

Lessons Learned: Educational Experiences as Described by Individuals who Attended Black Segregated Schools during Jim Crow

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Abstract

This study provides preliminary findings of a larger phenomenological study that investigates the educational experiences of 24 individuals who attended, taught, or served as an administrator at a Black segregated school during the Jim Crow Era. Research supports that much can be learned from Jim Crow teachers and their pedagogical practices that predates what we currently know as culturally relevant pedagogy. This article presents preliminary findings from five randomly selected participants from the larger study. Semi-structured interviews were utilized to obtain the participants' description of their K-12 educational experiences. The three propositions (i.e., student learning/academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness) of Ladson-Billings (1995a) concept of culturally relevant pedagogy was used to organize and interpret the meaning the participants assigned to their lived experience. A discussion facilitates a dialogue on practices and future research.

Keywords: *Jim Crow; school segregation; culturally relevant pedagogy*

This study seeks to examine the educational experiences of individuals who attended segregated Black schools during the Jim Crow era (1877-1964), as described by individuals who attended these schools. Hence, the salient question we examine is, how do people who attended Black segregated schools describe their K-12 experience of being taught by Black teachers? During Jim Crow, the teaching profession awarded Black, college-educated professionals employment opportunities (Foster, 1997). In fact, according to Foster (1997), “between 1890 and 1910 the number of blacks who were employed as teachers rose from 15,100 to 66,236” (p. xvii). The presence of Black teachers in the public schools continued. According to Foster (1996), 50% of Black professionals in the 1950s were teachers.

The composition of these teachers was broad and included those who taught in the various locations and types of segregated settings. Locations included and were not limited to, one-room cabins, public school buildings, church buildings, or in university classrooms (Fairclough, 2001). As these teachers taught in legally segregated and under-resourced schools (Kelly, 2010), they utilized situated pedagogies (hooks, 2003; James-Callaway & Harris, 2021; Kelly, 2010; Lather & Ellsworth, 1996) which helped to strengthen racial pride and mutual progress. The professional realities of Black teachers during Jim Crow changed as a result of the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) Supreme Court decision.

The *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision was instrumental in the national integration of public schools by race. Although *Brown* is considered an educational milestone (Patterson, 2001), sufficient literature argues the promises of *Brown* have gone unfulfilled (Anderson, 1994; Butler, 1979; Farrell, 1984; Gantz, 2004). In fact, after the *Brown* decision, the over-representation of Black children in special education (Dunn, 1968; Harry & Klinger, 2014), achievement, and discipline gaps (Townsend-Walker, 2014) became a persistent reality for Black students in the public school system.

Even though *Brown* (1954) decision addressed the integration of schools by race, the integration and placement of Black teachers in desegregated schools failed (Cecelski, 1994; Lash & Ratcliffe, 2014). The decline of Black teachers in public school classrooms continued as the student population became more racially and ethnically diverse. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2018), the current racial/ethnic distribution of full time public school teachers are 79% White; 9% Hispanic; 7% Black; 2% Asian; 1% Native American, and 1% Pacific Islander. From 1972 to the 2003-2004 school year, the percentage of students classified as racial or ethnic minorities increased from 22% to 41% (Hoffman & Sable, 2006; Kewal Ramani et al., 2007). As a result, countless students are matriculating through the public-school system without the opportunity of having exposure to racially diverse teachers. A diverse teaching force provides a diverse representation of abilities, ideas, and expectations from which students could benefit (Childs, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Miller, 2006; Rasheed, Brown, Doyle, & Jennings; 2020). Therefore, we assert the need for a more racially and ethnically diverse teaching force of individuals who self-identify as belonging to one of the myriad of ethnicities represented in the United States and demonstrate competence in working with ethnically and racially diverse students.

The evolution of racial terms was instrumental in our decision to use the term *Black* in reference to teachers and students referred to as *Negro*, *Colored*, *Afro-American*, or *African American* in the literature.

Generational Interpretations of K-12 Experiences

According to Morrison (2004), “remembering is the mind’s first step toward understanding” (p. 3). My (first author) first step toward understanding the varying educational experiences across three generations and the racial disparity in the current teaching profession (Lachlan-Hache, et al. 2020) originated from a single question. I distinctly recall the day my oldest daughter asked, “Momma, why are all of my teachers White?” My immediate response, “Because we live in a predominantly White community”, satisfied the inquisitive fifth grader, but troubled me. My daughter’s question resonated within me for several hours after we arrived home and completed our daily routines. At that moment, I could not describe the emotional seesaw on which I had perched. On one hand, I was proud of my intentionality and persistence in supplementing her education with the use of the *Eyes on the Prize* (Hampton, 1987-1990) documentary series. However, on the other hand, I was not so proud of the quick response I gave my daughter earlier that day. It was at that moment that I acknowledged the reasons for my daughter never having a Black teacher were worthy of investigation.

