Chapter 5
Teaching Black: Common Eyes All See the Same

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Abstract Supporting Black urban educators in ways that are affirming and inclusive acknowledges the complexities of being both Black in America and an agent of the school system. For equity-minded Black educators who work to disrupt systemic racism in schools, the relationship between their racial and professional identities are often in conflict. That is, Black educators often have to reconcile that they were recipients of anti-Black education and are current actors in schools' assimilationist practices. This co/autoethnographic self-study privileges the voices of five Black teachers working in the same school and the actualization of their critical consciousness. The authors explored how they came to consistently bring their whole Black selves to the classroom and school setting. Drawing from the tenets of critical race theory of education and racial identity development in teaching, the authors operationalized what they call *teaching Black*. Through this lens, they interrogated their racialized navigation through the urban workplace to reveal the ways they created supportive and validating third-spaces to confront issues of anti-Blackness, abuses of power, and structural inequities for themselves, their colleagues, and most importantly their students. The chapter provides recommendations for creating and sustaining school practices that support pre-service teachers in urban teacher education and in-service Black teachers to more fully appreciate the cultural and racial community wealth they bring to their schools.

Keywords Black teacher identity development · Self-care

This chapter comes during a time of racial reckoning in America. It is happening in the streets, in schools, in work offices, in homes, and in so many more places. We are also living through a global pandemic which has separated families, friends, and teachers from students. Still, the digital technologies (e.g., Zoom, email) we have

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relied on to stay connected with one another have challenged us to provide support to each other in ways we did not even know we needed. We are five Black educators who engaged in a self-study as a joint sense-making endeavor with regard to the reconciliation of our racial and professional identities in the workplace (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2020). During the years 2009–2014, we all worked in the same urban vocational high school in the Northeastern United States (U.S.), and our singular and joint experiences exposed the tensions that exist between what it means to be Black in America and to be public-school teachers. In sharing our parallel narratives, we investigated what experiences influenced the development of our racialized professional identities as Black teachers. In our conversations, we addressed relevant constructs such as cultural dissonance, challenging the status quo, and Black teacher attrition (Chisanga & Meyiwa, 2019).

We recorded our online Zoom conversations, the first of which occurred the day after the murder of George Floyd, and the last 3 days after the 2020 U.S. presidential election (Martin, 2020). Through our conversations and the sharing of our experiences, we were able to make more transparent how and why we are not just colleagues, but friends as well. The comfort and criticality that we were able to show one another reiterated the need for teachers and teacher educators to have conversations and spaces such as the one we had created. This is even more relevant today as many states continue to pass legislation prohibiting schools from acknowledging racism, White supremacy, and the use of power and privilege to marginalize others (Sharma, 2022).

Through this work, we sought to define what *teaching Black* means for us as we developed as teachers. We desired to understand and explain the tensions in teaching Black and how we resolved those tensions (Kitchen & Brown, 2022). We learned that teaching Black is much more than any one person's individual contributions in their classroom. Teaching Black is the affirmation of truth for the edification of ourselves and students, as well as the confrontations that come with resisting whiteness. For us, teaching Black is less about what you do at work and more about sharing your life with your work.

Supporting Black urban educators in affirming ways acknowledges the complexities of being Black in America while also being an agent of the state (i.e., the school system); as such, this is an area of inquiry that merits more in-depth exploration and scholarly attention (Hannon, 2020). For equity-minded Black educators who work to disrupt systemic racism in schools, the relationship between racial and professional identities are often in conflict (Duncan, 2019). That is, Black educators often have to reconcile that they were recipients of anti-Black education and yet also current actors in schools' assimilationist practices (Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021). Using co/autoethnography, a self-study methodology, (Taylor & Coia, 2009, 2020), we unpacked our separate and overlapping experiences about what it means to be a Black teacher in an urban-characteristic school (Milner, 2012). More specifically, we explored how we learned to bring our whole Black selves to the classroom (Hannon, 2019; Maloney, 2017) and the tensions this revealed. This self-study privileges our voices as five Black educators who worked in the same school and how our critical consciousness confronted school norms. We lean on the tenets of critical

race theory of education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and racial identity development in teaching (Hollins, 1999) to better understand our collective lived professional experiences of being Black educators in a high school that enrolls predominantly Black and Brown students.

