The Promise of Black Teachers' Success with Black Students

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In this article, I discuss African American[1] researchers' perspectives on the experiences, impact and success of Black teachers with Black students in public schools. This study builds on an earlier study that focused specifically on these researchers' insights about the impact of the *Brown versus the Topeka Board of Education* decision on Black teachers, Black students, and Black communities (see Milner & Howard, 2004). In that work, the interviewed researchers focused on the experiences and impact of Black teachers in improving the learning opportunities of Black students, both past and present. In short, based on that study with a focus on *Brown*, the researchers who participated in the study pointed to a need for the recruitment and retention of Black teachers in public schools to improve the academic, cultural, and social experiences of all students but particularly African American students. In this study, I attempt to focus on what we know about successful Black teachers of Black students to (a) contribute to the ever growing literature about successful teachers of Black students for the benefit of teachers from various ethnic backgrounds; and (b) outline several salient suppositions that may help

us in advancing the research and theory about successful teachers of Black students. Clearly, outlining some of the practices of Black teachers and their success with Black students can be insightful for all teachers interested in teaching Black students.

For the purposes of this study, I focus specifically on the following questions:

- From what features of successful Black teachers and their teaching might others learn and benefit? and

- What types of questions should we investigate and address in order to improve the learning opportunities for Black students?

It is critical to note that it is not my intent to engage in a form of what Gay (2000) called "professional racism"—

> by underscoring the need for more teachers of color. The need for more Latino, Asian, Native, and African American teachers in U.S. schools is unquestionable. But to make improving the achievement of students of color contingent upon fulfilling this need is based on a very fallacious and dangerous assumption. It presumes that membership in an ethnic group is necessary or sufficient to enable teachers to do culturally competent pedagogy. This is as ludicrous as assuming that one automatically knows how to teach English to others simply because one is a native speaker... (p. 205)

Engaging in this professional racism is not my goal or mission in this article. I agree with Gay and believe her perspectives here around the danger in assuming that Black teachers, for instance, carry all the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary to successfully teach African American students. To the contrary, there is a huge range of diversity even within groups, and we cannot oversimplify the characteristics of any group of teachers. I have observed some less than successful and knowledgeable teachers from various ethnic backgrounds, including Black teachers. Moreover, as Gay explained,

> ...knowledge and use of the cultural heritages, experiences, and perspectives of ethnic groups [of students] in teaching are far more important to improving student achievement than shared group membership. Similar ethnicity between students and teachers may be potentially beneficial, but it is not a guarantee of pedagogical effectiveness. (p. 205)

Still, based on the findings of my study, I want to focus on Black teachers' experiences and success both pre and post desegregation for insights about how all teachers can deepen and broaden their knowledge and understanding to better meet the needs and situations of students at present, particularly among Black students. In addition, I hope to encourage and inspire other researchers to continue investigating what we know about successful teachers of Black students. By outlining several central suppositions that emerged from this study and from the literature, more research is needed to build on what we know (theoretically) and how we know it (empirically).

Black teachers and their multiple roles, identities, and contributions have been the focus of many research articles, commentaries, and conceptual analyses

(Foster, 1997; Milner, 2003; Mitchell, 1998). The seminal work of Michele Foster, Jackie Irvine, and Vanessa Siddle-Walker, for instance, has helped shape the field for the study of and implications for Black teachers and their teaching. The literature on Black teachers and their teaching is conceptualized in several important ways: it spans the pre-desegregation era to the present and focuses on P-12 schools as well as higher education. The research is clear that having more Black teachers in the teaching force could potentially improve a wide range of situations and needs of Black students. However, we must not focus exclusively on the recruitment and retention of Black teachers in P-12 classrooms. Rather, I argue that understanding Black teachers and Black students' situations and needs are also important to equip teachers from various ethnic backgrounds with the knowledge and skills necessary to become successful teachers of Black students. In other words, what teacher education programs and teachers do until more Black teachers are recruited is perhaps just as important as recruiting teachers of color for public school classrooms. Thus, what can we learn about Black teachers and their teaching of Black students to benefit all teachers, regardless of their ethnic, cultural, and racial background?

