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LIFT EVERY VOICE: A NARRATIVE STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BLACK FEMALE EDUCATORS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

This dissertation, written by Rachelle A. Surrancy, and entitled Lift Every Voice: A Narrative Study of the Lived Experiences of Black Female Educators in Public Schools, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work, first, to my parents, Donald and Olive Thompkins, two of the most smart, witty and wise people I know. My parents established the importance of education early on in my and my siblings' lives and made decisions early in our schooling experiences that positioned us for academic success. Because of their wisdom, encouragement and support, my sister, brother and I are all first-generation college graduates; they enabled and empowered us to do, to be and to become what they could not. Although Daddy is no longer here, his legacy lives on even through this work, as he planted the seed and encouraged me years ago to pursue my doctorate – my reluctance and hesitation would not wane until ten years after his passing. Notwithstanding, Daddy, I have completed the task.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

LIFT EVERY VOICE: A NARRATIVE STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BLACK FEMALE EDUCATORS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by

Rachelle A. Surrancy

Florida International University, 2022

Miami, Florida

Professor Ethan Kolek, Major Professor

Black female educators (BFE's) are becoming an anomaly in public school education. This decline, which can be traced back to the period of desegregation, has persisted, as Black female educators comprise only 5% of the current teacher workforce; and this at a time when their presence is needed and critically important to the successful educational experiences and outcomes of all students, but particularly Black students. While much of the research focused on Black female educators has centered around factors contributing to their decisions to leave the field, this dissertation, through the critical lenses of Critical Race Theory (CRT), and Black Feminist Thought (BFT) explored the lived experiences of Black female educators in public school education, to lift their stories and provide insight into why they remain in and committed to their work. Using qualitative research methods, a narrative inquiry study was conducted with five Black female educators teaching in high-poverty, high-minority schools in the urban core. Participants shared their lived experiences through a series of interviews and the resulting data was analyzed using Braun and Clark's (2008) thematic analysis approach. The findings revealed that despite challenges faced – school disparities, organizational conditions, disparaging treatment, and school accountability – their faith, their resilience, their resistance (as activism), their connections with students and other colleagues, and their experience, speak to their commitment to and to remain in the work.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The rich and storied legacy of Black female educators, (BFEs), began in the Pre-Brown era of early schooling for Blacks in the South. Positionally, they were the majority, as data from as early as 1910 shows, Black women were seventy-six percent of the teaching workforce in schools designated for Black children (Hill-Jackson, 2017). This was in large part because after emancipation, teaching was one of few professions accessible to Black women (Hill-Jackson, 2017). Moreover, because newly freed Blacks hailed education as the great equalizer, Black female educators were positioned and perceived as up-lifters of the race; from the time of Reconstruction, when the first Freedmen Schools were established, through the emergence of segregated schools in the South (Irvine, 1989). In their classrooms, they were charged with not just teaching Black children, but preparing them initially, to embrace the anticipated new identity that accompanied their constitutionally assigned freedom, and subsequently to carry the responsibility of that freedom, to the extent possible, as both progenitors and protectors of it (Irvine, 1989).

With this mandate, they were charged to ensure that students had the tools necessary to access the dominant discourses (Delpit, 1992) in which they would need to be well-versed, in order to engage the systems of society that Blacks had been locked-out of because of their enslaved status. Understanding the burden that this new generation of young, freed people and those beyond them would carry as representatives of the new iteration of the Black race, BFE’s set high expectations for their students (Siddle Walker, 2001; Strong-Leek, 2008), and became their students' fiercest advocates (Siddle Walker, 2018), as they equated their students' success with the success of the entire Black race (King, 1993). Pre-Brown, Black female educators were revered and respected by their respective communities, for the important work in which they engaged (Loder-Jackson, et. al, 2016; Shipp, 2000). This prominence, which they enjoyed in the Black community through the Pre-Brown era would be involuntarily exchanged for their plight with the ushering in of the Post-Brown era in education, through the landmark *Brown v Board* (1954) Supreme Court decision. The *Brown* decision ruled that the Supreme Court's 1896 *Plessy* verdict of separate but equal, which up until 1954 was the standard, was unconstitutional, and subsequently laid the foundation for school desegregation. This era in education, which has come to be known as the Post-Brown era (Hill-Jackson, 2017), can also be marked as the beginning of the plight of Black female educators in public school education.

Statement of the Research Problem

The problem is Black female educators are becoming an anomaly in public school education. Since the 1930's, when greater than 70% of Black female college graduates entered the field of public education, there has been a slow, but steady thinning of this group in the field (Shipp, 2000). This disappearance is evident nationally with all Black educators, as data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2017), highlights that of the 3.8 million teachers only 6.7% or 256,000 of them are Black and only 5% of them are Black women. Foster (1989) holds, that this decline, which can be traced back to the genesis of Desegregation, is in large part a direct result of "racism", which Foster maintains, has over time, adversely and seriously impacted the "lives and careers" of Black educators (p. 124). This phenomenon is perhaps of critical importance at present, because with the persisting disparities in the system of public school education, which have now been further exacerbated as a result of the COVID-19 Global Pandemic, the social unrest driven by a political climate wherein violence against Black men and women is sanctioned, and the assault on American Democracy and democratic principles is supported, the achievement gap will widen, leaving historically marginalized students further behind.

The dilemma the disappearance of Black female educators creates is this – Black teachers play a vital role in the educational experiences of all students, but particularly Black students. Irvine (1989), citing Meier, Stewart, and England (1989), maintain that Black teachers are "key" to the schooling success of Black students, and perhaps more crucially; increasing them in numbers proportionate to the number of Black students being educated in the public education system, is the "single most important factor" in combating and confronting de facto racism and discrimination in their new and current iterations and by so doing, close the achievement gap (p. 55). As such, there is a critical need to lift, engage and privilege the voices of Black female educators about their lived experiences in public school education, and to understand their resolve to remain in and committed to their work.

This pressing problem was closely examined through research, within the context of the Miami Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) District, where Black female educators, at present, are underrepresented as they comprise only a quarter of the teaching workforce (MDCPS, 2021). Miami-Dade County Public Schools is the largest school district in the state of Florida, and the fourth (4th) largest urban school district in the United States. MDCPS is located in the southeastern region of the United States, and situated in Miami-Dade County, which encompasses both the City of Miami, and the greater metropolitan areas and surrounding municipalities, from north Dade to south Dade. MDCPS has been rated an "A" District by the State of Florida for the past three years. MDCPS services over 300,000 students in grades K-12 and employs more than 18,000 teachers. Approximately 92 percent of MDCPS' students identify as minority, with 72.7 percent Hispanic, and 19.2 percent as Black. Additionally, 72.8 percent of teachers employed with MDCPS identify as White or Hispanic, and 25.5 percent identify as Black.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the narrative inquiry study was, to, through the critical lenses of Critical Race Theory (CRT), and Black Feminist Thought (BFT) explore the lived experiences of Black female educators in public school education, as a means to lift their stories and strengthen the voice of this collective group, who are critical to this field. Moreover, by highlighting the experiences of this group, this study provided insight into why they remain in and committed to their work.

Research Question(s)

The following questions were advanced to guide exploration in this study: (1) what are the lived experiences of Black female educators in public school education?; (2) how do these experiences inform and influence their work?; and (3) how do these experiences influence their commitment to remain in the work?

Statement of Significance

With the disappearance of Black female educators in the field, at a time when research studies evidence their importance to the success of Black students, this study's significance is clear; as lifting the voices and highlighting the experiences of those who choose to remain committed to the work despite their encounters with racism at their intersecting locations, may give insight into how to disrupt the decades-long decline. This work was undertaken so that school districts' policy-making boards, district-level administrators, and school site administrators may gain insight which results in changes to existing or the creation of new programs, structures and systems of support to increase the number of Black women educators who are critically needed. This study added to the body of literature on Black teacher retention and race in education. This study also added to the limited scholarly literature focused on Black female educators and their experiences as educators in K-12 classrooms. Moreover, with only one quarter of the current teacher workforce identifying as Black, this study's implications for MDCPS may provoke action, as data presented at an April 2021 School Board meeting evidencing that Black students in MDCPS are lagging behind their White and Hispanic counterparts in all metrics, may signal an urgent need for change in policy and/or practice.

Delimitations

The populations central to my study were, Black female educators. Being Black in America, and specifically, Black American Descendants of Slavery (ADOS), informs the way in which one experiences racism, and if you are Black female, sexism. As such, it is important to distinguish that this study focused on capturing the experiences of Black female educators who identify as American ADOS. From the common experiences of this collective, according to Hill-Collins (2000), who identifies them as *African American* women, emerges a shared understanding of "Black womanhood," and also provides a unique lens through which their collective "Black and women-centered worldviews" are framed (p. 13). It is this unique knowledge that this study explored.

In addition to narrowing the focus of this study to Black female educators who identify as ADOS, the study also narrowed its focus to include Black female educators: (1) who were current practitioners, (2) whose teaching careers span at least seven (7) years, and (3) whose experience had primarily been in the urban core of public schools, where large numbers of Black, low socio-economic, students are educated. It is critical to engage Black female educators who are currently on the front lines in schools that are in the urban core, and who have been for some time, as they have real-time, first-hand knowledge of the challenges they encounter educating while Black and female – experiences that may also be key to slowing the decline of BFEs in the field.

Assumptions

One assumption embedded in my research was racism is alive and well and is very much a part of the day to day lived experiences of Black female educators, at each of their intersecting locations, and that these experiences, inform the way in which they approach their work. It was further assumed that some Black female educators' experiences, rather than diminish, actually strengthens their resolve to remain in and committed to their work, as they develop subjugated knowledge (Collins, 2009).

One implication of these assumptions on my research was that BFEs who readily discern racism masked as common place, taken-for-granted, status-quo, everyday occurrences, within the context of their work in public schools, used these experiences to build specific knowledge critical to their work and existence. Moreover, another implication of these assumptions on my research was that BFEs who have been more successful at navigating being Black and female in this sphere, provide a road map for how to slow the decades-long decline in the number of BFE's in the field.

Theoretical Frameworks

As critical social theories, critical race theory (CRT) and Black feminist thought (BFT), were the complementary lenses used in this study, to frame the experiences of BFEs, for analysis. While CRT provided a prism through which to critique the structural racism inherent in the system of public school education, BFT provided a way to explore how BFEs, from a collective perspective and/or standpoint (Collins, 2009), engage with and respond to this system within the context of their work. Although a more detailed explanation outlining their early framers, inceptions as bodies of thought, major tenets and how I will engage them in support of my research, is provided In Chapter 2, I offer brief overviews here of each theoretical framework.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

CRT is defined as "an analytical framework on race and racism in the law and society" (Lynn et al., 2006, p. 259). This framework came to be used across disciplines as a means and a method to assess the "impact of race and racism" on larger contexts in society. According to Lynn et al. (2006), Crenshaw et al. (1995 & 2002) offer that CRT was first introduced in the 1980s, by law professors and law students, as a "race-based critique" that grew out of "Critical Legal Studies conferences" that were held at the Law Schools of Harvard and UC-Berkeley (p. 259). The professors and students raised questions that challenged the notion that the law was, by nature, "objective" (p. 259). They further asserted that the law was structured to "privilege" those who were "wealthy and powerful," while denying the poor and powerless the "right" to engage the courts "as a means to redress" (p. 259).

CRT advances that: racism is pervasive and systemic, and has been a normal daily fact of life and society; race is a social construct, and as such is not fixed or static; as a "oppositional scholarship," is conceptually grounded in the "experiences of people of color; institutional policies must be analyzed contextually and historically; racism advances and benefits the interest of white – only to the extent that the dominant race will benefit, are laws, and practices permitted that also benefit people of color (Interest Convergence) (Lynn et al., 2006, p. 260; Delgado et al., 2012, p. 9).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) in Education

CRT is used as a tool to analyze the effects of race in education, and to create new ways of thinking towards how to better educate historically minoritized students. Scholars highlight the evolution of CRT in education, as a means to show the diversity of its origins as an important tool in the field of Education, but also to raise how the framework of "critical race studies in law, when applied to "studies of race and education," bridges the ideological with the material as a means to make critical connections about "race and class in American schooling" (Lynn et al. 2006, p. 266). This, (the wherewithal to critically analyze "racism in education") Lynn et al. (2006), posited was revolutionary, as it provided a roadmap to "new ways to think about the failure of schools" in order to more effectively "educate minority populations" (p. 267). Scholars continue to explore the impact of CRT in various spheres of the education arena; namely its placement in Qualitative Research, teaching pedagogies, such as critical race pedagogies, teacher education, and educational policy (Lynn et al., 2006, p. 270-279). But perhaps CRT's greatest impact, is in its placement in the research focused on the impact of racism in education, (Lynn et al., 200

Black Feminist Thought

With its early framing dating back to the 19th Century, forged in the work and activism of historical Black women figures like Maria Stewart, Sojourner Truth, and Anna Julia Cooper, and more recently, in the social justice movements of the 1960s and 1970s, BFT centers empowering Black women to engage the intersectional oppression – economic (work/labor), political and ideological (negative images and stereotypes) -- to which they have been historically subjugated (Collins, 2009). Moreover, Collins (2009) presents work and family, self-definition, sexual politics, motherhood and activism, as the core themes of BFT.

CRT and BFT supported my research by providing critical lenses through which I: (1) studied the pervasiveness and normalization of racism in the field of education and identified ways in which it is interwoven in the fabric of the system of public school education; (2) explored Black female educators' experiences with the everyday forms of racism they encountered in their daily realities as teachers of color in public schools and how they respond to it, and how this informed and influenced their work; (3) challenged the normative standard by privileging the experiences of Black female educators; and (4) employed the use of *counterstories* as a medium to highlight the lived experiences of Black female educators.

Methodology

This study, by design is qualitative. Qualitative research, centers understanding the meaning people (groups and individuals), assign to problems of humanity and society (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). As the aim of this research was to explore the lived experiences of the Black female educators who participated in this study, I elected to employ Narrative inquiry as the methodological approach around which to organize my research study. As an emergent genre in qualitative research, Narrative inquiry is used to capture the life stories and/or experiences, of an individual or small group of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As such, this methodology was closely aligned to the purpose of this research. In keeping with narrative inquiry CRT and BFT were the conceptual/theoretical frameworks/lenses through which I approached the written textual material (field texts and research texts) of this research, and upon which this study was centered, as a central tenant of both frameworks is privileging the voices of those whose voices are often left-out or silenced – Black female educators are such a group. This research methodology, then, was most aligned to these critical lenses, as narrative inquiry gives room for their stories to be told and thereby their voices to be heard.

The participant group consisted of five (5) Black female educators – Glenda, Terri, Carolyn, Joy and Denise – who are all assigned to schools in the urban core serving poor, predominately Black, student populations. As Creswell and Poth (2018) identify the use of interviews as a primary data collection tool for narrative inquiry methodology, I appropriated the semi-structured interview as the primary data collection technique/tool, as this was the best tool to document the accounts of participants' personal histories and experiences. According to the design of the study, I conducted a set of three interviews per each of the five (5) study participants. I conducted the interviews via the Zoom platform using both audio and video recording (with participant consent), to document each session. Each participant's series of interviews averaged 60 minutes in length each session.

For the purpose of this study, Braun and Clarke's (2006) *thematic analysis* approach to qualitative research was undertaken. This analytical approach to narrative inquiry purposes to, through the use of stories as data, analyze, identify and report patterns and common themes, either within and/or across data sets which are then organized under categories and broader themes (Braun & Clarke 2006). Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) process for thematically analyzing the data derived from the participants' narratives, to familiarize myself with the data sets, I used a transcription service to transcribe the three sets of interviews for each of the five participants' interview series. Data was transcribed verbatim. Each of the five (5) resulting themes – three major themes and two minor themes – were derived from the textual data of the participants' narratives, as each represents a theme that was pervasive in the narrative stories of a participant.

Moreover, as Black women's identities are made invisible and their voices are more often than not, silenced, it was important that I approach each participant's stories, as documented and transcribed into textual data, initially, individually to ensure that I privileged their stories and heard their voices clearly and distinctly. Also, in keeping with the critical/feminist worldview, and with the methodological approach of narrative inquiry, member-checks were embedded in the research process to ensure that the participants' stories were co-constructed and not merely re-storied, (Hatch, 2000; Creswell et al., 2018). In addition, to ensure that participants maintained ownership of their voiced stories, and to ensure credibility, I provided participants with copies of the full transcripts from their interviews, to check them for accuracy and a draft copy of their narrative profiles. Finally, to document my thought processes and decision-making throughout the analysis process, I used both a reflexive/researcher journal and analytical memos as part of an audit trail.

Limitations

One limitation of this study may be the number of participants, as although seven were recruited for participation, only five eventual participants agreed to participate in the study. Moreover, another limitation of the study, may be that all five participants teach elementary-aged students in traditional elementary and K-8 schools. That the perspectives and experiences of Black female educators from Middle and High schools, is missing, may provide opportunity for future studies.

Organization of Dissertation

The research for this dissertation is organized in six chapters. In Chapter 1, the introduction outlined the background framing the study, followed by the statement of the problem, which highlighted the historical factors contributing to the decline of Black female educators in the field, including the role of desegregation in dismantling the Black teacher workforce that existed pre-Brown. Further, the research pointing to the critical need in the field for Black female educators, particularly in the educational experiences of Black students is discussed. Moreover, a preview and discussion of the theoretical frameworks that support this research study, and the research design and methodology employed in the research study, is discussed. Finally, the study's delimitations, limitations, and assumptions, are also outlined in this chapter. In Chapter 2, through a review of the literature, I discuss the continued decline of BFEs in the field of education. In addition, a discussion centered on the general body of literature related to teacher shortages – the historical context and lasting impacts – as well as to teacher retention as a major contributing factor to the teacher shortage crisis; historical factors contributing to Black female teacher shortages, as well as present day factors impacting their retention, and a discussion of the literature highlighting the critical need for the presence of Black female educators in the schooling experiences of Black students in particular, was outlined. Finally, this chapter, through the review of literature, also advanced CRT – its history, major themes and tenants, and applicability to the field of education -- as well as BFT, as critical social theory frameworks through which this problem can be critically and closely examined, and their support of this research study.

In Chapter 3, I outline and describe the study's structure – its research design, chosen methodological approach, and methodology, specifically, the participants and participant selection, and the systems employed for data collection, data analysis and for ensuring data integrity – in an effort to show how these choices ultimately supported the aim and exploration of my research problem, in answering the following questions: (1) what are the lived experiences of Black female educators in public school education; (2) how do these experiences inform and influence their work; and (3) how do these experiences influence their commitment to remain in the work. In Chapter 4, I thematically present the profiles and narratives of the five Black female educators who participated in this study. Moreover, as Black women's identities are made invisible and their voices are more often than not, silenced, it was important that I present the participants and their narratives, in keeping with the theoretical frameworks of CRT and BFT, to ensure that their stories are privileged and their voices heard clearly and distinctly, before they are presented for analysis in Chapter 5. In Chapter 5, I provide an in-depth analysis of the minor and major themes resulting from the participants’ experiences as told through their narrative stories, and in Chapter 6, I discuss the salient themes in relation to the literature and to the research questions that they respond to. Thereafter, I discuss implications for future research, and practice.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study focuses on the lived experiences of Black female educators and their commitment to both the work and to remain in the work. The historic and continued decline in the number of Black female educators in the field comes at a time when research shows the critical need for their presence in the schooling experiences of all students, but Black students in particular. The purpose of this literature review is to situate the issue of the limited number of Black female educators, in the larger context of teacher shortages across the sector of education. As such, this review is divided into three sections. The first section focuses on the general body of literature related to teacher shortages – the historical context and lasting impacts – as well as to teacher retention as a major contributing factor to the teacher shortage crisis. The second section of this literature review focuses on historical factors contributing to Black female teacher shortages, as well as present day factors impacting their retention, followed by a discussion of the literature highlighting the critical need for the presence of Black female educators in the schooling experiences of Black students in particular, will be forwarded. Finally, the third section of the literature review advances CRT – its history, major themes and tenants, and applicability to the field of education -- as well as BFT, as critical social theory frameworks through which this problem can be critically and closely examined.

The Great Recession and the Teacher Shortage Crisis

There is a persistent and on-going crisis in education relative to school leaders' ability to sufficiently staff their schools with the requisite numbers of teachers needed to support the instruction of the growing population of students (Ingersoll & May, 2011;

NCTAF, 2003). This crisis is an outgrowth of teacher shortages, which can be traced back, over a decade, to The Great Recession (Evans, Schwab & Wagner, 2014), when the country experienced a sharp economic downturn, due in large part to the housing bubble burst, and other converging factors in the financial sector, which resulted in adverse impacts in every other sector of the country – education included (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond & Carver-Thomas, 2016; Evans, Schwab & Wagner, 2014; Johnson, 2020). States reduced their per pupil funding; and some states reduced funding per student by ten (10) percent or more, which forced local school districts to adjust to the budget shortfalls by closing schools (Carver-Thomas& Darling-Hammond, 2017); laying-off teachers and other instructional support positions, like Media Specialists and School Counselors (Evans, Schwab & Wagner, 2014; Johnson, 2020). According to Johnson (2020), many of the layoffs took place between 2009 and 2012, when state budgets, which had been bolstered by federal dollars that sunsetted, were still recovering, driving the involuntary turnover rate to 14 percent (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017) . This would have lasting impact and significantly alter the teacher labor market's supply and demand balances, as teacher demand declined, because schools had little need to hire new teachers, and in many cases, could not keep the teachers they already employed (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

The shortages resulting from the Great Recession, still persist today. Johnson (2020) maintains that because state support for K-12 schools never regained pre-recession levels, when the pandemic hit in 2020, there were 77,000 fewer teachers and other educationally related positions in K-12 classrooms and schools, although there were two million more students in those same schools. As such, one lasting impact of the Great Recession was fewer teaching positions across states wherein teachers could be hired.

The Dwindling Teacher Pipeline

The teacher shortage crisis resulting from the Great Recession, was further compounded as the pool of potential new teachers dwindled between 2008-2009 and 2015-2016, with a 37.8 percent decline in the number of students in teacher preparation programs, a 27.4 percent decrease in the number of people actually completing a teacher preparation program, and a 15.4 percent drop in the number of awarded degrees in Education (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). These declines are in stark contrast to the nearly two decades spanning 1984 to 1999, when, according to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) (2003), the number of new graduates earning bachelor's and master's degrees in Education increased by 50 percent, resulting in 220,000 new teachers being added yearly to the teaching workforce between these years (NCTAF, 2003). However, as fewer students entering colleges and universities in the succeeding years, elected not to choose Education as a major and career choice, the pool wherewith to recruit new teacher candidates, became smaller (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). In a study that analyzed trends in data on teacher supply, Sutcher, Darling-Hammond and Carver-Thomas (2016), noted that between 2009 and 2014, there was a 35 percent reduction in teacher education program enrollments, from 691,000 to 451,000, resulting in nearly 240,000 fewer teacher candidates to staff classrooms. This reality coupled with the challenge of retaining qualified teachers, are major factors that have both created and continue to contribute to the shortage of teachers in the U.S. (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Given the on-going crisis of teacher shortages, there is a critical need to retain qualified teachers in the profession for the effective instruction of students. To attend to this pressing issue, several scholar experts have undertaken research to study factors that impact teacher retention, as uncovering reasons for teachers moving schools, or leaving the profession altogether, provides insight into what it may take to retain them.

Teacher Retention

Teacher retention is driven by two major factors – teacher attrition and teacher turnover (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; NCTAF, 2003). Teacher attrition, which Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017), maintain, accounts for about eight (8) percent annually, refers to teachers who leave the teaching profession altogether (leavers), while teacher turnover, which refers to teachers who stay in the field, but who move schools (movers), accounts for another eight (8) percent annually. These retention factors, then, combine to produce a teacher turnover rate of 16 percent annually, which perpetuates the current and persisting teacher shortage crisis. Both factors have equally debilitating impacts in the field of education, as annually, 90 percent of the teacher demand results from teachers leaving the field (attrition), while teachers who move schools (turnover), namely high-poverty, high-minority schools, have a deleterious effect on the schools they leave (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Ingersoll, 2004; Sutcher, Darling-Hammond & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Given this dynamic, Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017), who in a study focused on the crisis of teacher shortages, conceptualized this educational issue using supply and demand as a theoretical lens, define teacher shortage as:

> ...an inadequate quantity of qualified individuals willing to offer their services under prevailing wages and conditions. In other words, teacher shortages emerge in different fields and locations when there is an imbalance between the number of teachers demanded and the number of qualified teachers willing to offer their services to fill these demanded positions (p. 10).

Teacher Attrition

The demand for teachers remains high. Although teacher attrition accounts for eight (8) percent yearly of those who leave the profession, this eight (8) percent translates into the need to hire annually, an average of 300,000 new teachers nationally, to fill the positions that the eight (8) percent are vacating (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond & Carver-Thomas, 2016). While teacher retirements account for one third of the eight (8) percent, two thirds of the eight (8) percent teacher attrition is driven by preretirement attrition – teachers electing to leave the field who are neither age-eligible or service years-eligible for retirement, and a large segment of the preretirement attrition is attributed to the tens of thousands of new and mid-career teachers leaving the field each year, (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; NCTAF, 2003), further exasperating the shortage crisis and driving teacher demand.

According to Ingersoll (2002), approximately one third of new and early career teachers leave within their first three years of teaching, and nearly 50 percent leave sometime within their first five years of teaching. Existing research highlights teacher dissatisfaction with teaching as a career, ineffective school leadership and financial reasons (salary) for teachers leaving the field (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Moreover, the effects of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), along with its accompanying testing and accountability, is also highlighted in the research literature, as diminished teacher autonomy, prescribed curriculum geared to teach towards standardized tests, and teachers feeling under pressure to raise students' achievement scores, are cited as contributing factors in teachers' decisions to leave the profession (McLaurin, Smith & Smillie, 2009; Smith & Kovacs, 2011; Sutcher, Darling-Hammond & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Additionally, the research also speaks to teachers' inability to manage and cope with stress, and new teachers, particularly, feeling isolated and siloed, as reasons why teachers leave the field (McLaurin, Smith & Smillie, 2009).

In addition to the reasons why teachers leave the profession, scholars also focus on attrition trends, which show that attrition is higher among women teachers, as they are more likely to leave than are their male counterparts, (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Moreover, teachers in high-poverty, high-minority schools, particularly teachers of color who are disproportionately represented in high-poverty, high-minority schools (Ingersoll & May, 2011; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017); teachers with little preparation, or those who came to the profession through an alternative certification track and teachers who lacked mentoring, or effective mentoring (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017), also account for the high rate of attrition. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019), also note that attrition trends are higher in the South, than any other region of the country. While teacher attrition is one factor that contributes significantly to the on-going crisis of the teacher shortage, the crisis is further heightened by teacher turnover – the other factor impacting teacher retention.

Teacher Turnover

Teacher turnover, which is defined as teachers who move, or shift schools either within the same or across school districts (Barnes, Crowe & Schaefer, 2007), contributes to the inequitable distribution of quality teachers across schools, within districts, states and the nation (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Ingersoll, 2004). More often than not, this inequity has the greatest impact on schools serving predominately poor, minority student populations (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Ingersoll, 2004), as teachers teaching in these schools, are more likely to leave these schools to teach at schools serving dissimilar demographics (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). The rate of teacher turnover in high-poverty, high-minority schools, is nearly a third higher than turnover in all schools (NCTAF, 2003). This dynamic creates, what Ingersoll (2003) refers to as the "revolving door" in education, where a constant flow, "in, through and out of schools" (p. 11) – high-poverty, high-minority schools in particular – recurs each year.

As the research literature explicates, Ingersoll's (2003) described ebb and flow, has an adverse impact on students in high-need schools and their learning outcomes, as the vacancies created by teachers (movers) transferring out of these schools, are typically filled with teachers who are inexperienced, less-qualified and uncertified (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; NCTAF, 2003; Sutcher, Darling-Hammond & Carver-Thomas, 2016), which also impacts teacher effectiveness. But because these schools are also the most difficult to staff, district and school leaders, in an effort to ensure that all classrooms are staffed, and students are greeted by a body, are forced to choose quantity over quality (NCTAF, 2003); choices which ultimately and ironically, are counter to their original intent, as students being taught by less experienced, less qualified teachers, may forfeit a full year’s growth (Borman & Dowling, 2008 citing Hanushek, 1992). Moreover, several studies focused on teacher retention, using data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), document teachers who shift schools, cited dissatisfaction with school administration (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Donley, Keyworth, & States, 2019; Ingersoll, 2003 and 2011); school conditions (e.g., - lack of resources, poor facilities), (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; NCTAF, 2003); absence of opportunities for shared decision making and career advancement, and financial reasons, (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll, 2003; NCTAF, 2003), as reasons for moving schools.

Teacher attrition and teacher turnover have had and continue to have an adverse impact in the field of education – particularly schools serving high-poverty, high-minority populations of students of color, namely, Black students. As these Black students demonstrate higher academic outcomes with Black teachers (Casey, 1993; Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Gershenson et al., 2018), there is a critical need to both attract and retain them in the field. As such, the next section of this literature review will focus on historical factors contributing to Black female teacher shortages, as well as present day factors impacting their retention, followed by a discussion of the literature highlighting the critical need for their presence in the schooling experiences of Black students in particular.

Historical Factors Contributing to the Present-Day Shortage of Black Female Educators

That there is a great need for Black teachers, and Black female teachers in public school education, is evident. With the current teacher shortage crisis that has persisted for over a decade, as difficult as it is to attract and retain teachers, it is even more challenging to attract and retain Black female teachers. This challenge has its roots in the period of Desegregation, ushered in by the landmark *Brown v Board of Education* (1954) court ruling handed down by the Supreme Court, which declared the separate but equal *Plessy* (1896) ruling, unconstitutional, and paved the way to have schools legally integrated.

Desegregation had an adverse impact on Black educators (Foster, 1989), the effects of which, would not be fully understood until some twenty years after the passage of *Brown* (Hill-Jackson, 2017). Countless numbers of Black educators were either displaced, uprooted from, or demoted out of their long-held positions as teachers and administrators, or fired altogether (Hill-Jackson, 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Siddle Walker, 2018). It is estimated that anywhere between 30,000 to 50,000 Black educators were impacted (Hill-Jackson, 2017; Siddle Walker, 2018). Given that BFEs comprised seventy-six percent of the Black teacher workforce at that time, it is reasonable to assume the brunt of this upheaval was borne on their bodies. In this new Post-Brown era – the effects of which still persist today – BFEs, were separated from the Black school communities in which they thrived (Hill-Jackson, 2017); were forced to work for salaries lower than their white counterparts (Siddle Walker, 2001); were left to combat perceptions of inherent incompetence (Delpit, 1988; Foster, 1989; Hill-Jackson, 2017), which relegated them to teach only Black children and poor white children in early desegregated schools (Foster, 1989); and eventually left them disproportionately impacted by state-mandated certification requirements (King, 1993; Shipp, 2000).

These historical factors resulted in the decline of BFEs in the field of education (Hill-Jackson, 2017). Pre-Brown data estimates the Black teacher workforce numbered around 90,000 (Hill-Jackson, 2017); but by 1965, eleven years after the *Brown* decision, this number had declined by fifty percent (Fairclough, 2004). In addition, from 1976 to 1986, colleges and universities experienced a seventy-five percent decline in the number of Black female students majoring in education (Shipp, 2000), another indicator that perhaps, for Black women, the noble work of educating children, Post-Brown, had become too daunting a task given the plight of BFEs, who were or had been practicing educators.

Desegregation was the high prize of the calling for Blacks and civil rights advocates, who long considered education and what they believed to be *access* to the *same* education that whites were being afforded (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Siddle Walker, 2018), to be the great equalizer. Critics of the civil rights legislation that directed the desegregation of schools, posit that whites and white society at large, benefitted more from desegregation legislation, than did the intended recipients (Bell, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Decades after the *Brown* decision, it became apparent that what had been hoped for, was still a dream deferred, as the reality of *Brown* did not live up to the promise of *Brown* – at least for Blacks (Bell, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1998), particularly, and BFEs specifically.

