



# Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching and Learning

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Malik S. Henfield  
*Guest Editor*

## *Culturally Responsive Education for African American Males: Merging Theory, Research, and Practice*

### Articles

#### **“Are you sure you know what you are doing?” – The Lived Experiences of an African American Male Kindergarten Teacher**

*Nathaniel Bryan and Jamison K. Browder*

#### **Educating Black Males with Dyslexia**

*Shawn Anthony Robinson*

#### **The Utility of Empathy for White Female Teachers’ Culturally Responsive Interactions with Black Male Students**

*Chezare A. Warren*

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The IJTL is designed to provide opportunities for divergent ideas, views, and opinions on various topics and issues from professionals in diverse disciplines and professional arenas. It strives to be highly interdisciplinary in content that is likely to be of interest to teachers, principals, other school administrators, policymakers, graduate and undergraduate students, researchers, and academicians.

Manuscripts that focus on special education, general education (including subject content areas), bilingual education, cultural and linguistic diversity, innovative methods in teaching, assessment, exemplary programs, technology (assistive and instructional), educational leadership and reform, public policy, current issues and practices, and research relevant to education are encouraged.

Manuscripts submitted to the IJTL should be interesting, thorough, innovative, informative, well-documented, and have practical value that embraces and contributes to effective teaching and learning.

## Call for Manuscripts

The Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching and Learning (IJTL) welcomes submissions that contribute to effective teaching and learning. It provides a forum for the dissemination of articles focused on a wide variety of topics and content subject areas.

The IJTL is comprised of four departments -- Feature Articles, Educational Tweets, Online Resources, and the Event Zone.

**Feature Articles** provide scholarly articles on important topics, theoretical perspectives, current issues, practices, strategies, and research related to teaching and learning in PK-12 and higher education settings. All manuscripts submitted to this department undergo a triple-blind peer review.

Manuscripts for feature articles may be submitted by faculty, graduate students (whose work is co-authored by faculty), school administrators, policymakers, researchers, classroom teachers, and other practicing educators on current and compelling educational topics, issues, practices, and concerns at all levels (PK-12 and higher education) from a wide range of disciplines.

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be interesting, informative, well documented, appeal to the IJTL diverse audience, and have practical value that embrace and contribute to effective teaching and learning.

Additionally, the manuscripts should be original, well written, and offer new knowledge or a new and insightful synthesis of existing knowledge that has significance or importance to education. They should also have a solid theoretical base and offer an appropriate blend of teaching and practice. The conclusion, summary, final thoughts, or implications should be supported by the evidence presented.

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**Educational Tweets** features brief informative tidbits, views, and opinions on hot topics, current events/issues, educational policies, interesting readings, and other areas that impact education or inform teaching and learning. The information, views, and opinions tweeted in this department reflect those of the author.

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| <b>Submission Deadlines</b>              |  |   |
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| <b>Spring 2014<br/>(March/April)</b>     | <b>Summer 2014<br/>(July/August)</b>     | <b>Fall 2014<br/>(October/November)</b> |
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## Author Guidelines

The Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching and Learning (IJTL) is a scholarly, triple-blind, peer reviewed, open access electronic refereed journal that welcomes manuscripts from scholars, academicians, teachers, researchers, graduate students (whose work is co-authored by faculty), administrators, practitioners, and policymakers on a variety of topics and content areas as well as educational issues, evidence-based practices, and topics of educational significance.

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Manuscripts must be submitted electronically using word processing software. Acceptable formats include Microsoft Word (doc /docx) and Rich Text format (rtf).

Manuscripts should be formatted for printing on standard 8 x 11 inch paper with 1-inch margins, double spaced (including quotations and references), and prepared in Times New Roman 12-point font size. Titles, headings, and subheadings should be in upper and lower case fonts.

Manuscripts should not exceed 25 pages in length, including the title page, abstract, references, and tables or figures.

A separate cover sheet should provide the author's full name, organization or institutional affiliation, mailing address, phone number, and e-mail address; and the corresponding author should be identified. The author's name should not appear on any other pages of the manuscript. It is the responsibility of the corresponding author to notify the corresponding editor of the IJTL of changes in address, organization, or institutional affiliation occurring during the review process.

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Submit completed manuscripts or inquiries to the editor at [coeijtl@subr.edu](mailto:coeijtl@subr.edu). The IJTL is published by the College of Education under the auspices of the Executive Editor, Vera I. Daniels, Southern University and A & M College, P. O. Box 11298, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70813. Telephone/Fax (225) 771-5810.