This chapter is organized as follows. First, we situate this inquiry within the sociocultural framework of critical race theory in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Zamudio et al., 2010) and racial identity development in teaching (Hollins, 1999). Then, we discuss how co/autoethnography as methodology informed this self-study. Following this, we highlight the most salient themes that emerged from our analysis. We discuss our findings in relation to broader themes from our self-study and in relation to our conceptual frameworks. We provide recommendations on how to prepare teachers to work in urban schools and support Black teachers in ways that are affirming and encourage professional growth. We consider how to create and sustain culturally responsive school practices that support Black educators and the cultural community wealth we bring to our schools' environments (Yosso, 2005).

5.1 Theoretical Framework

For this study, we took our epistemological cues from two guiding theories, the sociocultural framework of critical race theory in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Zamudio et al., 2010) and racial identity development in teaching (Hollins, 1999). Critical race theory in education provides a lens to discuss the intersectionality of race and property in schooling. In essence, critical race theory positions education itself as property. Access to equitable schooling and a quality education is leveraged and obtained more easily by some social and racial groups (e.g., White middle/upper class communities) than others. In the U.S., Black and Brown youth have historically (and presently) been denied equal access to quality education and equitable schooling contexts. Critical race theory calls on researchers and members of the education community to more fully attend to the ways that race functions as a mitigating factor that determines the qualities and characteristics of schooling and how these are differentially afforded to members of society (Larkin & Hannon, 2020). As both students of and educators within the American public school system, we used critical race theory to better understand how we learned to teach in ways that resist whiteness and affirm our Black identities and pedagogies. It also speaks to how we engaged with our students to advocate for themselves in school systems that are not systemically affirming of their cultural ways of being.

We used the work of Hollins (1999) on racial identity development in teaching to enact what she describes as a Type III teacher who "view[s] culture as affect, behavior, and intellect" (p. 190). In this way, we, as Black educators, recognized how central "culture and ethnicity [are] in daily life" and how it impacts teachers' "selecting approaches to instruction, framing curriculum, and creating a social context for learning" (p. 190). According to Hollins (1999), Type III teachers

"understand the centrality of culture in our existence as human beings" (p. 190). They understand that there is cultural knowledge and there are cultural understandings that contribute to students' learning, and those understandings should be an active part of the school curriculum. As such, these teachers will alter curricula to meet the needs of their students. They create student-centered classrooms that are collaborative and place a high value on cross-cultural understanding. Culture is central to Type III teachers. In this chapter, we argue that our racial identity development as Type III teachers often collided with the expectations of being public school teachers.

We refer to this phenomenon of racial and professional identity development as teaching Black. We were able to define teaching Black by responding to the statements: (a) teaching Black means knowing…; (b) teaching Black means feeling…; and (c) teaching Black means doing…by the end of our self-study. Implicit in these sentence stems is a recognition that being a Black teacher is inherently contradictory to the traditional values of teacher preparation (Petchauer & Mawhinney, 2017). In the U.S., these traditional values can mean subscribing to Euro-centric curricula, failing to include instructional resources and materials that reflect a diversity of socio-cultural identities and experiences, disciplinary practices that favor compliance over creativity, and teaching strategies that devalue the socio-cultural-racial identities of Black and Brown students while affirming those of White, mainstream, middle/upper class American backgrounds. For us, the reality of identifying as Black in America is both fundamental to and critical of the educational system given the harm it inflicts on Black students, some who then turn into Black teachers. Situated within pervasive whiteness and anti-Blackness, the inequitable academic opportunities for Black students have often mirrored the inequitable professional opportunities we experienced as Black teachers.

Throughout our sustained and deliberate engagement in this self-study (Loughran, 2004), we acknowledged how teaching Black meant being disruptive and subversive, as suggested by Ladson-Billings in her seminal book *The Dreamkeepers* (1994). Additionally, our meetings during the Covid-19 pandemic ultimately served as a means of sustaining connection and self-preservation. Together, we functioned as a support system to confront issues of anti-Blackness, abuse of power, and what it meant to be a Black educator. The racialized lens through which we examined our own teacher identity development is critical to the preparation, mentoring, and retention of Black educators.