According to King (1993), citing data from the NEA (1991), this realization was evident in the steady decline of Black educators in the field, which continued through the 1970’s to the mid 1980’s with 12 percent of the teacher workforce identifying as Black in 1970; but, in 1986, this number was reduced by nearly half, as Black teachers by this time, comprised only 6.9 percent of the teacher workforce. Moreover, this decline was also in tandem with the number of Black women choosing education as a career major. King (1993) notes that in 1976, 10,509 bachelor’s degrees in education were awarded to Black women. However, a decade later in 1987, that number had decreased significantly to just under 3,000 bachelor’s degrees in education being awarded, signaling that Black women were trending away from the field. Even at the height of an increase in the overall teaching workforce in the 1990’s, nearly 26,000 Black teachers continued to “disappear” from the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017, p. 168).

Black Teacher Retention

The effects of the Post-Brown era, resulting from desegregation on BFEs are still evident today, with a continued decline in the number of BFEs in public education. Present day, although Black students comprise 16 percent of all students serviced in public schools (U.S. DOE, 2016), Black female educators comprise only 5% of the public school teaching workforce (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Hill-Jackson, 2017; NCES, 2017) – quite a stark contrast to their position and prominence Pre-Brown, when they were the majority of the teaching workforce in segregated schools – while research shows that their White counterparts account for 82 percent of today’s teaching workforce (U.S. DOE, 2016).

As such, Black and minority teacher recruitment has been a research focus of social sciences researchers in sociology and education, in recent years, in an effort to address the shortage and to keep parity with the growing numbers of minority students in public schools. Ingersoll and May (2011), highlight the efforts to recruit Black and minority teachers into the field, beginning in the 1980s, to present, including funding provided by private industry foundations, like the Ford Foundation and Dewitt-Wallace Reader’s Digest Fund, to invest in preparing Black and minority teachers to teach; developing partnerships with community colleges and four-year universities with high minority student enrollment and teacher education programs; creating career ladders for paraprofessionals already in the field, to transition into full-time teacher positions; and the creation of alternative certification programs. Ingersoll and May (2011) maintain that while the efforts to recruit Black and other minority teachers have been largely successful, these efforts have been countered by the high attrition rate of Black and other minority teachers.

Black Teacher Attrition

The attrition of Black and other minority teachers further exasperates the Black and Black female educator shortage. As previously defined, teacher attrition refers to teachers who leave the profession altogether. As indicated in the research literature, minority teachers, inclusive of Black female educators, leave the profession at a rate two to three times higher than that of their White counterparts (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Ingersoll, May & Collins, 2017; Ingersoll & May, 2011). Citing data from the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) nationally representative Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and the Teacher Followup Survey (TFS), Ingersoll and May (2011), note that in the 2003-2004 cycle, approximately 47,600 Black, Black female and other minority educators, entered the profession. However, by the following year, in the 2004-2005 cycle, 56,000, or 20 percent of them left the field. According to research conducted by Ingersoll and May, (2011) and Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017), a third of minority teachers, inclusive of Black female teachers, left the field through retirement, while the remaining two-thirds cited job dissatisfaction, the need to seek better employment, concerns for job security linked to the accountability system, and the lack of support from colleagues, as reasons for leaving the profession. Furthermore, research interrogated in the literature also highlights factors that contribute to the decline of BFEs in the field of education. Namely, research focused on Black female teacher attrition and retention advances that BFEs account for nearly a third of all involuntary turnovers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). In addition, Farinde, Allen and Lewis (2016), cited lack of administrative support, and dissatisfaction with salary, as factors contributing to BFEs decisions to leave the field. Still, and perhaps more significant, Black teachers' experiences of being marginalized by their White colleagues, encountering, and combating negative perceptions and stereotypes, being over-worked and unduly burdened and having fewer opportunities to advance professionally, (Davis, 2019; Griffin & Tackie, 2016; Milner, 2012), are issues presented in the research literature that also speak to Black and other minority teachers' attrition.

Moreover, the five (5) percent of Black female educators who comprise the teacher workforce, along with other minority teachers, are overwhelmingly represented in high-poverty, high-minority, urban schools, as nearly half of public school minority teachers (including Black female educators), are employed in these schools, compared to just one fifth of their White counterparts (Ingersoll & May, 2011). The overrepresentation of Black female educators in high-need schools, however, while it may be perceived as a problem, is actually a positive indicator for Black teacher turnover.

Black Teacher Turnover

While Black and other minority teachers' attrition (teachers who leave the profession) rates are higher than that of their White counterparts, research shows that their rate of turnover (teachers who move schools) – particularly in high-need – urban, high-poverty, high-minority – schools, is lower when compared to their White counterparts (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Farinde, Allen & Lewis, 2016; Ingersoll & May, 2011). White teachers serving in high-minority schools, are more likely to transfer schools, as research shows, the higher the number of minority students, the greater the turnover rate of White teachers in these schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Jonsson, 2003; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). This is in stark contrast to Black and other minority teachers, who, according to the research, have lower rates of turnover in high-poverty, high-minority schools, as they are less likely to turnover (move) from these schools (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton & Freitas, 2010; Elfers, Plecki & Knapp, 2006; Farinde, Allen & Lewis, 2016; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Scafidia, Sjoquistb, & Stinebrickner, 2007; Villegas & Irvine. 2010). In fact, according to Ingersoll and May (2011), minority teachers who do turnover – move from one school to another – move to schools serving similar demographics – high-poverty, high-minority schools (Ingersoll & May, 2011), and often cite school conditions – or what Ingersoll and May (2011), refer to as "organizational conditions" (p. 43) – teaching autonomy, limited shared faculty decision-making, and lack of resources – as reasons for moving schools. This supports other research literature that highlights Black and Black female educators' motivation for entering and remaining in the profession in difficult, hard-to-staff, urban, high-poverty, high-minority (predominately Black) schools.

Villegas and Irvine (2010), posit that Black teachers make "deliberate and thoughtful decisions" (p. 186) concerning their entrance into the profession, as according to a study conducted by Irvine (2002), study participants viewed "teaching as a calling" (p. 186). Even more, according to Irvine (2002), participants in her study viewed their work as "having a religious and spiritual purpose" (p. 186). Moreover, Black teachers, cite the desire to give back to their community by improving both the educational outcomes and personal lives of Black children (Casey, 1993; Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Gershenson et al.,

2018) and the responsibility of "lifting as we climb," and "raising the race" (Irvine, 2002; Villegas & Irvine, 2010, p. 186), as reasons for entering and staying in the profession.

The Need for Black Female Educators

As the research has highlighted, schools serving students in the urban core are harder to staff and are disproportionately impacted by teacher shortages, resulting from teacher turnover and teacher attrition (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017 & 2019; Ingersoll & May, 2011). Black teachers, and specifically, Black female teachers are overwhelmingly concentrated in high-need schools, and are more likely to be retained at these schools. Moreover, they are less likely to move schools, if the organizational conditions – facilities, material and other classroom resources, school safety, etc. – (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll & May, 2011), are conducive. Given these indicators, there is a critical need for Black female educators in the field, but more importantly, in schools in the urban core. This would help to address issues raised in the research literature, namely, the issue of parity resulting from the growth in minority student enrollment, the issue of the revolving door in hard-to-staff schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll & May, 2011; U.S. DOE, 2016) and help support the learning needs of Black students (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Case, 1997; Foster, 1989; Henry, 1992; Hope, 1993; Villegas & Irvine, 2016).

The elementary and secondary student enrollment in public schools has increased steadily since the 1980s, with an overall growth, through 2011, of 19 percent (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Ingersoll and May (2011), report that while the number of minority student enrollments increased by 73 percent, the overall enrollment of White students, decreased by two percent, signaling that the minority student population, would inevitably become the majority population in public schools. However, the teaching workforce’s make-up has not changed as rapidly, as White teachers are the majority of the teacher workforce, representing nearly 83 percent of the total teacher workforce (Ingersoll & May, 2011). This then presents a parity issue, as students of color are less likely to have a same race teacher at any point in their schooling experience, since the number of White teachers outnumbers that of Black, Black female, and other minority teachers, while the number of Black and other minority students, are nearing majority levels in public schools (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton & Freitas, 2010; Ingersoll & May, 2011). As such, attracting and retaining Black female educators, would address the issue of parity resulting from the growth in minority student enrollment, and continued whitening of the teacher workforce (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton & Freitas, 2010; Ingersoll & May, 2011).

Moreover, as the research shows, turnover is 70 percent greater in schools serving Black students, when compared with schools serving populations of students that are fewer than 10 percent Black, according to research conducted by The National Teaching Project (TNTP) (2012), retaining Black female educators in hard-to-staff schools, is critical to slowing the revolving door (Ingersoll, 2004), which adversely affects student learning.

Additionally, the negative impacts of the underrepresentation of BFEs in the current teacher workforce, falls primarily to Black students who are sixteen percent of the total public school student population and who are the majority student populations in twenty-one of the twenty-two largest urban school districts (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Hope (1993) and Shipp (2000), maintain that Black female educators, are critically important in a multiplicity of ways to students, particularly Black students in their schooling experiences. For example, research conducted shows that

Black female educators are important to Black students, in the pedagogical strategies they use to engage them, such as the use of open affection, praise and collective encouragement (Ladson-Billings & Henry, 1999); using their classroom environments as spaces to create a "family ethos" (p. 398) to combat the negative schooling experiences of their Black students who are plagued with feelings of rejection and marginalization (Henry, 1999); and their use of culturally relevant instructional practices (Hill-Jackson, 2017; Hope, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Royal & Gibson, 2017). Research also documents that Black female educators' shared communication styles with their Black students, which attends to their social and emotional growth (Foster, 1993; Villegas & Irvine, 2010), relatability with their Black students, because of similar experiences (Nieto, 1999), and the cultural synchronicity or "insider knowledge" they use as a means to connect and engage their students, (Ingersoll & May, 2011, pp. 1-2; Irvine, 1989; Villegas & Irvine, 2010), are beneficial to Black students. Even more, research highlights the critical roles Black female educators assume for Black students, as othermothers and surrogate parents (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Case, 1997; Foster, 1989; Shipp, 2000), as well as advocates for and mentors to their students, (Hill-Jackson, 2017; Hope, 1993; Irvine, 1990; Villegas & Irvine, 2010).

Moreover, research centered on Black teachers in public school settings, further explores the benefits Black students experience as a result of being taught by Black teachers. One such benefit to Black students, is Black female teachers being present in the classrooms of the high-poverty, high-minority schools reduces the teacher shortages at those hard-to-staff schools, and slows the revolving door (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Villegas & Irvine, 2010), which increases the potential that students will receive and respond to effective instruction. Research also suggests that same-race teachers contribute greatly to improved outcomes for Black students (Gershenson et al., 2018). Specifically, research shows that Black students demonstrate higher and more improved academic outcomes, are less likely to be suspended from school, and more likely to be recommended for the Gifted program, when taught by Black teachers (Duncan, 2019). According to Irvine (1989), research conducted by Meier, Stewart, and England (1989), also evidenced that in school districts where higher concentrations of Black educators existed, high school graduation rates among Black students were higher, and fewer Black students were referred to non-standard diploma Special Education programs. Research also shows that Black elementary school students' college aspirations increased significantly (19 percent) after having been taught by a Black teacher (Gershenson, 2018).

Another implication of the decline of BFEs in the field is their lived experiences in public school education often go unheard and unnoticed – this points to the context of a larger issue Black women face in society – that of being invisible (Despenza, 2018; Henry, 1995). Being Black and female is an existence unique to this group; however, their unique experiences are often not treated as such. hooks (2015) laments that Black women, unlike any other group in America's history, have "had their identity socialized out of existence" (p. 7). Crenshaw (1989) speaks to those forces that converge to both construct and then conceal the experiences of Black women. As a result, the experiences of Black women go undocumented, as evidenced by the lack of scholarly literature (Crenshaw, 2016). This issue is also prevalent in the field of education where Black female educators are muted (silenced) (Delpit, 1988), and their struggles go unnoticed (Henry, 1995). As such, this study employs the critical lenses of both CRT and BFT to address the obscurity of Black women, namely, Black female educators, by lifting their voices.

What the research, however, does not address are the experiences of BFEs in public school education, who, despite the challenges they encounter at their intersecting locations, choose to remain in the work. Moreover, because of the scarcity of available scholarly literature lifting the voice of BFEs in general, there is little insight into this group's unique experiences as a collective, specifically. As such researchers suggest that further research focused on privileging the voices of Black women teachers, (Foster, 1989), be undertaken. Perhaps more now than ever, there is a critical need to engage Black female educators about their lived experiences within both the context of their own schooling experiences and the context of their work. The voices of Black female educators need to be heard.

Theoretical Frameworks

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Critical Race Theory, one of two theoretical frameworks being engaged for this study, is an analytical framework through which race and racism in the law and society can be viewed. This framework, which is used across disciplines, exposes inherent inequalities in the law and the effects of the same on people of color and assesses the impact of race and racism on larger contexts in society (Lynn et al., 2006, p. 259). According to Lynn and Parker (2006), Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller and Thomas (1995 & 2002) offer that Critical Race Theory (CRT) was first introduced in the 1980's, as a "as a political scholarly movement," by law professors and law students, as a critique, of the law, based in race (p. 259). Early formations of this new thought grew out of a series of conferences hosted by the Law Schools of Harvard and UC-Berkeley, which were being conducted to develop further the body of scholarly thought that was shaping Critical Legal Studies (CLS). The conferences created space for professors and students to raise questions that challenged the notion that the law is, by nature, “objective” (p. 259). These scholars further assert that the law is structured to “privilege” those who are “wealthy and powerful,” while denying the poor and powerless the “right” to engage the courts “as a means to redress” (p. 259).

Thereafter, a second generation of scholars, specifically, “scholars of color” (Lynn 2006, p. 259) who would later become the framers of CRT, assert that in its first iteration, the Critical Legal Studies (CLS) collective, did not adequately address the law and its racialized nature nor its impact on people of color, and as such, held that a new lens through which to provide a critical analysis of this phenomenon, was needed (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Moreover, the second generation of scholars held that the legal victories of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960’s, while effective at getting legislation passed to “weaken” “overt” or “classical” forms of racism, did little to address and identify forms of racism that are interlaced in the everyday fabric of American life. These everyday forms of racism, Crenshaw et al. (1995) hold, are embedded in “structures” in the larger society, that are built on “inherently racist practices” and are evident in the “...microaggressions...practiced in the everyday actions of individuals, groups, and institutional policy rules and administrative procedures” (Lynn et al., 2006, p. 260-261). With this, critical legal theorists not only uncovered how these social, political and legal system practices inform how institutions are governed, but also how these institutional practices adversely impact “racially oppressed people” (Lynn et al., 2006, p. 261).

Critical Race Theory Defined

Although much of the intellectual thought foundation of CRT began to be framed in the midst of the CLS Conferences in the 1980's, Crenshaw (2002), reveals that the struggle between the Black Law students at Harvard, and their Law School Dean over the denial of a course offering, that students believed to be essential, can be credited with being the impetus for the start of the movement. However, it would be years later, before the core group of legal scholars of color, who espoused the ideals of CRT, would formally organize to begin framing this scholarly body of thought, and begin the process of solidifying it as an intellectual movement grounded in emerging theory. This core group consisted of twenty (24) scholars, including Derrick Bell and Kimberle Crenshaw (the organizer), among others (Crenshaw, 2002).

This group would pen the major writings that would help to provide foundation and begin to give definition for the emerging framework and body of scholarship. Early writings established the following as major tenants of this scholarship that would be employed in critical analysis: (1) CRT recognizes that racism is pervasive and systemic, and has been a normal daily fact of life and society" and that racism is "ingrained in the political and legal structures" such that it is undetected, unnoticed and "unrecognizable"; (2) CRT holds that race is a social construct, and as such is not fixed or static; (3) CRT, as a "oppositional scholarship," is conceptually grounded in the "experiences of people of color" and "challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism and the experiences of White European Americans as the normative standard through a "unique voice of color"; (4) "CRT attacks liberalism" and the "belief in the law to create an equitable just society"; (5) CRT rejects the notion that the law is objective, neutral, colorblind and merit-based; (6)

CRT insists that institutional policies must be analyzed contextually and historically; and (7) CRT maintains that racism advances and benefits the interest of whites; only to the extent that the dominant race will benefit, are laws, and practices permitted that also benefit people of color (Interest Convergence) (Lynn et al., 2006, p. 260; Delgado et al., 2012, p. 9). Moreover, from these writings also emerged definitions to articulate the essence of what the movement's work would entail. One early definition that emerged held that Critical Race Theory is a body of legal scholarship that challenges the ways "race and racial power are constructed and represented" in the legal culture of America, and in the larger context of American Society (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xiii). Delgado et al. (2012), a founding framer of CRT, defines Critical Race Theory as a frame through which to study and transform the relationship between race, racism and power. Further, Mastuda (1991), another early framer of CRT, maintains that Critical Race Theory is "the work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that work toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination" (p. 1331). However, for the purpose of my research I am adopting the definition proffered by Solorzano and Yasso (2002), as CRT was still in its early framing in the field of education as a critical lens for analysis, where they assert that "critical race theory, in education is a framework or set of basic insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom" (p. 25).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) in Education

In their seminal work, *Toward A Critical Race Theory in Education* (1995), Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate IV, maintained that as a scholarly endeavor, although salient, race remained relatively untheorized, particularly, but specifically in the field of education. From this premise, they advanced a discussion, using race as a tool to explicate and analyze school inequity and inequality. They situated this discussion of race employing critical race theory as a foundational support, in an effort to stimulate a new way to think about "traditional educational scholarship" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 60) – the first undertaking of this kind in the field of education. In their explication of critical race theory and education, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), advance the following: (1) in the United States, race is a key determining factor in inequity; (2) property rights are the foundation of society in the United States -- rights that were afforded to whites, both in real property and in "whiteness" as property -- rights of disposition; rights of use and enjoyment; reputation and status; and the absolute right to exclude (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 59); and (3) both social and school inequity can be analytically understood at the intersection of race and property. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) propose these three over-arching themes, as a bases for closely interrogating the role of race and racism in school inequity.

Further laying the groundwork for establishing the critical need for a CRT lens in education, Tate (1997) in *Critical Race Theory and Education: History, Theory, and Implications,* posited that historically, paradigmatic views of people of color, both in the law and in education, have been predominated by deficit theories (the belief that people of color, namely Black people, are inherently inferior, and as such, should be relegated to the lower statuses in society wherein they exist), created, promulgated and promoted primarily by white, male legal and education research scholars. These ideologies provided a structural support upon which decisions were made and a society of laws and institutions were built, that all but guaranteed a permanent second-class citizenry in the United States; from laws that prohibited the education of Black slaves, to the 1896 *Plessy vs Ferguson* Supreme Court ruling that made separate but equal the law of the land. All of which still have implications for education. Likewise, Ladson-Billings (1998) further established the need for CRT in education, as she advanced curriculum, instruction, funding for schools and desegregation, as parts of the system of public education that are ripe for critical examination to expose inequities in schools. Other scholars in education research, while still focused on race as a centerpiece, have expanded CRT to examine the impact of intersecting oppressions on subjugated groups within the context of education (Solorzano & Yasso, 2002; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015).

Because CRT in education has its foundation in the legal scholarship that birthed it, all of the themes and major tenants espoused by the early framers of CRT in establishing it as critical social theory, are the same themes and tenants employed by education researchers engaging in this work. Namely critical race theorists in education assert: 1) race and racism are endemic and deeply entrenched in American society (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Yasso, 2002); 2) assertions of colorblindness, neutrality, objectivity and meritocracy, must be rejected (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Yasso, 2002); 3) counterstories must be employed to challenge the dominant/master narrative (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solorzano & Yasso, 2002); and 4) experiential knowledge is privileged (Solorzano & Yasso, 2002).

Whatever the discipline, be it law or education, the goal of CRT is twofold: (1) to understand how a system to subordinate people of color (race) was both created and is being maintained in America; and (2) how to end the systemic subordination of all oppressed people (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xiii).

Black Feminist Thought

The second and complementary theoretical lens that will frame this study is Black Feminist Thought. Black Feminist Thought as critical social theory, was born out of the need to establish a bases from which the collective view, experiences, and "standpoint" (Collins, 2009), of Black women in America, could be articulated. With its early framing dating back to the 19th Century, forged in the work and activism of historical Black women figures like Maria Stewart, Sojourner Truth, and Anna Julia Cooper, and more recently, in the social justice movements of the 1960s and '70's, BFT centers empowering Black women to engage the intersectional oppression – economic (work/labor), political and ideological (negative images and stereotypes) -- to which they have been historically subjugated (Collins, 2009). Collins (2009), the architect (Clemmons, 2019), of the modern day BFT epistemology, maintains that it is in this place of intersecting oppressions – the triple jeopardy of race, class, and gender (King, 1988) – that Black women's knowledge – a conscious awareness of the context in which they exist – is produced. This knowledge is then produced for Black women to "survive in, cope with and resist" [their] our differential treatment" (Collins, 2009, p. 35). Collins (2009) highlights Black women's entrenchment in their communities and their participation in constructing these communities, as well as the common experiences they gain from their work, as factors that have historically inspired Black women's critical social theory in the United States, and shaped "a distinctive

Black women's perspective on a variety of themes" (p. 13). However, although these shared experiences have produced a distinctive knowledge and perspective, this knowledge has been subjugated and suppressed through mainstream exclusionary practices; rendering Black women and their ideas obscured and invisible (Collins, 2009).

Black Feminist Thought Defined

As a means to provide definition, Collins (2009) outlines five defining features of Black Feminist Thought: (1) the dialectical relationship that Black women participate in -- the intersecting oppressions, and our resistance to those oppressions through activism; (2) the diversity of Black women's responses to patterns of common oppressive experiences; (3) the dialogical relationship, wherefrom Black women's experiences as a "heterogeneous collectivity" emerges to produce our unique standpoint; (4) the Black women intellectuals whose contributions are "essential" to this body of thought/work; and (5) the dynamism of BFT (Collins, 2009, p. 37). Moreover, Collins (2009) presents work and family, self-definition, sexual politics, motherhood and activism, as the core themes of BFT. These core themes are premised on an "alternative" epistemology that frames (1) "lived experience as a criterion of meaning; (2) the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims; (3) the ethics of care; and (4) the ethic of personal accountability" as the standards by which the knowledge that is Black women's standpoint, is authenticated (Collins, 2009, pp. 275-281).

CRT and BFT As Support to My Research

As CRT is a legal body of scholarship, most of its critical analysis of the law and its relationship to race, racism and power, comes through the critique of cases that have been litigated. One such critique is the foundation upon which many of the principle themes of CRT are erected. The critical analysis of the landmark case, *Brown vs the Board of*

Education (1954), gives invaluable insight into how a decision that many believed to have changed the landscape of education in the United States, upon close analysis through the critical lens of CRT, reveals that not much at all changed in the quality of education for Black students; some even contend that conditions for Black educators, their students, and Black communities at large, worsened (Foster, 1990). In the years following the passing of this legislation, as previously laid-out, the number of Black educators, particularly Black female educators, has been on the decline. And this at a time when, according to research, they are of critical importance to the field of education. As such, CRT and BFT supported my research by providing critical lenses through which I: (1) studied the pervasiveness and normalization of racism in the field of education and identified ways in which it is interwoven in the fabric of the system of public school education; (2) explored Black female educators' experiences with the everyday forms of racism they may encounter in their daily realities as teachers of color in public schools and how they respond to it, and how this informs and influences their work; (3) challenged the normative standard by privileging the experiences of Black female educators; and (4) employed the use of *counterstories* as a medium to highlight the lived experiences of Black female educators.

The system of public education, perhaps one of, if not the largest, social system, is not exempt from the practice of structural and institutional racism. As such, the purpose for using CRT and BFT in my research, is that they both provided lenses or frameworks, where through I critically critiqued the relationship of race and racism to power, and its systemic and adverse impact on the day to day lives of Black female educators, as a means to continue to silence and subordinate them; and their response. In employing these frameworks in my research, valuable insight was gained that can ultimately be used to speak to and address the disappearance of Black female educators in the field.

My Research Questions were structured to explore the collective experiences of Black female educators who work in schools located in the urban core. Specifically, the questions, sought to study their experiences, and how these experiences influenced both their work and their commitment to remain in the work. As such, using CRT and BFT, which both have as a major pillar the use of narrative as tool to share counter-narratives, as lenses to explore the experiences of BFEs, allowed the questions being posed to be answered and responded to, using the collective voice and experiences of the participants of focus.

Chapter Summary

In the review and explication of the literature, a discussion centered on the general body of literature related to teacher shortages – the historical context and lasting impacts – as well as to teacher retention as a major contributing factor to the teacher shortage crisis; historical factors contributing to Black female teacher shortages, as well as present day factors impacting their retention, and a discussion of the literature highlighting the critical need for the presence of Black female educators in the schooling experiences of Black students in particular, was outlined. Finally, the literature review also advanced CRT – its history, major themes and tenants, and applicability to the field of education -- as well as BFT, as critical social theory frameworks through which this problem can be critically and closely examined and their support of this research study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this narrative inquiry study, as previously indicated in Chapter One, was, to, through the critical lenses of Critical Race Theory (CRT), and Black Feminist Thought (BFT), explore the lived experiences of Black female educators in public school education, as a means to lift their stories and strengthen the voice of this collective group, who are critical to this field; and in doing so, gain insight into why they remain in and committed to their work. To that end, in this chapter I outline and describe the study's structure – its research design, chosen methodological approach, and methodology, specifically, the participants and participant selection, and the systems employed for data collection, data analysis and for ensuring data integrity – in an effort to show how these choices ultimately supported the aim and exploration of my research problem, in answering the following questions: (1) what are the lived experiences of Black female educators in public school education; (2) how do these experiences inform and influence their work; and (3) how do these experiences influence their commitment to remain in the work.

Research Design

Qualitative Research

This study, by design is qualitative. Qualitative research, centers understanding the meaning people (groups and individuals), assign to problems of humanity and society (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In this approach, guided by one or a set of theoretical frameworks, the researcher, as the instrument, may use any one of emergent qualitative approaches – Case Study, Ethnography, Narrative, Phenomenology, or Grounded Theory, among others – to study the problem of interest in the field (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and through a process of data analysis, that is inherently inductive, arrive at and present findings through the use of thick, rich descriptive texts (Merriam, 2002). The genre of Qualitative Research, over time, has undergone evolutionary movements (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Hatch 2002). In this current dispensation of qualitative research, or what Denzin and Lincoln (2005) term as the “eighth moment” (p. 3) in the evolutionary movement of this research genre, there is a demand for space within the social sciences and humanities disciplines, to critically interrogate social and global issues centered around race, gender, class and the like. It is in this space of qualitative research that my study is contextualized.

Methodological Approach

Narrative Inquiry

As the aim of this research was to explore the lived experiences of the Black female educators who participated in this study, I elected to employ Narrative inquiry as the methodological approach around which to organize my research study. As an emergent genre in qualitative research, Narrative inquiry is used to capture the life stories and/or experiences, of an individual or small group of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As such, this methodology was closely aligned to the purpose of this research.

Creswell and Poth (2018) identify the use of interviews as a primary data collection tool, the process of collaboration between the researcher and participants in the co-creation of the story, among other characteristics, as key defining features of narrative inquiry. Josselson (2011), represents narrative research as a qualitative research approach used to capture the lived experiences of people who make meaning and understanding of their lives through stories. With its foundation in hermeneutics and other related philosophical traditions, such as phenomenology, narrative research inherently presents truth, not as absolute, but as relative, as the stories/narratives constructed are according to the personal accounts of those who experience them, (Josselson, 2011). One of the defining features of narrative research is the way in which stories "drawn" from participants, "reveal how people "view and understand their lives" (Josselson, 2011, p. 225). Moreover, according to Nganga (2016), citing McLean (1999), these stories, are the vehicles through which people make "sense" of their past, present and future (p. 61).

Clandinin (2013), who, along with Connelly (1990) first introduced the term narrative inquiry in the field of educational research, defines narrative inquiry as "an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honoring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding" (p. 17). As such, narrative inquiry purposes to, according to Josselson (2011) "explore and conceptualize human experience as it is presented in textual form" (p. 225). Kim (2016) posits narrative inquiry as "a storytelling methodology through which we study narrative and stories of experience" (p. 118). She maintains this methodology's aim is to "understand human experience" (p. 190). Hatch (2002) highlights narrative inquiry, as a qualitative research method primarily aligned to the constructivist and critical paradigms, that researchers employ to capture "the stories that people use to describe their lives" (p. 28). The stories that people tell, according to Josselson (2011), represent their "meaning making" and how they "structure the flow of experience and understand their lives" (p. 224).

Clandinin (2013) further clarifies that narrative inquiry does not only focus on individuals' experiences, but also on "the social, cultural and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences are shaped, expressed and enacted" (p. 12). According to Clandinin (2013), in narrative inquiry, the researcher and participants work in tandem, over a period of time, in a place or places, and interact socially within the environments (social, cultural, institutional, etc.) wherein the stories of their lived experiences are formed. Within this context, the researcher and participants are located in, what Clandinin (2013) describes as a "three-dimensional space" – temporality, sociality, and place (p. 39), where temporality attends to the past, present and future of people and events, sociality to the personal (hopes, desires, etc.) of both the researcher and the participants, as well as the context of the social conditions and its impact on the individual, and place to the setting, or physical location wherein the actual "event or inquiry takes place" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). Clandinin maintains that (2013), it is the focus on all three dimensions simultaneously, while at the same time focusing on experience, which distinguishes this methodology from others.

As such, for the purpose of undertaking this research study, which sought to understand the unique experiences of, while at the same time, lift and privilege the voices of Black female educators, this methodological approach, was appropriate.

Finally, Josselson (2011) maintains that narrative research, which, by process is interpretive in nature, consists of the "joint subjectivities of researcher and participants subjected to a conceptual framework brought to bear on textual material (either oral or written) by the researcher" (p. 225). As such, in keeping with this narrative inquiry marker, CRT and BFT were the conceptual/theoretical frameworks/lenses through which I approached the written textual material (field texts and research texts) of this research, and upon which this study was centered, as a central tenant of both frameworks is privileging the voices of those whose voices are often left-out or silenced – Black female educators are such a group. This research methodology, then, was most aligned to these critical lenses, as narrative inquiry gives room for their stories to be told and thereby their voices to be heard.

Methods

Participant Selection

Participants for this study were selected using Purposive, Snowball sampling through a referral process. To identify initial contacts, I employed the help and assistance of colleagues in the field, who provided the names and email or a contact number, of teachers who fit the demographic for the study – identified as Black ADOS, were mid-to-late career (at least seven (7) years' teaching experience, as this ensured that participants had sufficient experience wherewith to speak/draw from), and were currently assigned to a school in the urban core serving predominately, low socio-economic, Black student populations. Thereafter, I shared an email (see Appendix A) and or text message, outlining information about the study, with the initial contacts as a means to engage them and ascertain their interest in participating in the study. Seven initial contacts were identified through this process. One initial contact did not respond to the email. For the remaining six (6) contacts who signaled interest, I held individual meet and greet sessions, via Zoom, to formally invite their participation in the study. During the sessions, using the recruitment script (see Appendix B), I shared detailed information about the study and encouraged and engaged potential participants' questions. After the individual meet and greet session, one contact declined participation. However, each of the five remaining contacts accepted the invitation to participate in the study and prior to the end of their virtual meet and greet sessions, were emailed, through the Docusign platform, and electronically signed a participant consent form (see Appendix C), received a signed copy back via email, and were then asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire (see Appendix D).

Participants

The resulting participant group consisted of five (5) Black female educators – Glenda, Terri, Carolyn, Joy and Denise – who are all assigned to schools in the urban core serving poor, predominately Black, student populations. Although I will share detailed profiles of each participant in Chapter 4, it is important to note here that the five participants are veteran teachers with teaching years spanning from sixteen (16) to twenty-six (26) years' experience, who range in age from their early 40's to early 60's. Both Carolyn and Glenda came to education as a second career. Although each of the five (5) participants began their full-time teaching careers in suburban, predominately White/Hispanic serving schools and school communities, they have spent the majority of their careers teaching in schools in the urban core. Four (4) of the participants – Glenda, Terri, Carolyn, and Denise are classroom teachers, while Joy, is a curriculum support teacher in her role as a Reading Coach. All five participants teach and/or support students who are elementary-aged, at traditional elementary schools with the exception of Glenda, who teaches elementary-aged students at a K-8 center.