## Review Process

Manuscripts submitted to the IJTL undergo a triple-blind peer review. All identifying information about the author is removed to ensure that the author's identity is not revealed.

Manuscripts received will be screened by the journal editors for conformity to the editorial guidelines, appropriateness of topic, and appropriateness for the journal readership. Manuscripts will also be assessed for content, relevance, accuracy, and usefulness to those in educational settings and stakeholders with an interest in educational policies and issues.

Appropriate manuscripts will be sent to peer reviewers. Poorly written or incorrectly formatted manuscripts will not be sent out for peer review.

All manuscripts received by the IJTL are assigned an identification number that is used to track the manuscript during the review process.

Within two weeks of receipt of the manuscript, an e-mail acknowledging receipt of the manuscript with notification of the assigned identification number will be sent to the author. The author may contact the journal corresponding editor at any time during the review process to obtain information about the status of their manuscript. Include in the subject line "Request for Manuscript Status Update (Manuscript # \_\_\_\_)."

The manuscript review process is generally completed within three months. This process may be slightly longer during major academic breaks or holidays.

Peer reviewers make one of the following decisions concerning a manuscript: (a) accept for publication (b) accept for publication and request minor revisions, (c) consider for publication after major revisions with the stipulation for a second peer review, (d) reject with resubmission invited, or (e) reject and decline the opportunity to publish.

Authors of manuscripts that have been accepted for publication will be notified by e-mail through the corresponding author. In some instances, authors may be asked to make revisions and provide a final copy of the manuscript before it is forwarded for publication.

Manuscripts accepted for publication may be susceptible to further editing to improve the quality and readability of the manuscript without materially changing the meaning of the text. Before publication, the corresponding author will receive an edited copy of the manuscript to approve its content and answer any questions that may arise from the editing process.

The IJTL is always looking for peer reviewers to serve on its Board of Reviewers. If you are interested in being considered as a peer reviewer, click on the link [Peer Reviewer](#) to obtain an application. Please return the application by e-mail ([coeijtl@subr.edu](mailto:coeijtl@subr.edu)) or fax (225-771-5810).

## Contents

|                                   |     |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| Guest Editor's Introduction ..... | 140 |
| <i>Malik S. Henfield</i>          |     |

### Articles

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| "Are you sure you know what you are doing?" – The Lived Experiences of an African American Male Kindergarten Teacher ..... | 142 |
| <i>Nathaniel Bryan and Jamison K. Browder</i>  |     |
| Educating Black Males with Dyslexia .....  | 159 |
| <i>Shawn Anthony Robinson</i>  |     |
| The Utility of Empathy for White Female Teachers' Culturally Responsive Interactions with Black Male Students .....        | 175 |
| <i>Chezare A. Warren</i>   |     |

### Departments

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Educational Tweets .....                          | 201  |
| <i>William E. Moore</i>                           |  |
|   | <i>Contributors</i>                                      |
|   | <i>William E. Moore ~ Chance W. Lewis ~ Noel Hammatt</i> |
| Online Resources .....                            | 202  |
| <i>Peggy Snowden and Chauncey Carr McElwee</i>    |  |
| The Event Zone .....                              | 203  |
| <i>Martha Jallim Hall and Michael J. Maiorano</i> |  |

# Culturally Responsive Education for African American Males: Merging Theory, Research, and Practice

## Guest Editor's Introduction



Malik S. Henfield

The poor academic performance of African American male students has been discussed ad nauseum in popular and scholarly literature. Although there are a number of out-of-school factors contributing to their underwhelming academic performance (e.g., social class factors, socioeconomic factors), there is also a plethora of in-school dynamics associated with the issue. Chief among in-school factors is a failure to see students' cultural differences as strengths, instead, pretending as though all students are the same.

In public discourse, it is quite common to extoll the virtues of sameness in society. In so doing, race, ethnicity, gender, and associated cultures are often eschewed in favor of a single worldview in which differences are ignored. Schools, serving as a microcosm of society, often operate with equal treatment as a goal. On the surface, this may seem like a just and worthy pursuit. However, having equality as an endgame in educational settings is quite troubling. More times than not, this leads to tremendous personal, social, and academic difficulties for students of color, particularly African American male students. By ignoring African American male students' culture or pretending as though cultural differences do not exist, educators lose opportunities to leverage students' differences as a means to better engage them. If students are not engaged, it is almost impossible for them to learn.