5.2 Methods

This inquiry is a co/autoethnographic self-study that examined our experiences and narratives as five Black teachers who worked at the same urban school (Hannon, 2019; Taylor & Coia, 2009). We chose this methodology because it was important for us to understand if and how our individual experiences were reflective of a more congruent and telling collective experience as shared by other Black teachers in the

same school context. Additionally, self-study (LaBoskey, 2004) enabled us to explore how our teaching practices were reflective of our racial identities and the tensions that existed between them. Critical to our self-study was understanding how our racialized teacher identities influenced the choices we made regarding our contributions to the classroom and school culture. Our self-initiated self-study aimed at understanding how our identities challenged or aligned with the normative expectations for teachers in the U.S. (Maloney, 2017). In this way, we desired to be better Black teachers. But to do this, we had to first define what it meant to be a Black teacher. We desired to improve the learning experiences of our students and understand the gendered and raced contributing factors in our meaning-making, mitigating circumstances, and commonalities in our professional decisions. Through our discussions, we unpacked if and how being Black influenced our decision-making and the possible tensions between our racial and professional identities. Thus, we set out to explore our experiences being Black teachers in an urban characteristic high school and how we believed we came to bring our whole selves to our school building and classrooms. This was a time when we were teaching in a way that was fully and unapologetically embracing of Black culture and who we are as Black teachers.

5.2.1   Participants

The lead author invited teachers to join this project based on the commonalities we shared. Our commonalities included working together at a vocational high school in the Northeastern United States with the same administrators and being academic content area teachers (as opposed to vocational teachers). All of us identify as middle-class Black Americans with at least one parent having a college degree. Malcom and LaChan joined the faculty in 2003, followed by Michael in 2006. Monique joined in 2009, and Lia joined in 2011.

5.2.2   Data Collection and the Research Process

Our data sources included the analytic memos and transcribed recordings from our nine meetings which were held primarily via Zoom over the course of 8 months. In order to help facilitate the discussions in our meetings, LaChan reviewed and developed guiding questions and prompts. Some of these prompts and questions were, "Describe how you came to the profession. What does it mean to you to teach Black? Talk about the evolution of your racialized identity." These were shared with our group members prior to our first meeting. While we did not provide each other copies of our individual written responses, we did utilize and draw from our responses to probe each other, share ideas or concepts, and collectively and collaboratively critique, question, and comment on what we were coming to understand.

It was important that we not just talk about what we experienced, but to also recall stories with examples of what we experienced.

During each meeting LaChan would take analytic memos, ask clarifying questions, and engage in member checking throughout the session. At the conclusion of each meeting, she summarized and synthesized the major points and themes from the discussion and asked for any further clarifications or corrections. Subsequent meetings would begin with a personal check-in, a restatement of the previous discussion's main points, and a continuation of the last salient topic we discussed. As a group, we were intentional about making sure that we discussed the feelings associated with our experiences. We did this by continuing to iteratively probe into the narratives we shared and the examples we provided regarding being Black teachers.

While during our initial meetings we focused on stories and examples of our teaching experiences, most of our sessions attended to unpacking how we understood what we experienced as tensions we felt in regard to being Black educators. This process allowed us not only to identified similarities and differences in our engagement at our school but also appreciate the perspectives we each possessed.

5.2.3   Data Analysis

After the conclusion of our final session, we reviewed our data sources and proceeded to identify salient themes from our engagement with each other. We collaborated to develop a code book based on our data. We utilized the online application Dedoose to code our transcripts. Drawing from these, we employed narrative analytic approaches (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004) and open coding (Saldaña, 2016) to discern what was being highlighted in individual data sources and collectively across all the data. We continued through this process and conferenced with one another to support the clarity and transparency of the analysis. Oftentimes, the experiences we recalled occurred concurrently in that we all had different perspectives of the same events, thus highlighting how important our discussions were in understanding ourselves, our students, and our environments. In this way, we were able to hear firsthand the recollections that we may have only had a cursory knowledge of. This aided in the promotion of the trustworthiness of this work (DeVault, 2018; Mena & Russell, 2017).