At this time, I was unaware of the vast research regarding the lack of diversity in the teacher pool (Bryan & Milton-Williams, 2017; Farinde et al., 2016; Lee, 2020; McClung et al., 2008; Rasheed et al., 2020; Ukpokodu, 2007). In addition, I was also unaware of the displacement and dismissals of Black educators because of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision (Fultz, 2004; Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Karpinski, 2006; Miller & Howard, 2004).

A few days after I answered my daughter's question, I took time to reflect on the racial and ethnic backgrounds of my K-12 teachers. Even though the racial and ethnic background of the majority of my K-12 teachers were White, I did have the opportunity to have ethnically diverse teachers.

My investigative momentum decreased for approximately eleven years. Similar to other *baby boomers*, I became part of the *Sandwich Generation*. According to Shallcross (2015), the sandwich generation consists of caregivers who care for aging parents while supporting children of their own. Long-term stressors associated with being in the sandwich generation attributed to a hiatus in my investigation of the reasons why my daughter never had a Black teacher. Even though at the time of my last parent's passing, my children were out of high school and becoming independent adults, I still wanted to investigate why my daughter never had a Black teacher from kindergarten to fifth grade.

Prior to the hiatus, I spent time reflecting on the racial and ethnic backgrounds of my K-12 teachers. However, I became aware that I had no information regarding the education of my parents. Although my mother emphasized the importance of education and had a desire for her children to obtain a formal education (Reid, 2016), she did not share the details of her K-12 educational experience. The impact of my daughter's question stayed with me until we took a family trip to South Carolina (USA) in the fall of 2014. This trip awarded me the opportunity to learn of my mother's K-12 educational history. This trip was the necessary fuel to reignite my investigative momentum to answer my daughter's question.

The Family Trip

The image of the one-room schoolhouse where my mother and her siblings attended school during the 1940s was a life-changing image. Cecelski's (1994) depiction of old schoolhouses in southern towns and rural communities, as "chimneys standing in the cold ashes of a tragic fire" (p. 7) accurately described the life-changing image I saw during a family trip in November of 2014. As part of visiting family residing in Georgia, we traveled by car to South Carolina. The two-hour ride was filled with joyful conversations. While my uncle drove around Calhoun Falls and shared memories of his younger years, I had a sense of a familial bond with ancestors whom I had never met. As we pulled onto the grounds of a church, my uncle explained that cemeteries were part of the segregated South and the cemetery on that land was the final resting place for several of my ancestors.

After parking and departing the car, my uncle continued to explain how, during Jim Crow, Black churches were vital to southern Black communities. He shared how it was common for segregated cemeteries and schools to be on the churches' land. As I stood in silence with eyes beginning to swell with tears, paying homage to my ancestors, my uncle quietly stated (while pointing), "That building over there was the schoolhouse where we all went to school, including your mother." He further explained that only Black children attended the school because, at that time, "the White people did not want their children to go to school with us" (A. Morris, personal communication, November 25, 2014). As I turned, I saw a structure that I would have thought was an abandoned shack. As I slowly walked down the dirt path leading to the former schoolhouse, tears began to flow. I thought about all of the Black children who once walked the same dirt path to attend school in a building that appeared abandoned. In my imagination, I heard children reading aloud, saw Black teachers standing before a room full of Black children and passionately teaching and praising students for their efforts. As I walked closer to the old schoolhouse, I envisioned my

mother as a young child exiting the structure for a well-deserved recess after a learning session. Once in front of the structure, I stopped and slowly turned to my right to behold the full magnitude of this former segregated schoolhouse. I realized that I was observing a snapshot of our educational history that many have forgotten.

Gone were all the traits and identifying markers of the children who once attended this school, nor were there any indications of the teachers who taught at this school. In fact, Gross (2008) utilized oral history methodology to document the legacy of an all-Black school in Kansas, which was demolished with no regard for saving photos, trophies, records, evidence of achievements, and related data on teachers and administrators who served Black students for nearly five decades.

On the ride back to Georgia, the image of the one-room schoolhouse was my constant companion. I quietly contemplated and wondered how many of the abandoned buildings we passed by while in Georgia and South Carolina were former segregated schools. By the time we arrived at our final destination in Georgia, I had a myriad of thoughts and questions regarding the students, teachers and administrators who served in the Black segregated schools during Jim Crow. Before going to sleep, I grappled with the questions; What happened to the Black teachers and administrators who were part of the public education system? What were the instructional methods and level of teacher expectations? And equally important, what happened to the students who were educated in these schools? Therefore, the sociopolitical context of Jim Crow is the backdrop of this study. Former students of segregated Black schools were asked to describe their K-12 educational experience. Specifically, we use the three propositions of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995a) to organize and interpret the meaning assigned to their lived experiences.