Black Teachers and their Teaching

Much has been written about Black teachers, their experiences, their curriculum development, and their teaching in public school classrooms (Dixson, 2002; Foster, 1990, 1997; Holmes, 1990; Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Irvine & Irvine, 1983; King, 1993; Milner & Howard, 2004; Milner, 2003; Monroe & Obidah, 2004), and this literature is not limited to public schools but also highlights Black teachers' experiences in higher education, namely in teacher education programs (Baszile, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1996; McGowan, 2000; Milner, & Smithey, 2003). Agee (2004) explained that a Black teacher "brings a desire to construct a unique identity as a teacher...she [or he] negotiates and renegotiates that identity" (p. 749) to meet their objectives and to meet the needs and expectations of their students.

hooks (1994) makes it explicit that Black female teachers carry with them gendered experiences and perspectives that have been (historically) silenced and marginalized in the discourses about teaching and learning. Although teaching has often been viewed as 'women's work,' Black women teachers and their worldviews have often been left out of the discussions—even when race was the topic of discussion (hooks, 1994). Similarly, in colleges of education and particularly preservice and inservice programs, the programs are largely tailored to meet the needs of White female teachers (Gay, 2000), and Black teachers along with other teachers of color (male and female) are left out of the discussion. Where curricular materials were concerned in her study, Agee (2004) explained that "the teacher education texts used in the course made recommendations for using diverse texts or teaching diverse students based on the assumption that preservice teachers are White" (p. 749). Still, Black teachers often have distinctive goals, missions, decision-making, and pedagogical styles that are important to understand.

In her analyses of valuable African American teachers during segregation, Siddle-Walker (2000) explained

> consistently remembered for their high expectations for student success, for their dedication, and for their demanding teaching style, these [Black] teachers appear to have worked with the assumption that their job was to be certain that children learned the material presented. (p. 265-66)

Clearly, these teachers worked overtime to help their African American students learn; although these teachers were teaching their students during segregation, they were also preparing their students for a world of integration (Siddle-Walker, 1996). Moreover, as Tillman (2004) suggested, "these teachers saw potential in their Black students, considered them to be intelligent, and were committed to their success" (p. 282). There was something authentic about these Black teachers. Indeed, they saw their jobs and roles to extend far beyond the hallways of the school or their classroom. They had a mission to teach their students because they realized the risks and consequences in store for their students if they did not teach them and if the students did not learn. An undereducated and under-prepared Black student, during a time when society did not want nor expect these students to succeed, could likely lead to destruction (drug abuse, prison, or even death).

Pang and Gibson (2001) maintained "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 often not found in textbooks or viewpoints often omitted" (p. 260-61). *Thus, Black teachers, similar to all teachers, are texts themselves, but these teachers' text pages are inundated with life experiences and histories of racism, sexism, and oppression, along with those of strength, perseverance, and success*. Consequently, these teachers' texts are rich and empowering—they have the potential to help students understand the world (Freire, 1998; Wink, 2000) and to change it.

However, as evident from the literature, these African American teachers still often felt irrelevant and voiceless in urban, rural, and suburban contexts—even when the topic of conversation was multicultural education (see, Buendia, Gitlin, & Doumbia, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1996; Milner & Woolfolk Hoy, 2003; Pang & Gibson, 2001). These experiences are unfortunate given the attrition rate of Black teachers in the teaching force. Black teachers are leaving the teaching profession and quickly (Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Howard, 2003).

Pre and post desegregation, Black teachers have been able to develop and implement optimal learning opportunities for students—yet in the larger school context, they were often ridiculed for being too radical or for not being 'team players.' As evident in my own research (Milner, 2003) and this study, Black teachers can feel isolated and ostracized because they often offered a counter-story or counter-narrative (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Parker, 1998; Solorzano, & Yosso, 2001; Tate, 1997) to the pervasive views of their mostly White colleagues. Black teachers' ways of connecting with their students were successful—yet often

inconsistent with their non-Black colleagues. In short, different does not necessarily mean deficient, wrong, or deficit.