5.3   Findings

Our self-study supported us to understand and operationalize what teaching Black looks and feels like. In this section, we present our findings with the recognition that they are intersectional and overlapping. Bringing our whole selves into our school building and into our classrooms required a constant negotiation of personal investment, truth-telling, and transparency. We continuously had an internal conversation

where we asked ourselves, "How Black can I be here today?" We were Black teachers teaching primarily Black and Brown students and surrounded by whiteness in the form of teachers, administrators, policies, disciplinary practices, curricula, expectations of professionalism, and mentorship. Despite microaggressions and cultural dissonance, we were able to build community with one another, speak truth into the curriculum, disrupt the status quo, and practice self-care. Ultimately, our self-study led us to identify salient aspects of our experiences which we discuss in alignment with Ladson-Billings's (1994) two main descriptors for teaching Black: disruptive and subversive.

5.3.1 Teaching Black as Disruptive

According to Merriam-Webster (n.d.-a), the business world definition for disrupt means, "to successfully challenge by using innovation to gain a foothold in a marginal or new segment of the market and then fundamentally change the nature of the market." This definition aligns with the aims of advocates for educational equity and applies equally to the education stratosphere and its impacts on historically marginalized students. During our self-study, it became very clear to us that our mere presence, voices, and ideas were often perceived as disruptive to school norms. Our desire to see ourselves in materials and curricula, our interest in advocating for disenfranchised students, and our aspiration for professional advancement were perceived as disruptive to the White-space power structure of schools. All of us were hired intentionally to disrupt the pervasive whiteness in our urban school, to help foster better relationships with students and families, and to improve the quality of instruction.

In the following, we provide examples of how we realized we were disruptive and the implications for disruptiveness. Malcom and Michael were the first and only Black male teachers in the physics and social studies departments, respectively. Malcom remarked how our Black administrators wanted a teaching faculty that was more reflective of the student population. Michael remembered feeling protected by his Black administrators. He commented:

> I was [hired] because of what my perspective was going to add to the environment. Being Black was supposed to mean something, not just represent something, not because you got to check a box. I was told "You teach how you teach." And, I never changed when someone came into my room. (Zoom Meeting, July 31st)

LaChan, who was one of the first Black teachers in years to re-integrate the English department, recalled feeling a sense of privilege in her hiring. In a subsequent meeting, LaChan connected this with the notion of being disruptive. She shared:

> I didn't know that I was being disruptive. I thought I was just adding variety…just making myself comfortable. I was just putting [things into] a different perspective, bringing a different lens to the table. Because regardless of whether there are Black people or White people, schools are White spaces. Regardless of how many Black people that are in them or run them. They operate in the same way, with the same purpose, and the same functions. I

thought I was being helpful…innovative. And not that I wasn't, because I still believe that I am. It's just about how they see us. (Zoom Meeting, August 28th)

Malcom drew a distinction between how it felt to be disruptive and valued, and disruptive and devalued. He said, "When [Monique] said the word asset, that kind of triggered me, because I don't think they want us to know that we're assets. Even though they want us to be assets, they just don't want us to [know] it" (Zoom Meeting, July 31st).

During the time we worked at our school, our Black principal and vice principal, who viewed us as assets, retired and were replaced by White administrators. As teachers, we continued to push toward equity, counternarratives in curricula, and inclusive education, but we quickly learned that our new administrators did not view us in the same ways as our previous ones. The shift in leadership brought a shift in the expectations of us as teachers.

We were hired to be disruptive, but now being treated like a disruption reinforced the feeling that we did not belong in this space as Black teachers. These microaggressions reinforced the constant tension of how much of ourselves to share in our workspace and demonstrated itself in how and what we taught in our classrooms. Therefore, we had no choice by to make our teaching methods and lessons more subversive.