The Use of Situated and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Sufficient literature indicates that Jim Crow teachers utilized pedagogical practices that proved to be culturally relevant (Baker, 2011; Dingus, 2006; Givens, 2021; Hale, 2018; James-Gallaway & Harris, 2021; Kelly, 2010; Preston-Grimes, 2010; Ramsey, 2008). Prior to the coinage of *culturally relevant pedagogy* (Ladson-Billings, 1995a), anthropologist established a variety of terms to describe their efforts to develop a better connection between students' home culture and the school. These terms included "culturally compatible" (Jordan, 1985; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1987), "culturally responsive" (Erickson & Mohatt, 1982), "culturally appropriate" (Au & Jordan, 1981), and "culturally congruent" (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981). However, according to Ladson-Billings (1992), these concepts have "not been widely applied to instruction for African-American learners" (p. 313). Yet these concepts identified and dealt with smaller communities in which the cultural practices of these communities were easily recognized and not entangled with other cultures. Pewewardy (1993) described the traditional practices of educators who insert culture into education, rather than inserting education into the culture as one reason for Indian children having difficulty in school.

It was within the context of the Jim Crow era, that Black teachers demonstrated pedagogical practices that were similar to what would later be coined "culturally relevant pedagogy" (James-Gallaway & Harris, 2021). James-Gallaway and Harris suggest that prior to Ladson-Billings' (1995a), coinage of culturally relevant pedagogy, Black teachers served in segregated schools "engaged a critical, politically and culturally informed pedagogy; their praxis built on and affirmed their students' cultural, racial, and political knowledge, worldviews, and assets" (p. 124).

Additionally, Feminist scholar, bell hooks (2003) asserted that we can learn from such gifted educators who specialized in “the legacy of self-esteem building that originated in segregated schools” (p. 79).

According to Fairclough (2007), Black teachers in segregated schools played a major role in the achievement and social mobility of Black students. Similarly, Kelly (2010), asserted these teachers, “fashioned situated pedagogies for the acquisition of educational capital that could be used in exchange for jobs, rights, and social power” (p. 329). Likewise, Lather and Ellsworth (1996), asserted “all classroom practices are situated...they take place in institutions, historical moments, cultural and social fields...in response to individual and social constraints that are often unrepeatable” (p. 70). According to Lather & Ellsworth (1996):

the concept of situated pedagogies is about educators creating responses and initiatives out of a space between both the histories and legacies of oppression and privilege that they draw on, consciously and unconsciously, and the often contradictory complexities of the local situation in their attempts to make sense of and act within such moments (p. 71).

Although none of the participants in the current study utilized the term “situated pedagogy” or “culturally relevant pedagogy” in their description, most of their descriptions included specific examples of care, support to ensure academic success, encouragement to have racial pride, and high expectations to become productive, active, and engaged citizens.

Clark (2021) provided the following quote from Ladson-Billings as her explanation of the three pillars of culturally relevant pedagogy:

Student learning reflects the difference between what students know and are able to do when they arrive in a classroom in the fall and what they know and are able to do when they leave in the spring...Cultural competence reflects students’ grounding in their culture of origin...while developing fluency in another culture...sociopolitical or critical consciousness is the ability to solve real-life problems using the skills and knowledge school affords (p. 26).

Methodology

The applied approach for this study was phenomenological. This approach was suitable to explore the meaning people assign to their experience of attending a Black segregated school during the Jim Crow era. The following sections will consist of: (a) phenomenology as the guiding research approach (b) recruitment of participants, (c) the data collection process, (d) the data analysis process, (e) findings, and (f) discussions and implications for future research.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology refers to the “philosophical, epistemological and methodological perspectives that attempt to explore and interpret the essence of the phenomena that structure our conscious experience” (Smith & Fowler, 2009, p.163). Hence, phenomenology begins and ends with lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990). In its most basic form, lived experiences involve a person’s immediate pre-reflective consciousness of life (Dilthey, 1985), and is experienced before one categorizes, conceptualizes, or reflects on it (Husserl, 1970). All we can “ever know must present

itself to consciousness” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9). With this approach, there is no separation between subject and object. The “reality of an object is only perceived within the meaning of the experiences of an individual” (Creswell, 1998, p. 59). It is not the goal of phenomenology to reduce the experience of a phenomenon to an abstract law; rather it is concerned with the meaning one assigns to their lived experiences.

Data Collection

Participants

For the larger study, a total of 24 participants were recruited and consented to complete one semi-structured interview. Recruitment and data collection for the study was between March 2019 and March 2020. Recruitment was at a predominately African American church located in the western region of the United States. Data presented in this article are from five randomly selected participants from the twenty-four. The randomly selected participants consisted of three females and two males, with an age range of 67-79 years, with an average age of 75.