Black teachers can have a meaningful impact on Black students' academic and social success because they often deeply understand Black students' situations and their needs. For instance, Mitchell (1998), in her qualitative study of eight recently retired African American teachers, reminded us of the insight Black teachers can have in helping us understand the important connections between the affective domain and student behavior. Building on lessons learned from Black teachers, Mitchell explained that in order for teachers to establish and to maintain student motivation and engagement, they should be aware of the students' feelings and their social needs. Students' feelings and emotions matter in how they experience education; Black students often bring a set of situations that have been grounded in racism, inequity, and misunderstanding (Milner, 2002). Racism and inequity can emerge not only through their daily interactions but also through institutional and structural circumstances.

The teachers in Mitchell's study "were critically aware of the experiences of the students, both in and out of school, and of the contexts shaping these experiences" (p. 105). The teachers in the study were able to connect with the students in the urban environments because they understood that the students' behaviors (whether good or bad) were often a result of their out of school experiences. There were reasons behind the students' behavioral choices. In Mitchell's words,

> … [The teachers] recalled situations in which factors outside of the school adversely affected students' behavior. They described students listless because of hunger and sleepy because they worked at night and on weekends to help support younger siblings. They described students easily distracted and sometimes belligerent because of unstable living environments. (p. 109)

Thus, these retired teachers understood the important connections between the students' home situations and school, and they were able to build on and learn from those out of school experiences and situations in their teaching. The Black teachers understood that many of their students were doing drugs, living in poverty, and were acting as adults in their homes in terms of bringing in money to support their families. However, the teachers did not use these realities as an escape. The teachers still put forth the effort necessary teach and to teach well.

It is easy for teachers to grant students "permission to fail" (Ladson-Billings, 2002) when they consider the complex and challenging lives of their students outside of the classroom. However, successful teachers of Black students maintain high expectations for their students (Siddle-Walker, 1996) and do not pity them but empathize with the students (McAllister & Irvine, 2002) so that students have the best possible chance of mobilizing themselves and empowering their families and communities. To explain, teachers who are committed to improving the lives of their students do not accept mediocrity, and they encourage and insist that their students reach their full capacity, mainly because these teachers understand that

allowing students to 'just get by' can surely leave them in their current situation or even worse. Thus, teachers cannot adopt approaches that do not push their students—high expectations, as Siddle-Walker (1996) explained, are necessary to help the students emancipate themselves and to move beyond their current situations. Irvine (1998) described an interaction between a student and teacher below by borrowing James Vasquez' notion, "warm demanders," a description of teachers of color "who provide a tough-minded, no-nonsense, structured, and disciplined classroom environment for kids whom society has psychologically and physically abandoned" (p. 56):

> "That's enough of your nonsense, Darius. Your story does not make sense. I told you time and time again that you must stick to the theme I gave you. Now sit down." Darius, a first grader trying desperately to tell his story, proceeds slowly to his seat with his head hanging low. (Irene Washington, an African American Teacher of 23 Years; From Jacqueline Irvine's (1998) *Warm Demanders*)

An outsider listening and observing the Black teacher's tone and expectations for Darius may frown upon the teacher's approach. However, this teacher's approach is grounded in a history and a reality that is steeped in care for the student's best interest. In short, the teacher understood quite deeply the necessity to help Darius learn. She understood the necessity to "talk the talk." There is a sense of urgency not only for Irene to "teach her children well but to save and protect them from the perils of urban street life" (p. 56). Indeed, Black teachers often have a commitment to and a deep understanding of Black students and their situations and needs because both historically and presently these teachers experience and understand the world in ways similar to their students. In addition, the teachers have a commitment to the students because they have a stake in the African American community. Students often do not want to let their teachers down because the teachers are concerned for the students (Foster, 1997), and this concern has been described as other mothering (Collins, 1991), and I would add other fathering. The students sense this care of the teachers, and this care pushes them to do their best in the teachers' classroom.

Method

In an attempt to understand some of the impact of *Brown* for Black teachers, for Black students, and for Black communities, I invited six experts (educational researchers) to participate in an interview. For the purposes of this study, I focus specifically on these researchers' perspectives of the experiences and impact of Black teachers[2] to provide information for other teachers, teachers from various ethnic backgrounds, on successful teaching of Black students and to think about a research agenda that points to some central suppositions for future study. The six experts that I selected and invited to participate in the interview met several criteria: (a) they had engaged in research and writing about *Brown* (and in some cases taught courses that highlighted *Brown* from various perspectives); (b) they were experts and researchers who had been in their respective fields of study for

longer than five years; and (c) they were willing to participate in the interview and follow-up interviews if necessary. I found it necessary to have conversations with experts around the country who had studied these and similar issues to get their viewpoints at the 50-year anniversary of *Brown* in order to assess where we have been, to think about where we are presently, and to chart a research agenda about where we are going.