5.3.2   Teaching Black as Subversive

To subvert means to "undermine the power and authority of an institution" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b). As Black teachers, we were subversive by undermining the anti-Blackness in our curricula and including culturally and racially diverse instructional resources. We supplemented required texts with texts that amplified Black and Brown voices and provided counternarratives to dominant, White oriented narratives and perspectives. In our courses, we used primary and secondary sources that centered and highlighted the perspectives of Black and Brown people. We examined the real-life physical and sociocultural struggles of cause and effect when examining energy and force by exploring the phenomena of Black girl hair and the hegemonic White supremacist definitions of beauty. We did all of this to help our students understand that the narrative they had been given, the same narrative that we had been given as former students, was not a complete story and was told to them for a reason: to maintain a racist status quo and inequitable, socially unjust socio-cultural systems that people of color live through daily. Regardless of the novel, article, primary source, or experiment, we taught our students in ways that reflected the cultural understandings of being minoritized in America.

We learned in this self-study that because of our rapport with students and our valuing of who they were as individuals, we were able to productively keep students actively engaged in learning. Because of this and the trust that it enabled, our students largely did not have disciplinary issues in our classrooms, which contrasted

with the experiences of teachers who failed to connect with them in meaningful ways. In keeping students engaged, we were challenging them to advocate for themselves, call out injustice, and make a positive impact in their school and community. We were teaching them to use their voices. Lia recalled one such experience teaching advanced placement (AP) Literature. She shared:

> I decided to incorporate literary lenses into my AP course…looking at marginalized people. And I had my students look at "Goldilocks and the Three Bears." They hit the ceiling, and then went to lunch. Somebody got in an argument because [they] told a White boy, "You're racist" because of the privilege of moving somebody else's book bag off the table where one of my Brown AP students put their book bag. And I was like, "Yeah I might have started that, because we just talked about White girls going into places and then claiming victim [like Goldilocks] and the Brown people who are likened to animals and not viewed as human." We did the whole spiel, and they were on "ten" when they left class. And then, there was almost a fight over White privilege about moving book bags in a space that had already been claimed. That was so distinct in my mind because I didn't anticipate that particular response, but I was very proud of it. I was glad that I instigated that. 100%. I owned it. (Zoom Meeting, August 28th)

Monique, a Spanish teacher, expressed a similar sentiment regarding the tension she experienced with the materials she was presented with. She shared:

> It's like you're constantly fighting this battle of, "I know that education is not set up for my students. The materials…they don't necessarily represent the people in front of me." So, I [need] the wherewithal to constantly research, make my own materials, make things and find things that reflect my students. (Zoom Meeting, August 28th)

Monique was not the only one with this subversive struggle. In our own ways, we all worked to bring "color", to diversify our curricular materials, lessons, assignments, and activities. Giving the students representations of themselves was a priority, and we knew this helped to engage them.

Michael also became a teacher with the aim to provide students with representations of themselves and the motivation to shake things up and present a more balanced accounting of history than he'd been exposed to as a student. Later in his career, he would become an assistant principal and shake up the social studies department at his new school by challenging teachers to include diverse perspectives in their teaching. The notion of shaking things up surfaced as important in our discussions yet not without its consequences. Lia shared the following:

> When we feel pushback [from colleagues and administrators], it's because we're smart. The disrupting [and subversion] comes in the fact that you have a cohort of very intelligent Brown teachers who push for excellence. And when we challenge, we're upsetting the power dynamic… our disruption and the rejection that we feel it's not necessarily because it's teaching while Black. It's because we're smart while Black. (Zoom Meeting, July 31st)

Despite all of the daily tensions we experienced as teachers, we recognized and valued each other's classroom as places of respite where we could decompress and recharge our minds and hearts. Working together to mutually make-meaning of our experiences enabled us to identify moments of pride and disappointment, appreciation and resentment, confidence and invalidation.

As is evident, teaching Black as subversive has its challenges. Yet, it also has its rewards, one being autonomy and electing when we wanted to subvert with our presence, ideas, and opinions. At moments, we appreciated being left alone in our classroom to teach our students as we saw best. But, when it was time to address an issue such as the application of inequitable dress code discipline or when students would complain about how White teachers would leverage microaggressions against them, we were encouraged by many of our colleagues, supervisors, and administrators to remain silent and invisible (e.g., Cooper, 2009). This only fueled our need to make sure that even if we could not challenge schoolwide practices, the students in our classrooms felt affirmed, validated, and appreciated. All too often, our tension between autonomy and invisibility was a shaky bridge to navigate. Our concerns were minimized and unsupported making our reliance on one another more critical because there was another person to validate one's point of view. As Black teachers, it was this sense of community that allowed us to care for and take care of our students and ourselves.