Getting to Know the Participants

Participant “Teresa”, a 77-year-old Black female was born in 1942 and attended Black segregated schools in Louisiana during her K-12 education and undergraduate program. The first time Teresa attended school with White classmates was when she pursued her Master’s degree. Teresa was the sixth of nine children in a home in which her parents established high expectations for all of their children. Because, according to Teresa, professional options for educated Blacks were limited to either teaching or nursing, she studied elementary education and special education. Teresa served a total of 35 years in the field of education as a teacher and a reading specialist.

Participant “Linda” is a 79-year-old Black female who was born in 1940. Similar to Teresa, Linda attended Black segregated schools in Louisiana. After high school, Linda moved to California and planned to attend college to study English. Instead, she married and raised a family. In very brief responses, Linda fondly recalled seeing teachers outside of the school. According to Linda, “teachers were also a part of our communities and we saw them around the neighborhood”.

Participant “Henry” is a 75-year-old Black male who was born in 1944 and attended Black segregated schools in the state of Virginia. Henry was the second of nine children who, because he was very responsible, was given the responsibility to care for his younger siblings while their mother worked. This responsibility created continued interruptions in Henry’s education. Henry described his greatest challenge as being from an impoverished background. Henry openly shared that classmates would often tease him because of his appearance due to lack of proper grooming. According to Henry, “I got a lot of nurturing and embracing from Black teachers saying, “You’re a smart student, don’t get caught up with what you don’t have.” Henry also expressed gratitude for the teachers who encouraged him. According to Henry, “our teachers taught us honor, respect and above all that education was the most important thing for us to better ourselves. They put the time in for us to really excel.” After high school graduation, Henry served in the military and then attended and graduated from an HBCU (Historically Black College and University).

Participant “Robert”, a 76-year-old Black male was born in 1946 and attended Black segregated schools in the state of Texas. When Robert began school in 1952, he contracted the Measles and was required to stay home for six weeks. He subsequently contracted the Mumps and then the Measles again. Although Robert did not receive his full first-grade education in the school

setting, he knew all of the first-grade content and was able to begin the second grade with his class. Robert attributes his early academic success to the efforts of his mother who was a teacher and worked with him during his illnesses. She ensured that he learned everything that would be required of him to begin the second grade. Robert shared the following thoughts about the education he received, “You know, I tell you what, I would say we probably received a better education than the education Blacks are getting now”. Robert served in the military before earning a degree in Accounting. Robert worked for the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and Housing of Urban Development (HUD) for over 30 years.

Data Collection

Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews. Each interview was downloaded to a password -protected computer. A list of the assigned pseudonyms was also saved onto a password-protected computer. Field notes were taken immediately after each interview.

Qualitative research does not require the researcher to complete data collection before data analysis begins. In qualitative research, concurrent analysis and data collection is possible and a good practice (Gibbs, 2007). In addition to the interview, unobtrusive data was collected. According to Hatch (2002), unobtrusive data are, “nonreactive” and “can tell their own story independent of the interpretations of participants, and they can be gathered without disturbing the natural flow of human activity” (p. 119). This data included aspects of the participant's demeanor, such as display of emotion, appearance or sound of being fatigued, or falling asleep. According to Hatch, unobtrusive data are useful in the triangulation processes, “because their nonreactive nature makes them one step removed from participants’ interviewing interpretations, they provide an alternative perspective on the phenomenon being studied” (p. 119).

Early conceptualization of triangulation (Denzin, 1978; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), demonstrated how multiple methods reveal shared perspectives and realities. Triangulation allows researchers to have greater confidence in their findings and conclusions. For this study, triangulation was achieved during data collection and data analysis. During data collection, interviews were conducted and field notes maintained. Additionally, multiple data sources consisted of twenty-four people with different perspectives regarding the same phenomenon. (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis begins and continues during each stage of the research (Bailey, 2007). For our analysis, we started with a collection of audio recording of semi-structured interviews. All transcripts were manually coded. Although the selected coding method is a time consuming and tedious process, we agree with Gibbs (2007) who argues, “Computers cannot do the interpreting for you. In the end, it is your responsibility, the human researcher, to come up with interpretations, to develop analytic explanations and to underpin your overall analysis by appropriate theory” (p. 146).

Triangulation in data analysis was achieved as the first three authors individually coded transcripts and continually met to discuss our individual interpretations. With the use of codes, all original data are preserved (Gibbs, 2007). During the first round of coding, we worked independently and assigned descriptive codes. The creation of a codebook was the most effective way for us to manage the volume of the data.

Due to circumstances and stressors surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent civil unrest after the murder of George Floyd, the entire research team was faced with a “new normal” that included the closure of our university, switching to remote instruction, and prioritizing student care. As a result, we halted the analysis process. Once we re-engaged with the data, the second and third authors identified segments of the transcripts that were potentially thematic. (Gibbs, 2007).

Elements of *oral coding* (Bernauer, 2015) were later implemented into the analysis. The first author continued to reflect on the richness of listening to the recorded interviews while paying particular attention to pauses, laughter, sighs, and crying as the participants described their lived experiences. Although, we now consider oral coding to be the most efficient data analysis for the current study, the identified themes from the data reduction process are discussed with the research findings.