From the six invitations extended, three experts agreed to participate in the study. I conducted the phone interviews, which lasted approximately 45-minutes to an hour. Participants in the study were asked several questions. As themes and issues emerged throughout the interviews, follow up questions were posed. Thus, these interview questions (listed below) are not exhaustive. Rather, they represent the thrust of questions posed: (a) what happened to Black teachers after the *Brown* decision (e.g., morale, dedication, self-concept, and retention)? (b) What impact might the *Brown* decision have on Black teachers leaving the profession? (c) How might *Brown* have influenced the education of Black students? (d) Why is it important to have Black teachers educating Black students? (e) How might we think about increasing the number of Black teachers in the teaching profession? (f) What types of questions should we be researching and addressing regarding the *Brown* decision around Black teachers, Black students, and Black communities? (g) In other words, where should we (researchers, teachers, and policy makers) go from here in order to reverse (Ford, 1996) the underachievement of Black students? Finally, the experts were given the opportunity to add additional comments at the end of the interview. Interestingly, consistent features and characteristics of successful teaching and teachers emerged in the interviews, which spoke to the question: What can we (teacher educators, other Black teachers, and teachers in general) learn about the teaching of successful Black teachers and their practice that can benefit others in the profession?

Analysis of Interviews

An interpretive perspective (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) was used to guide the interview analyses in this study. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Upon reviewing the interview transcripts, themes emerged from all three transcripts. In several instances, the themes overlapped, and I used them to guide much of the discussion in subsequent sections of this article. As themes emerged throughout the interviews, I developed coding categories to better understand the issues and to organize the data. These categories were named conceptually but were, in essence, themes that were stressed and pointed out by the participants to guide further inquiry. The posing of interview questions followed an inductive cycle, where a broad and general question was posed and experts were given the opportunity to expand upon those issues based on their perspectives and knowledge base.

The Participants

Participant one[3] (hereafter referred to as Barbara) is an endowed professor at a research University. She has been in the field of education for longer than 20 years. Participant two (hereafter referred to as Vince) is a lead researcher in a research institute. Vince has been in the field of education for seven years. Participant three (hereafter referred to as Peggy) is a professor at a research University who has been in the field of education for longer than 20 years. All three participants have written scholarly articles and/or book chapters about the *Brown* decision, Black teachers, and/or Black students. Moreover, in two cases, the researchers have written books that focus (in some form and to some extent) on these important matters. The discussion shifts now to reveal the researchers' perspectives, offered in the interviews.

Researchers' Perspectives

In this section, I discuss several themes that emerged from the interviews with the researchers: Black teachers' importance and refocusing teacher education; roadblocks, barriers, and role-models; and culturally informed relationships.

Black Teachers' Importance and Refocusing Teacher Education

Among other issues, one theme that consistently emerged among the interviewed researchers when asked about the educational experiences of Black students as related to *Brown* was that of the need for more Black teachers. The participants all stressed the importance of having Black teachers in the teaching profession. In addition, the participants also stressed the importance of refocusing how teachers are educated. To illuminate, the researchers stressed the impact of, the relevance of, and the possibilities of having Black teachers teaching in public schools for the benefit of all students and especially Black students. All three experts reported the great need for an increase in the Black teaching force. For instance, Barbara and Vince stressed the importance of recruiting Black teachers, particularly for the benefit of Black students.

It is also important to note that Barbara stressed that White teachers [or teachers of any ethnic background] can be successful teachers of Black students. Barbara's perspective is consistent with that of other research that shows how teachers from any ethnic background can be successful teachers of Black students (Cooper, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994). However, Barbara also made it clear that in order for more meaningful learning to occur with Black students, "we're going to have to change dramatically the way we train teachers." Barbara's attention to the ways in which we educate Black teachers suggests that teacher educators, policy makers, principals, and teachers need to focus on more innovative ways to educate teachers as these teachers work to provide learning opportunities for students in P-12 classrooms; that is, we cannot focus all our attention on recruiting Black teachers but must (re)focus our attention on how teachers are educated such as building on successful features and characteristics of successful teachers from any background, including Black teachers.