5.4 Discussion

In this section, we discuss what we learned from our self-study in relation to ourselves, preparing teachers for urban teaching and urban teacher education, and how our understandings are situated within the context of our theoretical frameworks. Considering our insights on teaching Black in alignment with Ladson-Billings's (1994) framing as disruptive and subversive, and the efficacy of self-study to elevate our awareness of our roles as Black teachers, a critical element of this work is that the practice of community building was an act of self-care. We take this up in the next subsection.

5.4.1 Community Building as Self-Care

For us, teaching was not just about the content we taught, but it was also about creating a community where everyone felt valued and celebrated for their contributions. In building community, we were bringing our Blackness to the workplace. Eventually, that would change. One by one, the Black teachers were leaving. Lia referred to it as an exodus. Roughly 12 Black teachers and support staff left over the course of a few years. Our community of Black teachers was dwindling, and no one had a commitment to replacing those who had left with other teachers of color. It became more difficult to advocate for change. Orienting all of the new White teachers to our Black and Brown students was challenging. Most importantly, the responsibilities of teaching our students in affirming and student-centered ways were not shared across disciplines by all the educators at the school. The pressures were sitting on the shoulders of a few Black teachers, pressures highlighted in other similar

contexts (e.g., Will, 2020). With the progression of time, more expectations were imposed on us to assimilate to a shifting school culture that moved away from centering the experiences and identities of our students and back towards White, normative constructions of teaching and learning.

Teaching Black as self-care helped to balance the burdens with the blessings. It allowed us to tackle the responsibilities of teaching Black and Brown students with one another. Resisting Whiteness and affirming ourselves was a form of self-care in an institution that made it absolutely clear that you are only welcomed when you perform in the ways that were conventional, apolitical and colorblind (Martin & Kitchen, 2020). In some ways practicing self-care helped us mitigate the reality that we were becoming isolated from one another, but it also served to raise our awareness of the possibilities to transition to a new phase in our careers. Creating a sense of community for each other and for our students made us feel connected beyond the classroom. We were family, and we treated our students and each other as such. In a community, we felt safe to take pedagogical risks. We felt safe to be honest with one another. And, we felt safe being critical of one another (Shin & Im, 2020). What we did not fully appreciate was the impact of even the loss of one Black teacher in our school. After all, we had been intentionally hired to disrupt the status quo of pervasive whiteness in urban schools and classrooms and to affirmatively reflect diversity in our pedagogies. While we acknowledge that we wanted to fit in, we knew that was unlikely unless we built an internal community, a third space.

5.4.2 Schools as White Spaces

From a critical race theory perspective, U.S. systems of schooling were built upon, White supremacy and education itself is constructed as property. A challenge to this system arises through the questions we grappled with in this self-study such as who benefits from Black teachers' service to the system as it exists? What power structures are maintained when Black teachers assimilate? Who benefits from schooling system that shift away from normative practices as a result of teaching Black as disruption and subversion? We know from experience and from the literature (e.g., Carver-Thomas, 2018) that Black teachers are an asset to any school system. Yet, we are positioned as such that we have no right to make demands from a system in service to our students and the communities that we teach, especially those in urban contexts. As Black people and Black educators, the status quo maintains that we are to be deferential, appreciative, and compliant (Cooper, 2009). We are expected to know our place and not disrespect those in authority. In this way, being Black teachers in schools (which operate as White spaces) and teaching Black as disruption and subversion means taking risks, confronting microaggressions, and sometimes being isolated from your very own support systems. A critical race theory lens highlights how teaching Black is thus a material, socio-political and socio-cultural tool that can be yielded to dismantle schooling systems and structures that oppress both teachers and students of color.