I chose to engage Black female educators who were Black ADOS, because the theoretical lenses through which this study is being viewed, CRT and BFT, emerged out of the historical struggles of Blacks in the United States, the genesis of which both frameworks locate in the enslavement of Black people in America. As such, participants who have generational ties to this struggle, may have experiences that have been shaped by their knowledge of the lasting impacts of the enslavement of Black people, which in large ways, are still evident today. Moreover, this group, because of their shared understanding of Black womanhood (Hill-Collins, 2000), and experiences unique to this identity, coupled with their placement in schools that are in the urban core, which positions them to speak with first-hand knowledge of the challenges, they encounter educating while Black and female, was critical to the purposes and goals of this study.

Data Collection

The primary purpose of this research study was to explore the lived experiences of Black female educators. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018) citing Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), the interview, which Creswell et al. (2018) define as a social exchange/interaction through conversation, is a medium through which "knowledge is constructed" and is employed in qualitative research to "understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, to uncover their world" (p. 164). Moreover, since, as previously indicated, Creswell and Poth (2018) identify the use of interviews as a primary data collection tool for narrative inquiry methodology, I appropriated the semi-structured interview as the primary data collection technique/tool, as this was the best tool to document the accounts of participants' personal histories and experiences.

In keeping with this and aligned to the methodological approach of narrative inquiry the data I derived was textual and the primary source of data was field texts in the form of interview transcripts. In addition to being the researcher as instrument, (Merriam, 2002), the primary source for data collection in this study, was interviews. According to the design of the study, I conducted a set of three interviews per each of the five (5) study participants.

Interviews

At the end of each participant's virtual meet and greet session, I scheduled the time and date for their initial interview in the series of three, based on the participant's availability. The interview scheme was structured to conduct three interviews, following Seidman's (2006) three-interview series structure, with each of the five participants, which took place over a three-month period, from July through September 2021, with each participant's subsequent interviews being spaced out a week (Seidman 2006), as their schedules permitted, which sustained the momentum of the engagement from interview to interview. I chose to set the interviews during these months, to accommodate the participants' summer schedules, as they had greater flexibility, as teachers, during these times. Because of COVID-19 protocols that were still in effect, I conducted the interviews via the Zoom platform using both audio and video recording (with participant consent), to document each session. Each participant's series of interviews averaged 60 minutes in length each session, with some sessions being shorter, or longer in length. Conducting multiple interviews ensured that sufficient data was captured for analysis, and multiple interviews allowed for a relationship of trust to be built between myself as the researcher and the participants, which helped to foster greater participant-transparency.

To guide the semi-structured interviews, I created an interview protocol (see Appendix E), which was structured using open-ended questions, with possible follow-up questions, that were a combination of "grand tour" and "mini grand tour" questions (Seidman 2006, p. 85). The use of open-ended questions framed as grand tour and mini grand tour questions, invited participants to voice their stories, and allowed them greater latitude in approaching the questions from a direction as determined by the experience(s) they wanted to share. Also, at the end of each interview session, I always gave space for participants to share or to add anything (a thought, memory of an experience) that came to mind during the interview, but was not voiced, that they would like to have included in that interview segment. Doing this encouraged participants to share more of their unsolicited but relevant stories of their experiences and strengthened our collaboration as researcher and participant.

In addition to the video and audio recordings via Zoom, I took notes during each participant's interview session, which I kept in my researcher/reflexive journal and referenced either during the interview or at the start of the next interview, to frame follow-up questions that clarified or probed deeper into what the participant may have shared that I may have needed more context for. For example, at the end of Denise's second interview, in the series of three, at the point where I would give participants space to share anything that came to mind during the interview, that they wanted to give voice to and have included in the interview session, she shared an experience to highlight the stark differences she encountered between her previous suburban school and her then new school located in the urban core. In my journal entry dated August 7, 2021, I wrote the following: "Why was this [] ES – experience a shock to her...lead with this for next interview," as I wanted to probe Denise more about her reaction to the apparent disparities.

Although in qualitative research, interviews can be used in tandem with other data sources, it can also be used as the only data source, as is the case in this study. While I originally intended to use relevant, personal artifacts provided by the participants, I had to forego this intent, and as a result, artifacts were not used for this study.

Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis Approach

Kim (2016) maintains the analysis of data derived from narrative accounts is the means by which narrative inquirers “develop an understanding of the meanings our participants give themselves” (p. 189). As such, data analysis and interpretation aligned to narrative inquiry, must be attended to specifically, so as to ensure the resulting stories that emerge are “faithful” accounts that have been interrogated and interpreted with “suspicion” to uncover the essence of “implicit meaning” (Kim, 2016, p. 194), which make for a deeper and richer understanding of the experience(s) under study. While narrative inquiry provides for a diversity of approaches to analysis, which Reissman (2008) coins as “a family of methods for interpreting texts” (p.11), each of these methods engage a process of analysis that by nature, are interpretive. Effectively, these methods allowed for the close analysis of the narrative data, to identify patterns (Creswell et al., 2018), using “detailed description” (p. 189) and eventual codes to organize the data, under larger categories and ultimately, broader themes, which provided for greater understanding of the participants’ experience (Creswell, et al., 2018; Kim, 2016).

For the purpose of this study, Braun and Clarke’s (2006) *thematic analysis* approach to qualitative research was undertaken. This analytical approach to narrative inquiry purposes to, through the use of stories as data, analyze, identify and report patterns and common themes, either within and/or across data sets which are then organized under categories and broader themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach can assume two forms – one where concepts applied to the data, are drawn from pre-existing theory, or a theoretically-derived interpretation, and the other where concepts are "inductively derived from the data," or a data-driven interpretation (Kim, 2016, p. 196; Braun & Clark, 2006). For this study, both forms were present, as the resulting five broader themes I arrived at inductively, based on a close analysis of the data from the field texts (the participants' interview transcripts), and, although unintended, I noted that the derived themes were very closely aligned to pre-existing theory, namely, some of the major tenants of BFT.

Transcribing the Data

Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) process for thematically analyzing the data derived from the participants' narratives, to familiarize myself with the data sets, I used a transcription service to transcribe the three sets of interviews for each of the five participants' interview series. To protect confidentiality, only the Zoom audio files, which did not contain the names of the participants – as I made certain not to reference participants by name during the recorded interviews – were uploaded to a secure, password protected site. In addition, the transcription service allowed me to add the identifiers of my choosing for each speaker in the interview transcripts. I submitted interviews to the transcription service so that one participant's interview series (data set) was transcribed at a time. I elected to have each interview transcribed verbatim, as I believed this was critical to ensuring that the organic and distinct voices of each participant was fully revealed, although I initially made the decision to not include raw texts, as I believed that the participants, as Black female educators, already faced with controlling images centered around incompetence, would not want to have their stories read, or their voices portrayed, as some would automatically judge them, as inarticulate. However, after conducting initial member check sessions to review the raw interview transcripts, I received feedback from some of the participants expressing concern about their excessive use of fillers, i.e., “ums,” you knows,” etc., and I was affirmed in the initial decision I made, to not include false starts, or excessive fillers, or grammatical errors. This way, I could present the participants’ voices seamlessly.

Privileging the Voices and Experiences of the Participants

Moreover, as Black women’s identities are made invisible and their voices are more often than not, silenced, it was important that I approach each participant’s stories, as documented and transcribed into textual data, initially, individually to ensure that I privileged their stories and heard their voices clearly and distinctly. This was a guiding focus of my plan for analysis as I began to interact with the data. As such, I first analyzed each participant’s series of interviews, or data set, vertically, as I wanted to pay particular attention to the nuances of their perspectives and experiences, and then moved to a horizontal analysis, across participants interviews to confirm and reveal the existence of this study’s Black female educators’ standpoint.

I decided to present the participants’ narratives thematically, as a way to highlight the essence of who they are and who their experiences revealed them to be. As such, it was important that I included in each participant’s narrative, stories that distinguished and aptly represented the strength of their experience. In addition, to highlighting stories of their experiences, I also included pieces of each participant’s life history, namely their early experiences of school and schooling, leading up to their journey to become a teacher, and subsequent teacher journey. These decisions allowed me to, while centering the participants’ experiences, simultaneously attend to the temporal – past, present and future of participants' storied lives – the social context and conditions wherein the participants exist, and the places where the stories of their experiences were born.

Coding the Data

I read through each participant's set of transcribed interviews, twice, without making notes or marking potential codes, as I wanted to conduct a close read of each interview to gain a sense for each participant and their voice, as well as to become well acquainted with each participant's narrative stories. After which, I then re-read the transcripts for a third time, along with the original audio recordings to check for transcription accuracy -- i.e., mistaken words, punctuation, etc. Thereafter, I began to read the interview transcripts for each data set, to note and mark words, phrases and/or sentences for possible codes.

After identifying possible codes, I re-read the transcripts of each data set, and began to color code, by hand, the data according to the initial codes I identified. Codes were identified within individual data items (individual interviews, i.e., Interview 1, Interview 2, and Interview 3), and then within and across the full data set (the participant's complete three-interview series). After identifying the initial codes, i.e., faith, community, mentor/mentoring, out-of-place, racism, resilience/perseverance, collegial relationships, etc., within and across individual participant's data sets vertically, I began a horizonal analysis, reading data items across participants. I engaged in a close re-read of all of the Interview 1's, then all of the Interview 2's and finally all of the Interview 3's, across participants, to identify code recurrence. Thereafter, I created a chart of all identified codes, and corresponding colors, across all participants' data sets and began organizing them categorically. For example, school accountability, treatment from non-blacks, racism (structural and school disparities), etc., were codes that were subsumed under a category that I titled “Challenges Encountered Doing This Work.” After I organized relevant codes under categories, through continued re-reading of the data sets across participants, using a make-shift schematic map of post-it notes of the codes and categories, I began organizing the notes according to evident patterns, and potential themes, which were ultimately refined into the resulting five (5) themes forwarded in this study. Each of the five (5) resulting themes – three major themes and two minor themes – were derived from the textual data of the participants’ narratives, as each represents a theme that was pervasive in the narrative stories of a participant. These themes, although unintended, were also aligned to some of the tenants of BFT.

Data Integrity

Positionality

This issue matters to me because as a Black, female leader in public education, I observe first-hand the steady decline in the number of Black female teachers in education, as their absence grows more apparent; they are becoming an anomaly. My intersecting social locations informed my “seeing” the issue and my questions in these ways: I am a Black, female, educator, who is an instructional leader in a large, elementary school located in an urban core, serving a predominately poor, Black student population. I have spent my entire Principalship serving in schools similarly demographic-ed schools. As such, I am very much an insider; and my insider-ness is multidimensional. These perspectives did not limit my analytical work, however. As I engaged the research participants to capture the stories of their experiences, although some of my own stories paralleled theirs in some ways, these paralleled perspectives strengthen my analytical work, because as an insider, my ability to connect, empathize, and understand the unique experiences of the participants, helped me to engage the research and my analytical work with greater veracity.

Given this, I endeavored to honor each participant's lived experience, and privilege that experience as important knowledge (Clandinin, 2013), through the retelling of their stories, and not my own. To be certain that this was done, I worked with each participant, through member checks, to con-construct their narrative stories as shared.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintain that in qualitative, or what they term "naturalistic inquiry" (p. 301), the trustworthiness of a study is established through a study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. There are several "activities" that Lincoln and Guba (1985) highlight that researchers can engage – prolonged engagement, peer review, etc. – to ensure the credibility of a study. However, they note that one activity, member-checking, a process where data is shared with the participants to check for accuracy, is the "most crucial technique" for establishing credibility (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 314). To ensure credibility, I provided participants with copies of the full transcripts from their interviews, to check them for accuracy. Moreover, I also provided participants with a draft document of their individual narrative stories, to do the same, and set individual times to meet with them to discuss any feedback or adjustments they deemed necessary to accurately reflect their lived experiences. Through this process, member checks ensured that the stories were co-constructed, and that the participants maintained ownership of their voiced stories.

In addition, trustworthiness was established in this study, through the use of "rich, thick, description" (Creswell, et al., 2018, p. 261; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), to detail the participants and their experiences in both the analysis and interpretation of the data, as well as the participants' co-constructed narratives, through transferability. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member-checks, as an activity, can also be used to establish a study's trustworthiness through dependability, as there cannot be one without the other. As such, and in keeping with the critical/feminist worldview, and with the methodological approach of narrative inquiry, member-checks were embedded in the research process to ensure that the participants' stories were co-constructed and not merely re-storied (Hatch, 2000; Creswell et al., 2018). To ensure confirmability, I maintained a reflexive journal (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), wherein I documented my thought processes centered around my interaction with the data as a way to reflect and think-through, my decisions, and my own experiences which may have been similar to those of the participants'. Moreover, an audit trail (Creswell, et al., 2018), consisting of analytical memos, to thoroughly document my thought processes and decisions surrounding critical aspects of the data analysis process was employed. For example, in my horizontal analysis across participants' narratives, as the data began to reveal that an assumption I held was not being meted out in the data, I memoed the following analytic memo in my researcher/reflexive journal:

> I approached this study fully expecting to confirm the belief I held about Black female educators working in schools in the urban core of this district – that they are there because they have been relegated there, not by choice, but *stuck* - by design of the *system*. However, as I read across the second interviews of all five participants, what is becoming very apparent to me is that this is NOT the case –

> ALL of them – ALL five participants have and continue to work in schools in the urban core by choice. Perhaps even more eye-opening than this revelation in the data, is the idea that my assumption was maybe me projecting on to the participants the frames through which I view my context and condition as a Black female administrator in this district, assigned to schools in the urban core. Will the data answer why they chose to do so? (Analytic Memo dated January 21, 2022).

Ethics

To ensure the standards of ethics are adhered to, I sought and received the approval of the institution's Internal Review Board (IRB) and MDCPS, prior to commencing the research to ensure all standards and protocols were met. In addition, each participant was given a Participant Consent form to sign, which detailed for them, among other information, the purpose of the study, and the level and extent of their participation, should they choose to participate. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. All data, and any identifying information was kept securely, and will remain confidential, until destroyed at a time to be determined.

Moreover, as Wertz et al. (2011) asserts, although qualitative researchers are *governed* by protocols established by Internal Review Boards, and other professional associations, ultimately, qualitative researchers must also be constantly *guided* by their own personal ethics and moral compasses because the work we engage in with human subjects/participants is fluid. As such, as a qualitative researcher, through this research, I developed an awareness and understanding that inherent in this work is an ethical obligation that is shared by both me as the researcher and the participants. I was ethically obligated to the participants to remain transparent throughout the research process, from start to completion, and ensure that they were and stayed well-informed and felt valued throughout the process, as co-contributors.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I outline and describe the study's structure – its research design, chosen methodological approach, and methodology, specifically, the participants and participant selection, and the systems employed for data collection, data analysis and for ensuring data integrity – in an effort to show how these choices ultimately supported the aim and exploration of my research problem, in answering the following questions: (1) what are the lived experiences of Black female educators in public school education; (2) how do these experiences inform and influence their work; and (3) how do these experiences influence their commitment to remain in the work. Moreover, I discussed, my decisions around coding, the interview verbatim transcription of participants' interviews, my approach to analyzing the data, and my positionality.

CHAPTER IV

PARTICIPANTS' NARRATIVE STORIES AND PROFILES

In this chapter, I thematically present the narratives of the five Black female educator participants who were the focus of this study. I decided to present the participants' narratives thematically, as a way to highlight the essence of who they are and who their experiences revealed them to be. Moreover, as Black women's identities are made invisible and their voices are, more often than not, silenced, it was important that I present the participants and their narratives wholly, in keeping with the theoretical frameworks of CRT and BFT, to ensure that their stories are privileged and their voices heard clearly and distinctly, before they are presented for analysis in Chapter 5.

The five participants, who between them average 20 years' experience, with actual years of teaching ranging from 16 to 26 years, were all mid to late career teachers, teaching in elementary and K-8 schools designated as Education Transformation Office (ETO)-supported schools, in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) district; one of the largest urban school districts located in the southeast region of the United States. Following is a table that outlines each of the participants and their profiles specific to the study. In keeping with established research ethics protocols, each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect their confidentiality.

Name	**Age**	**Number of Years Teaching**	**Current School Level Assignment**	**Number of Years at Current School Location**
Glenda	Early 50’s	16	K-8	3
Terri	Late 40’s	16	Elementary	14
Carolyn	Mid 60’s	23	Elementary	14
Joy	Early 40’s	18	Elementary	7
Denise	Early 50’s	26	Elementary	3

True to the tenants of BFT, the five participants in this study, as Black female educators, share similar experiences. For example, although presently working in Title I, ETO-supported schools in the urban core of the MDCPS school district, each of the five participants began their teaching careers in suburban-based, non-Title I schools. Two of the participants, Carolyn and Glenda, came to the field of education as a second career choice – Carolyn entered from Nursing and Glenda from Social Work; the other three participants chose education as a career while they were still students in public school. Glenda, Terri, Joy and Denise, all shared early memories of pretend playing school as young children.

This chapter centers the previously untold life stories and lived experiences of each of the five Black female educator participants. Each of their narratives is headed by a bolded noun. These nouns illustrate the strength of the participant’s experience, as drawn from their narrative-stories, and also represent the themes, as derived from their told stories, that are offered for analysis in Chapter 5. Lifting the voices of the Black female educators in this study, through narrative, both honors and validates their lived experiences in public schools as authenticated knowledge from which others can draw. Presented hereafter are their stories.

Lifting Their Voices

Faith

Glenda

...this is what GOD wanted me to do...

Growing up in the South, Glenda recalls that she always liked school, even before she was old enough to attend. Living vicariously through her older brother who was already attending school, she played pretend school with her stuffed animals:

> ... I can remember before I was even able to go to school. I guess, every child pretends. I did a lot of pretend play as I was a teacher, you know, to my stuffed animals. So, I... that's kinda, like, an early memory. Or when my brother was getting ready to catch the bus to school, I always, you know, wanted my hair to be combed and, I also wanted to be dressed, as well, in preparation for school... or my pretend school, rather. You know, but I already liked school.

According to Glenda school was always "a good thing" for her. She credits her next-door neighbor, who was a teacher, with being the reason she fell in love with reading, as every summer, her neighbor took the time to take her to the library, to explore and check-out countless books. Glenda also attributes this summer ritual to igniting her love for learning. Despite, however, having early success with school as a student, pretend playing school as a young child, and the influence her neighbor, the teacher, had on her developing an early love for learning, Glenda never considered becoming a teacher:

> However, early on, I didn't decide to be a teacher. So, it's quite interesting how much I loved to pretend play, and how much, you know, I enjoyed the learning process. I guess, as I grew up I never even thought of education as being a profession.

Glenda’s decision to not consider teaching as a profession, was partly influenced by her perception of teachers when she was younger. She believed, based on her observation of teachers she knew, some of whom were members of her church, that teachers had no lives outside of reading books and grading papers, and “no social life outside of the classroom.” She also did not think she had the “personality” to be a teacher, and she believed that teachers did not “make a lot of money.” The decision to not consider teaching as a profession, also and in large part, stemmed from Glenda’s family’s expectations; education was not a field that her family emphasized as a career choice:

> Because in my family, they [wanted] you to be a doctor or a lawyer, you know. They [wanted] you to choose another type of career outside of teaching. Teaching was never a career choice, that [any] one said you should go do. So, I'm not saying it was a bad thing, but it just was not [some]thing that was encouraged.

As a result, Glenda entered her hometown’s historically Black, state university, as a Nursing major, but subsequently changed course to complete her degree in Social Work, for which she also holds a Master’s. It was not until two years out of her master’s degree program in Social Work, that Glenda for the first time considered teaching as a profession when one of her friends and colleagues in the field, suggested that they should become teachers:

> And it wasn't until a friend of mine... I guess we were social workers out of grad school probably, like, two years, maybe, and, she had this bright idea that we should be teachers. And I said, ‘I don't think my personality matches that career.’ You know? And she said, "Why- why not? Let's give it a try."

With her friend’s suggestion, Glenda’s journey to become a teacher ensued. She applied for the Miami Teaching Fellows program and was invited to interview. From that point, Glenda firmly believed that she was charting a spiritual path that was being divinely ordered:

> For me, everything is spiritual. So, me coming here to interview was my daughter's birthday, and I had never been away from my daughter on her birthday. And I remember going through that interview experience...one of the ladies, you know, after I interviewed, one of the teachers came over, and she said, "When you are selected, I will assist you with making sure you find the right school for your daughter." Now, mind you, it was my interview, and I wasn't asking for anything. It had to be over 1000 people there. So, for her to say that to me, it [kind of] gave me chills. And I was like, ‘Why would she say that to me, and that not be true?’ So, I remember speaking to my daughter later that day, and speaking to my mother, and I said, ‘You know, the lady told me once I'm selected, she will assist me.’ She doesn't know me....you know? How was she, [out of] all these people, why would she say that to me? And I remember going back to my hotel later and, God was confirming to me..."You are selected."

Glenda’s faith is pervasive throughout her narrative. Her faith and beliefs are deeply rooted and inform the way in which she makes meaning of her experiences. So, for her, her entry into teaching was a part of her life’s destiny – a calling; this she believes was confirmed again and again as events unfolded that seem to support her belief:

> So, when I traveled back to[my home], I remember I was supposed to be notified by the end of the week that I would be selected. So, the Lord told me to, "Go ahead and type your letter of resignation." And I was like, how am I gonna type my letter of resignation when I don't know the date that I'm leaving? So, the Lord said, "Just do it." So, I did it, and I waited for the date, you know? And sure enough, like, within 24 hours I received the confirmation. So, for me, knowing that this is what God wanted me to do. I was 33 years old at the time, and, you know, the age 33 has significance with God and so, I knew. I said, ‘Okay, Lord, you know, you [want to] do something new and you're ordering my path right now.’ So, for me that was confirmation.

Glenda would have to use the same confidence she had in the certainty of her newfound path and calling, in the difficult conversation she had to have with her father, for whom she worked as a therapist in his business, and whose expectation was that she would follow in his footsteps and one day assume the responsibility of that business, about her decision to enter the teaching profession – a career choice that her family never encouraged:

> Two things. At that time, my father had a background in, social work therapy and, I was actually working for him as a therapist. So, you know, here's my father who's built a business, and he's hoping that I carry out the business in the event he retires

> or, you know, passes away. He's building something to leave for his children. So, that conversation was very difficult, to let him know that, you know, ‘I appreciate what you've done for me, career-wise. However, I feel like I'm being led to do something completely different, and... I don't [want] be disobedient and not do it, you know, what I feel that God is leading me to do.’ So, that conversation was very hard to have...but I did.

Notwithstanding the difficulty of that conversation, Glenda’s father “respected” her decision and the reason in which she grounded that decision. Likewise, Glenda’s mother who also initially did not understand her decision to shift, gave Glenda her blessing. This was important, because, being a single parent, Glenda and her daughter would need the support of her family as she transitioned, not just careers, but effectively, her life from one state to another state.

Glenda did not anticipate that her decision to follow what she believed to be her spiritual path into the teaching profession, would require her to have to, initially, separate from her eleven-year-old daughter. Glenda acknowledges that this was the most difficult part of her decision to enter the teaching profession:

> ...because this part I didn't realize, I would have to leave my daughter, you know? So, I [had] another conversation with God...He didn't tell me I would have to leave my child right away, you know?

Glenda moved to Miami in the summer of the early 2000’s to begin the Miami Teaching Fellows summer training program, which was equivalent to an abbreviated student-teaching experience, and would not reunite with her daughter until that December – six months later. Although difficult, Glenda accepted that her decision to leave her daughter behind was also serving a greater purpose, as her daughter, in large part, was the reason she opened herself to the idea of transitioning. She saw this transition as an opportunity to afford her daughter the benefit of being raised outside of her home state, which was located in the deep south; a place she described as still being divided along Black and white color lines. Glenda wanted her daughter -- who, as a second grader had experienced racism firsthand in school, when her white teacher took the word of another student, who also happened to be White and her Sunday School student at church, that she threatened him -- to know something different:

> So, another part of the decision to move - I wanted my daughter to understand that there was more in the world than just black people, and white people and poverty and, you know, that there was another world full of opportunities, and this was our chance to actually see what's out there in the world...outside of [our state].

As difficult as it was for Glenda to transition away from her daughter, however temporary, her transition into teaching would be an even more difficult task. Glenda, fresh out of the social work field, and into a classroom, remembers that in her first years of teaching, she “did not know what to do.” Among other things, she highlights her lack of classroom management and “understanding” of how to establish “clear boundaries and rules,” at the onset to manage student behaviors. Notwithstanding, Glenda persevered, as she determined, transitioning into teaching, that this was “something” she was not “[going to] give up on.” She committed to “stick with the program at least five years.” Now a nearly 20-year veteran, despite initially having been assigned to a mentor who “wasn’t so great,” Glenda credits the foundation she gained in her early years of teaching, to other colleagues who became her mentors:

> I had to lean on mentors to really assist me, early on in the journey...Teachers on my grade level, mentored me...Because as a new teacher, you think you know, but you really don't know until you're actually faced with those issues in the classroom...So, they helped me with stuff like lesson plans, classroom management, you know, things like that. Showing me how to use a behavior chart, you know, those things I wasn't really familiar with, but they helped me. They would model lessons for me. So, they would do things to help.

Glenda firmly believes that the presence of colleague-mentors in her early days of teaching, helped to sustain her.

Because of these early experiences, which helped her to understand the importance of mentoring others, Glenda, who currently, and for the past three years, has worked in an inner-city school, located in the heart of a historically Black community, without being assigned to do so, is intentional about paying it forward to the new, young Black teachers joining their school community:

> So, for me, I think mentorship is huge. Especially in education. And because, for me, my first mentor wasn't so great, one of the things that I like to do, myself, personally, when I see new teachers on a campus, where I work, I try to be assistance to them. So, from [my] experience, it [kind of] shaped me, personally and professionally, to help others without being assigned to do it.

This practice, Glenda found to be critical, especially for new teachers coming into their school setting. Some of whom shared with her that but for her mentorship as a colleague, they were “on the way out the door.”

Glenda’s school, which she describes as a “generational school,” because the families whose children attend there, have existed in the public housing projects that surround the school, for many generations, is a K-8 Center, serving a predominately Black student population, with a magnet/choice program for the arts. Glenda, with no knowledge of the area, submitted her resume to the principal at that time, based on the recommendation of a fellow college alumnus with whom she taught in a neighboring school district, who was now teaching at the school, and assured her that the school was a “good place.” Her faith was front and center again, when another one of Glenda’s friends who grew up in one of the surrounding neighborhoods of the school, who was also an educator in another state, urged her to consider teaching at the school:

> And then also I had another good friend who grew up, [and] was a product of, [the] community. Her grandmother raised her about a couple [of] blocks from [the school], although she did not go to [the school]. But she is a product of that community. She's also an educator, and she teaches in [another state]. And she asked me, she was like, will you please be willing to at least give back to my community? I'm in [another state], but I know that what you have to offer to the students in my community, is something that they need.

Glenda viewed this as “confirmation” from God, that this is where He wanted her to be, and despite concerns she had related to her personal safety when traveling to the community for work every day, after learning where the school was located, she accepted the principal's offer of a position:

> For me, I think what really concerned me was safety. I was concerned whether, you know, it would be safe for me to really travel to work and through the community, because I didn't know the community well. However, it didn't stop me from taking the position...

Glenda believed then, as she still believes that despite the "challenges," both personal – exhaustion, concern for personal safety – and professional – learning a new curriculum, a new way of work, limited parental involvement, and truancy -- she encountered, which she frames as "breaking walls," her singular mission is to "build relationships" with students and parents alike, and impact the lives of the students entrusted to her to teach. Glenda says of her current assignment – "I'm doing God's work."

Resilience and Perseverance

Terri

...there was a lot of trial and error. But the most important thing is I never gave up; I was scared a couple of times, but I never gave up.

Terri has had to overcome many obstacles, both on her journey to realizing her life's dream of becoming a teacher, as well as in her teacher journey-experience. Terri, a graduate of a historically Black college/university, was one of many Education majors, who, soon to be a college graduate and one step closer to becoming a teacher, was impacted by a change in graduation requirements. The new change required that Education majors obtain a passing score on the state certification test prior to having their degree conferred:

> When I got to college, everything was okay, I was fine with it, until my Senior year, with those teacher certification tests; that was my hardest right there. And, it just got so...it was like, it was a little overwhelming because, before, you can just graduate, and then take those tests. And then...they changed it...2003 I think it was, they changed it. And, I did get frustrated because I didn't pass it the first two times...I understood that I couldn't get my degree until I passed that test.

Terri would try, unsuccessfully, multiple times, to sit and pass the certification test -- always falling short of a passing score by two to three points. Discouraged and despondent, Terri, who started substitute teaching, had all but given up on her dream of becoming a teacher, and began to explore other career options:

> Now, by this time, I had applied for FDLE and I was through with education; [be]cause the test, I think I was getting 296...it was like two or three points off, and I just, you know, kind of gave up...I was just going a whole different route.

However, Terri regained her focus and confidence after finding and joining a Facebook support group for users who shared frustration with multiple failed attempts on the Florida Teacher Certification Exam (FTCE). After joining this group and reading posts of tales of both trial and triumph, and with the encouragement of her college mentors, Terri was inspired to re-engage the process and hired a private tutor:

> What kept me going is just...I would read in that group all the issues...you could ask, post questions or whatever...Dr. [B] at the school and Ms. [B], both of them, they [were] like, "You came this far...", you know, they kept encouraging me also. "What are you [going to] do?" They offered some courses at [a local college]... I chose the private tutor so I could do one on one.

And in three months-time, her dream which had been deferred for two years, was once again in sight of becoming reality, as she passed the required state teacher certification exam and had her degree conferred.

Having overcome those major hurdles, Terri, who always knew she wanted to be a teacher, because while “some kids played doctor,” she “played school,” with her nieces and nephews when they came over, reconnected with her desire to teach – a desire that she held with all certainty since she was a Fifth Grader, and was successful at being offered her first teaching position, as a Kindergarten teacher. Although Terri accepted her first teaching position and started the school year at one school (a school in her community), she would end up on the surplus list, because of a lower than anticipated enrollment at that school, and subsequently have to be placed by the District, at another school, one month into the school year. Terri recounts that this early experience was “just hard.” After being designated as surplus, and being placed at the new school, Terri was assigned to teach a combination Kinder and First Grade class, on a team with teachers whom she describes as “seasoned” and “set in their ways”:

> ...the hardest part when I taught at [the school] was that K1 class. It was a K1 combo. It was the lower First Graders with the higher Kindergarteners, and that was just hard for me...my first-year teaching, I [had] to do two sets of lesson plans; everything was sets of twos, and I was like, ‘this is a lot’ – it was. And there, I was with, how would I say it, seasoned teachers. And when I say set in their ways, they were set in their ways. I wanted to be a team player...but, it was difficult.

Terri was a first-year teacher, new to the school, the only teacher with a combination class assignment in Kindergarten, and the only Black teacher on the Kindergarten team. Not only was her teaching assignment difficult, but the team she was assigned to teach with, made her first-year teaching experience even more difficult.

Unlike the school in her community where she initially accepted her first teaching assignment before being declared surplus, this school's demographic was predominately White and Hispanic, with a Hispanic Principal and predominately Hispanic teaching staff. One of Terri's first experiences was with a Spanish-speaking parent, who, after speaking with one of Terri's Hispanic teammates about an issue she had with Terri regarding her son who was in Terri's class, went to the principal to request that her child be removed from Terri's class because Terri did not speak Spanish:

> ...she went to the other teacher, started talking to her in Spanish...then, to the principal. My principal called me and when he asked to see me afterschool, I just knew that was it...And he asked me, "Would you be offended if I moved the child out of your class?" Because he said the parent was having trouble communicating with me because she spoke Spanish. I said, 'but the child speaks perfect English'. I said, 'He's not having a problem.' And he said, "I understand...but, do you mind?" And they switched him out of my class. He was removed from my class because she was having trouble communicating with me.