Culturally responsive education is an approach to schooling that, at its crux, is concerned with not only acknowledging cultural differences such as those associated with race and gender, but also utilizing them in pursuit of academic excellence for all students. In this issue, each of the authors merges theory, research, and practice to explore the concept in an effort to help readers understand its utility in terms of educating African American male students.

In the first article, "*Are you sure you know what you are doing?*"—*The Lived Experiences of an African American Male Kindergarten Teacher*, Nathaniel and Jamison tackle the persistent issue of low African American male representation in the teaching workforce. Using a single case study qualitative design, these authors explore an African American male kindergarten teacher's perceptions to shed light on why so few African American males select teaching as a profession. Findings suggest that systemic issues, including microaggressions, played a role in the participant's teaching experience, which could have implications for future research.

In the second article, *Educating Black Males with Dyslexia*, Shawn offers compelling information about what it is like to be a Black male and dyslexic in U. S. schools. He begins by discussing the tremendous difficulties and experiences of Black males, in general, then narrows the focus to Black male students receiving special education services. The article includes an engaging first-person account of how Shawn continues to battle dyslexia and how he managed to find success.

The last article, *The Utility of Empathy for White Female Teachers' Culturally Responsive Interactions with Black Male Students* was written by Chezare and investigated the interactions of four White female teachers and a group of their Black male students. This study is unique in that empathy and its utility in teaching Black male students was central to the investigation. Findings suggested empathy has the potential to be a valuable tool in efforts to engage Black male students.

Each of the articles in this issue addresses the need for more culturally responsive educational approaches from different perspectives. Nathaniel and Jamison's article offers data from a culturally responsive African American male teacher's perspective. Shawn's article details the experience of what it is like to be an African American male on the receiving end of culturally responsive education, and Chezare's article explores the behaviors of culturally responsive White female teachers. It is my hope these authors' work will be useful to educators concerned with engaging African American male students and improving the conditions in which they learn.

~ Malik S. Henfield ~

**Malik S. Henfield, PhD**, is an Associate Professor and Program Coordinator of the School Counseling and Counselor Education and Supervisor programs in the College of Education at the University of Iowa. His scholarship situates Black students' lived experiences in a broader ecological milieu to critically explore how their personal, social, academic and career success is impeded and enhanced by school, family and community contexts. Dr. Henfield's work has focused on the experiences of Black students formally identified as gifted and his latest projects focus more exclusively on cultural (e.g., race, gender, and social class) factors associated with developing talent maximization mindsets among Black males—in urban contexts, particularly. As a counselor educator, he has a fundamental belief in mental health as a key component in meeting students' needs and is, therefore, committed to diversifying the counseling profession as a means to help meet said needs. To that end, Dr. Henfield researches underrepresented students' (e.g., African American students, international students) experiences in mental health training programs as a means to uncover the connection between program factors and positive student experiences, which has direct implications for diversity in the counseling profession.

# “Are you sure you know what you are doing?”— The Lived Experiences of an African American Male Kindergarten Teacher

**Nathaniel Bryan**

*University of South Carolina*

**Jamison K. Browder**

*University of South Carolina*

As of 2012, data indicate that only one percent of public school teachers are African American males. Numerous reports urge decision makers and higher education professionals to aggressively recruit and retain African American males as teachers in an effort to improve the academic outcomes of African American children in our educational system (Huntsman & Howell, 2012; Lewis & Toldson, 2013). Unfortunately, the voices of male teachers have been under-studied in educational settings, particularly those of African Americans. The purpose of this article is to explore the lived experiences of an African American male kindergarten teacher as to help us understand why African American males rarely choose teaching as a profession. Using a single case study, the researchers and a male African American kindergarten teacher examine these experiences through a racial microaggression taxonomy. Findings revealed that this African American male teacher may be a victim of a cycle of institutional tensions that include microaggressions, as well as an overcomer within the cycle of personal triumphs. Recommendations are provided to improve the experiences of African American male teachers.

**Keywords:** African American male teacher, microaggressions, pre-service teaching, in-service teaching, Early Childhood Education

Few studies have documented the lived experiences of Pre K-2 male teachers in preservice and inservice early childhood (Haase, 2010; Jones, 2008; Lynn, 2006; Rentzou & Ziganitidou, 2009; Warin, 2006). In this article, we attempt to fill this void by addressing the demographics of teachers by gender, race, and area of specialization (i.e., early childhood education). Our ultimate goal is to draw attention to the issues and needs for African-American male teachers, the most underrepresented teachers in American public schools; to support them in the field and find ways to increase their presence; and show that the presence of African American males in the teaching profession is invaluable.