Ultimately, we know that anti-Blackness is inextricably tied to Black suffering (Dumas, 2014). Whether intentional or not, when schools do not have safe spaces for Black teachers to share and support one another, Black teachers and students suffer. When there is no demonstrative effort and associated outcome to diversify the faculty and leadership, Black teachers and students suffer. When Black teachers' voices are stifled to maintain White middle-class norms of schooling, the entire school culture suffers. To be a Black teacher means to have courage. It means having a support system that helps Black teachers to push through a system that intentionally makes it difficult for them to fit in. It means that one must feel comfortable with not fitting in, confirming, or assimilating. It also means having a support system that provides safety and is validating of one another's experiences and identities. It means being willing and able to teach Black.

5.4.3   *Teacher Quality and Urban Teacher Preparation*

With fewer Black teachers in our school, more Black and Brown students were being taught in classrooms where their racial identities and cultural and community assets were not being honored. Subsequently, they were not experiencing the same levels of success as could have been the case with Black teachers in affirming classrooms. For example, Black teachers who used to teach honors classes were now teaching students whose skills had not been developed by their previous teachers and less-skilled White teachers were teaching honors classes. Even though all teachers at the school had equal access to instructional materials that reflected a diversity of culture and perspectives, what to do with those materials and how to integrate them into teaching practices emerged as an issue of teacher quality and teacher preparedness.

A great deal of teacher preparation is spent on the strategies of teaching and too little time is spent on teaching candidates how to support one another and work collaboratively to problem-solve and use both student data and teacher inquiry data to inform instruction. Such endeavors should also focus on providing teacher candidates, especially urban teacher candidates, with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to honor and affirm the racial identities of their students (and, ultimately, develop as Type III teachers themselves. With so much emphasis placed on meeting the academic needs of P-12 students, it is still necessary to also teach candidates to handle the stressors and pressures of urban teaching. Part of this can be attended to by more fully engaging in teaching practices and a professional ethic as a Type III teacher that maintains the racial identities of students, especially Black and Brown students, as salient and valuable.

5.5   Recommendations and Conclusion

Over the course of this self-study, we experienced a range of feelings, understandings, and realizations. The tensions of teaching Black revealed several dispositional qualities that can be developed among teacher candidates in urban teacher preparation. These qualities reflect and are drawn from how we valued each other during our time working at our school and more recently throughout the self-study. These dispositional qualities are:

- A commitment to empathy for students and colleagues.
- A commitment to affirming Black and Brown students.
- A commitment to acknowledging whiteness and anti-Blackness.
- A commitment to fostering a supportive community for Black and Brown staff.

In addition, we believe that the following recommendations would support urban teacher preparation and the ongoing learning and professional development of in-service teachers (especially Black teachers and other teachers of color) who work in urban schools.

5.5.1   Leadership and Collaboration

Embedded within teacher preparation coursework should be opportunities for teacher candidates (TCs) to learning how to be resources and colleagues to one another. They can do this in their coursework by being taught how to authentically engage in peer reviews, peer observations, peer mentoring, and critical friends protocols. Additionally, sending TCs into clinical internships in cohorts with the expectations that they are committed to working with and supporting one another in structured ways, supports collaboration, TCs' learning and TCs' efficacy (Dinsmore & Wenger, 2006). For teaching in urban settings, this is even more critical as many urban schools are often staffed with novice teachers due to high attrition rates (Mawhinney & Rinke, 2019).

5.5.2   Racial Affinity Groups

Teacher educators and school leaders should reevaluate policies and practices that perpetuate silos and isolate preservice and in-service teachers from one another. In our experiences, when we were assigned to professional learning communities, the teachers of color were dispersed among the White teachers. In many cases, it would have been beneficial to enable us to work together or select our own groups. Many educator preparation programs have honor societies and education organizations that reflect a White majority. Having an educator group for TCs of color can help to

serve the same purpose other education group whose mission is to support P-12 students of color.

5.5.3 Diverse Teacher Educators and Teachers

In teacher preparation programs teacher educators can be full and part-time faculty, cooperating teachers, mentor teachers, or clinical supervisors. Focusing on racially diversifying those who enact these roles is an excellent step in exposing TCs to instructors and guides who can provide multiple and insider perspectives on schooling as people of color. We know that P-12 students benefit from having teachers of color. The same applies to TCs. Therefore, an intentional commitment to hiring teachers and teacher educators is necessary.