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While the interviewed researchers pointed out that many Black teachers serve as role models for their students, Barbara explained that there are too many barriers and roadblocks present that prevent Black teachers from entering the teaching profession.

Roadblocks, Barriers, and Role-Models

On one level, Vince explained that Black students need "to see other Black teachers" in order to have role models. He stated that, "What people experience day-to-day effectuates how they view and vision the possibility of their lives." Pre-*Brown*, Black students went from schools where all of their teachers and principals were Black to schools (post-*Brown*) where most, if not all, of their teachers were White. The magnitude of Black students' "now being taught by White teachers" cannot be stressed enough, according to Vince. One can only imagine the quality of instruction that Black students received from White teachers, some of whom were opposed to the very notion of desegregation and teaching Black students from the very outset of the *Brown* decision. New Black teachers as well as Black students seemed to lose their Black teacher role models. Consequently, Black teachers, in large measure, started to select alternative fields. Whereas, historically, teaching, in the Black community was perceived as one of the most prestigious professions for Blacks (Foster, 1997), the perception of the teaching profession changes when this 'equilibrium' is imbalanced according to Vince. Black students and new Black teachers need to see experienced, successful Black teachers. To illuminate, in Vince's words:

> …If students are growing up in schools that they don't see Black teachers, that they don't see Black principals or Black superintendents, how the hell are they going to imagine themselves being one?

Role models are critical in helping students decide on a profession and in helping students visualize the possibilities of their life.

On another level, Barbara stressed that

> teacher education programs and states are going to have to eliminate or re-envision some of the barriers and road blocks that keep Black teachers out of the profession. And most of them [barriers and road blocks] come from the standardized tests of assessment that summarily declare that these Black candidates, in teacher education, aren't worthy or capable enough to become teachers.

Importantly, the push to recruit and to retain talented Black teachers is framed by these teachers' abilities to relate to and to connect to other Black students, socially, academically, pedagogically, and culturally. Barbara explained:

> And so Black teachers are important to have not because we want them [only] as role models, but that's important. But that's not the only reason we want [and need Black teachers]. We want them because they have a way of teaching [Black] kids that leads to achievement. They know how to come up with examples in the kids' lives that make the lessons come alive, and they [Black students] retain the material.

In essence, both Barbara and Vince stressed the importance of Black teachers' contributions as role modes for Black students. Further, Barbara pointed to some central reasons she believed many capable Black teachers are not making it into the classroom: roadblocks and barriers (primarily standardized tests). Still, if the researchers have found that teachers from various ethnic backgrounds can be successful teachers of Black students, we need to further investigate the extent to which teachers can become role models and how they develop and provide vivid examples to help Black students learn. Thus, successful teachers of Black students act as role-models and develop pedagogical strategies that bring lessons to life through examples provided.

Barbara and Vince consistently referenced the importance of cultural connections between Black teachers and their Black students as a fundamental reason to increase the Black teaching force. At the same time, how do other teachers (Black) and teachers from various—different—ethnic backgrounds develop those connections with their Black students?

Culturally Informed Relationships

In many instances, there are cultural informed relationships that exist between Black teachers and Black students. In addition to Black teachers' having the ability to construct meaningful instructional examples with Black students, Peggy pointed to the connections between the hidden curriculum (or what students learn through the implicit nature of teaching and learning) and Black teachers. In other words, Peggy stressed the importance and benefits of Black teachers teaching Black students because there are inherent, unstated, lessons that emerge in classroom interactions that show up between teachers and students. For instance, she stressed that "cultural connections" are often prevalent in relationships with Black teachers and Black students. These culturally informed relationships allow Black teachers to develop meaningful, relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1994) and responsive (Gay and Kirkland, 2003) curricula and pedagogy in classrooms with Black students. To elaborate, Peggy stated,

> It comes in subtly [or through the hidden curriculum]; it comes in the talks that they [Black teachers] had with the students. It comes up in club activities…so the hidden curriculum was to explain what it means to be Black in American, to [be] role models…And I would add this deep understanding of culture. It's not just that I have high expectations of you and...believe in your capacity to achieve, and they're [Black teachers] willing to push you [Black students]. The teachers also had an intuitive understanding of the culture because they lived it…I [the teacher] live in the community. I go to church in the community. You know, in this segregated world...