The student was placed with a Spanish-speaking teacher. Terri admits that she "was so upset" with the principal's decision to move the student from her class and, as a new teacher, did not quite know what to make of his decision.

Yet, while grappling with this dynamic, Terri was also becoming overwhelmed with the dynamics on her team. Terri remembers that although she wanted to be a "team player" her teammates' treatment of her made it clear that she was not a part of the team:

> And they would talk over me in Spanish, which I hate, that irks my nerves. They would, we would sit, I would plan with them, but then half the time I wouldn't know what they were saying, because they would start off in English and then they would do a little side bar in Spanish and I'm like "why am I going"? I didn't want to complain because I [was] new.

In addition, her team was not open, and often rejected her ideas and suggestions. For example, Terri suggested to the team that rather than assign students homework daily, they should consider assigning weekly homework packets, to no avail. So that year, Terri was relegated to the "time consuming" task of issuing homework daily, because in her assessment, she "didn't have a say so." With an obvious lack of mentorship, assigned or otherwise, at her newly assigned school, and trying to cope with the parent dynamic, and a team of colleagues who made her feel unwelcome, absent of voice, Terri, reached back to two Black teachers, who were also veteran teachers, from her first school with whom she had formed a bond in that first month as her colleague-mentors, for guidance and support in how to handle what she was experiencing: So I used to reach out to Ms. [W] and Ms. [J]. They used to tell me to speak up, but I was like, "No"...but they encouraged me and gave me some [advice].

Although she only had benefit of her experience with her colleague-mentors for one month prior to being identified as surplus, much of their way of work – from their system of planning, instructional approaches, to their philosophy related to student discipline – Terri adopted as her own and this would become the foundation upon which Terri would frame much of her professional practice moving forward. Because of the support of her colleague-mentors that year and into the next year, Terri successfully navigated her experiences at the school, and eventually, taking the advice of her colleague-mentors, Ms. [W.] and Ms. [J.], began to find and use her voice with her teammates, and “speak-up,” to present her ideas and suggestions for how planning should be organized, as well as the frequency of homework:

> So that second year, I brought up the [homework] packets. Give [them] out on Monday and collect them on the following Monday. I would do the homework packets[for the team]. And I also talked to them about the planning. Some people want their lesson plans a certain way, with their Reading, and Language Arts, and so that's how we disseminated who was going to do what, and I ended up with the homework packet.

Notwithstanding Terri’s ability to overcome the dynamics – parental and collegial challenges – she encountered after being assigned to this school her first few years of teaching, Terri, as a result of not being aware that the District’s timeline for state certification test completion was one year sooner than the state’s, was removed at the end of her second year, from the system and her position at [the school] at the end of the District’s fiscal year (June 30th). Having already learned the art of persevering, Terri did not flinch. She immediately took and passed the last of the required state certification tests that summer in time for the ensuing school year and was offered a teaching position at her now current school.

Terri, in search of another teaching position, heard about a new school that was opening in the fall, and was still in need of teachers. On the advice of friends, who counseled her that even if she had to travel some distance, her goal was to secure a full-time teaching position for the upcoming year, and then transfer to another school the next year, Terri pursued this lead. Motivated, and armed with this information, she went to the school, met with the principal, was offered and accepted the offer of a position. Terri, recounts about the school that she “knew nothing,” and “didn’t know that school even existed...I just knew I needed a job.” That was fourteen years ago.

When the school opened, according to Terri, they serviced a predominately Black student population, most of whom were bussed in, primarily from pockets of lower socio-economic backgrounds. The school, she remembers, was “at capacity,” as the enrollment was nearly 800 students, and as a result, after the school year began, because of the influx of Kindergarten students, she was assigned to teach in a co-teaching model – she and another teacher in one classroom with thirty-five students. This continued into the second year. Terri explains that although her school services predominately low socio-economic Black students, and is named for an economically depressed, historically Black community in the southern part of the county, the physical school building does not actually sit, geographically, in that community. Ironically, according to Terri, her school is located in what she describes as a middle-class, suburban neighborhood. Many of the children from those surrounding neighborhoods do not attend Terri’s school, as their parents elect to send them to the neighboring charter schools located in proximity to her school:

> The name of our school is [], but we're not really in [that community]. We're a little further down; but, we're in like the...middle-class neighborhood. Those kids don't come to our school. They go across the street to the charter schools. They go to the charter schools; they very rarely come to our school.

Some of this phenomenon Terri maintains happened over time, as the school’s academic standing under the state’s accountability system, began to decline. Terri recounts that around year seven or eight of the school’s existence, the school’s letter grade dropped to an “F.” This resulted in the school being designated as ETO, and placed, by the state on an extended school day schedule – requiring that students remain in school an extra hour to receive additional instruction in Reading; all of which still remain in place present day. Moreover, with the stigma of the school’s failing letter grade and increased oversight by the District and state, coupled with the increase in the number of charter schools in the area, the school’s enrollment began to decrease, as parents began to choose other options available to them. By year ten, the school’s enrollment declined by almost 200 – from nearly 800 students to 600 students – according to Terri, and would continue to decline every year thereafter. Presently, the school’s enrollment hovers at or just below 300 students:

> One year, we were a “F” school. That first time we were a[n] F school, [the] No Child Left Behind, when everybody got those waivers to go somewhere, that's when we lost a lot of students. And because we were extended day, that's when our numbers started going down. Parents didn't want their kids in school [until] 4:00...when we became ETO, then our numbers went down further.

With the added weight of accountability, and oversight by ETO, Terri felt that “a lot [was] put on teachers,” adding that the work “was stressful.” Their way of work was significantly altered, with an increase in visitors frequenting their school and classrooms, and the very prescribed way in which Terri and her colleagues were asked to capture and track progress monitoring data for students:

> I feel like a lot is put on the teachers. We get visitors. I mean, I don't care about visiting. That part I don't really care about. But it's just the point, we have visitors.

> We used to have visitors weekly. Then you have to do all these charts for Kindergarten...So, for Kindergarten, I had to fill out three folders and they didn't let me make a chart, like a cell chart so I can put everybody on one...I just didn't think it was necessary. I have Kindergartners. You're [making] me do this, this, this, but that's what the District wanted so that's what I had to do. Keep their i-Ready scores up, keep up with their Topic Assessments...It wasn't always like that. It wasn't. The work wasn't always like that.

Even being ETO-supported, and an extended day school, the school's academic standing made little improvement, which perpetuated the declining enrollment. As students left, so did many of Terri's colleagues – some through surplus, because the school's enrollment could not support the level of teaching staff that was once needed when the school was at or near capacity, and others on their own accord, as they could no longer endure the effects of the system of accountability that had altered their way of work. Terri is only one of two teachers remaining from the founding faculty who opened the school. Some years ago, Terri had to take a leave of absence for an entire school year, to attend to personal health challenges she was experiencing; upon her return to work the next school year, some of her colleagues commented "While you, [were] home all this time, you [were] home for a whole year, you could have found you another school." Terri's reply to her colleagues was, "Just I don't know. It didn't cross my mind." This is a testament to Terri's commitment and her resolve to persevere and continue to educate her students as she navigates the challenges the system – accountability and others – poses in her school community.

Resistance

Carolyn

But a lot of times, it just- it required being bold enough to say, okay, no I know what's best for my students and what you want me to do is not working...And so, having the boldness to do that. It wasn't easy.

Carolyn is a Black female educator who has been teaching for 23 years. By choice, more than half of her career has been spent in a school community that services students who are poor, and black and who, according to the current system of accountability, have significant academic deficits. Much of Carolyn’s passion to teach this population is fueled by her own schooling experiences. As a student in the 1970’s, she experienced first-hand both the end of segregation and the imperfect roll-out of desegregation, when she and her classmates, who had been students in an all-Black elementary school, with the same teacher for the last four years of their time there, were impacted when the city’s local school district, who despite the passing of *Brown* in 1954, nearly 10 years earlier, delayed compliance, and as a result, were now under a federal order mandating the integration of public schools.

Carolyn remembers: “We were not wanted at the school; and it was very obvious we weren't wanted. The teachers were not very kind. The kids were not very kind.” In reflecting on these experiences, when juxtaposed to the experiences in her all-Black elementary school, Carolyn and her classmates could not at the time appreciate their experience:

> We didn't realize how blessed we were until we left that school and went to the [junior high] school. To have a teacher and you know that the teacher doesn't really

> care about you, it did something to I think all of us. And we knew that they didn't care.

Moreover, Carolyn recalls that, because she excelled academically, many times, she was the only “child of color” in her classes, for both junior and senior high school; experiences she characterizes as “lonely.” She remembers always being made to feel that her best effort was not equal to that of her white classmate counterparts; out of this her need to resist what she perceived as unfair treatment, along with her advocacy, was birthed:

> I had to go, I had to do more than the other kids in order to get the same grade. I mean, if I answered my question and they answer the question, if my question wasn't like a response twice as long, then I wouldn't, I'm like but I have the same information. Or if I found a different way to do a math problem -- I [got] the same answer but it wasn't the way they did it. I'm like but this is how I do it. And not having it accepted because no, it didn't match the way they did it. I remember we had to do a black history [project] and I wanted to do the Black Panthers - and [the teacher] go[es], "Oh no, you can't do that." And I'm like, ‘but why not, it's Black History [Month] and I can choose who I want.’ And they wanted to tell me who I could do. And I'm like no, no. I either do that, or I don't do any.

Carolyn, who because of her experiences and the treatment she describes receiving from teachers in the schools she and her classmates were made to integrate, admits that she developed a dislike for school:

> Well, my mom kept saying, "You know what? You're smart. You're – you know, God loves you." And she just kept instilling that in me. Because I told her, I did not want to go. I didn't want to go to the school. I wanted to go to the school where

> everybody looked like me. And she said, "No, you know, the laws have changed..."
>
> So, I tolerated it, but it made me dislike school. I disliked school. In fact, when I graduated from high school, I didn't even go to my high school graduation. That's how much I disliked it.

Given these early schooling experiences, which would also be the catalyst from which Carolyn's spirit of resistance would emerge, it is no surprise that Carolyn, upon graduating high school, would not elect to enter the field of education, but decided instead to become a nurse. However, through a series of life circumstances, many years later, Carolyn's journey-path would lead her to education, as a second career choice.

Carolyn states that "it's because of my daughter that I ended up teaching." She shares that her daughter, whose educational experiences in some ways mirrored her own, -- the only black student in her class, a strong dislike for school – as a student, early on, was non-passive, "strong-willed," and did not "tolerate anything that they [teachers] had to offer her." Because of these traits, Carolyn was often called to her daughter's school to address her non-compliant behavior. Carolyn, hoping to remedy her daughter's behavior, enrolled her in a private school, but to no avail, as her daughter's behaviors persisted, and calls for Carolyn to come to the school persisted as well. As such, Carolyn made the calculation, that since she was already being called to the school often, perhaps accepting a volunteer role at the school, would be beneficial for both her and her daughter. After having been a volunteer for some time in a Pre-K classroom, Carolyn recounts that the principal offered her the opportunity to teach at the school:

> So, I became a volunteer at the school. And I was there so much, the principal says, "Well you're here so much, why don't you just get a job teaching?" And I said, 'but

> I don't have any training. I'm not a teacher. I'm a nurse.’ I [said], ‘I'm doing this because you[‘re] always calling me about my daughter.’

With this invitation, Carolyn embarked on her teacher-journey, first deciding to follow the lead of the Pre-K teacher whose classroom she had been assigned to and enrolling to receive her Child Development Associate (CDA) certification. It was at the start of this process where Carolyn learned through one of the counselors at the college she was enrolling in the for CDA course, that because she already held a Bachelor’s, she was eligible for a year’s-long program to become a fully certifiable teacher. The opportunity opened up to her by her daughter’s private school principal, would serve Carolyn, as she remained a part-time Pre-K teacher for a number of years. However, after some time, Carolyn made the decision to return to the field of nursing as a teacher at the nursing school for a large public hospital. Her return, though, would be cut short by a car accident, which caused Carolyn to reassess her family dynamic, at that time, and make adjustments to reprioritize what was in the best interest of her family, which she ultimately determined would be for her to return to education again:

> So, I left [the preschool] and I went back to nursing and worked at [the public hospital’s] School of Nursing. And I loved that, then I got into a car accident; and while I was at home, I decided you know what, I need something that's [going to] work with my kids, so let me find a job that will work with my kids. So, I [said] well I know what, education.

Carolyn’s return to education this time, however, would lead her to the public school sector.

Still moved by her daughter’s transformation by the time she was in Third Grade, because of the impact of a teacher, and reminded of her own elementary school teacher, who had such an impact on her life, Carolyn was inspired to herself, become that same kind of teacher for students:

> But she ha[d] such a positive experience when she got to, I think it was third grade – a teacher that was reminding me of that teacher that I had in elementary school – this teacher just changed her life. And all [of a] sudden for my kid that hated school, she loved school. And from that point on, I [said], ‘Oh my God. I'm [going to] be that teacher for my kids.’

With her reentry back into education, namely, public school, Carolyn was offered and accepted her first public school teaching assignment at a school serving a predominately Hispanic student demographic:

> I was hired as a teacher with absolutely no experience [in a public school classroom] because I changed careers, so I had no teacher training as far as an internship. I did a program where I was already bachelor-degreed in nursing, and I switched to education. So, the principal, she said, "You know what, I'm [going to] take a chance on you." And she did; so, I was hired to teach Kindergarten.

Carolyn remembers in her first few days teaching in public school, thinking, “Oh my God. I don't know what I've done. I don't know what I've gotten myself into.” To further compound her doubts, her principal entered her classroom with one request – “Whatever you do, I just don't want the kids to cry. So do whatever you need to do, I don't care what you do, but I don't want them to cry." Recognizing that her years of experience as a part-time teacher in a Pre-K classroom had not adequately prepared her for her new teaching assignment, Carolyn enlisted a mentor: ...“But I knew that I was lacking in so many areas.

I was like, I don't even know what to do because I've never had a full day in a regular classroom. And so, I found a mentor.”

Carolyn understood the critical importance of having a mentor to help guide her through her first year as a full-time, public school teacher, so she, on her own, sought out a seasoned, Black female teacher (one of few at her school) who, through her observation of that teacher’s practice and interaction with her students, demonstrated qualities that reminded Carolyn of her elementary teacher. Carolyn, confident that she had found the perfect mentor, advised the principal of her choice. However, the principal advised Carolyn of two things – first, that she had already identified someone else to be her mentor, and second, that the teacher whom Carolyn had identified, “doesn’t mentor anyone.” Notwithstanding, Carolyn moved forward. She did, however, meet with reluctance from her preferred mentor, but this did not discourage Carolyn, as she continued to pursue her until she accepted the assignment that Carolyn had enlisted her for:

> I [said], ‘You're [going to] be my mentor.’ And she goes, "No, no, no, no, no. I don't do that." I [said], ‘I don't care what you don't do. You're going to be my mentor...’ And I wouldn't take no for an answer...She was an awesome teacher, and she reminded me of my, [elementary teacher]. I [said], ‘No. You've got so many qualities. I need you to be my mentor.’ And she did, she really did. And she took me under her wings, and made transitioning from nursing to teaching so much easier.

Carolyn attributes her success at that school, to her mentor who “held my hand throughout that first year,” and for the subsequent years she would remain there.

Having developed a soft spot for this type of student, out of both her own, and her daughter's experiences, at the end of her third year, Carolyn volunteered to teach a class made up of students whom she described as "children who just didn't like school," for the next upcoming school year. It would be this teaching assignment, that reminded Carolyn of where and with which student group, she truly wanted to have an impact and make a difference with, just as her daughter's teacher made with her daughter years earlier:

> And then they started a program and I volunteered [for it] because again, I was thinking you know what, [my daughter's teacher] made a difference in my daughter. They had a program for children who just didn't like school, and it brought back memories of me not liking school. I [said] you know what, here's my chance. So, I volunteered to teach those group of kids, and it was the best decision I'd ever made.

This assignment, caused Carolyn to reflect:

> I don't feel like I'm really giving back here, even though I volunteered to work in the special program. I still didn't feel like I was doing what I wanted to do, when I decided to go and become a teacher. I said, yeah, I'm reaching kids, but I'm not really reaching the kids that I [want to] reach. And it's not [going to] happen here at this school, so I need to find a school where I would have a stronger chance of being able to reach children of color.

Not long after this reflection, one of Carolyn's colleagues shared with her that she heard about a new school being built in a historically black community, that was scheduled to open the next school year. Excited to hear about the possibility of an opportunity to teach in a school that would service Black students predominately, Carolyn sprang into action – from conducting a drive-by of the school's construction site, to sending the principal of that school her resume – hoping to position herself as a candidate for one of the teaching positions there for the next school year:

> A friend of mine told me, “[Carolyn], there's a new school they're building, and I think it's [going to] have a lot of our kids.” I'm like, ‘what do you mean?’ She goes, “there's a new school in [that community]. If it's in [that community], it's [got to] have, you know, children of color.” I said, ‘okay.’ She [said], “let's go check it out.” So we went, we drove by the school, and we watched the school being built. And I applied and sent the principal my resume...

A part of Carolyn’s action steps also involved submitting her transfer request to her current school’s principal, who, upon learning the school for which Carolyn was requesting a transfer, was taken aback. According to Carolyn, her principal was so stunned, that she did not believe Carolyn neither understood what she was asking for, or that she was actually serious about transferring from her current school – a suburban “A” rated school, servicing a predominately White-Hispanic student demographic, to a school servicing a predominately Black student demographic in an urban core, riddled with historically failing schools – and refused to sign Carolyn’s transfer request:

> And so when they started building [the new school], I went to my principal and I [said], ‘I'm going to transfer to [the new school]." She goes, "Have you lost your mind? You're leaving here to go to [there]?" I [said], ‘Yes, I am leaving here to go to [the new school].’ She goes, "Do you realize what you're getting yourself into?" I [said], ‘Yes, I do. I need to be where I can work with kids, my own kids.’ She tried her hardest to talk me out of it. She in fact, up until the last day of school, she hadn't even signed my transfer.

After threatening to contact the teachers' union, and refusing her principal's offer of "one more year," Carolyn's transfer request was signed, clearing her path forward to transition to the place where, according to Carolyn, "I could impact my kids, and give back to them what [that] teacher had done for my daughter."

Carolyn's new school and new assignment would not disappoint, as Carolyn and her friend assumed rightly, the school's student demographic was made up primarily of Black students, who were bussed in from nearby neighborhoods, consisting of public housing projects and pockets of low-income housing. Carolyn explains that the school district adjusted the boundaries or zones of a suburban school from the eastside, which had historically serviced the pockets of Black students that were now the majority of their school's student population. However, although Carolyn was where she chose to be, doing what she believed she was compelled to do, she describes that doing this work, did not come without its challenges the first year, even being a brand new school; many of those challenges Carolyn attributed to the student demographic their school serviced:

> But, we knew we had to work hard with the kids to get them where they needed to be, even though we knew we didn't have the full support. I think we would've had, had our dynamics, the demographics of our school, been different. Because when I went there, I thought because it was a new school, it would be well stocked. We weren't fully stocked with materials until probably going into our second year. And that was hard, because I came out of a school where no matter what I asked for, it was there. And I was like, how can this be? This is a brand-new school. So that was hard...There were times when we didn't have enough books, we didn't have enough workbooks. They [the students] were having to copy on paper when they should've

> been able to just use those workbooks. The library was not fully stocked. It had books, but I [had] been spoiled from where I came from, because when I say whatever story we were reading, we had, I could go to the library and pull whatever I needed to pull for those particular stories. So, we didn't have all of the materials the first year. In fact, they were still working on the school when we moved into it. So there were a lot of distractions for the students, and I just felt like had we been servicing a different demographic, it would not have been as it was. I think we would've had what we needed when we moved in.

The challenges would persist. With frequent changes in administrators – principals and assistant principals – Carolyn often found herself having to defend her instructional approaches and advocate for what she believed to be in the best interest of her students, which put her at odds with her administrators. Carolyn recounts an ongoing struggle with one such assistant principal:

> ...and with that AP, she would [want to] come in and tell me how to do things. And I'm like no, no, no, no, no. You know, that might work for you, but that does not work for me, and that does not work for my kids. And I'm here for my kids...She was used to if she said it, you did it. And I'm like no, my background is in Reading, and I know what I'm doing. So no, what you're telling me, that doesn't wash with me. [Be]cause I remember she came in, and she [said], "No, you're not to teach spelling anymore." And I'm like, ‘What do you mean I don't teach spelling?’ I [said], ‘My kids need to learn how to spell.’ And she goes, "No. We've decided we're not." I [said], ‘Well, you can decide what you want, but I'm not taking it out

> of their curriculum. I mean, I might not give it a grade, but I'm going to teach them how to spell'...and so everything that I wanted to do she was totally against.

Carolyn's advocacy on behalf of her students, and her reluctance to acquiesce taking the path of least resistance, did not come without consequence. For example, for the first time in her teaching career, Carolyn received a low performance evaluation. Moreover, she relays that the Black male principal who had been assigned to the school in the middle years of the school's existence, often overlooked and failed to acknowledge her work and that of the other Black teachers at the school, whom she believed were the backbone of the school, while he often acknowledged, with praise, the work of their White and Hispanic counterparts:

> ...but then I ended up with another principal that was like me, [who] was just totally the opposite [of my previous principal]. It was like come on guy, you know, we're here. We're trying to help you. And you could see that he didn't respect the teachers of color as much as he did the other teachers. Which really made me sad because I'm like, we're working our butts off here for you, and you don't even acknowledge when we do something. But everybody, the other ones, get all the praise.

Compounding the internal challenges, were the existence of external challenges, some stemming from students' lack of academic readiness and limited to no parental support, and another, and perhaps more significant, resulting from the school's standing according to the state's accountability system, which resulted in the school being designated as ETO. Carolyn describes that, "it was like fighting against a system that you really couldn't fight against...because, you do it the ETO way, or no way." Having ETO as this looming presence in the building, significantly altered Carolyn and her colleagues' way of work, and according to Carolyn “caused a lot of friction,” in the building. Notwithstanding the friction created by the existence of ETO, Carolyn attributes the support of her colleagues, whom she states “leaned a lot on each other,” to making the decision year after year to return to the work and doing that work at her school.

Connection

Joy

I do see a connection between, how my experiences played a large role and why I decided to work in inner-city schools; my best childhood memories came from those inner-city schools where I felt more of a belonging, and where now I feel like I am able to give back a little bit more...

From the time Joy was a Third Grader, she knew she wanted to be a teacher. Third Grade, for Joy, was a turning point, and the first time she felt connected – as if she belonged – and was “at home,” in a learning environment. Previous to then, Joy, who always excelled academically in school, attended private and public schools where often, she was the only Black student in her class. Joy remembers that she was not comfortable, because she always felt that she was being thrust into the “spotlight” because she was “different” – Black, a girl and smart – and treated almost as if she were an anomaly:

> I felt like I was kind of like the spotlight and, to this day, I don't like being in the spotlight. And with me being different in Kindergarten through Second Grade, I didn't like the attention...And then my mom made the connection as well, because when she would come out to the school, it would be the same thing. I was the spotlight kind of thing, and she saw that wasn't my personality to be, you know, the spotlight of every situation. And I didn't want to be that token... I didn't necessarily know that's what it was then, but I do know now, but I didn't feel comfortable.

Although the school Joy attended was conveniently located near her mother’s office, recognizing that Joy was uncomfortably out-of-place with the unwanted and forced attention, Joy’s mother made the decision to enroll her in the elementary school in their community for Third Grade. For the first time in her schooling experience, Joy was in a school community with classmate peers who looked like her, as she recalls: “I saw more people like me.” And even more, for the first time, Joy’s teacher was Black. Joy credits Mrs. [S], her Third Grade teacher, whom she ascribes her “fondest memory,” of schooling to, with the reason she fell in love with the idea of becoming a teacher:

> ...my fondest [memory] was my Third Grade teacher, Mrs. [S], from the elementary school that I attended. She pushed me like no other, and from that point on, I wanted to be just like her. And from Third Grade on, I wanted to be a teacher... And from that point on, I knew that I wanted to make a difference just like her.

The “difference” that Joy references, is in stark contrast to her previous experiences in school. Before, she had teachers who made her feel like a spectacle, which made her “uncomfortable;” but Mrs.[S], Joy shares, made the difference for her, as she created a classroom “atmosphere,” that both challenged her academically, and created a sense of community to which she felt she belonged finally:

> She would tell us that we needed to be challenged and she gave us those college words, she called them. I'm not necessarily sure if they were actual college words...But the atmosphere that I was in, where I felt like I [could] connect with the teacher that was in charge, that was the biggest difference...She made me feel really, like I felt at home. I was really comfortable.

By the time Joy was in high school, her Third Grade dream of becoming a teacher, was firmly cemented. After graduating high school, Joy entered the workforce and enrolled in college, as an Education major. While working for a local corporation, who happened to also have a district-run elementary school located on the property of their corporate headquarters as an added benefit and convenience for their employees, Joy used this as an opportunity to complete her required field experience hours. This helped to further confirm for her that education was indeed where she wanted to be. After graduating with her Bachelor’s, Joy began substituting before being offered her first full-time position at an elementary school located in a suburban middle-class neighborhood, but would end up being identified as surplus, and as a result, be reassigned to another school with a slightly different demographic, as they serviced a pocket of students bussed in from a low-income housing complex from the west side of the highway. This experience, aside from her days of substituting at a school in her community that serviced a predominantly Black student demographic, would begin Joy’s trajectory forward, as she intentionally began to seek-out positions in schools situated in the school district’s urban cores.

Even after marrying and relocating to the north end of the county, Joy, who accepted a position at a school with a seven- minute commute from her house, opted after one year, to drive nearly 30 minutes from her house, to teach at a school that was more closely aligned to her teaching ethos:

> It [is] pretty much my entire teaching career where I'm in these demographic schools. I think in the beginning, it was by default. So that was that at the beginning, and I think that's what I was accustomed to. So, when I moved [north], it was more of location when I went to [the first school], it was literally, from my door to the

> classroom door, it was seven minutes away. That's the school I only stayed [at] one year; it was location. And then I got the opportunity to go to [another school], which I thought was a little bit more my speed, definitely by choice.

For Joy, she believed she was called to the classrooms in the schools she chose to serve in, so that students, maybe for different reasons, who felt disconnected and out of place, perhaps as she did in her early schooling experiences prior to Third Grade, would always have someone to connect to and always feel at home in their classroom space. So, to engender this feeling of connectedness, as a teacher, Joy always ensured that her classroom was filled with pictures of her students and all of the work they engaged in throughout the year, this she shares, was a way for students not only to own their classroom environment, but also to see it as a home away from their own homes:

> I was kind of [an] out of the box, kind of teacher. I had pictures everywhere of my students, and still have some of those pictures. So, grouping, just coming in the classroom, just looking at your face, on a bulletin board, next to a picture of the grouping, was something that I did...and I use[d] pictures for everything, like we would have different things in the classroom, and I would post pictures and around the room, so when people came in our classroom, they saw all the different things that we did. So, I just think it was more of showcasing these are my children during the day, like, these are my babies, and I think that was more important to them because they felt like this was like their second home [kind of] thing.

Not only did Joy post pictures, around her classroom as a way to make connections for students, she also, as a means to keep them engaged and motivated to learn, implemented a classroom store – which was akin to the neighborhood cookie-lady’s house-store –

stocked full of goodies that were familiar and appealed to her students. Students could access the store's goodies by earning points and then cashing those points in for their desired items. Again, for Joy, this was a way to make all of her students "feel like winners," as no matter what students scored on a test, everyone received some points for their effort.

After having taught for more than ten years at a number of schools in the urban core across the district, Joy's teaching practices and instructional approaches were noted, and she was encouraged by her then principal, to apply to the Coaching Academy, as he believed she would make an excellent Coach. Joy was a little hesitant about the possibility of leaving the classroom, as she loved her students and the work she engaged teaching them. But, after some consideration, and with the encouragement, of her principal, Joy, applied, and was accepted into the Coaching Academy, and upon completion, was immediately hired as the Reading Coach for the school to which she has been assigned for the past seven years. The school, which is located in what is considered a red-light district, riddled with high poverty and crime, when Joy arrived, was a double "F", Tier 3 ETO-supported school that was also identified by the state as an L300-Extended Day school, because of the low proficiency scores in Reading, servicing a majority Black student demographic, many of whom lived in a nearby trailer park. Joy reflects that when she arrived as the school's Reading Coach, she met a teaching faculty who were seemingly battle-weary:

> I think when I came in it was kind of a low momentum, I'm [going to] say. But it's kind of hard when you're, you're working [until] 4:00 teaching kids...[The school] was a double "F", L-300 school. The state was involved, and we had tons of

> visitors...and just so many other things that [were] happening in the community at the same time.

As such, part of Joy's work would involve building relationships with her colleagues and building them by supporting them as they engaged new approaches to their work with their students; as it was obvious, that what was being done before, was not resulting in raised student achievement. Joy's approach to this lift, lay in her ability to influence teachers to reimagine their practices, and consider that the student demographic they served, required more than what existed in textbooks and prescribed curriculum:

> But I was able to show teachers a different way of doing things; how to deal with the kids, because I had that experience, being in those same type of classrooms...you have to think beyond the books, beyond the walls...You can't just be a teacher of content, you have to be a teacher of life as well.

Although Joy describes her work as "challenging" at times as, she feels like she's "trying to build a castle in quicksand," she is firm in her belief that she "belongs" doing this work, in the schools that she has chosen to do the work in, as she endeavors to ensure "bigger and brighter outcomes," for those students, and larger school communities.

Experience

Denise

...I do encourage new teachers to move around. For that simple fact that, sometimes your worst experience can be your best teacher and you learn as you go.

Growing up in a historically Black community, Denise, who attended the schools in her community, remembers of her elementary school years, "strong," and "caring", Black teachers, with deep-rooted connections in the community, "who could spank."

Denise recalls that, Ms. [M], who was both her Fifth and Sixth Grade teacher, instilled in them, an awareness of their identity as “little Black girls and little Black boys,” and often framed lessons as preparation for what they may encounter in the future:

> I always think of Ms. [M]. She was both my Fifth and Sixth Grade teacher. And she tried to instill those qualities of you are an African-American. She wanted to instill and get us ready for the future. Now back then, I didn't know what she was trying to say and what she was trying to do, but she knew as little Black girls and little Black boys, maybe some of the things we would encounter. So, she wanted to instill that education.

Much of whom Denise would become as an educator, would be informed by her early schooling experiences and would continue to be shaped by those teachers she would encounter throughout the remainder of her public school education.

Encouraged by her father to pursue education as a career, Denise would begin her journey to becoming a teacher after high school as an aftercare worker – her first experience with children – at a school serving a predominately White student demographic, headed by a White principal, located in a middle-class suburban neighborhood. Denise enrolled in college, and continued working in the afterschool program, eventually becoming a substitute teacher at the same school, and upon graduating from college, the school’s principal offered Denise her first teaching position. According to Denise, she was offered the position, because she was the right “fit.” It was not only that the principal had had the opportunity to observe her with children over the years in her capacity as an aftercare worker, and then substitute, it was also, and perhaps more importantly for Denise, that she happened to be, at that time, Black and female – none of the aforementioned qualifiers would have mattered, if she did not meet these specific criteria, or what Denise refers to as the "quota." Denise explains that at the time that she was being hired into the system in the 1990's, school principals were held to "racial quotas", in that they were required to hire a certain number of Black teachers and other staff:

> ... they found me to be a good candidate for their school and their environment. The Third Grade teacher retired and I just happened to fit in during that time. Right, so you hire so many African-Americans, and the cafeteria staff and the custodial staff, [were] part of those numbers as well. So, the racial - well, the quota, I believe, I don't know the actual name for it, but it was like a racial quota where the principal can only hire so many blacks and so many whites for the staff. That was during the beginning of my time. So, the Third Grade teacher [who was retiring], she happened to be African-American and then I was a perfect candidate to come in and start at that school.