According to Bernauer (2015), “oral coding is an alternative method of “transforming (analyzing and interpreting) oral data collected from interview” (p. 406). Whereas traditional coding involves recording the interview and immediately transcribing the data, the oral coding approach allows the researcher to have an extended amount of time with the data, which ultimately delays the reduction of the audio recording to text. This delay also allows the researcher to, “capture participant nuances conveyed through tone, inflection, volume, pause, and emphases” (p. 406). The oral coding process relies on a Three-Phase Approach.

Although the oral coding process allows extended time for the researcher to continually, connect to the raw oral data, this method provided grater insight into the participants descriptions of their educational experiences of attending an all-Black segregated school du ring Jim Crow. Hatch (2002) asserted that:

the findings of qualitative studies report the outcomes of analyses, they are seldom straightforward; the object is to bring understanding to complex social phenomena that cannot be reduced to precise, statistical relationships; and they are written in a style that uses literary sensibilities to take readers inside the issues and settings under investigation (p. 224).

Findings

Our initial data analysis of the randomly selected participants, prior to oral coding, consisted of descriptive coding of the transcribed interviews for the five randomly selected participants. Through the continuous review and interpretation of the data, the use of analytic codes were applied to segments of the transcripts that suggest the ways in which the participant may have thought about or conceptualized their educational experiences.

The data reduction resulted in the identification of four themes (i.e., the value of school, self-image, forms of capital, and adulthood). *The value of school* theme related to participant’s description of high expectations related to the completion of high school and going to college. All five participants for this study graduated from high school. However, four of the five participants attended and graduated from college. The second theme of *self-image* referred to how the participants viewed themselves and/or how their self-image was impacted by how others perceived them. Henry described incidents of being teased because of his economically poor home life. In spite of his low self-image, Henry received encouragement from teachers who emphasized that he could finish high school and “make it”.

The third theme, *forms of capital*, referred to non-monetary sources to promote educational and social mobility. Teresa was just one of the participants who had access to educational capital (Kelly, 2010). Teresa was educated in an all-Black school that provided enrichment programs and access to the writings of William Shakespeare, and issues of local, national, and global economics. The last theme of *adulthood* described the participant's accounts of their adult life, college experience, and chosen careers.

Excerpts from Cynthia

According to James-Gallaway and Harris (2021), teachers in segregated schools exemplified aspects of Ladson-Billings' (1995a) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. The following results and interpretations pertain to Participant Cynthia and demonstrate aspects of culturally relevant pedagogy (Clark, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 1995a). The guiding research question for this study is, *How do people who attended Black segregated schools describe their K-12 experience of being taught by Black teachers?*

Cynthia is a Black female born in 1952 and received her entire K-12 and undergraduate education in the state of North Carolina. Of the five randomly selected participants, Cynthia was the youngest and the only one from North Carolina. During the interview, Cynthia provided a detailed description of her home and school experiences. Cynthia was the youngest of two. Her mother and father held high educational expectations. Her biological mother died when she was in the fifth grade. Although her father remarried the following year, the educational expectations of her father and step-mother did not wane. The clear articulation of not only graduating from high school, but also graduating from college aligns with the identified theme of *value of school*. Cynthia shared:

Both of my parents could read and write. . . So that's why they stressed that education was the key to success, to opportunity, and that's what they wanted for both of us –that's the doctrine that was ingrained in us since we were little...I was told, you will finish high school and go to college.

Although Cynthia described herself as a naive child, who most of the time was “just being a kid and doing what kids do”, she was well aware of her culture and the sociopolitical context of Jim Crow and her place in society. She described aspects of her experiences that aligned with what the proposition Ladson-Billings defines as *Cultural Competence*. According to Ladson-Billings (1995a), this component reflects when students are able to maintain aspects of their culture while learning aspects of another culture. Cynthia shared accounts of learning of prominent Black leaders and learning passages from the Bible; both of which were important to her culture, while learning English, Math, and other subjects deemed required by the local school board. Cynthia recalled:

I had a sense of cultural pride when I was at the Black school. We did learn things about Black history. We learned things in class about George Washington Carver and other Blacks who contributed to our society. The value of the church in the Black community was also evident in schools. I also learned, I Corinthians 13 from the Bible.

Even though Cynthia observed differences in the resources between the Black and White schools, Cynthia discussed some of the benefits of all-Black segregated schools:

I always had a Black principal. It was just good to see someone who looked like you in certain positions. Parents had a sense that their kids could get an education and get good jobs. It was great to see Black teachers and principals...Because most of our teachers were part of our community, there was a sense of belonging. We would see our teachers in our community and in church.

The sense of cultural pride that Cynthia described relates to the identified theme of *self-image*. Supportive home, school, and community environments facilitated the process of establishing a positive self-image. Black children and parents could aspire to become a professional because they were able to see it lived out by those in their community who achieved such status. The presence of Black teachers and principals provided Black children the opportunity to see firsthand the rewards of obtaining a college education.