5.5.4 Black and Brown School Leaders

Administrators of color may likely have the intentional goal of diversifying the teacher workforce as well as possess a social justice perspective and orientation to schooling. In our experiences, our Black administrators valued us because we were diverse and did not represent a monolith of Black culture. By encouraging and providing sustained opportunities for administrator/teacher and teacher/student mentorship, it provides a pathway for communication and relationship building. You cannot be what you cannot see. Giving teachers the opportunity to learn from one another and learn from Black and Brown school leaders builds relationship and can strengthen school communities. It also aids in perspective taking and sense-making. In our experiences, the opportunity to see each other teach and lead was transformative in our pedagogy and relationship with students.

5.6 Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, we individually define what teaching Black means to us. We believe it was most appropriate to allow our answers to speak to our findings and highlight the tensions that exist been being Black and being educators.

5.6.1   To Malcom, Teaching Black Means…

Teaching Black means knowing that I, as an individual also represent an entire group of people that are categorized based on the way they physically look. I'm looked at as an exception, and they don't cast that same generalization on the rest of that same group that they cast on when it's looked at on a negative scale. Teaching Black means doing whatever I can to make every student feel like I really care about them. And then it becomes easy to teach whatever your content is.

5.6.2   To Michael, Teaching Black Means…

Teaching Black means knowing specific things about Black culture, and the diversity within the Black culture. Teaching Black means navigating the standardized curriculum that's handed down and finding those areas that are biased, and teaching so that their voice, their identities, their experiences are not ignored, not minimized and are a part of education.

5.6.3   To Monique, Teaching Black Means…

Teaching Black means knowing that you're just as smart and just as capable, if not more. Teaching Black makes me feel resentment because everyone else gets to just exist as themselves, but there's always this voice in the back of my head, "You know you can't get away with that." Teaching Black means using empathy, knowing that you want to have more culturally aware students and be more culturally savvy. Teaching Black is being flexible and empathetic.

5.6.4   To Lia, Teaching Black Means…

Teaching Black means feeling that there's a sense of pride that goes with it. Teaching Black also means feeling lonely from the collective grieving that Brown people are doing in the U.S. right now. I do not want to have to go to work and pretend like I am okay and that life is normal when none of that is acknowledged. Teaching Black is a very precarious balancing act.

5.6.5   To LaChan, Teaching Black Means…

Teaching Black means knowing that you will always be against the grain and that can have an effect on how you see yourself, how you value yourself, and how you internalize those messages. Teaching Black means knowing that I'm always taking a risk to bring my whole Black self in any space I choose to occupy. Teaching Black means knowing that at some point, a limit will be imposed on me to be more silent, more compliant, and less of a troublemaker. Teaching Black means knowing that how people perceive me doesn't make it true.

5.6.6   From Then to Know: Where We Are Today

The experiences and engagement in this self-study led us to reflect upon the past, and to consider the present and all that has occurred in our lives since our time together at our school. Malcom transitioned to teach physics in a large urban district and owns a farm. Michael resigned as the only Black social studies teacher at the school thus far and became an assistant principal in a school with a large Black and Brown student population and majority White teachers. LaChan finished her doctoral program and accepted a director of teacher preparation position at an institution of higher education. Lia pursued a second master's degree as a clinical mental health counselor and is both a teacher and a licensed therapist. Monique remains a teacher of Spanish language, culture, and history at our school. She was recently awarded Teacher of the Year.

In summary, from this self-study we learned that we are keenly aware that teacher quality matters for teachers working in urban settings. We also learned that there is a hidden moving bar that we as Black teachers are supposed to be aiming for that our White counterparts seemingly do not have to attain. We learned that in order to provide students with an equitable and balanced education, we must be courageous enough to disrupt the current curricula even at the risk of being isolated. We learned that being a Black teacher means there is both an obligation and burden of shouldering the pressures of an entire schooling system that tells Black and Brown students that they are of lesser value than their White peers. And lastly, we learned that leaning on each other is one of the strongest forms of self-care that makes the commitment to being educators possible. Our experiences are bittersweet. So is teaching Black.

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