Given the hiring structure in place, Denise was the only Black teacher on her grade level; this was the case for the other four Black teachers at the school as well, as they too were the only Black teachers on their respective grade levels. Because of this, Denise, aware of her anomalous existence as a Black woman in a predominately White school, felt that she had to be careful, and always mindful to be on point where both her students' parents and her White/Hispanic colleagues were concerned:

> I had to make sure – and I do want to say this for this particular school – I had to dot my i's and cross my t's as an African-American woman, who's working predominantly with the White and Hispanic teachers. It was more of them. We did have some African-American teachers on staff, but I can probably count them

> maybe, [on] one hand, the teachers. With the parents and with the students... I had to really make sure, even though you should watch what you say and do anyway, but I always felt that, if I just [said] that one little thing, you know, the parents [would] complain or take it to a whole new level because of me being African-American.

Notwithstanding the limited number of Black teachers, and what she describes as existing in a fishbowl in this predominately White school community, Denise remained at the school for the next eight (8) years, and reflects that it was “a great experience,” for her, as a new and early career teacher, and helped her to establish a foundation for her teaching practices.

However, after marrying, Denise moved to the north part of the county and transferred to an elementary school located in a historically Black neighborhood, that serviced a predominately Black student demographic, with a Black principal and a majority Black teaching staff – a school community vastly different from the one she left. Although Denise was keenly aware of the physical community wherein the school was situated, she was not at all prepared for the stark differences between this school and her former school, that she would encounter. Having come from a predominately White school, with a White principal, and majority White/Hispanic teaching staff, Denise was accustomed to a well-maintained, resource-rich school, where, if the school could not provide it, the very active Parent Teacher Association (PTA), was there to support by stopping those gaps. She recounts, specifically, being “dumbfounded” about the upkeep and maintenance of the school:

> So, I go to [this new school] and the naive me thinking, ‘Oh, all of these schools are somewhat the same. It can't be that bad.’ It's the same district. I mean the same Miami-Dade County. It was night and day. I was in for a rude awakening. I was like, this cannot be Dade County. Dade County cannot be allowing this. So, coming from [my old school] eight years...it was almost top-notch, it was just very respectable, from coming in blinded, I didn't mind working the demographic. I didn't mind that. I knew what I was getting into. I knew it was Title I, I knew the area, but I didn't know the inside of the school. It was horrible, how the school was kept...when you have mice or shall I say rats coming out in the daytime during your instruction by the restroom. It blew me away...And it got me to think that, ‘Okay, I went from that to this...’ I was dumbfounded.

Denise would teach at this school for only one school year. After which, she transferred to a neighboring school, servicing a similarly demographic-ed student population, where she would remain before returning again to the south end of the county. With each move, Denise continued to choose serving in schools that existed in the urban core.

Denise returned to the south to accept a Reading Coach position at an elementary school and thereafter, accepted a teaching position to open a K-8 school, where, after nearly ten years there, for health reasons, she made the decision to “downsize,” as the K-8 had become too large for her to navigate, physically. With this move, Denise decided to go “back to her roots” – both professionally and personally – as she accepted a teaching position at an elementary school in the community where she grew up. The school, which serviced fewer than 200 students, due to historically declining enrollment, as a Tier 3, ETO-supported, state-identified L300-Extended Day school, was considered fragile, as the school’s grade fluctuated year after year. Although up until this point, Denise had been deliberately choosing to work in schools with demographics that were vastly different from the school community she serviced early in her teaching career, Denise was especially excited about the opportunity to teach students who were sitting where she once sat as a student in that community. However, her excitement soon waned as she recognized that her principal, who was Hispanic, did not prioritize her focus on the academic performance of students, who were majority Black, or on guiding teachers to do that work, which in Denise’s experience, was critical to the success of these students and the school. In Denise’s assessment, the principal prioritized her focus more on opportunities for social media post-worthy activities – student performance shows, i.e., holiday shows, culture-specific shows, etc. – what Denise characterizes as “externals,” rather than students’ academic progress. Although Denise could see the benefit in giving students an outlet to showcase their talents, it was her belief that there lacked a balance in its priority placement, and this often came at the expense of students’ learning. Moreover, the extracurricular activities were adding additional stress, as teachers, not wanting to give-up instructional time to practice for the shows, and already burned-out from teaching an extended school day, as well as Saturday School, and afterschool tutoring, often gave-up their planning time instead, to prepare their students for the shows:

> Because if she wanted to make it happen for the benefit of the students I did it. Yeah, it was very stressful because it had to be done during special areas. We didn't want to do it. It was just extra. We [were] already extended day. We [were] already extending ourselves anyway. Some teachers, we did, tutoring on Saturdays, we

> [were] already spreading ourselves thin. We had tutoring after school to meet the needs of the kids. So, it was just, now you want this extra external stuff...

The principal's misplaced focus, according to Denise, resulted in the school's grade decreasing: "...with her shenanigans, we dropped to a "D." Having had experience in other ETO-supported schools, Denise understood the level of accountability teachers, especially in those schools, were held to:

> I knew what ETO, coming from the background, I knew what ETO was looking for. I knew at the end of the day, the teachers [were] going to be accountable to show data. I knew that, and [the principal] wasn't about that.

She also knew that because of the drop in the school's grade, teachers would be under greater scrutiny. This, Denise placed squarely on the principal's decision, time and again, to not make student learning the priority focus and decided that after three years, she could no longer exist under that principal's leadership. With this decision, Denise began to seek-out position opportunities at other schools, which led her to her current school assignment.

True to her pattern, Denise accepted a position to teach Fifth Grade at another Tier 3, ETO-supported, state-identified L300-Extended Day school, in a historically Black neighborhood located in what is considered the deep south of the school district. The deep south is characterized by pockets of high-poverty, high crime communities birthed out of families – Black and Hispanic – who settled the area after migrating there to work the farmlands and fields. The school, which Denise describes as being "surrounded by projects," and other low-income housing, services a predominately Black and Hispanic student population. Denise shares that because of the area where the school is situated, Code Red lockdowns, which occur when there is heightened police activity near the school, are common-place, and often causes a disruption and is an interruption to students' learning:

> ...And we do have to deal with Code Reds and, crime from time to time. Code Red lockdowns, I want to say once a month, maybe twice a month we would have an incident not within the school, but in the surrounding area...And sometimes the lock down can be five minutes, sometimes it's 30 minutes. So, yeah, we do deal with that. My [class]room was close to the street. I [could] look out the window and it's just sirens all the time, helicopters all the time... Once it's done, we just [get] back into instruction. It's a disruption, it [is] a disruption.

With the awareness that students' learning, however brief, can be impacted because of happenings in the community outside of the walls of the school, Denise, through her instructional approaches, tries to safeguard students' learning time as much as possible, beginning with consistency and the implementation of and adherence to a strict "routine." This, Denise maintains, helps to keep students "focused," on their learning, and not the happenings they are overly exposed to in their community when they are away from school, which have the potential to become the topic of their conversations in class:

> So, when I pick up the kids at 8:20, I have, I should say a strict routine. It is everyday, it is consistent. You come in and you do one, two, three, four. We will begin our work with the least amount of disruption as possible. Because I always look at time and organization being very, very critical...Because the students in this particular environment like to talk back and forth with each other...[about] what's going on in their community...I need to keep them focused and moving along because if not, they get into personals.

While Denise found, through experience, that adopting these instructional routines were critical to the success of students in her classroom, she shares that other teachers, who were new to the school and or the district, “struggled,” to adopt these types of practices. For example, Denise’s partner teacher, who was a new hire to the district from a charter school, had difficulty adjusting her practice, as she, according to Denise, “could not grasp what needed to be done,” as she, coming from a charter school, was not accustomed to the way of work or level of work required of teachers teaching at this school and schools like it. Her incapacity, indirectly impacted Denise’s work, as the inconsistency of routines from her class to Denise’s class, negatively affected students, as well as expectations governing students’ uniform wear and overall presentation, which were set by Denise, were not carried through in her classroom: “It is frustrating when I do that and then [students] switch to another teacher and it gets lost.”

Denise, over the course of her nearly 30-year career, has had a variety of experiences, primarily serving in schools in underrepresented communities. Despite challenges that are seemingly inherent in the work undertaken in the schools she has serviced, and presently services, Denise has a heart for her students, as she sees herself in them – “I know where they are coming from,” – and is clear as to why she continues to remain in the work: “I still have a mission...to teach.”

Chapter Summary

The foregoing narratives provide insight into the everyday lived experiences of the five Black female educator participants in this study. Their individual and collective stories, while highlighting their life histories with respect to their early schooling experiences and teacher-journey paths, they also highlight their work, their commitment to their work, and the challenges they engage in the context of their work. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, their narratives present the five salient themes – two minor and three major – that help to answer the research questions advanced for this study. Minor Themes 1 and 2, *Faith* and *Experience*, and Major Themes 1, 2 and 3, *Resilience*, *Resistance*, and *Connection*, are forwarded for analysis in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

The purpose of this narrative inquiry study was, to, through the critical lenses of Critical Race Theory (CRT), and Black Feminist Thought (BFT), explore the lived experiences of Black female educators in public school education as a means to lift their stories and strengthen the voice of this collective group, who are critical to this field. As such, this chapter presents, in the form of themes, the major insights derived from the three in-depth interviews conducted with each of the five participants. From their interviews emerged narratives of their rich experiences and storied lives founded in *faith*, forged with *resilience* and by *resistance*, and framed by their *connections* and *experience*. These five themes – two minor and three major – represent the emergent self-definition of each participant, as each of the themes parallel and present, first the individual, and then the collective portrait of the participants and their experiences. The two minor themes are considered such because, although salient, were more pervasive in the narratives of particular participants (one to two), while the three major themes, were prominent across all or most participants' narratives.

There were three research questions upon which this study was premised: (1) what are the lived experiences of Black female educators in public school education?; (2) how do these experiences inform and influence their work?; and (3) how do these experiences influence their commitment to remain in the work? The five themes – the three major (Themes 2, 3, and 4), and two minor (Themes 1 and 5) – both align and answer the research questions forwarded in this study. Minor Theme 1, Faith, aligns to and answers Research

Question 3, as the participants' foundation in faith, influences their commitment to remain in the work. Major Theme 1 Resilience, aligns to and answers Research Question 1, as their resilience is a result of the experiences they live and challenges they encounter in their work in public schools, while major Theme 2, Resistance, aligns to Research Question 2 as their resistance to a system of education that has been historically structured to disadvantage Black children, influenced their decisions to teach in the urban core, and informs their work as advocates, both inside and outside of the classroom for their students. Major Theme 3, Connection, aligns to and answers Research Questions 2 and 3, as the connections the participants make, with their students and colleagues, inform their way of work, as well as speak to their commitment to remain in the work. Finally Minor theme 2, Experience, aligns to and answers Research Question 1, as the participants' lived experiences are centered in this study, and the knowledge produced from those experiences is attributed to their coming to and using their voices to empower themselves and others. Following is a discussion of the salient themes, beginning first with the two minor themes and then moving to the three major themes.

Faith

The *Ministry* of Education

The first of the two minor themes presented is faith. Although a minor theme, faith is still salient in the lived experiences of some of the participants as the foundation upon which their decision to enter the field of education is premised. Additionally, although more pervasive in the narratives of Denise, Carolyn, and particularly, Glenda, faith also, as presented here metaphorically as *the call*, *the acceptance* of the call and *the assignment*, pervades each of the participants' experiences, as supported by the textual data. Moreover, even as a minor theme, faith, as it aligns and responds to Research Question 3 (RQ3), provides insight into why the BFEs in this study remain in and committed to the work.

The Black female educators in this study draw attention to the role faith has in framing their perspectives on that which they have been called into. A sense of purpose and the deep-held belief that entering the field of education and engaging the work, is what they have been called to, is evident in the lived experiences of the research participants of this study, who like their predecessors before them, received the call, accepted the call and were given the assignment.

The Call

“For me everything is spiritual,” is Glenda’s response as she opens her story detailing her decision to become a teacher. Her statement evidences how her faith (spirituality) informed and influenced the way in which she viewed her decision to leave the nursing field for the field of education. Like BFEs before her, Glenda believed this call to enter education was being directed by God and was God’s will for her:

> So, the Lord told me to, "Go ahead and type your letter of resignation." And I was like, you know how am I [going] type my letter of resignation when I don't know the date that I'm leaving? So, the Lord said, "Just do it." So, I did it, and I waited for the date. And sure enough, like, within 24 hours I received the confirmation. So, for me, [I knew] that this is what God wanted me to do.

Glenda’s “confirmation,” as she labels it, can be seen as her call into the *ministry* field of education. This is also evident in Denise’s narrative, where she associates her obstacle-free journey into the *ministry* field of education, as an indication (a sign), that becoming a teacher was not just something she chose but something that she was chosen for and called to, as part of God's divine plan and will for her: "it really wasn't a struggle. So, I knew it wasn't just my plan. I just think it was God's plans...for me too."

Accepting the Call

Part of the call into the *ministry* of education, is accepting the call to enter the field. For the BFEs in this research study, it is evident that they each accepted the call. For most of the participants, they felt the call early in life, as they remember pretend play, where they were the teachers and either family members or stuffed animals were the students:

Glenda: "I can remember before I was even able to go to school. Um, I guess, every child pretends. I did a lot of pretend play [like] I was a teacher, you know, to my stuffed animals."

Terri: "Well, I always wanted to be a teacher. And when my nieces and nephews would come over, like some kids play doctor, I played school."

Joy: "I want to say it's been like a lifelong dream. I was one of those kids that actually had teddy bears across the bed and passed out papers. I had a younger sibling and my cousin; they would constantly be my students."

Denise: “I know as a little girl, I would play teacher, I would have school in my room. You know, [I had] little teddy bears and the dolls and stuff like that.”

Although most of the participants felt the call early as young children, for two of the participants, Terri and Joy, their acceptance of the call was cemented for them as students in elementary school, because of the influence and impact of their Black women teachers.

For Terri, who states, “I always wanted to be a teacher,” she reflects that her acceptance of the call came as a Fifth Grader while still in elementary school because of the model of her teacher:

> I think Fifth Grade with Ms. [E], my Fifth Grade teacher. I loved Ms. [E], even before she was my teacher. If you needed help, she was there afterschool, and in the morning, she would be there in the morning too. If you needed help, all you had to do was ask and she would make time for you...I [did want to] follow in [her] footsteps.

Likewise, Joy reflects that Third Grade is when she knew (accepted the call) she wanted to be and would become an educator, because of the impact that her Third Grade teacher made on her as a student:

> Mrs. [S] from the elementary school that I attended. She pushed me like no other. And from that point on, I wanted to be just like her. And from third grade on, I

> wanted to be a teacher....And from that point on, I knew that I wanted to make a difference just like her.

And Denise, although later in her schooling experience, remembers accepting her call in senior high school: “I think, just going towards education and wanting to be a teacher, is probably when I got to senior high”. However, for two of the BFEs, Carolyn and Glenda, their acceptance of the call in to the *ministry* field of education, would come much later in life.

Carolyn’s faith is very evident in her life story, as she shares that being reared in a “strong Christian home...made the difference,” throughout her life, and highlights “my faith,” as a major source of support in her work. Notwithstanding, Carolyn who clearly had been called to the *ministry* field of education, rejected the call early on. When asked if teaching was something she considered early on, she replied, “no, I did not.” This decision, to not consider teaching as a career, was in large part an outgrowth of Carolyn’s own negative schooling experiences, which were shaped by her encounters in classrooms during the difficult period of desegregation in the 1970’s. These same negative experiences that caused Carolyn to reject the call, would ultimately become the impetus for her accepting the call much later in life, when, in recognizing that her daughter’s strong dislike for school, began to mirror her own pattern of negative schooling experiences, she made the decision to intervene and became a volunteer at her daughter’s school, which ultimately led to her being offered a part-time teaching position as a Pre-K teacher. Carolyn answered the call because she needed to save her daughter; and in saving her daughter, she would save countless others just like her.

Like Carolyn, Glenda would also accept the call to the *ministry* field of education, later in life. However, unlike Carolyn, the only one of the BFE participants in this study who did not share a reflection of pretend playing school as a child, Glenda felt the early call, as she recalls her earliest memory of school being her bedroom, which she turned into a classroom, where she was the teacher, through her pretend play, and fell in love with learning because of the influence of her neighbor who was a teacher. Still, her accepting the call would be delayed because of her family's expectations of her career choice, which did not include teaching, because in her family, teaching was something that "just was not...encouraged." But, when the call re-emerged, Glenda could no longer deny it, for to continue to do so, she viewed, would be her being disobedient to God, and what He was leading her to do. This is highlighted in the difficult conversation she had to have with her father:

> So, you know, here's my father who's built a business, and he's hoping that I carry out the business... So, that conversation was very difficult to let him know that, "I appreciate, you know, what you've done for me career-wise. However, I feel like I'm being led to do something completely different. And, I, you know, I don't [want to] be disobedient and not do it; what I feel that God is leading me to do."

With that, Glenda uprooted her life and her daughter's life, to journey what she believed to be the path that God was "ordering," her steps to navigate.

The Assignment

The final piece of the tri-fold process of being called, is being located or assigned to a particular place – a church, a city, a community, a classroom – to carry-out that which you have been called to do. Equal to the call and accepting the call, is the assignment. The lived experiences of the BFE participants evidence that they believe that they have not only been called to the *ministry* field of education, but also to the particular locations wherein they carry-out their calling. For each of the participants, their assignments locate them in schools in the urban core of the district. Despite some of the challenges connected to teaching in schools in communities that are underserved, the BFEs in this study, believe that, like their calling, the assignment to their particular schools is likewise, God-ordered and ordained. Carolyn's narrative reflects this when she recounts being questioned as to why she was still at her school:

> So, no, most people [are] like "Why do you stay at [your school]?" And I'm like because I am called to be at [my school]. I need to be there...I somehow think there was a spiritual connection to me staying there because right after I finished National Boards, I was recruited by many different schools. But it was like, God says no, I want you here. I need you here for these kids. And so, I stayed. I stayed there...this was the place I needed to be...no matter what a lot my friends said.

Moreover, Glenda, who accepted her teaching assignment having no knowledge of the community wherein the school was situated, even after being warned of potential dangers that existed in the school's surrounding community, believed that because God ordered her steps to that particular school, He would ensure her wellbeing:

> "This is where God wants me to be right now. Then I had the other teacher friend say, don't go work in the city...for me, I think what really concerned me was safety. I was concerned whether, you know, it would be safe for me to really travel to work

> and through the community, because I didn't know the community well. However, it didn't stop me from taking the position...[I had to] just trust God.

For Terri, this idea of being on assignment, is implicit in her response, when questioned as to why, even after being out for one school year resulting from health challenges, she did not consider going to another school, responded that, “it [the thought] never crossed my mind.”

The first of two minor themes, faith, provides insight, through the lived experiences of the BFE participants in this study, into why they remain in the work. In response to RQ3, it is evident that at the foundation of their decisions to enter, engage and remain in the work, is their faith.

Experience

Knowledge

The second of the two minor themes forwarded in this study is experience. As previously indicated, the participants in this study, all are mid to late career educators, with years of teaching ranging from sixteen to twenty-six. Within the span of these teaching years, as their narratives highlight, the BFEs in this study have had a variety of experiences which have shaped their understanding and the way in which they engage their work in schools in the urban core of the school district. As such, the knowledge gained from their experience, both empowers and establishes their voices as authentic and trusted. While at times they themselves are empowered to use their voices, both as advocates for themselves and their students, they likewise empower others as they share their experience in the form of wisdom. Moreover, it also evident that the accumulation of experience is necessary for the posterity of Black female educators.

Experience and Coming to Voice

Across participant narratives, this idea of experience and coming to voice is present. As the BFEs in this study grow in experience, there is an equal and parallel growth in voice as evident in the narrative of Terri, when, taking the advice of her colleague-mentors, she finds and begins to use her voice the second year of her experience at the suburban school, with her Hispanic colleagues to "speak-up," to present her ideas and suggestions for how planning should be organized, as well as the frequency of homework:

> So that second year, I brought up the [homework] packets. Give [them] out on Monday and collect them on the following Monday. I would do the homework packets[for the team]. And I also talked to them about the planning. Some people want their lesson plans a certain way, with their Reading, and Language Arts, and so that's how we disseminated who was going to do what, and I ended up with the homework packet.

Additionally, when asked how she has established herself in her current school over the course of her time there, Terri responded: "Well, I'm going to say I'm a little more vocal." Likewise, Denise reflects this same sentiment: "...I say things that I never would say a long time ago because now, I'm more confident. Back then I wasn't." Moreover, Carolyn, in sharing her experiences also reflected:

> If I had to do it over again, I think I would've wanted to be a little bit more [bold] from the beginning. I started to- there [was]- and I can't think of her name now, but on TED, there was this teacher, a champion...Rita Pearson. And I would keep playing that over and over and over and over again in my mind. And then there were different people that I [would] come in contact with that I'm like, wow, I want to be like that. I- I need to try that in my classroom. And just having the right people that I was exposed to help me grow into being a voice for my kids. Because you know, when you're first in teaching, you've got to just follow the rules and just do what you're told. But seeing that, wait a minute, they have a voice, they're making a difference, they're not doing this, this, and this and it's making a difference. And they're not afraid. So, you know what? I- I think I want to try that. I- I want to try being bold enough.

As the BFEs in this study grew more because of their experiences, they became more empowered to use their voices – because they know, they were compelled to speak-up and speak-out regardless of the consequences. This is evident in Carolyn’s narrative, when she uses her voice of experience to speak-up, in advocating for her instructional approach to writing, and to advocate for her students and what was in their best learning interest, to challenge the newly minted Reading Coach about her approach to teaching students how to write to an essay prompt:

> And I'm like, can you just like, let them say what they need to say, and not always have to have the last word when they've spoken? Just, leave it, and let, let, let it be instead of [trying to] fix [it], like they, they have it the way they want it. That's what

he said, that's what he meant. Don't change it, because then when you add all those words that you're adding, you lost what he meant when he said what he said. So, how that was, the dynamics of... her thing was, they, they didn't have enough [experiences], and I [said], no, no, no, that's not true. Children have experiences. They just don't have the same experiences that you've had. But it's not that they don't have any. They have plenty. They have a lot. And if you let them draw from what they know from inside, and not try and force them to use language that is just not gonna work for them. I [said], let them choose about five words that will improve the level of their writing, but they can still own what they're writing, and not try and mimic and copy what you're writing, and lose all the meaning of what it is they're trying to say. So, I tell, I [said], I tell you what. You take your group, I'll take mine, and let's see how they do. And so, she took a group, and I had a group...So then she decided to change up some of the kids that I have. And I [said], they're not ready for what you want them to do yet. Let them stay where they are. They'll get there, but don't rush it. It's coming. You know, I, I see a change from the beginning to now, but don't push them that fast, because they need, they need to be pushed, and I am pushing them, but you've [got to] let it happen at the pace where they're [going to] be able to handle it. [She said], “No, I'm [going to] take them, and they're [going to] do this.” And I [said], okay, have your way. She did, and they failed every single test she gave them, because it's the way she would approach them. And I'm like, ‘Can I have my kids back so I can work with them and get them to where I need them to be?’...But it was like, no, no, no, no, it has to be done this way. And so I'm just like, no. It doesn't have to be done like that... She

> ended up kicking a couple of kids out of the group, because they wouldn't, they just... her approach was just off. And so, I [said], well they can come back to me, if it's fine, and, and I talked with [them] and I [said], ‘You know what? When you get ready to do that writing, you do what you can write about. Just forget all that stuff, and you know, concentrate on what your prompt is and pull your own experiences right? [Be]cause you can write about what you know about. You can't write about what you don't know about.’ So, [one student who] did that...He scored one of the highest scores, she never recognized him. And so, I guess I had a little bit too much mouth, because [the next year] I got shipped over to another department, where she was no longer affiliated with that department.

Given the failure of the Reading Coach’s approach to writing, it is obvious that she did not have the insight or understanding which comes from experience, and notwithstanding, did not heed Carolyn’s voice of wisdom. Despite the resulting consequence of being moved to a department that the Reading Coach did not service, Carolyn, reflects: “I don’t regret the chances that I took with my kids because I saw the difference that it made in their learning and that was my goal.” While Carolyn’s narrative highlights experience as empowerment to use voice, Joy’s and Glenda’s stories evidence how they empower others through sharing their experience in the form of wisdom.

When Joy made the decision to become a Reading Coach, she did so with the intent to inspire, encourage and empower other teachers in schools in the urban core, to improve their teaching practices as a means to positively impact the poor, predominately Black student populations they serviced. Joy would do this by sharing, from her experience as a successful classroom teacher, her knowledge of best practices:

> It was just something different. because I [had] been teaching for, for quite a while. And that was, I had already had almost 15 years, maybe like 13 years under my belt... as a teacher, you know, I'm able to have those firsthand experiences, you know, getting down and dirty with the kids, and learning from those experiences. And then as a coach, I think it's pretty much the same way. But I [am] able to show teachers, I'm able to show teachers, a different way of doing things, um, [and] how to deal with the kids, because I had that experience, being in those same type of classrooms...[B]ecause I was a teacher before in a classroom, I was able to put myself - I know what, what is expected of a teacher and how they can, um, look at things a different way. So, when I explain things, I feel like I explain it in a manner highlighting why we're doing different things, not just telling, you know, this is what we should do, but put it in a, in a way that they understand why we're doing it, and that my ultimate goal is to, to help the students.

Based on Joy’s experiences, and her first-hand experiences with being “down and dirty” with students, and being successful as a result, she built a rapport with her teachers, and they regarded what she had to say as authentic, and trusted her shared wisdom as their Coach. This is evident in Joy not meeting any resistance from the mostly older, Black female teachers she supports; on the contrary, they are open to her feedback and suggestions:

> Fortunately, I haven't had any of the resisting teachers. Like I do have maybe, like, one teacher who's just, you know, [is] very OCD, very by the book – "no, they'll make too much noise doing that." And "I like it like this." And, um, that's as far as it has gone, as far as resisting. But they see, when I come in and I do something that I've suggested, and I model it, and [they] see how the kids react, and they're performing better because of it, then [they] start to say, "Okay, you know what? I need to do a little bit." But if, even if I do it for five minutes, I've [got to] do it a little bit more. So, it's just a little more of kind of in addition to the modeling, you've [got to] persuade.

As a result of the influence of Joy's shared experiences in the form of the wisdom and support she provided to teachers, and them regarding her voice as trusted and authentic, the "low-momentum," faculty she met when she arrived at her school seven years prior, as a new Reading Coach, was transformed into a teaching faculty full of excitement and high-energy, which resulted in improved learner outcomes and raised student achievement.

Similarly, Glenda shares the wisdom she has gained through experience, with the new and early career Black female teachers at her school. Because of her own experience with an ineffective, formally assigned mentor, Glenda, without being officially assigned to do so, has developed her own informal mentoring group with new and early career teachers coming to her school:

> So, for me, um, I think mentorship is huge. Especially in education. And because, for me, my first mentor wasn't so great, one of things that I like to do, myself, personally, when I see new teachers on a campus, you know, where I work, I try to

> be assistance to them. You know? So, from that experience, it kinda shaped me, personally and professionally, to help others without being assigned to do it. I don't know if it was because the teacher was on another grade level that made it challenging for the teacher, but it didn't work for me... but on the flip side of that I've had the opportunity to mentor teachers as well and I've been the opposite, you know? I've had some new teachers that really didn't need much of my help. However, I was still consistent with them. I was still consistent with them, and so in any job whether it's something I get paid for doing or not, I try to bond with some of the new teachers and kind of guide them if there are some things they don't understand,[like] just being in [their] setting professionally, how to handle questions, [and] how to talk to an administrator, or how to seek help...just helping them kind of balance the two, you know, family and career...That's very rewarding for me as well.

Out of her own negative experience, Glenda avails herself as a colleague-mentor, and guide to share her wisdom and experience with new teachers, and to ensure their experience is both positive and supportive.

Finally, Denise’s narrative highlights the importance of new teachers being afforded opportunities to gain experience, so at the appropriate time, “seasoned” teachers can pass the mantle, or in Denise’s words, “the baton,” to them in an effort to ensure that the work is continued:

> I [found] myself in the earlier years doing a lot more. Like I was on the EESAC there, I would decorate there. So, I was more involved...And I just

> find that, the older that I'm getting in the system, that I was hoping to see younger [teachers], uh, take the initiative to be or to do a lot of these things...It's like, we, we need the younger teachers to kinda step up, get these experiences underneath their belt, so we can keep pushing this along. That's how I feel.

The second of the two minor themes, experience, in response to Research Questions 1 and 2, provides insight into both the lived experiences of the BFEs in this study, as well as into their commitment to and to remain in the work. The significance of experience in the lived realities of the BFEs in this study is evident, as it empowers them to exercise their voice as advocates for themselves and their students, and others, and is critical to the forward movement of the work they engage each day, and the posterity of those to follow.

Resilience

Work

#BlackWomenatWork

The first of the three major themes that provides insight, through the lived experiences of the BFE participants in this study, as to why they remain in the work, is their resilience. Perhaps, there is no place more prominent where the resilience of Black women is on display, than in the context of their work. The lived experiences of the BFEs in this study, likewise, within the context of their work in public schools, evidence this phenomenon.

Challenges Encountered Doing This Work

School Inequalities

The daily realities of the BFE participants in this study, are shaped by the many challenges they encounter carrying-out the assignments they have been called to – their work – teaching students in schools located in the underserved communities of the urban core of the school district. Within the context of this work landscape, they live the daily realities of the effects of a larger racialized society on them as Black female educators within a racialized system of schooling plagued with inequalities, which have historically disfavored poor, Black students from underserved communities, and on them as Black women as they face disparaging treatment.

Denise, Joy and Glenda are assigned to schools that are physically located in economically depressed communities, surrounded by either public or low-income housing, where few homes and homeowners (property owners) exist, as evident in the descriptions they share:

Denise: It is a high poverty area. We're surrounded with, projects. The housing is low income. And we do have to deal with code reds and, and, uh, crime from time to time.

Joy: The community I teach in now is a high poverty area. We have over 90% of our students on free and reduced lunch...we are located right next to a trailer park. So, a lot of our students come from, the trailer park area. [There is] high crime, it's right down the road from the police department [and there is a] tendency to see street walkers and drug deals in that area as well.

Glenda: The school community that I work in is in the heart of []...It's surrounded by projects, which consist of multiple families living in those projects. So, it's kind of surrounding, they call that area [], I believe.

These school, then are not considered the *better* schools. As previously highlighted, all of the study's participants began their fulltime teaching careers in schools located in suburban communities, so they are keenly aware of the disparities that exist between schools perceived as *better*, and those which are not. In recounting her transition from the suburban school serving a predominately White, middle-class student demographic where she spent the first eight years of her career, to a school situated in the urban core, serving a predominately Black student demographic, Denise remembers how astounded she was at the condition of her now new school, after making the assumption that, that school would not be all that different from her previous school:

> So, I go to [this new school] and the naive me thinking, 'Oh, all of these schools are somewhat the same. It can't be that bad.' It's the same district. I mean the same Miami-Dade County. It was night and day. I was in for a rude awakening.

Denise goes on to describe the poor upkeep of the school and the rat infestation. Thereafter, she reflects and as if face-to-face with a tangible manifestation of the system (the school district) that allowed this to exist, asks a series of questions aloud:

> ... It was horrible, how the school was kept...when you have mice or shall I say rats coming out in the daytime during your instruction by the restroom. It blew me away...And it got me to think that, ‘Okay, I went from that to this...’ I was dumbfounded. I don't want to come off in a negative way, but is it us? You know, it's, I'm, African-American, the teachers are predominantly African-Americans, the students, the principal is African-American. The Reading Coach is African-American. The community is African-American. And I'm like are expectations...[Are] the expectations too low for these students, and you just let whatever, happen at the school?