The sociopolitical climate of Jim Crow did not hinder Cynthia's academic progress. She was determined to graduate high school, attend and graduate from college. Even through what Cynthia described a "a very lonely senior year", she was looking forward to graduating and attending college.

After leaving the all-Black school, Cynthia did not experience a school environment in which she had a sense of belonging. However, she did have a strong sense of belonging in her neighborhood community. That sense of belonging was an essential part of Cynthia's self-image.

As one who lived during the Jim Crow era, Cynthia described a sense of contentment. She stated, "We did not challenge the status quo". Cynthia acknowledged that symbols and the reality of Jim Crow were around her. She recalled:

I remember seeing the "White Only" signs...but there was like a sense of contentment because we knew where we could and could not go. We didn't make a big deal about it, we just said that we did not have to be treated that way, so we just did not go there. We could only eat at the Black restaurants. If we didn't want to go there, we just cooked at home. That was just the way we did things.

The *Student Learning/Academic Success* component of culturally relevant pedagogy reflects the difference between what students know and are able to do in the fall and when they leave in the spring (Clark, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Cynthia shared multiple accounts of achieving academic success and acquiring knowledge after receiving instruction at both the Black and White school. Beginning in the first grade, Cynthia compared her knowledge of numbers and letters to that of a peer who was able to write letters and numbers before entering the first grade. Cynthia attended Peach Tree School (pseudonym), an all-Black school, from the first to ninth grade. Cynthia was perplexed when attempting to understand why her parents, who emphasized the value of education, did not teach her the alphabet and numbers before she began the first grade. Cynthia stated:

I just don't know why my parents did not teach me my letters and numbers before I started school. My mother was a stay-at-home mom...Maybe they just didn't know that was something that parents should do.

Cynthia also described a God-given natural academic ability as a contributing factor for her academic success. Reflecting back, Cynthia stated:

As it turned out, this [not knowing her letters and numbers in first grade] wasn't an issue because I learned my letters and numbers and eventually caught up and even excelled in school...I was on the honor roll and one of the top students in my classes...Even having a speech impediment and not knowing I had a severe hearing loss, I did well in all of my classes. When I was in 8th grade at Peach Tree, I was first in my class, the 8th grade class. I was number two of the junior class at Willow Creek High. I wanted to do well so I could graduate and attend college. I was determined to attend and graduate from college.

Cynthia remained at the all-Black school until her sophomore year of high school. At that time, she transferred to Willow Creek (pseudonym) High School, an integrated school. Cynthia described the account of transferring from a segregated to a desegregated/integrated school:

The transfer was not easy. I left my friends, I left my circle of support to attend Willow Creek High School. After being at Willow Creek for only two years, they throw us all together at Blue Shadow (pseudonym) for my senior year. All of a sudden, I don't belong to any group. Because I left those kids at Peach Tree, I never really...I never had close friends at Willow Creek...I didn't belong to any group. I had a very lonely senior year. I was so happy to get out of there.

Because Cynthia was enrolled in an all-Black school and had only Black classmates from first to eighth grade, Cynthia's transition described the transfer to Willow Creek as shocking. Cynthia described the shock of only having a few other Black students in her classes:

When I went to Willow Creek High School, the former all-White school, I was shocked at the numbers of Black students. Out of 76 students in my junior class, five were Black. Each class had one or two Blacks. That still was not a lot of Blacks.

Cynthia shared a vivid memory of her English class at Willow Creek. Cynthia recalled:

I remember sitting in my English class when I first got to Willow Creek High School. I remember the teacher doing a review of the things we should have learned in the ninth grade, and I remember sitting in my seat going, "I don't know that. I never heard of that." . . . We didn't learn that and realized I'm behind.

Once Cynthia had a thorough comprehension of the English curriculum and expectations, she excelled once again. She described the written word as her "saving grace". The ability to read content that was discussed in class was a tremendous help to Cynthia. At that time, Cynthia was unaware that she was profoundly deaf.

Cynthia had to demonstrate her level of academic excellence before the White teachers acknowledged her academic strengths. Cynthia recalled:

When Rachel [her friend] and I got to Willow Creek, the White teachers had only had dealt with a few Black students. . . But when I was in class, the teachers and some of the students

were shocked that I wasn't a dummy. The teachers and some of the students were surprised that I was smart.

Cynthia also felt as though she was behind in math. However, as with English, Cynthia soon caught up and excelled. According to Cynthia:

At Peach Tree, we were all put into General Math. I think that was a problem because the curriculum at the segregated school did not allow for varying abilities. They did not have a college track. It was the same track for everybody. I wasted a whole year in my freshman year by taking General Math when I could have taken Algebra 1. I did not take Algebra 1 until I was at Willow Creek, the White school.