Peggy discussed how Black teachers often expressed and demonstrated "high expectations, deep care for Black children, [and] beliefs in their [Black students'] capacity to succeed." These issues were inherent in the implicit curriculum as Peggy explained. Peggy goes on to explain what she refers to as the "bottom line:"

> But the bottom line is that...teachers had the advantage of understanding the culture and being apart of it [during segregation]. They didn't have to be taught it. We [Black teachers] understood it. They understood you don't talk down to parents, okay?—That you don't treat people negatively. I mean they understood these things, wherein after desegregation, we're still trying to figure out how to understand it.

Thus, the idea is that Black teachers, by virtue of their out of school interactions and their deep cultural understanding of what it meant and means to be Black in America, often brought a level of knowledge and connectedness into the classroom that showed up in their teaching. Because Black teachers often interacted with Black students and parents outside of school (in the grocery stores, and at church, for instance) they had an insider's perspective on how Black students lived and experienced life outside of the classroom, and they were able to use this knowledge and understanding in the classroom with their students—to provide optimal learning opportunities for students. Black teachers were equipped to bring cultural understanding and connections into the classroom, partly because of how they lived their lives outside of the classroom. In essence, there were culturally informed relationships that existed in the classrooms between Black teachers and Black students that enabled success for all involved. We need to know more about how teachers can build cultural knowledge and how they can use that knowledge in the classroom.

Teaching and learning extended beyond the walls of the school as teachers found themselves sitting next to the parents of their students in church, for example. In Barbara's words,

> Many of the Black teachers were also Sunday school teachers at church. They lived in the community. And so they lived in the community and went to church with these [Black] kids; these things all connected in some interesting kinds of ways…it's not the building, necessarily. It's not the supplies, but it's the relationship between a teacher and a student that is the critical piece for Black kids. When you take that out of the equation, everything else fails. It doesn't matter how fine of a building, or how nice the books are, you've got to have a confident teacher who your kids all trust and care for. And if the teacher doesn't like the kids, it all falls apart.

The relationships that existed in the classroom enabled success for teachers and students alike. The researchers that I interviewed stressed the importance of teachers' ability to establish relationships with their students, and they believed that teachers from various backgrounds can develop these relationships to benefit Black students.

The discussion shifts to discuss, in more depth, some of the findings in this study. In particular, I discuss and conclude with features of successful teachers of African American students as I believe these features and characteristics can serve as data to assist all teachers in teaching Black students well. Moreover, what issues and perspectives as outlined in the previous section need additional attention through careful inquiry?

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Discussion and Conclusions

Clearly, teachers from any ethnic background can be effective and successful teachers of Black students (Cooper, 2003; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). As Gay (2000) stressed "the ability of teachers to make their instruction personally meaningful and culturally congruent for students account for their success, not their [ethnic] identity *per se*" (p. 205). However, much can be learned from the ways in which Black teachers have engaged and empowered Black students (both pre and post desegregation). Again, one of my goals in this article is to discuss some of the pervasive strategies, philosophies and characteristics of Black teachers that can help teachers, any teacher, become more effective and successful pedagogues of Black students. As evident in this article, teachers can provide learning environments that foster student learning, and many Black teachers, historically, have succeeded in fostering optimal learning opportunities for students, especially for Black students.

In figure 1, I attempt to outline some important features of successful Black teachers of Black students. The figure could prove useful in at least two interrelated ways: (1) the chart outlines a set of suppositions around practice that appear central to successful teachers of Black students, and other teachers—teachers from any ethnic background could benefit from the list; and (2) the chart provides a list of suppositions that surely need to be (re)visited, (re)searched, and (re)investigated. That is, replicate studies and studies that investigate the suppositions can possibly assist researchers, teachers, policy-makers, and teacher educators as they work collectively to improve the learning opportunities for Black students. It is important to note that the features in figure 1 emerged from past and current research as well as other scholars' research (as outlined in previous sections of this article). It is my desire that teachers of any ethnic background would learn from what Black teachers often bring into the classroom as all teachers work to improve their practices with students.