Denise comes to the reality that the poor conditions at the predominately Black school in the underserved community, appear to be directly tied to race.

Moreover, the presence of racism masked as school inequalities, is also evident in the experiences of Carolyn and Terri, BFE participants in this study who are assigned to the same school. As both of their narratives highlight, their school, unlike the other BFE participants’ schools, opened as a new school, and although named for a historically Black community (HBC), is not situated or physically located in that community, but rather, was built in a suburban community surrounded by a series of new home developments. However, because of boundary changes, services a predominately Black student demographic, as Carolyn recounts in her narrative:

> They [the school district] kind of changed zoning from the school they [the Black students from the HBC] were in when [my school] opened to kind of alleviate them [the Black students from the HBC] from [that] school they were attending, [and]

> ship[ped] them all over to [my school]. And so, when they were rezoned, all those kids that were at [the school east-of-the-highway] from [the housing project], all came to [my school], which seemed a stretch.

As a result of this, the children from families in the new home developments enrolled their children in neighboring charter schools, as Terri recounts:

> The name of our school is [], but we're not really in [that community]. We're a little further down. But, and we're in like the middle-class neighborhood. But I feel like those kids don't come to our school. They go across the street to...the charter schools. They go to the charter schools. They very rarely come to our school.

Moreover, both Carolyn’s and Terri’s narratives recount how under-resourced their new school was when it opened – they lacked both adequate teaching staff and material resources to support teaching and learning. Carolyn recounts:

> Because when I went there, I thought because it was a new school, it would be well stocked. We weren't fully stocked with materials until probably going into our second year. And that was hard, because I came out of a school where no matter what I asked for, it was there. The library was not fully stocked. It had books, but I [had] been spoiled from where I came from, because when I say whatever story we were reading, we had, I could go to the library and pull whatever I needed to pull for those particular stories. So, we didn't have all of the materials the first year. In fact, they were still working on the school when we moved into it... And I was like, how can this be? This is a brand-new school... There were times when we didn't have enough books, we didn't have enough workbooks. They [the students] were

> having to copy on paper when they should've been able to just use those workbooks... I just felt like had we been servicing a different demographic, it would not have been as it was. I think we would've had what we needed when we moved in.

Terri remembers having to co-teach in a classroom with thirty-five (35) students because there were more students than teachers allocated: “It was rough. We were at capacity at that time. My first year there, I had to end up team teaching with another teacher and we had 35 students in our class.”

Treatment from Non-Blacks

In addition to the challenges of school inequalities – under-resourced schools (teachers and material resources), as well as facility-related issues (upkeep) – the BFEs in this study encounter while carrying-out their work, they are also faced with disparaging treatment from non-Blacks, in their everyday lived experiences. This is evident in Carolyn’s narrative as she recounts an exchange she had with her suburban school’s principal, when Carolyn advised her of her decision to transfer from their “A” school to a new school slated to serve predominately poor, Black students in a historically underserved community:

> And so when they started building [the new school], I went to my principal and I [said], ‘I'm going to transfer to [the new school]." She goes, "Have you lost your mind? You're leaving here to go to [there]?" I [said], ‘Yes, I am leaving here to go to [the new school].’ She goes, "Do you realize what you're getting yourself into?" I [said], ‘Yes, I do. I need to be where I can work with kids, my own kids.’ She

> tried her hardest to talk me out of it. She in fact, up until the last day of school, she hadn't even signed my transfer.

Here, Carolyn's then White-Hispanic principal, dismissed Carolyn's announcement of her decision, as she assumed that Carolyn did not have a complete understanding of the decision she made to transfer to the new school serving a vastly different demographic than her current school. This is also evident in the principal's refusal to sign Carolyn's transfer.

Carolyn's narrative also highlights an exchange, one of many, she had with her assistant principal, who was a Hispanic female, where the dynamic of disparaging treatment by non-Blacks is clear. Because Carolyn is a fierce advocate for her students, and even more a defender of the instructional approaches she engages with them, her advocacy and defense did not sit well with her assistant principal, who always challenged Carolyn's instructional decisions:

> ...I remember she came in, and she [said], "No, you're not to teach spelling anymore." And I'm like, 'What do you mean I don't teach spelling?' I [said], 'My kids need to learn how to spell.' And she goes, "No. We've decided we're not." I [said], 'Well, you can decide what you want, but I'm not taking it out of their curriculum. I mean, - I might not give it a grade, but I'm going to teach them how to spell. And we're [going to] take some time for them to write because they need to know how to write. They need to have those math drills.' And so, everything that I wanted to do, she was totally against.

As a result of Carolyn challenging her superior, as she advocated for what she believed to be in the best learning interests of her students, at the end of the school year, the assistant principal used her power of the pen to issue Carolyn a low evaluation:

> And she let it be known when she did my evaluation. I told her, I [said], ‘I've been teaching for quite a few years and this is the lowest evaluation [I’ve ever received].’ She goes, "Well because you don't listen.” Like I didn't know I was supposed to listen. I thought we were supposed to have a conversation, that we were supposed to be about the kids. But I think what upset her most is that here I was a teacher of color, not doing what she wanted me to do.

Moreover, Denise’s narrative highlights her experience with disparaging treatment from a Hispanic teacher, new to the school, who was assigned to Denise as a mentee. However, in Denise’s account, her mentee, whom Denise believes questioned her competence, rather than engage Denise with questions, or requests for assistance, went “around” Denise, to the other colleagues on the grade level, who were also Hispanic, for the guidance that should have been coming from her mentor:

> ...I was her mentor, however, she went outside, or she went around me and she talked to other people on the grade level...she went to other colleagues and asked, [about] lesson plans or this, or how do you this... I don't believe she trusted me, as a teacher.

Like Denise, Terri is faced with the same reality. Similar to Denise’s experience, Terri’s competence, to both teach a Hispanic student, and to offer ideas and suggestions to her grade level colleagues regarding instructional practices, is raised in her narrative accounts of these experiences. In the first experience, a Hispanic parent requests that Terri’s principal, who was also Hispanic, remove her child from Terri’s class, because she did not speak Spanish, and place him with a teacher who was Spanish-speaking, although the child spoke perfect English, according to Terri:

> My principal called me and when he asked to see me afterschool, I just knew that was it...And he asked me, "Would you be offended if I moved the child out of your class?" Because he said the parent was having trouble communicating with me because she spoke Spanish. I said, ‘but the child speaks perfect English’. I said, ‘He's not having a problem.’ And he said, "I understand...but, do you mind?"

As such, Terri believed that the parent’s real concern was with her as a teacher, and her instructional practices:

> We would give out Kindergarten packets. So, I was doing stuff, that was one of the problems she had with me too, that parent. She said it was a lot. I'm like, "It's not a lot, it's the same thing, I just make packets." She didn't like that.

Terri ultimately believed that the parent felt that another Hispanic teacher would be a better teacher than she would be. Likewise, Terri’s colleagues’ treatment of her was disparaging, as Terri’s narrative highlights how they made her feel invisible:

> And they would talk over me in Spanish, which I hate, that irks my nerves. They would, we would sit, I would plan with them, but then half the time I wouldn't know what they were saying, because they would start off in English and then they would

> do a little side bar in Spanish and I'm like ‘why am I going?’... Like, [I didn’t] really have a say...I didn't want to complain because I [was] new.

As the only Black teacher on that grade level team, Terri’s Hispanic colleagues relegated her to the margins and rendered her silent, as she was locked-out of their communication, and they were unwilling to accept any of her suggestions.

Part of the resilience of the BFEs in this study, is in the face of challenges encountered while carrying out their assignments to teach in the most underserved communities in the school district – which are by and large, predominately poor, Black student demographics – they are able to be empowered. Within the context of their work landscapes, and against the backdrop of school inequalities, and disparaging treatment from others, they are able name their own realities, to carve-out niches/spaces for themselves, and more importantly for their students, to freely engage in the art of teaching and learning. This is how they survive.

Resistance

Activism

Intentional Deliberate Decision to Teach in the Urban Core

The second major theme presented from the lived experiences of the BFEs in this study and adds to the insight as to why they remain in the work, is resistance.

Like the Black women educators of the early twentieth century, the BFE participants in this study, can likewise be viewed as activists, as the everyday actions they engage in their classrooms on behalf of the predominately poor, Black student demographic they serve, is aimed still at group survival. Loder-Jackson (2019), identifies two forms of activism in her explication of Black educators' activism-actions in Alabama during the Civil Rights Movement – conventional – or the more public, formal, direct, organized activism-actions (institutional transformation) – and unconventional – the more hidden, subtle, indirect, creative strategies of resistance (group survival). The activism of the BFEs in this study can primarily be categorized as unconventional. Their unconventional activism is first evident in their decisions to teach in schools in the urban core, serving predominately poor, Black student populations. In the school district, each year teachers with at least three years' teaching experience, can submit a request to be transferred to another school anywhere in the school district. In this way, teachers have autonomy and agency to actively lobby other school principals for positions they need to fill. It is rare that leaders of schools like the schools the BFE study participants serve in – majority Black student demographic, Title I, Tier 3, ETO-Supported, L300-Extended Day – are lobbied for position openings; conversely, as more often than not, they are on the receiving end of teachers submitting requests to transfer out. The BFEs in this study all began their fulltime teaching careers in majority White-serving student demographic, middle-class, suburban school communities. They each chose to leave the comfort of their resource-rich, well-maintained, sufficiently staffed schools and students who come with higher rates of academic readiness, to teach in schools that were diametrically opposite. Their collective decision, although ever so subtle, is powerful and speaks volumes. Their decision goes against the grain of the norm. While other teachers were (and still are) clamoring to be let out, they knocked and asked to be let in, to serve, teach and educate, the underserved students of the communities that are often neglected, as evidenced in Carolyn's narrative account:

A friend of mine told me, [Carolyn], there's a new school they're building, and I think it's [going to] have a lot of our kids. I'm like, what do you mean? She goes, there's a new school in [the historically Black community]. If it's in [the historically Black community], it's [got to] have, you know, [Black] children. Because it's in [the historically Black community]. But I said, okay. She says, let's go check it out. So we went, we drove by the school, and we watched the school being built. And so, I applied. I asked, um, I, um... sent the principal my resume, because at the time, I was, as I said, I was at [my former school]. And she told me at the time they were surplussing a lot of teachers, so she would need to wait, since I was not surplus. And fill up positions first, with teachers that were being surplussed. Many of them from the school where these kids were coming from, and a few other schools, and then once she filled that quota, then she would let me know. And she did, she let me know, um, about a week before school closed, that she would have an opening for me... Teaching at [my former school], it, it was easy because the kids were all on level. Whatever you needed, you got. I mean, the parents, if you said your son needs this, it was there like, within the hour. Either the parent brought it, or somebody else in the family brought it. There, it, there was no challenge there. And I wanted to give back, because as I said, my kid had a struggle when she was in school, and I'm like, I don't feel like I'm really giving back here, even though I volunteered to work in the, um, a special program. I still didn't feel like I was doing what I wanted to do, when I decided to go and become a teacher. I said, yeah, I'm, I'm reaching kids, but I'm not really reaching the kids that I [wanted to] reach. And

> it's not [going to] happen here at this school, so I need to find a school where I would have a stronger chance of being able to reach [Black] children.

Likewise, Joy recounts choosing to leave a school that was a seven (7) minute drive from the front door of her house to the school, to transfer to a school a greater distance from her house, because that school was “more her speed”:

> So by choice, when I moved up this way, it was more of a location when I went to [the first school up north]. And it was - that's the school I only stayed one year. It was literally from my door to the classroom door, it was seven minutes away. So, it was location and then when I got the opportunity to go to [the other school], which I thought was a little bit more my speed. [I] definitely [went] by choice. And then [my current school] was definitely by choice...Going into these types of schools I, I just think that, that's where I'm more comfortable. I feel like that's where I can help, my community the most, give back to the people that look like me, and make a difference in, those children.

As evidenced in Carolyn’s and Joy’s narratives, and across each of the other participants’ narratives, their activism begins with their decision to engage their work and carry-out their call to the *ministry* field of education in schools labeled “difficult” because of the challenges resulting from the racist practices inherent in the system of public education. The BFEs in this study, happily and with joy, take-up, but more than that, ask for, what others may perceive to be, the burden of educating students in the urban core of the school district; because, first, it is their choice, and second, to them, as evident in Terri’s narrative, this is where their gifts are most needed:

> I like the school. I, I feel like if I'm [going to] work this hard...I'm not [going to] go over here [to a well-off school] where these kids have all this at their fingertips - and I'm [going to] use the word, give them my talents - when I can keep it right here where I know they really, really need me. And work hard over here. I've never put in a transfer...and people [say] you [can] go back over [there]. Yes, I could transfer back to [the suburban school I came from]. They're coming from [pre-school] reading, and my day [would] be a little, a little easier. I could [go] over there. Grades are good. I'm sure I'll get that check every year. Yes, come Christmas, I [would have] to make two trips to my car with gifts, if I [wanted to] be all of that. But it's about the kids-they need my attention...

Activism As Advocacy

Prioritizing the learning needs of the poor, Black children they serve is in effect, like the Black women educators before them, the way in which the BFEs in this study participate in the struggle for group survival. In addition to the unconventional activism evident in their intentional and deliberate decisions to teach in the urban core, the unconventional activism of the BFEs in this study, is also carried through in their classrooms as they “fight the system,” to advocate for, among other things, the instructional decisions they make with regard to what and how students should be taught and their behaviors addressed.

As previously highlighted, each of the five BFE participants in this study are assigned to ETO-supported schools, designated as fragile, according to the state’s accountability system, because of historically low-performance. As such, teacher autonomy, especially in schools with ETO oversight, is severely limited. Moreover, out of fear that they may be blamed for the school's data being low, teachers often do not venture outside of the scripted curriculum or instructional frameworks, as Joy, explains:

> ... you're given these stories where you have to do certain skills. The questions need to look a certain way, the kids' answers need to look a certain way. And everything is pushed towards a test. So, [classroom teachers] tend to lose their creativity because they're so pushed to teaching to the content, versus looking at everything else...So, I think, you know, because everything is scored, and because we're graded, and, you know, and it's, third, fourth, and fifth is, you know, the challenge of the school to keep everything, you know, afloat. And we don't [want to] be embarrassed, we don't [want to] go down. We [want to] you know, we [want to] go up. So, teachers tend to stick to what they're being told and what they're given. Because they, if they feel that they do something else they might be held accountable for the scores going low, proficiency decreasing, and so forth. So, it's like why take a chance? They're [going to] blame me for not doing what I was supposed to do.

It is against the backdrop of this landscape that the BFEs in this study engage unconventional activism-actions, as they, even in school atmospheres where many are fearful of not following the curriculum as prescribed (even if it is not working for their students) resist the system and advocate for making instructional decisions on behalf and in the best interest of their students. Carolyn shares this of her experiences:

> Well...not being afraid to think outside the box. Because we were given a script and you know, if you kind of moved away from that script then you were like considered not being compliant. But a lot of times, it just- it required being bold enough to say, okay, no I know what's best for my students and what you want me to do is not working so I need to try something that I think will work for this particular group of kids. And so, having the boldness to do that; um, it wasn't easy. They [ETO Support Specialists] would come in and say, okay, we're [going to] do it this way. I'm like, but that doesn't work with this group of kids. And it was – “no, this is the way it's going to be done.” I'm like, ‘but I know what it says there, but I'm telling you, we work with these children, and this approach is not going to get the results that you're looking for’. And so, it was like fighting against a system...

But for Carolyn like the other BFE participants, this was a system they chose to resist and fight every day on behalf of their students. This resistance to the system and advocacy for the autonomy to make instructional decisions that are in the best interest of students, is also evident in Joy’s narrative, as she, in her role as a Reading Coach advocates on behalf of children in encouraging the Reading teachers she supports at her school, to cast off their fear, step outside of the box (the scripted curriculum), and begin using instructional delivery strategies that are more aligned to how students learn and what students need:

> Like, ‘you could still teach the, the content. But you can still have fun with it. You can switch up things a little bit more’...So, if I see it going on where you just, you only [want to] teach reading and that's it, and you're not worried about anything else that's going on in that classroom, now let's stop, talk and discuss what's best

> for the kids...to let them know that, you know, it's not just about the scores, it's about the whole child...

Terri also demonstrates this activism in advocating for a student, as evident in her admonishing a colleague to consider alternate methods of discipline for a student, as Terri believed that the SCM/student discipline referral system in place does not benefit students now or in the future:

> I've made a comment about it. I said something to [the] teacher... And it was constructive [feedback]. I wasn't criticizing, I was just trying to tell her to try another way. Like I, okay. Like I said, ‘I already know [the student] is a difficult child. But [the student] is just acting out for attention. I don't think [he] deserves a SCM every day.’ Now I've had bad children in [my] class; I don't write a SCM unless I'm trying to do, RTI, that, or if they hit someone and it left a mark. But I just don't like SCMS... I just don't think every child deserves a SCM. I mean, every action doesn’t deserve a SCM. Let them talk to the child...or, send them to the counselor or you pull them to the side and talk to them...[because] when you write a child [up]...[it] goes in his or her permanent file...

Resistance as activism is what the BFEs in this study engaged when they made the conscious, deliberate and intentional decisions to serve in schools in the urban core. Moreover, they continue to engage this resistance in their everyday lived experiences within the context of their work in public schools, in their classrooms, on behalf of children, to advocate for instructional approaches that best meet their learning needs.

Connection

Relationships

The third major theme that resonates across the participants' narratives as part of their lived experiences and provides greater insight into why they remain in the work, is connection. Much of the BFEs' experiences speak to the connections they make with others which are a natural and necessary part of and critical to the work they engage each day. The centrality of this theme of connection in the lived experiences of the BFEs in this study, is evident both in their connections with students and in their connections with other Black female educator colleagues.

Connections with Students

Central to the work of the BFEs in this study, as they carry-out their called assignments, is the impact they make in affecting the lives of their students. This impact results from the meaningful connections they make with their students. This lived reality is especially forward in the experiences of Joy, whose early memories of schooling are replete with experiences that left her feeling out-of-place and disconnected from herself, her peers and her teachers. As her narrative story highlights, up until Third Grade, Joy was the "only student who looked like me," in the learning environments of the schools she attended, because of their proximity to her mother's work location. However, all of this changed for Joy, when in Third Grade she attended a school in her community for the first time in her schooling experiences, and encountered a Black female teacher who, for the first time, helped Joy to make meaningful connections back to herself, to her peers, and to her as her teacher. The affect of this teacher's connective quality, and impact on Joy, solidified her early call in to the *ministry* field of education and shaped what would become part of her assignment; like her teacher before her, she would build relationships with her students and create classroom communities wherein students felt connected and a part. One way that Joy builds these relationships and connects with her students is through shared cultural connections. This is first evident for Joy during her student teaching experience, when she and one of her students, who Joy recognized was in a setting all too familiar to her, as he was one of the two only students who looked like Joy in his class, shared an insider moment where this cultural connection is in effect:

> ...During my internship at [a suburban elementary school], it was kind of the same experience that I had when I was in Second Grade. There was a little boy, well, actually there were two students in that class, but there was one particular boy that kind of stuck on me because I looked like me and he looked like me. So, we kind of like, you know, made that connection. And my teacher, [who was] my [Cooperating] teacher was not. And he [the student] made a statement - I will never forget this - he made a statement about peas in your head. She [the Cooperating teacher] had no clue what he was talking about, but I knew what he was talking about; but it was a different context of the word that she was talking about. So, I felt from then on that I knew that I was in the right place. I definitely wanted to make a difference, and I wanted to be effective in my community. So I [could] ensure that every child felt, you know, that they were comfortable in every situation and that [there was] one person that they [could] definitely connect with.

Remembering her own disconnection from her peers, her teacher, and all that was familiar to her, in a predominately White, suburban school and class learning environment, as a Second Grader, like this student, the cultural connection Joy shares with him during her internship, brings Joy full circle with her own experiences, but also helped her to connect with that student in that moment – something he could not do with his teacher who did not share the same cultural understanding needed to access what he was trying to communicate in that space of time. This experience also helped to crystalize for Joy, that every student like her, and this little Black boy, needed that connection with their teacher.

Joy also continued this idea of connecting with her students through shared cultural understanding as a classroom teacher, in her implementation of a class store, which she used to motivate her students to achieve their set learning goals, as well as to build their confidence. Although the use of class stores as tools for motivating students is not a new concept, Joy's reconceptualization centered on connecting with her students through the types of food items available to students:

> Well throughout my entire career, I provided all type[s] of incentives. I was just that type [of teacher], like I felt like [students] need[ed] to feel that, that [they're] rewarded, and this is what [they're] supposed to do...I actually had a school, not a school, but a class store, so all of the things that they liked, the chips and the cookies, and the hot sausages and the things that were out back then. I actually had [the] classroom store in my closet, and basically they, they would get points based on doing homework, how many questions they got correct, um, attendance, anything that I [could] motivate them to be a better person and to be a better [student], they got points for it. So, it didn't matter if you were the smartest thing, or you were [not], it was always, "Okay well, you got 2 out of 10 right, guess what?, that's two points!" So, everybody felt like a winner - and I [felt] like that [it was]

> really important that I made all of my students feel like winners, not just the ones that perform[ed] well on tests, but the ones that came to school, the ones that tried their best, it was just motivation all the way around. So, they knew that my goal was for them to succeed, and all they had to do was try, and they would make me happy and in return I would make them happy [with the food items from the class store]...Right before I became a coach, that was my big thing, my class store was like a big hit...like it didn't matter if you got 10 points or 100 points, you still could get something from that store. It may not be the biggest thing, but [they] were able to get something.

When asked about how she arrived at her choice of food items she made available to her students, Joy reflected:

> Um, my grandmother was a, a cookie store lady, so I knew what were, or what was the favorite, snacks around. [You] always [find the cookie lady]in [the] inner city [neighborhoods]. You wouldn’t technically find [these types of snacks] in the suburbs, but you would definitely find [them] at the cookie lady's house. I [felt] like, [if] I want[ed] them to work towards something, [the reward had] to be something that they [were] interested in. I would [not have] be[en] able to go in there with, let's say, a banana, or, let's say, some apple juice, something random that they could get from the cafeteria. It had to be something that [they] just couldn't go and get from the cafeteria...it wouldn't be any point to earn [it], because [they] could just go to the cafeteria...So, it had to be [snacks] that [were] more out of reach for them that they necessarily could not get you know, right away [at school]. So

> that's why I chose those items. I had a variety of different things...the hot sausages [sold the most]...I think that was just a snack, a preferred snack...I [did] see the connection as to why it was successful, because that's something that they liked and they enjoy[ed], and they [could] relate to, and they knew that, [those snacks were] from their environment.

Joy intentionally chose snacks that she knew her students would connect to, as these snacks, which were readily available to them in their homes and the larger community, were familiar to them. That she took the time to thoughtfully consider what rewards would motivate them, based on their shared cultural experiences – Joy knew because, growing up, her grandmother was the neighborhood cookie lady in their community – connected Joy to her students and her students back to her. This connection is evident in the learning outcomes at the end of that school year, as Joy highlights:

> "...and, I had some really good performers [on the test] that year. So, I think that, that [the class store and available snack rewards] played a huge role, because they all felt like winners."

Because of the connection Joy created with her students through the class store and the snacks-rewards she made available to them (she made them happy), her students in turn responded to that connection, and to her instruction, and were open to their learning experience (they made her happy). This mutual exchange yielded positive academic outcomes.

This theme of connection is also evident in Joy's physical classroom learning environment, where, as a means to build community in her classroom by connecting students to themselves, each other and to her as their teacher, she fills the learning space with their pictures:

> I was kind of [an] out of box, out of the box, kind of teacher. I had pictures everywhere of my students, and still have some of those pictures. So, grouping; just coming in the classroom, just looking at your face on a bulletin board, next to a picture of the grouping was something that I did. [Be]cause it was just more than a name on a postcard, [or] an index card. [The students felt] like, my teacher took [an] interest in me, and she wanted to take a picture of me, so I-you know, [did] this, and I use[d] pictures for everything. Like we would have different things in the classroom, and I would post pictures and, and do it around the room, so when people came in our classroom, they saw all the different things that we, we did. So, I just think, it was more of showcasing these are, uh, these are my children during the day, like, these are my babies, and I think that, that was more important to them because they felt like this was like their second home [kind of] thing.

The learning environment was as much a way for Joy to showcase her connection to her students, whom she endears as "my children," and "my babies," as a proud mother, as it was a space for them to own and feel connected to themselves, their peers, and their teacher, in community.

The idea of using the classroom learning space to foster connections with students, is also evident in Glenda's narrative, as she speaks to her deliberate focus of connecting with her students and creating a learning environment that metaphorically represents a family:

> I build relationships. I build relationships with my students. When my students come to class, it's not all about homework. I - I actually have conversations with every one of my students...In any classroom I have, I let them know that we're a family, and families, you know, we help each other and sometimes [in] that family, things don't always go the way we planned, or everybody doesn't get along, but, you know, in this family, we look out for each other. In this class, we look out for each other, and when someone's weak, we help each other...in our community and, this is a safe place.

Additionally, Terri's, Carolyn's and Joy's narratives evidence similar lived experiences centered around building relationships and making connections with students, and the way in which these meaningful connections extend even years beyond the initial connection. This is evident in Terri's experience with two of her former students who she taught as Kindergarteners, who are now in Third Grade:

> For instance, when a [student], was in Kindergarten, he was able to do his work. He did his work. But now that I'm tutoring him [and he's in] Third Grade, he doesn't like school [any] more. I asked him why and he tells me sometimes that he [doesn't] like the teacher, sometimes the work is too hard for [him]. But now that I'm there and he and I have a relationship, I'm getting him to like reading again. And [also] throughout the day, sometimes there is the difficult child; [I'm] not saying I'll make it better all the time, but I do sometimes. I, I bring the attitude down. I've [done] that. I'm a give an example. His name is [J]. He's very dramatic, and I always get

> on him, but I've known him since he's been [at the school] and now he's going to the Fourth Grade. He's just a mess, and I...(laughs). Not a bad mess. He's just dramatic, and he blows everything out of proportion. So I, when I see him [misbehaving] I'm [like], "Not today," and then I have to get in his ear and talk to him, and then he'll have a better day. And then, when I see him for tutoring after school, I ask the teacher, "Did he, did he do better?" Then I give him a treat. I have, you know, [those] Dumb-Dumb lollipops. They are very effective. He wants to continue to be my helper, so, he's gonna do right. But, it [doesn't] always work with the other teachers, but it works for me. It works for me...It's just like, I'll just say it like this – [it's] just, I think it's because I'm black and I know how to reach [him] and what to say to [him]. Because [he doesn't], you know, respond to, "Please sit down." He responds to, 'If I come to this lady's class one more time', he responds to that, and he listens to me and he'll be like, "All right. All right. All right. It's all right Ms." He responds…Now, he's like, he's my surrogate child.

Terri's extended connections with her, now former students, is likewise powerfully noted and beautifully painted in the story she tells of her experience returning to work after being out on leave for an entire school year:

> It's like... I'm a cancer survivor. So, two years ago I had to take a, I, I took a leave. I was gone for a year. So, when I came back, my friend had already told me the kids [were saying], I just walked out and quit. (laughs). That's just – [they're] so grown, they...So, when I came back, [they said] "Ms., why you didn't tell us you were leaving? Why [didn't you] tell us?"- just like that. And then I had to explain

> to them what happened, [be]cause they [weren’t] going to stop. And [after I told them they were like], “Well, why [didn't you] tell us you [were] sick?” I was like, [Be]cause I didn't want to y'all to worry." You know, I had to, to check in with my bosses (laughs). But they, they, they missed me. And they knew, they knew I was gone. [They said], “We came by your room. It was this person in here. We came back to see you.”...I did miss them though.

The meaningful connections that Terri formed with her students, were such that, even in their little minds and hearts, they believed they were entitled to know the circumstances surrounding her absence from the school for an entire year. They had an expectation of her – not as a teacher/former teacher, but as a family member, a mother figure – that she should have made them aware of this issue that significantly impacted her life, and in some small way, their own lives at school, as they felt the absence of her presence. This connection was one of mutual care and concern – Terri’s students were concerned about the reason for her absence and she was concerned about shielding them from the worry of knowing the reason for her absence, while she was away.

In Carolyn’s experience, the dynamic of lasting student connections, is also evident as she shares about a student, who was a part of a class of at-risk students she volunteered to teach at her former school:

> It was wonderful. You know, they were like gosh, she, she cares. You know they'd act out and I'm like I don't care what you do we're still [going to], when you're finished, we're still [going to] get this lesson done. And so to have a teacher that in spite of them acting out that they knew I cared about them I had one that came back,

> um, she was a teacher. She became a teacher. I was at [my school now], and she heard my voice, and she goes, "Oh my god. That's my teacher's voice." And she looked for me because she knew my maiden name, but she didn't know what my current [last] name was, and they [told her], "No, we don't have a teacher here by that name." And she goes, "I know my teacher's voice when I hear it." And she looked for me until she found me. So that was a very rewarding to know that, that I had that kind [of] an impact on her.

Because of the way Carolyn connected with that class of at-risk students, this student, who just happened to be attending a professional development training at Carolyn's school that day, was not only inspired to become a teacher, but even years later, after having been exposed to countless other teacher voices, demonstrates this extended connection to Carolyn, as she was able to clearly discern Carolyn's voice in the midst of many other voices.

The lived experiences of the BFEs in this study, as highlighted in their narrative stories, use their shared cultural understandings, and create classroom atmospheres and learning environments to foster meaningful connections with their students which extend years beyond students' formal assignment to them as their teachers. While their connections to their students provides greater insight into their work, and as well as their commitment to remain in the work, another layer of insight is gained in highlighting the connections they also make with their colleagues.

Collegial Connections

Inherent in the work the BFEs in this study engage every day, are challenges that exist resulting from the practices that support systemic racism in public schools. Although their lived realities in the schools to which they are assigned, can be at times, overwhelming, because of this, the collegial connections they form, as evidenced in the lived stories of the BFE participants in this study provide a source of professional, emotional, and social support.

Glenda, who came to education as a second career, speaks to the collegial relationships that are formed between teachers who work in schools in the urban core:

> ...what I've learned and, just in my career, when you work in tough schools, usually the teachers will - you will find a group of teachers will kind of band together and build relationships.

This she knows first-hand, as the relationships she built early on, helped her to navigate the professional challenges she faced early in her teaching career, when her formally assigned mentor’s support was ineffective and largely non-existent:

> ...Other teachers on my grade level, you know, mentored me, you know, when I may have had [a] difficult kid, or [did] not understand, you know, setting clear boundaries and rules [for students]...I realized that a lot of my support was coming from my team. So, all those veteran teachers from my team were really mentoring me as opposed to, the assigned mentor. You know, it [was] my team, [those] veteran teachers that [were] really helping me understand what I need[ed]...The school was an open school. So, that was a different experience for me. I didn't even know they made schools like that. So, I was already a little concerned as a new teacher. How was my teaching going to be successful with so many distractions possibly around me without a closed classroom? So, you know, they assured me that, you know, this was something that could work, and they showed me how.

As evidenced in Glenda's story, the professional support of her colleagues, or as they have been termed in this study, her colleague-mentors, emerged organically, through an informal network of support when the formal network of support (her officially assigned mentor), broke down and failed to function as designed. This phenomenon is evident across participant narratives and informs the way in which the collegial connections the BFEs in this study form for professional support, develop. This is clearly seen in Carolyn's early teaching experience at the predominately White/Hispanic serving suburban school, when she rejects the mentor her principal attempts to formally assign to her, opting instead to recruit her own colleague-mentor – a seasoned, Black woman teacher, with whom she had already formed a connection:

> So, I was like I don't even know what to do because I've never had a full day in a regular classroom. And so, I found a mentor...She was older, and so she reminded me of Miss[H]...and I told her I [said], 'You're gonna be my mentor.' And she goes, "No, no, no, no, no. I don't do that." I [said], 'I don't care what you don't do, you're going to be my mentor.' I [said], 'No, you've got so many qualities, I need you to be my mentor.' And I remember going to the principal...She goes, "Oh no. She doesn't mentor anyone"...[and] someone else was recommended, and I'm like no....And I wouldn't take no for an answer. I [said], 'She's going to be my mentor'...So, she became my mentor, and she was the driving force behind me becoming as successful as I was at that school...So, we became really good friends, and she was so impressed because she says no one had ever been able to get her to be their mentor. And she was an awesome teacher, and she reminded me of my, Miss [H]. And she did. She really did. She took me under her wings, and it made

> transitioning from nursing to teaching so much easier. She held my hand throughout that first year, and we stayed, I was able to use her as, I would consult with her for the first three years.