Although Cynthia indicated that she had to “catch up” when she enrolled into Willow Creek, she arrived there with knowledge of academic strategies to identify and resolve a real-life problem. This is a credit to Cynthia's teachers at the all-Black school. One could argue this relates to the identified theme of *forms of capital* (Bourdieu, 1986). Although capital can present itself in three ways (i.e., economic, cultural, and social), the described experience is an example of cultural capital in that she utilized the strategies learned to address educational deficits in order to master the required knowledge and eventually exceeding the expectations of White educators.

Even though Cynthia noticed a difference in the rigor of the education at Willow Creek, she acknowledged there was no one at the school to provide encouragement and guidance as she navigated the college application process. Cynthia recalled:

My parents had never been to college. They didn't know anything about what you need to do to get to college. I knew I needed to take the SAT, and I did. I scored in the 900s in my junior year. Nobody told me that I should take it again in my senior year.

After attending Willow Creek for two years, Cynthia was then transferred to Blue Shadow High School, a consolidated school that integrated several White and Black schools. The unexpected transfer resulted in an unexpected financial blessing in her pursuit of higher education. It was at Blue Shadow that Cynthia's hearing loss was identified. There was a Black counselor at Blue Shadow who previously worked for Vocational Rehabilitation. This counselor's husband was a graduate from North Carolina A&T, the school at which Cynthia had been accepted. Through a slight smile, Cynthia shared the following:

I told her my life story, my dreams, and determination to go to college. I shared with her what I had done about taking the SAT and being accepted in North Carolina A&T and looking for financial aid...The counselor asked if a doctor had ever associated my speech impediment to a hearing loss. She went on to say that if I had a hearing loss, my college tuition could be paid for through Vocational Rehabilitation.

Similar to what I (first author) experienced as a high school and college student (Reid, 2016), Cynthia was hesitant to accept a label that would identify her as having an impairment. Cynthia eventually agreed to have her hearing assessed. As a senior in high school, Cynthia, for the first time was informed that she had a profound hearing loss. Cynthia acknowledged that her family's

financial resources were limited and the funds received from Vocational Rehabilitation was a true blessing. Cynthia shared:

So that was the blessing in disguise. The transfer to Blue Shadow in my senior year helped me financially. Meeting up with Mrs. Dawson (pseudonym) who followed me through high school and all of my college years and even I would visit her when I would go home for a visit. She just became a friend. I ended up with a Bachelor's degree in Mathematics & Engineering and a Master's degree in Computer Science.

When asked about the Black teachers and their ability to teach and prepare the students, Cynthia replied:

I guess they were working to the best of their ability. I think there were those teachers who were a little more conscientious in terms of making sure that we learned what we needed to learn. Certainly, they didn't have all of the resources that they needed—textbooks, labs, all of that—and then providing enriching experiences and things outside of the classroom.

Cynthia's final reflections of her experiences:

Even though I had a lonely senior year, when I look back through my yearbook, I am amazed at all the comments about how smart I was. I think about the older people who knew me and would say, "Keep up the good grades." Because the newspaper published the names of the students on the honor roll, people who were at my church and in my community knew of me, my parents, and my accomplishments. There is something to be said about people who look like you teaching you, People who knew you from the community knowing you and your family. There were even some teachers at Peach Tree who graduated and then came back to teach there. There was a sense of family bonding. That was lacking at the integrated school.

When Cynthia was asked what two words she would use to describe her experience of attending an all-Black segregated school, she replied:

Acceptance and compassion because I knew there were people there who cared for and loved me. I was accepted as a girl who talked funny, I was accepted for being smart and I was accepted for being myself.

The use of Ladson-Billings (1995a) propositions of culturally relevant pedagogy proved to be an effective tool to organize, interpret, and present the preliminary findings of this study. However, because of the COVID-19 related interruption to our data analysis, and the addition of oral coding (Bernauer, 2015), we plan to conceptualize a framework to more thoroughly examine the four identified themes from the data reduction process within each propositions of culturally relevant pedagogy. For example, within the *Sociopolitical Consciousness* proposition, we will consider how the themes of *value of school*, *self-image*, *forms of capital*, and / or *adulthood* are evident throughout the participants' experiences directly related to maintaining or establishing a sociopolitical consciousness.

Limitation

The limited amount of time to establish rapport and to member check with participants is considered a limitation. I (first author) experienced opportunities to establish rapport. For three of the five (60%) randomly selected participants, the initial contact and subsequent follow-up seemed welcomed. It was during these opportunities that clarifying questions from the transcripts were answered. For the current study, only initial rapport was established and I was unable to member check with two of the five (40%) of the randomly selected participants. If the percentage of the randomly selected participants is representative of the larger study of 24 participants, it is expected that member checking may not be accomplished with approximately 10 participants. This is a realistic probability because of the age of the participants. At the time of this preliminary study, I had been informed, that since the interview, four of the participants had passed away. Additionally, the longer it takes to analyze the transcripts, there is a higher probability that participant's memory capacity may decrease and affect their recall of specific experiences.