Figure 1
Suppositions of Successful Teachers and Teaching

Culturally Responsive (Gay, 2000) Classroom Management (Weinstein, Thomlinson-Clarke & Curran, 2004) Approaches: Teachers may be less likely to refer their Black students to the office for suspension and expulsion because they implement firm, no nonsense management styles in their abilities to create optimal learning opportunities and spaces where learning can occur. They understand how to get students involved in lessons, and they have strict and successful classroom management approaches.

Culturally Informed Relationships: Teachers understand Black students and their experiences both inside and outside of school. They use cultural knowledge about the students' (home) community to build and sustain relationships with them.

Mentoring and Role-Models: Students often see the possibilities of their futures by the mentoring and role-modeling from their teachers. Black students often think: 'if they (as Black teachers, principals, and superintendents) can be successful, I can too.'

Parental Connections: They learn and deepen their knowledge, understanding, and awareness about Black parents and their concerns in many out of school contexts such as church or the beauty shop. They respect parents of their students; they do not insult or talk down to parents, and the parents respect the teachers. They work *together* for the benefit of the students.

Culturally Congruent (Gay, 2000) Instructional Practices: Teachers refuse to allow their students to fail (Ladson-Billings, 2002). They develop appropriate, relevant, responsive, and meaningful learning opportunities for students. Teachers have high expectations for students and push students to do their best work. Teachers often see expertise, talents, and creativity in their students, and they insist that students reach their full capacity to learn.

Counter-Narratives on Behalf of Black Students; Teachers offer a counter-story or counter-perspective on the situations that Black students find themselves dealing with in school. Because of their deep cultural knowledge about Black students, these teachers often advocate for Black students in spaces where others misunderstand their life experiences, worldviews, and realities.

In conclusion, the loss of African American teachers and the interactions Black students had with these teachers has been detrimental to the overall success of African American students. Hudson and Holmes (1994) explained that: "…the loss of African American teachers in public school settings has had a lasting negative impact on all students, particularly African American students and the communities in which they reside…"(p. 389). More than anything, Siddle-Walker (2000) concluded that because of the hard work and dedication of Black teachers "students did not want to let them down" (p. 265). The students put forth effort and achieved academically and socially because

> teachers held extracurricular tutoring sessions, visited homes and churches in the community where they taught, even when they did not live in the community, and provided guidance about "life" responsibilities. They talked with students before and after class, carried a student home if it meant that the child would be able to participate in some extracurricular activity he or she would not otherwise participate in, purchased school supplies for their classroom, and helped to supply clothing for students whose parents had fewer financial resources and scholarship money for those who needed help to go to college. (Siddle-Walker, 2000, p. 265)

In short, much can be learned from the success of Black teachers with Black students. While the increase in the Black teaching force could potentially be advantageous for Black students and all students, learning about how and what these teachers have done to be successful with Black students has the potential to assist us in thinking about the education of teachers (any teacher—from any ethnic background) at the present time. That is, what are some characteristics, philosophies, and insights about Black teachers that other teachers, from any ethnic background, can use to improve their experiences and impact with Black students? In addition, it is important for researchers to continue this line of inquiry to build on, substantiate, and redirect what we know and how we know it as we work to provide the very best learning opportunities for all students—and especially Black students.

Notes

[1] Throughout this article, the terms "Black" and "African American" are used interchangeably.

[2] It is important to note that these "experts" had studied *Brown* in some dimension of their research. In some cases, the experts may form speculative arguments about the nature of questions posed because they had not studied (with any depth) that particular issue. In such cases, I was sure to frame these speculative claims as such. That is, I trust the level of expertise that the experts shared but understood that in some cases the researchers were relying on a data set that *related to* an issue rather than focus *specifically on* that issue. Finally, the terms "experts" and "participants" will be used interchangeably throughout this article.

[3] Pseudonyms are used to mask the identity of the participants and their institutional affiliations.

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