In Carolyn's prior observations of her colleague-mentor, she discerned teacher qualities that reminded her of her elementary teacher, Ms. [H], who was her last teacher in legally segregated schooling, and in effect, the last of what Carolyn remembers as part of her schooling experiences that were positive. As such, Carolyn wanted to have imparted to her, these same teacher qualities which were powerful reminders of what good teachers do to make positive impact on their students and believed that this impartation could only come from her colleague-mentor – one of few teachers that looked like her at that school – with whom she had already connected. Because the principal never formally sanctioned Carolyn's choice of a mentor, the professional support Carolyn received from her colleague-mentor, existed through an informal system of support, but for Carolyn, this did not render that support any less effective.

In addition to the professional support the BFEs' connections with their colleagues provide, their narratives also evidence the emotional support their collegial relationships yield. Both Carolyn's and Denise's narratives highlight the dynamic of emotionally supportive collegial relationships that are critical to them as Black female educators working in predominately Black serving schools and school communities in the urban core. Denise frames her experiences with connecting with other colleagues, as an outlet to dialogue with her colleagues and talk through concerns, to alleviate the day-to-day stress resulting from their work and work environment:

> I have to say, every school I've gone to, I, I'm able to connect with teachers. You have to build that rapport, with the other colleagues, and develop some sort of trust...Because we already have a lot of stuff already weighed on us. It's already stressful. So, if the students are gone and we, as adults, can just kinda talk things out and just let things go without students being present, it releases some of the stress. It releases some of the stress, and you do need a confidant...

In Carolyn's experiences collegial connections centered the needs and well-being of other colleagues as a basis for supporting one another emotionally and professionally:

> ...and we leaned a lot on each other, and that was good. I remember when we were in Second Grade, we had a team that was probably one of the best teams I had while I was [here]. And we stayed together for a few years before they split us up. But having that support of your colleagues. And what, what made the team, what made that such a, uh, a great team, [was] we all cared very deeply about the kids, and we were willing to do whatever we needed to do...And we didn't mind that we were dealing with children that were below grade level, but we were willing to do whatever it [was] we needed to do, so we would, you know...One teacher would say, "Okay, I've got this." You know, "What are you having trouble with in your room? Okay, I've got this, I can help you with that." And so, whatever your strength was, you use[d] that strength to help that teacher in whatever, wherever [they] were weak, then that teacher would, you know, help out [someone else]. And we helped each other as far as planning, planning made, it went a lot easier because everybody was wanting to do their part. And so we all planned together, everyone contributed, and, and it was just, we all helped each other. Where we had a bad day, we'd say,

> okay, we know, we just need to get together and just let's, move away from the kids for a little while and just let ourselves be with each other. And we would do that. We would have lunches, we would, you know, have a luncheon for each other. We would have, um, just times where we would meet after school just to see how each other was doing, just to check in on each other. So, it made a difference.

This is also evident in Terri's experience, when, after having to be repeatedly subjected to disparaging treatment – as the only Black, non-Spanish speaking teacher on her grade level – at the hands of her Kindergarten team members, reached back to the relationships she had formed with two colleagues from her brief stint at another school, for emotional support and guidance for how to handle this very difficult situation:

> Half the time I wouldn't know what they were saying because they would start off in English and then they would do a little side bar in Spanish and I'm like "why am I going"?... And, I didn't want to complain because I [was] new...So, I would reach out to my friends at – oh, actually the first month [of my teaching career], I was at [another school], and [then] I got surplused, that's how I ended up at [the suburban school]. So, I used to reach out to Ms. [W] and Ms. [J]. They used to tell me to speak up, but I was like, "No". And they, just, they calmed me down...[and] they encouraged me and gave me some [advice]...And it worked out...

For the BFEs in this study, not only do their collegial relationships and connections provide a source of professional, and emotional support, they can also serve as social outlets, and like the connections the BFEs in this study make with their students, can extend well beyond the initial connection, as bonds strengthen, and relationships are nurtured into friendships, as evidenced in Glenda's narrative:

> Um, one of my schools I taught at in [a neighboring school district], the whole Kindergarten team, we're still friends today. I still drive to [there] and, you know, we still do family things, weddings, whatever. You know, so, just being on that team and working and – it was a Black school – and just working, you know [with] Kindergarten, which is a challenging grade, [with] kids [who have] never been to school. So, relationships, you know, [I did] form relationships with my colleagues where we [would] go to dinner together, we socialize[d] together...We've been friends for probably about seven years or so now, or longer. We definitely support each other. They're like, "When are you coming back?" And I tell them, ‘No.’ I tell them, ‘I'm going to retire in [my current school district].’ But it's great. I look forward...Although I'm [here] and they're in [their school district], I still make the sacrifice to go meet up with them. I think that [the] value of that friendship is very important. I trust them to give me sound advice, you know and vice versa, whether it's career, whether it's professional, we look out for each other...We've seen each other grow and, you know, the younger ones have kids. It's kind of like there are three older ones. You know, I'm a part of the older and there are three younger ones. So, it's great when we all can mesh together...Every year, we always get together, and [we] get together over the summer and we always get together for each other's birthdays. So, it doesn't matter where we are. We always come together and support each other in that aspect or whatever else is going on.

Denise’s one year experience at the first predominately Black school in the urban core she taught at, also speaks to this as she and an early career teacher’s collegial connection evolves into a social outlet:

> ...I did make [a connection] with one colleague...but I can think she [kind of] came under me, more so like [an] auntie type. She was an upcoming teacher...she was young and...we did things outside of the school...when we talked it wasn't really about school or anything like that. We just [kind of], you know, hung out.

Central to the everyday experiences and lived realities of the BFEs in this study, are the connections they make with their students, and colleagues, while carrying-out their assignments in schools serving poor, predominately Black student populations, located in the urban core of the school district. The significance of these connections, provide another layer of insight into why they remain in and committed to the work.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented, in the form of themes, the major insights derived from the three in-depth interviews conducted with each of the five participants. These five themes – two minor and three major – parallel and present, first the individual, and then the collective portrait of the participants and their experiences as Black female educators in public schools. Minor Theme 1, Faith, aligns to and answers Research Question 3. Major Theme 1, Resilience, aligns to and answers Research Question 1, while major Theme 2, Resistance, aligns to and answers Research Question 2. Major Theme 3, Connection, aligns to and answers Research Questions 2 and 3. Finally Minor theme 2, Experience, aligns to and answers Research Question 1. I will explore these themes further in the next chapter, where a discussion of their salience in relation to the literature and research questions will be engaged.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Black female educators are becoming an anomaly in public school education. The purpose of the narrative inquiry study was, to, through the critical lenses of Critical Race Theory (CRT), and Black Feminist Thought (BFT) explore the lived experiences of Black female educators in public school education, as a means to lift their stories and strengthen the voice of this collective group, who are critical to this field. I envisioned that highlighting the experiences of this group, their work, and how their work is informed and influenced by their experiences, would give insight into how to disrupt their decades-long decline in the field of education. As such, in this chapter, I discuss the emergent themes in relation to the literature and their alignment to the research questions advanced for this study. Thereafter, I will discuss the study's implications for research and practice and offer my concluding thoughts.

Discussion

Research Question 1 (RQ 1) asked: ***What are the lived experiences of Black female educators in public school education?*** Through my analysis of the data, participant's experiences, according to their narrative stories, centered around major Theme 1 Resilience and minor Theme 2, Experience, speak to this question. According to the narrative accounts of the BFEs in this study, their lived experiences are replete with challenges they face which are rooted in racism and racist practices. Namely, their experiences with school inequalities premised on inherent racist ideologies, disparaging treatment from non-Blacks, which stem from negative, controlling images that have been used to perpetuate their/our oppression as Black women and the struggle to find and use their voice, which have been historically silenced, are present and a part of their lived experiences in public schools, in the urban core. Following is a discussion of the themes in response to RQ 1 and the related literature.

Major Theme 1 – Resilience

Challenges Encountered Doing the Work

The BFEs in this study, as evidenced through their narrative accounts, encounter challenges while engaging their work everyday. These challenges result largely from the racism – manifested in the racist practices that are embedded in the larger system of public school education (structural) and in the racist practices of individuals (microaggressions) who also exist in this work landscape – that they experience while carrying-out the assignments to which they have been called. As such, contending with this reality, is a part of their everyday lived experiences in the context of their work in public schools.

Structural Inequalities

One of the challenges that is part of the lived reality of the BFE participants in this study, as evidenced through their narrative accounts, is their experiences with structural racism through school inequalities, which are pronounced in the schools they exist or existed in. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), maintain that the framers of the United States Constitution, in contemplating its founding principles, privileged the rights of property owners (White men), over that of human rights (slaves). This "tension," which has existed from that time until now is still pervasive today, and the idea upon which the system of education is premised – "those with 'better' property, are entitled to 'better' schools"

(Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 53-54). The participants' narrative accounts give witness to this, as the schools wherein they exist and have existed are faced with this reality, as is highlighted in Denise's account of the rat-infestation in the predominately Black elementary school. Because Denise's then school was not considered a *better* school, Denise and her students had to live with the reality of rats running through her classroom during instructional time daily. Moreover, Terri and Carolyn's accounts of their "new school," that opened under-staffed, under-resourced and under construction, points to a system that perpetuates a practice where the haves have it and the have-nots do not. Because all three BFEs had been teachers in resource-rich *better* schools in White-Hispanic, middle-class, suburban neighborhoods, they recognized the disparities and inequalities between the schools, and assigned the difference in treatment to racism which they believed the school district allowed.

In addition, school inequalities not only exist at the level of school facilities, but also, as revealed in the narrative accounts of the participants, there are embedded district-level practices that perpetuate and support the inequalities, when it is in the best interest of the district and district-level decision-makers. Bell (1995) refers to this as Interest Convergence.

Interest Convergence

According to Bell (1995), Interest Convergence, as he coined it, is a major tenant of CRT, which maintains that to the extent that Whites can calculate that a law, or policy, etc., specifically designed to benefit Blacks, will also benefit Whites, will they support and or allow it into existence. For example, it is a widely held belief of Critical Race Theorists that Desegregation was supported, promoted and permitted by Whites because they stood to benefit more from its implementation, to promote America’s political agenda globally, as well as economic interests domestically (Bell, 1987).

As Carolyn’s and Terri’s narrative accounts detailed, their school is named for a historically Black community (HBC), however, the school is not located in that community. Typically, schools named for communities are actually located in that specific community. However, in the case of Carolyn’s and Terri’s school, the Black community, for whom the school is named, via a very active community-based organization, for years lobbied the school board for a new school that would service the children of their community but continued to be denied their request. The district’s school board eventually approved the request, which alleviated the east-of-the-highway school from servicing the pockets of students from the historically Black community. The district’s school board eventually approved the request, because doing so, satisfied their need to alleviate an east-of-the-highway school (*better*) school, who, at that time, was the home or boundary school for several pockets of students bussed in from the historically Black community. Approving the opening of a new school and naming it for the HBC, appeased the active community-based organization (Blacks) – although the school was not built in their community, they were satisfied with the community’s name being assigned to the school – and alleviated the east-of-the-highway school from servicing the pockets of students from the historically Black community.

Interest Convergence is also evident in the lived experiences of Denise. Namely, as her narrative illustrates, she receives her first fulltime teaching assignment because the principal needed to meet her racial quota, by filling the position of a recently retired Black female teacher, with another Black female teacher. In addition, in Denise’s experience at one of her former schools with the principal who placed more emphasis on students' performances than she did on academics, although she agreed that students benefitted from the outlet, in Denise's estimate, the principal pushed them because she saw the students' performances as photo opportunities which boosted her visibility with her superiors, via social media.

Whiteness as Property

Harris (1993) maintained that whiteness, over the course of time, specifically after the period of Reconstruction, which came to be ruled by laws that shaped the Jim Crow south, became valorized as "treasured property" (p. 1713), both in theory and function. Namely, whiteness, according to Harris (1993), assigns an "embedded" set of privileges, assumptions and benefits to whites that are "affirmed, legitimated and protected by the law" (p. 1713). A status which affords them the wherewithal to maintain power and control, in the continued subordination of Black people (Harris, 1993). This dynamic, according to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), is evident in the system of public school education.

In addition to CRT's Interest Convergence that exists as part of the everyday lived experiences and realities of the BFEs in this study, CRT in education's tenant, borrowed from the extensive research of Harris (1993) that premises whiteness as property, is also evident in the experiences of the BFEs in this study with structural racism in the form of school inequalities, specifically, Carolyn and Terri, as the process as described, of re-ordering students from one school to another through boundary changes, or what Carolyn refers to as "rezoning," points to the absolute right to exclude, and reputation and status of property, components of this critical lens.

Absolute Right to Exclude

In the narrative relating Carolyn's and Terri's experiences, both BFEs share that when their school opened, a large part of the student demographic was bussed to their school from the HBC for which the school was named, resulting from boundary changes that re-directed those students to the new school. According to Carolyn's account, the school east-of-the-highway's school performance grade improved after the boundary change.

Using boundary changes as a tool, the school east-of-the-highway, was "excluding" the pockets of Black students previously bussed into their school from pockets of the HBC. This resulted in the school's grade improving. Moreover, the boundary changes resegregated students, as the new school's demographic, because of the rezoning, was now predominately Black. The whiteness as property's absolute right to exclude, is also evident across the experiences of the BFEs in this study, as all of the elementary schools they are assigned to have been identified as L300, Extended Day schools by the state, which extends students' school day by an hour to provide students additional support in Reading. In this reality, the students at each of the schools are "excluded" from the experience of a regular-schedule school day, and rarely have access to extracurricular activities because of the length of the school day.

Finally, the absolute right to exclude is evident in the "white flight" (p. 60) (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) of families who lived in the surrounding communities of Carolyn's and Terri's school, as many of them opted to enroll their children in nearby charter schools, instead of the school located in their neighborhood, thus excluding themselves and their children from the school located in their zip code, but named for the HBC, and serving a predominate Black student population.

Reputation and Status Property

Next, the whiteness as property functioning as reputation and status can be seen in the naming of Carolyn’s and Terri’s school. Because the school is named for a HBC, according to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), the school was automatically defamed, because to “identify a school...as nonwhite in any way is to diminish its reputation or status’ (p. 60). Given this, families in the suburban neighborhoods surrounding the school, associated the name of the school with the historically Black community, whose reputation historically was stigmatized.

The Right to Use and Enjoyment

Lastly, whiteness as property functioning as the right to use and enjoyment, which, as explicated by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), “allows the extensive use of school property” (p. 59), is clearly evident in Denise’s narrative when she recalls “rats coming out in the daytime during instruction,” in her first teaching experience in the urban core. Here, students nor the teachers could fully enjoy or use their classrooms or the school’s property extensively, because of the rodent infestation. Likewise, Carolyn’s account of the first year her new school opened, under-resourced, also evidences the prevalence of school inequalities in the daily reality and experiences of BFEs in this study. Carolyn, in comparing her previous school’s resource-abundance, connects the lack of instructional resources (use) at her current and *new* school, with the school’s predominate Black student population. Students could not enjoy fully, the full extent of their learning experience, as they were not afforded even the use of workbooks. Structural inequalities, a manifestation of racist practices, in public school education, are pervasive in the lived experiences of the BFEs in this study, and one challenge, among others, they face as they carry-out their work.

Treatment from Non-Blacks

Another challenge the BFEs in this study face as part of their lived reality and experiences, in the context of their work in public school education, is the disparaging treatment they receive from non-Blacks. Much of this treatment grows out of long-held stereotypes, or what Collins (2009) terms “negative controlling images,” (p. 77), which have historically been attached and assigned to Black women, as means to both justify and maintain their intersectional oppressions. These controlling images, which were initially constructed in the context of slavery, and have endured, continue to be pervasive, and thus an everyday reality for Black women in America, and accordingly, a core theme of BFT. Since slavery, Black women have been stereotyped into one of three negative controlling images – Mammy, Sapphire or Jezebel – with the negative image of Mammy being the most widely appropriated to Black women. For the dominant society, Mammy typifies the docile, “faithful and obedient servant” (p.80), who knows her place and stays in her place (Collins, 2009; Baer, 2016). This same image is also readily assigned to Black women in education (Ladson-Billings, 2009), where often she is represented as a “cold and callous” (p. 89), figure who neglects her own children but is overly concerned for her White employer and the children of their family. Ladson-Billings (2009) maintains that the negative controlling images historically assigned to Black women as teachers, are pervasive across the television, film and literary genres. In these mediums, in stark contrast to White teacher portrayals, who are always cast in positive lights, Black women teachers are often portrayed as "bossy," "heartless," "mean-spirited," and "evil," (p. 93) especially towards Black students and their parents, (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Moreover, negative stereotypes of Black women teachers, focused on representing them as incompetent have also been widely held.

Part of the lived experiences of the BFEs in this study, is being confronted with microaggressions (Crenshaw et al., 1995), from non-Blacks, that are rooted in a preconceived idea they have about Black women, and in the context of their work, about Black female teachers. This is evident in Carolyn's narrative where she is issued a low evaluation because in the eye of her Hispanic female assistant principal, she did not stay in her place or remain silent when she challenged Carolyn's instructional decisions. As a result of Carolyn's non-conformity to the docile, obedient, subservient, stay-in-your-place – all behavior traits associated with the Mammy controlling image – at the end of the school year, the assistant principal used her power (the disciplinary domain of power – a power domination designed to maintain oppression – (Collins, 2009), to, in her estimation, put Carolyn back in her place. Likewise, both Terri and Denise are confronted with and have to combat the negative controlling image of the incompetent Black female teacher – Terri with the Hispanic parent who requested to have her son removed from her class to the Hispanic teacher's class, although the student spoke perfect English; and Denise when her assigned Hispanic female mentee elected to deliberately "go around" Denise, as her assigned mentor, to ask Denise's Hispanic colleagues for assistance.

#BlackWomenatWork

There is no place more prominent where the resilience of Black women is on display, than in the context of their work. This is evident in the narrative stories and accounts of the Black female educators in this study. For Black women, work, historically, from slavery up until now, has been an inextricable part of their/our existence. Unlike White women, dating back as far as slavery when in forced labor, Black women never had an option not to work. Moreover, during subsequent periods after Emancipation, when laws were constructed to ensure a permanent second-class citizenry, that effectively locked Black men out from, among other critical aspects of society, jobs that afforded them the ability to earn a decent wage, Black women were obligated to continue in the workforce, to ensure their family's survival (Collins, 2009). Because of this, Black women have historically been overwhelmingly represented and exposed in the workforce. As such, it is also the place where they experience, more often than not, intersectional oppressions; thus, its salience as a core theme of BFT (Collins, 2009).

Through the lens of BFT, analyses of Black women's work – both paid and unpaid – has explored their victimization in the context of work, resulting from intersectional oppressions, although less explored, but equally as important, the unpaid work Black women engage in the context of their families, and the historic trajectory of their work and work roles through specific eras, from enslavement through industrialization.

Whether as slave laborers, or in their work roles as field workers post emancipation, domestic workers primarily through the period of industrialization, and in recent history, in the professions, Black women have encountered significant challenges in the context of their work. From experiencing racism in its many forms and iterations, to combating negative controlling images, Black women's resilience comes through as they have been able to "to bear up," (p. 413) under, even in the most difficult of work circumstances (Van Wormer, 2011). This standpoint is confirmed in the lived experiences of the Black female educators in this study. Notwithstanding the challenges they encounter – school inequalities and disparaging treatment – which are rooted in racism, and part of their lived experiences in public school education, the BFEs in this study, like those before them remain resilient in carrying-out their work, their assignment, on behalf of the poor, Black students they serve each day, and year after year.

Minor Theme 2 – Experience

The second minor theme, experience, through the participants' narrative accounts centered around this theme, provides additional insight into the BFEs' lived experiences in public school education and how they engage their experiences to both empower themselves and others.

The experiences of Black female educators in public schools, often go unheard and unnoticed (Despenza, 2018; Henry, 1995). As Black women in the larger society, they/we have historically been rendered invisible, and relegated to the margins in silence (Crenshaw, 2006; Delpit, 1988; Henry, 1995; hooks, 2015) – an indication that their/our experiences did not matter and the insights gained from those experiences were discounted. As such, they/we have had to establish their/our own "material base" (Collins, 2009, p. 274), from which we produce our own knowledge, or what Collins (2009), the intellectual framer of Black Feminist Thought (BFT), coins "a Black women's standpoint" (p. 275).

This standpoint, which is framed from the collective, yet diverse wisdom and experiences of Black women from various stations and statuses in life, is authenticated in and by the experiences that produced that knowledge. As such, experience and lived experience, in Black women's standpoint in BFT, is privileged as the authenticator of knowledge. In BFT, knowledge without experience, which is largely the dominant, hegemonic knowledge, is not valued, but knowledge with experience – wisdom – is held in the highest regard (Collins, 2009).

This is evident in this study through Carolyn's narrative in her exchanges with the novice Reading Coach, where Carolyn makes the case, out of her wisdom and experience, for her approach to teaching her students writing, that the Reading Coach, who has no experience with teaching this student demographic, devalues; she instead opts to follow her knowledge which was absent of experience, to the detriment of the students. Because of Carolyn's wealth of experience and wisdom in appropriating the instructional approaches best suited for her students' learning styles, she knew the approach to writing that would yield the desired outcomes. It is clear that Carolyn held her experience as superior to the Reading Coach's knowledge, which empowered her to challenge the Reading Coach's approach, and stand firmly in what she believed to be the best instructional strategy for teaching her students writing. It was from this wealth of experience that she was empowered to speak up and out.

The participants in this study center the importance of experience in shaping both themselves and others. First, the participants' narratives highlight how their experience and experiences as Black women teachers, form the bases of their self-definition, as evident in them becoming more confident and empowered to use their voices. As the BFEs grew with experience, and how to use their experiences to shape and define themselves as teachers, and Black women teachers, specifically, their understanding of the importance of voice and using their voice, likewise grew, as evident the narrative account of Carolyn. This is significant, because, although limited, the research shows that often, Black female educators' voices are left out (Delpit, 1988), of critical decisions related to curriculum and instruction, as the top-down, scripted approach to teaching is readily present in schools, especially schools in the urban core. Because of mandated accountability oversight, resulting from legislation like NCLB, (McLaurin, Smith & Smillie, 2009; Smith & Kovacs, 2011; Sutcher, Darling-Hammond & Carver-Thomas, 2016), the voice of Black female educators are muted even more, making the struggle for them to be heard even greater.

However, even in this context, BFEs like Carolyn, Terri and Denise, as their narrative accounts demonstrate, do not allow their work contexts to define them, but rather, they define and shape themselves within the contexts of their work, as previously highlighted, and are, through this self-definition, empowered to find and use their voices to speak out as advocates on behalf of themselves and their students within the context of their work and inherent challenges.

The BFEs in this study, likewise, use their experience to empower others. This is in keeping with BFT, where historically, Black women have used the spaces of their spheres of influence – family, church, the community, their work – to share the wisdom gained from their lived experiences with other Black women, especially younger, to give them guidance that would empower them to begin the process of coming to self-definition

(Collins, 2009). This is evident in the narrative accounts of Joy, in her role as a Reading Coach, Glenda, as a self-named mentor to new, Black female teachers at her school, and Denise as a seasoned teacher, encouraging the younger, Black female educators to gain the experiences necessary to assume the mantle, evidence this phenomenon.

Research Question 2 (RQ 2) asked: ***How do these experiences inform and influence their work?*** Through my analysis of the data, participant's experiences, according to their narrative stories, centered around major Theme 2, Resistance and major Theme 3, Connection, answers this question. The lived experiences of the BFEs, in this study, which are largely shaped by the challenges they encounter in the context of carrying-out their work, also inform and influence the work they engage. Recognizing the inherent racism that exists in the system of public education, the BFEs in this study approach their work from these lenses, as they understand what their poor, Black students need in order to have meaningful educational experiences that will serve them long after they have left their classrooms and their schools. Moreover, the connections they form with their students and other Black female colleagues, likewise inform and influence the way in which they approach and carry-out their work. Following is a discussion of these themes in response to RQ 2 and the related literature.

Major Theme 2 – Resistance

Activism

The Intentional Deliberate Decision to Teach in the Urban Core

The BFEs in this study engage in resistance as a form of activism each day they enter their schools which are situated in the urban core. This decision informs and influences their work daily. As their narratives highlight, each of the participants made deliberate and intentional decisions (Villegas & Irvine, 2010) to teach in the schools where they are assigned, effectively using their sphere of influence – their classrooms – to engage in the dialectical tradition that accompanies Black women's activism, only, in this context, on behalf of their students (Collins, 2009). That each of the five BFE participants in this study, made the conscious, intentional and deliberate decision (Villegas & Irvine, 2010) to teach in schools in underserved communities, can be viewed as an activist stance and a form of resistance against both, the system that created and enables the racist practices and structural inequalities highlighted across their narratives, and the oppressive controlling images of Black female teachers, which characterizes them as mean, callous, and disconnected, as portrayed in Conroy's literary character, Mrs. Brown (Foster, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Moreover, the BFE participants in this study, through their intentional and deliberate decisions to teach in the urban core, further their unconventional activism through resistance, by combating the historically held belief in the negative controlling images that portray Black women teachers as mean, callous, disconnected, and uncaring, as represented in the character of Mrs. Brown in Conroy's (1972), *The Water is Wide*. Mrs. Brown, who, as a teacher is sent to the remote Sea Islands to teach "at the insistence of Mr. Bennington" (p. 22), the underserved students of poor, rural South Carolina, accepts the call of Mr. Bennington, but not in the way of the welcomed burden akin to one carrying the cross – the symbol for selfless sacrifice towards a triumphant outcome – like the BFEs in this study do; rather, Mrs. Brown accepts the call as if it is the unwelcomed burden of an albatross around her neck.

Activism As Advocacy

In addition, the resistance, as a form of activism, of the BFEs in this study both informs and influences their work, as their activism becomes advocacy on behalf of their students. Across participants' narratives, stories of their advocacy (Hill-Jackson, 2017; Hope, 1993; Irvine, 1990; Villegas & Irvine, 2010), on behalf of their students, related to instructional approaches and decisions, are highlighted. This is evident in Carolyn's narrative accounts, in her exchanges with both her assistant principal and the Reading Coach, and in Joy's accounts in her role as a Reading Coach, advocating for what is in the best instructional interest of students, in directing the work of the teachers she supports who are afraid to leave the scripted curriculum and engage their creativity, out of fear of the repercussions of accountability (McLaurin, Smith & Smillie, 2009; Smith & Kovacs, 2011; Sutcher, Darling-Hammond & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Additionally, in Terri's narrative accounts, her advocacy on behalf of using alternative discipline strategies with students, so as not to permanently mar their discipline records, is evident.

Black women in America have been conditioned to survive. This survival instinct, borne out of struggle and what Zora Neal Hurston terms, being "de mule of de world," has persisted and both forms and informs the core of who we/they are. It is, likewise, in this instinctive survival that our/their resistance is built to, as evidenced in the experiences of the Black BFEs in this study, withstand the endemicity of racism and racist practices embedded in social institutions, like schools, and the larger society, as well as combat the negative controlling images to which we/they have been historically assigned, and further resist intersectional oppression. (Collins, 2009). As such, Collins (2009) maintains that survival is then, also, for Black Women in America, a "form or resistance" and is the “foundation” of their “activism” (pp. 216-217). According to Collins (2009), Black women’s activism takes place in two realms. One realm of Black women’s activism is aimed at achieving changes to exclusionary practices and policies embedded in government, schools, the media, and other sectors of the larger society, through “institutional transformation” (Collins, 2009, p. 219). The other realm wherein Black women’s activism is undertaken, is within the context of “social structures,” where they engage struggle to “create Black female spheres of influence” (Collins, 2009, p. 219). Here, Collins (2009) asserts, is where Black women’s actions and activism strives to ensure “group survival” (p.219). The latter realm is where the majority of Black women’s activism takes place, as does the activism of the BFEs in this study, as they use their classrooms – their spheres of influence – to engage the struggle for group survival on behalf of their students.

Education, as a social institution, has historically, for Blacks, been viewed as the mechanism by which they could achieve parity with their White oppressors. As such, early twentieth century Black women educators, as previously highlighted, accepted the call with full awareness of the weight of their assignment – to uplift the race by preparing and equipping their people to fully engage a society that had long excluded them and disregarded their humanity. Still living under the shadow of the former law that made it illegal to teach slaves how to read and write, these teachers, who understood the importance of their students mastering foundational skills, approached the task of ensuring this mastery, as a subtle, but meaningful form of their resistance to the oppression still attached to unjust laws (Collins, 2009). As teachers, early twentieth century Black women educators were viewed as community leaders; with this influence Collins (2009) maintains that Black women “used their classrooms and status as educators to promote African-American community development” (p. 228). Education, they believed, as the great equalizer, would somehow dispel long-held myths about the inferiority of the Black race. With this charge, their classrooms became their spheres of influence, whereby they could work towards group survival, within the institution of education, through their “everyday resistance” and “actions” (Collins, 2009, p. 225) – teaching the students in their communities, whom they believed would then carry-out the struggle for equality. Educating them was their activism.

Like Loder-Jackson’s (2019), unconventional activism-actions, Jones (2009) maintained that the activism teachers take up as a form of resistance to the oppressive system of public school education, can be done “quietly within classrooms and schools” (p. 85). This standpoint is confirmed, as likewise, the resistance activism that the BFEs in this study engaged, when they made the conscious, deliberate and intentional decisions to serve in schools in the urban core. With this initial decision, they continue to engage and advocate for their poor, Black students, as part of their everyday lived experiences within the context of their work in public schools, in their schools and classrooms – the spheres of influence they have created – from which they can contribute to the on-going, collective struggle of Black women, those before them and those now, for group survival. Ensuring the survival of the children, through adequate and equal educational opportunities, ensures the survival of the entire race. If the children are saved, then we are all saved.

Major Theme 3 – Connection

Relationships

The connections that BFEs in this study make with both their students and other Black female colleagues, are central in their lived experiences in public school education, and also inform and influence their work. Historically, Black people engage connection through the idea of community (Collins, 2009). These connections helped to over time, create a community dynamic that fostered interpersonal relationships, both within families, and between other members of the community who were embraced as extended family (Collins, 2009). Community then, was seen as a unifier and a source of support where the effort of the collective group, not the individual, was privileged (Collins, 2009). Moreover, the role of Black women in fostering this community dynamic, was central to its definition (Collins, 2009).

Connections with Students

In keeping with BFT, the BFEs in this study, as evidenced across participant narratives, build community within their classroom spaces as a means to foster connections with their students, so that in turn, students can connect with their learning and learning experiences. This is evident through the narrative account of Joy, who as a classroom teacher, transformed her learning space into a home away from home with pictures of her students and their learning activities all over the wall space, which fostered a family atmosphere in her classroom (Henry, 1999). Moreover, Glenda's narrative account also highlights how she builds connections and establishes shared accountability with her students and uses her classroom space to have conversations with them, which helps to create a "safe space," where she reminds them that they are "a family" (Henry, 1999).

In addition to using classroom spaces to connect with students, the BFEs in this study also use their cultural connections with students to inform and influence their work. This is evident in Joy's class store, that was well-stocked with treats and eats familiar to her students, who could readily walk in the corner store, or to the cookie lady's house in their neighborhoods, to purchase them. Here, Joy used her "insider knowledge" (pp. 1-2), or cultural synchronicity (Ingersoll & May, 2011, pp. 1-2; Irvine, 1989; Villegas & Irvine, 2010) to key in on culturally-relevant snacks that she could use in her class store as motivators for her students to be incentivized to perform to her expectations.