A second identified limitation of this study is directly related to the total number of participants. The original anticipated number of participants was approximately 20 individuals. However, due to the number of individuals expressing interest in sharing their experiences of attending an all-Black school during Jim Crow, all persons who consented to participate in the study were interviewed. Because of the thick and rich nature of qualitative data, analyzing transcripts for 44 individuals is tedious and time consuming. The completion of data analysis process will take twice as long as it would have if only 20 participants were interviewed.

Discussion and Implications for Future Research

Researchers and practitioners have much to learn from Jim Crow teachers who valued education and profoundly influenced millions of Black Americans, and individuals who attended Black segregated schools. Historically, the education of Blacks has been an important political battlefield in the South, with Black teachers being in the center. Despite the historic battlefield, the teaching profession was one of the most chosen of the few professional options for Black college graduates. As these teachers taught in legally segregated and under-resourced schools, they helped to strengthen racial pride and mutual progress. In fact, attending and graduating from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) was a chosen path by a large percentage of individuals who attended all-Black schools during their K-12 experience.

As shared by participants, the educational journey of Black students in Black segregated schools was, in the majority of cases, characterized by a sense of belonging, the development of cultural pride, a demonstration of care, and preparation to become active and engaged citizens. The persistent evidence of such characteristics were key factors in the academic success of Black students in both K-12 and higher education settings. The role of Black teachers in the academic success of Black students has been well documented and should be used as a reference to ensure the future and continued academic success of Black students.

Efforts related to the integration and placement of Black teachers in desegregated schools, after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision, failed. Because of the persistent reality of the overrepresentation of Blacks in special education, disparities in achievement and discipline of Black students and the underrepresentation of Blacks in GATE and AP courses, an examination

of past and present pedagogical practices of effective teachers, from varying ethnic backgrounds, provides researchers and practitioners with a multitude of perspectives and insights. As the years pass, opportunities to interview individuals who taught at Black segregated schools continue to diminish. Hence, there is equal value on the perspectives of individuals who were students at all-Black segregated schools. Far too often, we dismiss the insights, perspectives, and experiences of individuals who lived during the early and mid-twentieth century.

When thinking about a more ethnically diverse teaching force, there is a potential reality to consider. A truly ethnically diverse teaching force can essentially take another fifteen to twenty years. Because college-educated Black professionals now have a myriad of competitive career options from which to choose, teaching may not be frequently chosen. If the current teaching force remains ethnically the same, steps to equip current novice and veteran teachers is required. It is recommended that current novice and veteran teachers conduct a self-assessment and comparison of their pedagogical practices and the propositions of culturally relevant pedagogy.

In order to adequately prepare students to be change agents and participate in a diverse and democratic society, all three propositions of culturally relevant pedagogy (i.e., student learning/academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness) are equally valued and needed. If the continued existence of a predominately White teaching force, is in fact the reality, then equipping preservice, novice, and veteran teachers to effectively implement all propositions of culturally relevant pedagogy is essential. This approach to teaching can show up in any discipline. Additionally, this approach implies that there is a change in pedagogy. It is not enough to simply include content that connects to the students' lives, albeit this is a good, yet cursory starting point. The current rhetoric surrounding the teaching of a complete history of the United States, including facts regarding the colonization of Native Americans, slavery, the Jim Crow era, and internment camps, may affect the full implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy. To ensure students in the 21st century classrooms experience academic success, maintain cultural competence, and develop a sociopolitical consciousness, teachers should evaluate the current achievement disparities and make a conscious decision to become a part of transforming an educational system in which ethnically diverse students can experience academic success.

The following recommendations are based on the preliminary findings of the five randomly selected participants. Findings from the remaining participants may yield different recommendations. The first recommendations for future research is directly related to teacher preparation programs (TPPs). It is recommended that TPPs assess their effectiveness in equipping preservice teachers to be culturally relevant teachers. Assessments should include, but are not limited to; an assessment of program curriculum to evaluate the inclusion of culturally relevant pedagogy propositions, follow-up surveys of graduates to determine their perceived preparedness to serve racial and ethnically diverse students. Also provide continued professional development to ensure current and newly hired TPP faculty are aware of the propositions of culturally relevant pedagogy and their implementation within the program. This recommendation implies that professors in TPPs will embrace the value and need for preservice teachers to be equipped with the three propositions of culturally relevant pedagogy.

The second recommendation for future research is related to a greater understanding of how segregated schools educated students with special needs. The fact that Cynthia completed first through eleventh grade without a diagnosis of a profound hearing loss is hard for current educators to comprehend. Future research to investigate the experiences of Black students with physical and learning limitations in all-Black segregated schools would provide additional insight into the instructional practices of Jim Crow teachers.

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