesson plans, school newsletters, songs, and poems and/or any object that can also be helpful in recounting your life experiences. These are objects (diplomas, plaques, t-shirt, book, etc.) that trigger memories of important times, people and events.

I will tape record the audio of the individual interviews and conversations, and videotape the group interview. Please know that at any time you can request to have the recorder turned off. You also have the right NOT to answer any particular questions. In participating in the study, you are giving me permission to use the information provided in the interviews for research and academic presentations and publication purposes ONLY. Your privacy and identity will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. Your real name will not appear together with any information you share. Your identity will not be publicly revealed in any way.

What are the risks of participating? There are no risks for you, physically or mentally in participating in this study. However, there is the possibility of experiencing some discomfort or uneasiness while recalling memories related to racial issues when sharing anecdotes or stories. In this case we can stop the interview, or you can change the subject, or you can let me know you want to take a break or stop. If necessary, you can seek counseling services through Austin Travis County Integral Care (ATCIC). Contact information can be found at or (512) 472-HELP or <http://www.integralcare.org/>. These services are provided on a sliding fee schedule. Please understand you will be responsible for any fees.

Again, there are no known risks associated with participation in this study. However, if you have any questions regarding the study or any risk you think you might encounter, please ask now or when you feel comfortable. You can call my supervisor or me at the aforementioned telephone numbers.

What are the benefits of participating?

Benefits for the participants: By participating in this study you will have an opportunity to share your story in a safe environment. Sharing your story will contribute to the historical canon of the narratives of Black America and by telling our stories through our voices. This experience can also be empowering for you when realizing how much you have accomplished and the significant role you play in your school and community.

Benefits for the education field: This study can inform practice and theory related to educational institutions by reframing their view of race and diversity. Other professionals can learn from your experiences and work. Study results could provide insight for educators, administrators, and policy makers to better meet the needs of Black teachers and students.

Is there any compensation for participating? No, there is no compensation.

How can I discontinue participating and whom should I contact if I have any questions?

For questions about the study, please contact me by phone at (512) XXX-XXX. For questions or concerns, regarding the rights of participants and duties of investigators, contact IRB Chair Jon Lasser at 512-245-3413; email: lasser@txstate.edu, or Becky Northcut, Compliance Specialist at 512-245-2102; email: bnorthcut@txstate.edu

**PLEASE RETURN THIS SHEET
CONSENT FORM**

Signature and printed name of the investigator soliciting consent

As the researcher conducting this study, I have explained the purpose, procedures, benefits and risks involved in your participation:

Name

Date

You have been informed of the purpose, procedures, benefits and risks involved in participating in this study and have received a copy of this form. You have had the opportunity to ask questions before signing and you have been informed that you may ask questions at any time. You consent voluntarily to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not relinquishing any of your legal rights.

“It is possible the investigator may want to use some of the recordings and video clips produced in this study in presentations and academic/scientific demonstrations. Please sign below if you agree to allow the use of the recordings where you appear.”

Signature of the Participant

Date

“With my signature I am giving permission for the audio cassettes made for this study to also be used for educational purposes. I also grant permission for you to make copies of the documents I provide and take photos of the artifacts/objects I bring to the interview/conversation sessions.”

Printed name of the participant

Date

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VITA

Rosalind Marie Oliphant was born in Houston, Texas to Lou and Jodie Oliphant. She is the oldest of four children. She graduated from Jack Yates High Magnet School of Communication in Houston, Texas in 1982. She then went on to attend the University of Texas in Austin where she earned a bachelor's degree in organizational communication in 1987.

Rosalind has worked in state government as a writer. She also founded and operated Austin's first Black bookstore, Folktales (1992-1999) before attending Texas State University-San Marcos and earning a master's degree in education.

She has worked in education for twelve years as a high school teacher and an elementary school assistant principal. In addition to her role as an educator, she is the creator of the Austin African American Book Festival, an intergenerational event celebrating literature by and about African Americans. She is also active in her Church serving as an usher for twenty five-years.

Rosalind and her husband, Tony Jones, have one son, Josh.

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This dissertation was typed by Rosalind M. Oliphant.