The connections the BFEs in this study build with their students through transforming their classroom learning spaces (Ladson-Billings & Henry, 1999), and using their insider knowledge to connect and engage their students for learning (Ingersoll & May, 2011, pp. 1-2; Irvine, 1989; Milner, 2006; Villegas & Irvine, 2010), informs and influences their work, as both Joy and Glenda's academic and social-emotional approaches proved to be effective in dismantling many barriers to their students' accessing their learning. In addition to students' confidence in their ability to learn increasing, they evidenced improved academic outcomes (Casey, 1993; Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Gershenson et al., 2018), as Joy also reported she had "high performers," that year on the state assessment test, and Glenda's narrative shares the account of one of her students whose reading fluency improved exponentially.

Connections with Other Black Female Colleague Educators

BFEs way of work is also informed and influenced by their connections with their colleagues, especially other Black, female colleague educators. This is evident in the narrative stories of both Carolyn and Terri, which both highlight that the most optimal way of work is the work that is done in a shared-community, where everyone contributes to make the work lighter. This is especially seen in the way in which the BFEs carry-out their planning. Terri shares in her narrative account that this way of work for her, was adopted from her colleague-mentors with whom she taught for just one month. Given the context wherein that the BFEs carry-out their work – ETO-supported, Title I, L-300 Extended Day schools serving predominantly poor, Black students in underserved communities – which brings with it additional demands, and accountability tasks, as Terri's narrative account highlights with the required excel tracker sheets, approaching their work communally, is both helpful and supportive for the BFEs in this study.

In addition to informing their way of work communally, the connections that BFEs foster with other Black female educator colleagues, as evident in Carolyn's, Glenda's and Terri's narratives, also informs and influences the way in which they professionally support or are professionally supported by other BFEs, in informal, mentor-mentee relationships. According to their narrative accounts, both Carolyn's and Terri's work was informed, influenced and impacted, by the supportive relationship of seasoned, Black female colleague-mentors who, although not officially assigned, were organically connected, and helped them to successfully navigate the first and subsequent early years of their teaching careers.

Glenda's narrative, absent of this dynamic, compelled her to, on her own, ensure for other new, Black female educators, that they would have a seasoned, Black female colleague-mentor, in her, whom they could lean on for professional support. This was important for Glenda, as she shares that her motivation for doing so, is to keep them in the profession. Glenda, understanding the everyday reality of what she and other BFEs in the urban core, are faced with and their students and administrators live daily, with regard to existing in schools that are difficult to staff (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll & May, 2011; U.S. DOE, 2016), her motivation for taking the initiative to become an unassigned mentor to new and early career, Black female educators in her building, was as she states "to keep them in the profession." What Glenda's narrative account highlights is critical, as research conducted by Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017), shows that teachers who have no mentoring or ineffective mentoring, have higher rates of attrition (leave the profession altogether).

Research Question 3 (RQ 3) asked: ***How do these experiences influence their commitment to remain in the work?*** Through my analysis of the data, participant's experiences, according to their narrative stories, centered around minor Theme 1, Faith and major Theme 3, Connection, respond to this question. Although a minor theme, the idea of faith is salient in the lived experiences of the Black female educators in this study and help to give insight in answering why they remain in and committed to the work. Moreover, as already highlighted, in BFT, connection through building community and relationships, not just with students, but with other Black female educator colleagues, is important in the lived experiences and realities of the BFEs in this study and provide insight in answering the question of remaining in and committed to the work.

Minor Theme 1 – Faith

The Ministry of Education

In exploring the question centered around BFEs' experiences and how their commitment to remain in the work is influenced by these experiences, we must look to the foundation that has sustained our collective existence through and despite our intersecting oppressions for insight to an answer – our faith. Black Feminist Thought highlights the entrenched and critical presence of faith, within the collective experience of Black women in America. From slavery, until now, born out of the Christian faith initially introduced to them by their white slave masters, but one that they would come to own as their own, Black women's belief in a Power greater than themselves, has been central to their/our survival. Much of this deep-rooted spiritual awareness, according to Collins (2001), was forged in the Black church – a place that has been traditionally considered "safe" for Black women (p. 111). It is from this safe space of the Black Church that Black women have led, formed bonds with other Black women, been instrumental in helping to construct political movements aimed at achieving equality and justice for the race, (Collins, 2001; Baer, 2016), and developed a deep sense of their God-given purpose. That purpose, as outlined in the literature, for many Black women in the early twentieth century, was found in education.

For early twentieth century Black woman educators, entering the field of education was akin to one accepting the call into the Gospel ministry – you receive *the call*, you *accept* the call and then you, through *assignment*, are located to a place to carry-out that which you have been called to – as there was weighted importance placed on this work. Black Womanist theologians, Dodson and Gilkes (1987) maintained:

> If any one ministry could be identified as central to the Black sacred cosmos of the twentieth century, it would be education...Black people...defined education of the oppressed and the oppressors as central tasks of Christian mission (p. 84).

As such, for Black women educators, teaching was viewed as a ministry assignment to which they were called (Irvine, 2002), and as a result often dedicated their entire lives to this work. Citing the research of Perkins (1982), Collins (2001), highlights that Black women educators held a strong belief that engaging their work as teachers, was a "special responsibility to their respective (p. 186) communities which they alone could fulfill" (p. 228) – what Irvine (2002) references as "raising the race," and "lifting as we climb" (p. 186). Through this lens, as is historically the pattern, the BFEs in this study equate their decisions to enter the *ministry* field of education, as God-directed and ordained, as part of their God-given purpose and calling (Irvine, 2002). Even when Carolyn and Glenda delayed accepting the call, that the call was eventually answered and accepted, was inevitable and inescapable, as this was their destiny.

The nexus between Black women educators' decisions to enter the *ministry* field of education and their faith, has been and continues to be pervasive, as, like their predecessors, the BFEs in this study understand the weightiness of the work they engage, and that their assignments require a measure of grace to carry-out, as Glenda's words reflect: "I think teachers are angels by God; God sent them here, you know, [be] cause you have to have a certain level of grace on your life to be a teacher."

Often times, in navigating the paths which they have been called to, the BFE participants in this study, as highlighted in their narratives, are questioned by others who do not understand their decisions related to their teaching-career paths, as what they clearly understand as carrying-out their God-given purpose and assignment, others cannot reconcile as rational thinking or decision-making. Nevertheless, the BFEs remain steadfast in their resolve and their commitment to their assignments, as they, in the words of Glenda, view their assignments as “God’s work,” to which they have been called. Like the early twentieth century Black women educators, as veteran teachers, each of the BFEs in this study have made the assignments they have been chosen to carry-out, their life’s work.

Moreover, with faith as a framing perspective, the BFEs in this study bring an automatic awareness that the work they engage has a greater meaning and purpose, because of Who has called and assigned them to the work. This awareness may speak to, as the literature explicates, one of the factors contributing to Black teachers having higher retention rates in urban, high-poverty, high-minority schools (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton & Freitas, 2010; Elfers, Plecki & Knapp, 2006; Farinde, Allen & Lewis, 2016; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Scafidia, Sjoquistb, & Stinebrickner, 2007; Villegas & Irvine. 2010), as Black female educators may remain in the work at these schools and in the larger field of education, because they believe they have been called and assigned to these schools and can only be released when their assignment is completed.

While all participants did not explicitly assign a spiritual context to their experience, their intentional and deliberate decisions to teach in schools in the urban core, may signal, metaphorically, that they were drawn (called) to their schools out of a greater purpose; and it is this greater purpose, whether divinely assigned, or not, which influences their commitment both to and to remain in the work.

Major Theme 3 – Connection

Relationships

As previously highlighted, the connections that BFEs in this study make with both their students and other Black female colleagues, are central in their lived experiences in public school education and offer insight and a response to why they remain in and committed to the work.

Connections with Colleagues

Collins (2009) maintains that Black women's relationships with other Black women, are critically important to our existence and survival. She posits that it is in the safety of the spaces created with other Black women, that Black women "construct individual and collective voices" (p. 112), through which we can speak, be heard and more importantly be understood, as the listeners can likewise connect to the experience being shared, because they can identify with the same or similar experiences (Collins, 2009). It is also in the context of these safe spaces, that Black women have their/our humanity affirmed as sisters, and friends, through a variety of horizontal (dialogical) (Collins, 2009), conversations for a variety of purposes. This dynamic is present across the narrative accounts of the BFEs in this study, and answers why the BFEs in this study remain in and committed to the work.

Each of the five participants, highlight the value and critical importance that developing and maintaining connections/relationships with their colleagues, and Black female educator colleagues, particularly. Through their narrative accounts, they share that having those relationships has been a saving grace and sustaining force in both their professional and personal lives. This is evident across participant narratives, which highlight the professional, emotional and social support these collegial relationships provide for the BFEs in this study. In some instances, these relationships were housed in their schools, and in other instances, as is evident in Terri's narrative account, between schools, where she highlights reaching back to Ms. [W] and Ms. [J], two seasoned, Black female educators, at another school whose support and guidance helped her to navigate the challenges she faced the rest of her first year and beyond, at the predominately White-Hispanic school, located in a suburban neighborhood, where she was the only Black teacher on the Kindergarten team. This connection for Terri, to her colleague-mentors, was critical to her success and her survival that first year, because Ms. [W] and Ms. [J], were the only two people at that time that Terri could talk to who understood what she was experiencing.

Moreover, in keeping with BFT, the BFEs in this study, in the safe spaces they have created, as Carolyn, Denise, and Glenda highlight in their narrative accounts, with other Black female educator colleagues, be it a classroom gathering place after the students have been dismissed, or in a social setting outside of the confines of the work context, they do the work – through their dialogical conversations, and affirmations – to build-up each other and themselves. In doing this, they, construct (name their own realities) for themselves as Black women, and as Black female educators their own self-definitions to counter the negative controlling images they combat in their lived experiences in public schools daily. It is through these exchanges that the BFEs in this study are able to engage and re-engage in self-definition, and as such, continue their commitment in and to the work.

Connections with Students

The connections the BFEs in this study establish with their students, transcend well beyond the time they are officially assigned to their classes. These connections and relationships speak to the impact that BFEs have and have had on the educational experiences of their students. This is evident in the narrative account of Carolyn, whose former student, who was now a teacher, heard Carolyn's voice out of many teachers' voices the day she attended a training at Carolyn's school, and though she did not know Carolyn by name her new last name, (Carolyn's last name had since changed), she set out to find her until she found her. Joy's narrative account speaks to a student whose life she impacted when he was in elementary school, who still today, when he sees her, reminds her of how their encounter changed the trajectory of his life.

Moreover, as evidenced across participants' narratives, the BFEs' in this study, connections to students center on their roles as "community othermothers" (Collins, 2009, p. 207) and surrogate parents (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Case, 1997; Foster, 1989; Shipp, 2000). According to Collins (2009), historically, Black women teachers have been considered community othermothers, as the relationships they form with their students, is viewed as a "mothering of the mind," (p. 207) relationship. Collins (2009) maintains that for Black female teachers, this mothering of the mind is a special bond they develop with their students and moves beyond traditional mentoring which is privileged in the literature of the dominant discourses. As such, the lasting connections highlighted from the participants' narratives with their students, are more aptly described through the critical lens of BFT and provides more insight in response to why BFEs remain in and committed to the work.

The foregoing was a discussion of the salient themes in relation to the literature and their alignment to the research questions advanced for this study. In the next section of this chapter, I will discuss the study's implications for research and practice and offer my concluding thoughts.

Research Implications and Recommendations

Recommendations for Future Research

One recommendation for future research is, to further explore the influence of the informal systems of support through unassigned, informal mentors, whom I've coined as colleague-mentors, on retaining Black female educators in the field. Throughout the study, many of the participants highlight their experiences with colleague-mentors who were vitally important to their early existence in the field. As such, this is a topic that requires further exploration. In addition, as this study only highlighted the experiences and lifted the voices of Black female educators in traditional elementary schools and K-8 centers, future research that extends to include the experiences of Black female educators in middle and senior high schools, is also recommended. The inclusion of the voices, experiences and perspectives of Black female educators in the secondary, will add to the insight gained through this study. Also, because the teaching profession is a majority female field, issues specifically related to the participants' gender were not readily evident. As such, another recommendation for future research is to conduct a study centered on Black female educators in school leadership roles, i.e., principals, assistant principals, district administrators, etc., to explore the intersectionality of race and gender while serving in these roles. Finally, of particular note, during the course of the study, three of the participants highlight significant health issues they developed and/or suffered – cancer, fibromyalgia and a stroke – while carrying-out this work. As such, it is important to engage future research to explore the effects of working in high-need – high poverty, high-minority schools in the urban core – on the health of Black female educators. This is a particularly salient topic to explore, as a potential factor in Black female teacher retention. Carolyn one of the research participants, made the decision not to return to teaching at the start of the school after suffering a stroke months earlier, which she attributed to the conditions in her work environment, created by the school's leadership.

Implications for Practice and Policy

There is a need to retain Black female educators in public schools. Even more, there is a need to retain Black female educators in hard-to-staff, high-poverty, high-minority schools in the urban core of historically underserved communities. As such, this study was undertaken to explore the lived experiences of Black female educators in public schools, to lift their voices first, and also to gain insight into why they remain in and committed to the work; insight that can provide a road map for how to slow this decades-long decline of them in the field. And in so doing, move policy-making boards, district-level and school site administrators to make changes to existing, or create new programs, structures and systems of support, to both increase and/or retain Black female educators in the field.

The findings of this study point to a few, but important implications for research and practice in Black teacher retention. One implication for practice is the need to engage Black female educators in decisions about instructional approaches, and strategies, particularly for Black students in the urban core. This is one of the many areas in education, Delpit (1988), maintained, where the voice of Black female educators has been silenced, as they have not been invited to the decision-making table around these educational discourses. However, as this study’s findings suggest, Black female educators have invaluable insight to offer about effective instructional approaches, as the BFEs in this study, contributed to raised student and overall school achievement at their schools, which could be directly related to the instructional approaches they both advocated for on behalf of their students and employed in their classroom learning environments. When she arrived, Joy’s school, was a Tier 3, ETO-supported, L300-Extended Day, Double “F” school. As a result of her work with teachers in encouraging and supporting them to move away from the scripted way of delivering instruction and engage instructional approaches that were in the best interest of their students, her school, although still ETO-supported, is no longer a Tier 3, L300-Extended Day, double “F” school. This school level impact is evident in the majority of participants’ schools. Their impact on students at the classroom level, contributed to school level improvements. This may signal that Black female educators and their instructional approaches are especially effective in high-poverty, high-minority schools, and as such, warrants a seat at the decision table where their invaluable input centered on relevant instructional approaches can be offered. Giving opportunity for Black female educators’ voices to be heard with regard to effective instructional approaches and strategies, privileges their experiences and the knowledge that is produced as a result. It is then recommended, that policy-making boards, and district-level administrators, consider creating an ad-hoc and/or standing committee to the board, made up of a cadre of Black female educators, who are experts in the appropriation of instructional approaches, and with proven achievement results, who will, through their wisdom and experience, advise both the policy-making board and district-level administrators in matters related to instructional approaches and practices that are best suited for students in schools in the urban core, particularly. Giving Black female educators the visibility and the opportunity to voice their insights is needed to bring them from the margins of obscurity to which they have historically been relegated.

Another implication for practice, highlighted by the study's findings is that Black female educators are connectional, as such, they thrive and survive in environments that promote and foster community. The BFEs in this study, whose experiences, whether from their early schooling experiences as students, as in the case of Joy and Carolyn, or early experiences in their teaching careers, when often they were the only Black teachers on their grade level teams, or one of few in the entire school, have felt out-of-place and had to carry-out their work in siloes. However, within the schools in the urban core, which speak to community and a communal way of work, the BFEs are and feel in-place and at-home. This is evident in their connections and interactions with other Black female colleagues and their connections with their students. With each group, they work to build community – in their classrooms for their students, and in the safe spaces they create with their colleagues, either through the organic, informal colleague-mentor relationships that develop, or those that are long-standing. Moreover, although challenged with less than desirable working/school conditions (Ingersoll & May, 2011) – poor facility upkeep, under-staffed, under-resourced, the weight of school accountability – the BFEs, in choosing to teach in schools in the urban core, seem to have a greater desire for a sense of belonging, than they have to exist in schools that have optimal conditions, but may be void of these critical connections and community. In light of this, one recommendation for school site administrators is to provide more opportunities for Black female educators to serve in roles as teacher-leaders. In this capacity, given their predisposition to building community, Black female educators could support the work of their school site administrators by both building and working in community with their colleagues to promote building-level initiatives centered on school improvement. In addition, district-level administrators and policy-making boards, should consider allocating funding for BFEs to form an association (formal) or a support group (informal). This newly created structure would become a safe space wherein Black female educators would continue nurturing their connections with other Black female educator colleagues and engage in dialogical (horizontal) conversations that are professionally, emotionally and socially beneficial to this group.

Finally, given that at present only one quarter of the current teacher workforce in MDCPS identify as Black, and data presented at an April 2021 school board meeting evidenced that Black students in MDCPS are lagging behind their White and Hispanic counterparts in all metrics, it is recommended that MDCPS' School Board approve district-level administrators, to create a unit within the Office of Human Capital Management's Recruitment Office, that will primarily focus on the recruitment and retention of Black female educators to and in our school district.

Conclusion

I came to this work fully expecting to confirm a suspicion that I long held – that Black women teachers are concentrated in high numbers, in schools serving, historically, the most under-served communities, because that is where they are relegated. However, what the research revealed, through the participants' narrative stories, is that each of the five study's participants are assigned to their ETO-supported, Tiered, high-poverty, high-minority schools, serving predominately Black student populations, by choice. Given the structural racism that perpetuates school resegregations and the economically depressed communities that each of the participants work in physically, or serve, the students and their parents, who populate schools in the urban core, do not have a choice to be there, as they, unlike the participants in this study, are relegated there. This reality makes the participants' intentional and deliberate decisions to teach in the urban core, that much more powerful – the BFEs go in to where students cannot get out. It is also from this place that they engage their voices and advocate for what is in the best interest – academic and social – of their students, as Carolyn's narrative highlights, "I am the voice for my students."

Through the narrative accounts of their told stories, the participants shared their self-defining experiences which revealed the role of faith, their resilience and resistance, their connections to both their students and other Black female educator colleagues, and ultimately their voices.

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APPENDIX A

SAMPLE EMAIL SHARED WITH INITIAL CONTACTS

From: Surrancy, Rachelle A.
Sent: Tuesday, July 29, 2021 3:36 PM
Subject: Black Female Educators

Good afternoon, [redacted]

I hope all is well with you as you close-out this school year. I am reaching out to you, because I believe you would be an excellent potential participant in a future research project I am undertaking centered on Black female educators. I would like to share more about it with you.

Please contact me at 786-517-7175 at your earliest convenience.

I look forward to having the opportunity to speak with you.

Regards,

Ms. Surrancy

Rachelle A. Surrancy

"To whom much is given, much is required"

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT FOR MEET AND GREET SESSION WITH POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

(Say) Good (morning, afternoon, evening). Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. The purpose of this meet and greet session is to share with you a little more about the research study that you expressed an interest in participating.

The purpose of the narrative study is to explore the lived experiences of Black female educators in public school education, as a means to lift their stories and strengthen the voice of this collective group, who are critical to this field. Moreover, by highlighting the experiences of this group, this study also proposes to provide insight into why they remain in and committed to their work. With the disappearance of Black female educators in the field, at a time when research studies evidence their importance to the success of Black students, this study's significance is clear; as lifting the voices and highlighting the experiences of those who choose to remain committed to the work despite their encounters with racism at their intersecting locations, may give insight into how to disrupt the decades-long decline.

Should you choose to participate, you will be one of six to eight participants in this study. Your participation will involve three sessions, approximately an hour and a fifteen-minutes in length each, over a three-week period between the months of July 2021 and September 2021. Interviews will be conducted virtually, via Zoom. Do you have any questions at this point?

(Pause to address questions)

After hearing a little more about the study, are you still interested in being a participant?

If the answer is yes, continue with the script below. If no ***(say)*** – Thank you for your time.

Thank you for agreeing to participate. Before we go further, I am sending you an email containing two important documents. The first document is a consent form that I would like to go over with you and will be attached to the email. The second will be a link in the body of the email to a short questionnaire document that I will need you to complete by the end of this session.

(Pause to send email with consent form and survey link; confirm that potential participant has received the email)

(Say) Did you receive the email? Great. I will now share my screen to review with you the Consent Form. The purpose of this form is to review your rights as a participant in this research project. Your decision to participate in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate in this study, you may withdraw from your participation at any time without penalty. After I read the consent form, I will ask you if you have any questions about the research, or your rights as a participant. Is there anything you need clarification about at this point?

(Pause for clarification questions)

(Read the consent form verbatim, aloud)

Do you have any questions about the research, or your rights as a participant?

(Pause to address questions)

(Say) I will now re-send you the Consent Form for you to sign electronically.

(Send Consent Form to potential participant electronically and confirm that it has been received and signed)

(Say) Thank you, I see that you have signed the consent. Can you now complete the short questionnaire?

(Confirm that questionnaire has been completed)

(Say) Thank you, I see that you have completed the short questionnaire. Before we end, I would like to schedule a date for your first interview. What day and time is good for you?

(Schedule interview - set day and time for interview via Zoom)

(Say) Thank you for scheduling the first interview. I will follow-up via email with a Zoom invite.

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research study on the experiences of being Black female educators.

Following are things you should know about this study. Please carefully read this document prior to agreeing to participate.

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the narrative study is to explore the lived experiences of Black female educators in public school education, as a means to lift their stories and strengthen the voice of this collective group, who are critical to this field. Moreover, by highlighting the experiences of this group, this study also proposes to provide insight into why they remain in and committed to their work.

NUMBER OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS AND STUDY DURATION

You will be one of six to eight participants in this study. Your participation will involve three sessions, approximately an hour and a fifteen-minutes in length each, over a three-week period.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in three individual interviews, over a three-week period, between the months of June 2021 and September 2021. Interviews will be conducted virtually, via Zoom, at agreed upon scheduled times. In addition, you may be asked to share personal and professional documents, i.e., journal entries, photographs, lesson plans, etc., that also capture your experiences.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are “no known risks.”

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

Participating in this study will give you the opportunity to reflect on and make meaning of your experiences as a Black female educator in public schools. Having a better understanding of how these experiences inform your work and your commitment to your work, may empower you as you find and define your voice through the stories of your personal and professional experiences.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All information taken from the study will be coded to protect your name. Your name nor any other identifying information will be used when discussing or reporting data. This interviewer will keep all files and data collected secured. Once the data has been fully analyzed it will be destroyed within three years of the study's completion. Likewise, audio and/or video recordings will also be destroyed within three years of the study's completion. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. In addition, the Institutional Review Board officials responsible for monitoring this study may inspect these records.

COMPENSATION

You will not be compensated for participation in this study.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND AUTHORIZATION

Your decision to participate in this interview is completely voluntary.

WITHDRAWAL FROM THE STUDY AND/OR WITHDRAWAL OF AUTHORIZATION

If you decide to participate in this study, you may withdraw from your participation at any time without penalty.

COST/REIMBURSEMENTS

There is no cost for participating in this study.

RESEARCHER CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions about the purpose, procedures, or any other issues relating to this research study, you may contact me by email at rthom043@fiu.edu.

PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT

I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study:

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

I understand that I will be given a copy of this signed Consent Form.

Name of Participant (print):

____

Signature: Date:

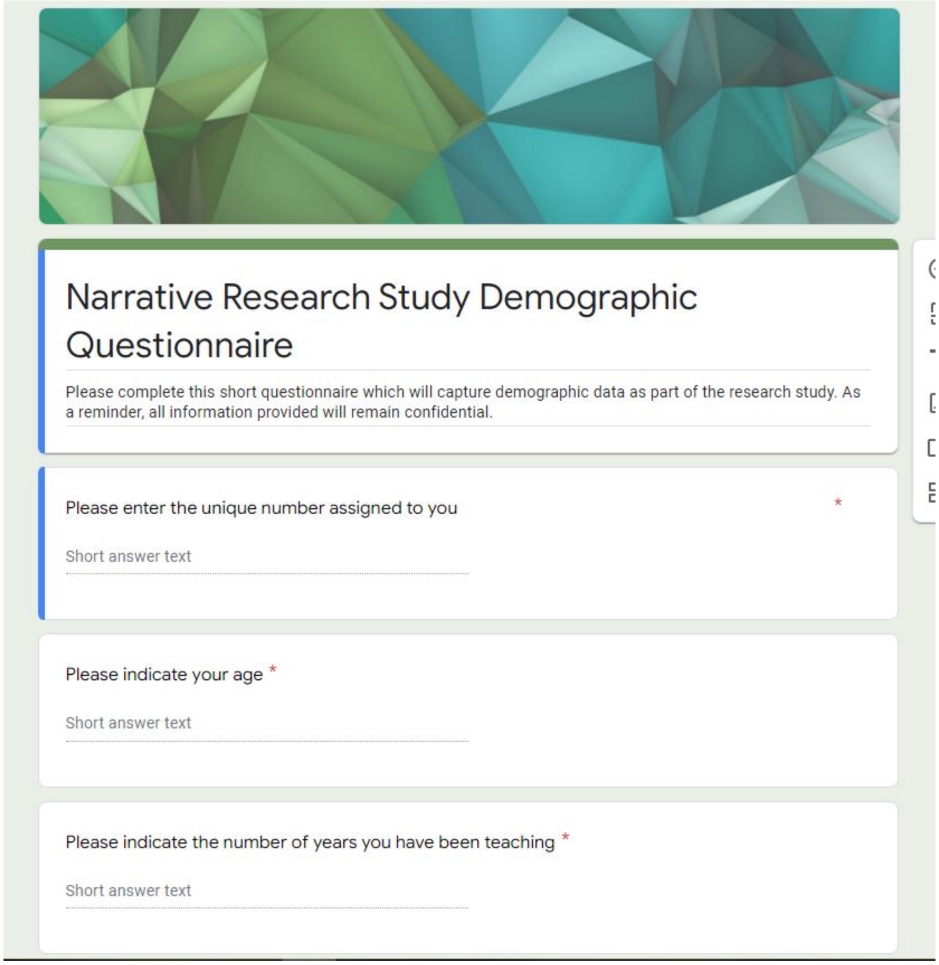
Person Obtaining Consent (print):

____

Signature: Date:

APPENDIX D

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE



Narrative Research Study Demographic Questionnaire

Please complete this short questionnaire which will capture demographic data as part of the research study. As a reminder, all information provided will remain confidential.

Please enter the unique number assigned to you *

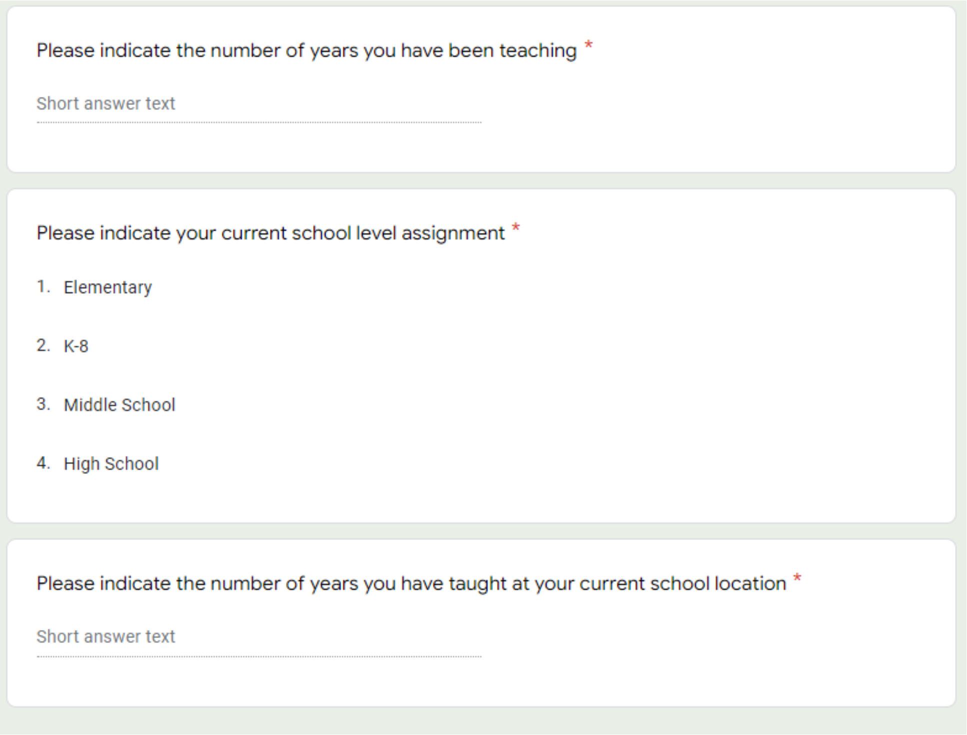
Short answer text

Please indicate your age *

Short answer text

Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching *

Short answer text



Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching *

Short answer text

Please indicate your current school level assignment *

1. Elementary
2. K-8
3. Middle School
4. High School

Please indicate the number of years you have taught at your current school location *

Short answer text

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND SCRIPT

(Say) Good (morning, afternoon, evening). Thank you for taking the time to speak with me. During this series of interviews, you will be asked to share with me about your experiences as a Black female educator, beginning with questions about your early experiences with education. Our interview should be approximately an hour and fifteen minutes in length. There are no right or wrong or desirable or undesirable answers. I would like you to feel comfortable with saying what you really think and how you really feel. I will be keeping track of the time on my cell phone.

(***For virtual interviews – say***) If it is okay with you, I will also be audio and video recording this interview via the Zoom platform. Recording the interview ensures that I can get all the details from our exchange, while also ensuring that I give you my full attention during our time together. The recording will remain confidential. If you choose not to be recorded, you may still be interviewed.

Do you grant consent for your interview to be video and audio recorded via Zoom?

Interview Protocol

Participant ID:
Time of Interview:
Setting:

Questions for Interview One (Life History)

1. What is your earliest memory of your schooling experience? (RQ 1)
2. Can you describe the moment you knew you wanted to be a teacher? (RQ 1)
    a. *Possible Follow-up Question* - From that point forward, can you describe your path/journey forward to becoming a teacher?

Questions for Interview Two (Details of Experience)

1. Can you describe (the school community) where you teach? (RQs 1 & 2)
2. How did you come to teach at this school? (RQs 1 & 2)
3. How would you describe your work as a teacher in this school setting? (RQ 2)
4. Can you describe what it is like for you to do your work (teach) in your school? (RQs 2)
    a. *Possible Follow-up Question* - Can you give me an example of that/this?

Questions for Interview Three (Reflection on Meaning)

1. You have shared about your experiences on your journey to becoming a teacher and about your experiences as a teacher; can you describe what these experiences mean to you? (RQ 3)
2. What meaning have you made from these experiences – in other words, how do you make sense of these experiences? (RQ 3)
3. What keeps you coming back to this work? (RQ 3)

(Say) Thank you for taking the time to recount this personal experience with me. We are nearing the end of our time, but before we conclude, the interview, I would like to give you room to share with me anything you feel is important that did not come out during the interview, that you would like to be included.

Please remember that the content from this interview, both written and recorded, will be kept confidential. You may withdraw your consent at any time, including now or in the future. If you have questions about my research, please feel free to contact me at the email address provided on the consent form. Do you have any additional questions, or need any additional clarification before we close?

(End)

VITA

RACHELLE A. SURRANCY

Born, Miami, Florida

1990-1991	A.A., English Miami Dade College, North Miami, Florida
1992-1994	B.A., English Florida International University Miami, Florida
1994-1995	M.S., English Education Florida International University Miami, Florida
1994-2003	English/Language Arts Teacher Miami Dade County Public Schools Miami, Florida
1998-1999	Certificate, Educational Leadership Florida International University Miami, Florida
2003-2009	High School Assistant Principal Miami Dade County Public Schools Miami, Florida
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2013-Present	Elementary School Principal Miami Dade County Public Schools Miami, Florida
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