The undocumented voices of African American male teachers within the field of early childhood can be attributed to several factors. First, there are few men in the field of education. Research consistently reveals that less than 25% of teachers (out of 3.5 million public school teachers) in the United States are male (Aud et al., 2013; NEA, 2008), and that this percentage decreases in the field of early childhood education. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010), only 3-5% of teachers of young children are male, and the percentage of male teachers *decreases*

*more drastically* when race is added. Only 1% of teachers are Black males, which equates to approximately 35,000 teachers in our public schools, with most being at the middle and high school levels (Aud et al., 2013; Lewis, 2006; Lewis & Toldson, 2013). Second, studies are rare regarding the experiences of male teachers, particularly Black male teachers. Given their minuscule presence, the unheard voices of male teachers in early childhood can be attributed, in part, to both female-dominated and White female-dominated classroom environments (Lewis & Toldson, 2013; Milner, 2010), gender and racial stigmas and suspicions regarding Black males (Brown, 2012), and low pay among teachers (Aud et al., 2013). Finally, the voices and impact of male teachers who work with young children have been under-studied, overlooked, and even trivialized in educational theory and research. This is thought to be due, in part, to the constituency of early childhood scholars and practitioners who prefer to keep both teaching and early childhood as women's work (Carrington & McPhee, 2008). These trends and ideas need to be further explored considering the potential benefits of having African-American males in early childhood.

Researchers have outlined several reasons why more male teachers are needed in early childhood. Specifically, the research has shown that African American male teachers have the potential to transform the dismal educational trends associated with many African-American students, such as low achievement, poor test scores, suspension and expulsion, and dropping out of schools (Brown, 2012). Thus, the inclusion of more males in the early years has the potential to benefit society, the profession, and children. By having more male teachers in early childhood, it can help dismantle the hegemonic forces that limit occupational choices for women and men in society (Mukuna & Mutsotso, 2011); and it can significantly impact society's perceptions of gender-specific occupations. This is a complex dynamic that could have a positive effect on paradigm shifts in philosophy, theory, research, and policy. Also, more occupational choices emerge for men when dominant ideologies of gender and occupations decrease.

One way to combat dominant ideologies is when individuals cross over into gender-imbalanced occupations. The education profession could benefit from an increase of males in early childhood by bringing new perspectives and opportunities to the field, and children could benefit from the presence of male teachers. Researchers suggest that effective male teachers serve as role models to both boys and girls. While their presence can have a positive impact on improving the overall academic plight and behavioral expectations of boys (Martin, Marsh, Cheng, & Ginns, 2010), their presence also has benefits for girls in the same or similar ways. By having male teachers in early childhood, boys and girls could learn to abandon socially constructed ideas of gender-specific occupations (Piburn, 2010).

### **Why More African American Male Teachers are Needed**

Amidst the debates, dialogues, and discussions on male teachers and their benefits in school settings (Lewis & Toldson, 2013; Lynn, 2006; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2011), little attention has been given to African American male teachers and their potential benefits to children. Although research has shown that 10% of students in K-12 settings are African American males, it should be noted that only 1% of these teachers are African American males (Aud et al., 2013), and even fewer African American males work within the early year context.

The lack of research on African American male teachers and the marginalization of African American male teachers who work within the early childhood domain call for further examination of this phenomenon. Though there are only a few research studies that have documented the lived experiences of males in the field of early childhood, these studies have elevated the voices of White American males and international Eurocentric males while excluding the voices and lived experiences of African American males (see Friedman, 2010; Haase, 2010). This exclusion has created a gap in research and policy on the lived experiences of men in the field of early childhood education. However, President Obama created initiatives that call for the presence of more African American male teachers (see Huntspan & Howell, 2012). Presently, we are unsure of how these initiatives impact the number of African American male teachers in early childhood.

The purpose of this article is to explore the lived experiences of an African American male kindergarten teacher and the effects of microaggressions on his experiences before, during, and after pre-service teaching and eventual teaching experiences in Early Childhood Education at a predominantly White public university in the Southeastern United States. First, we provide a brief review of the literature to establish a rationale for why African American males may not choose teaching as a profession and we identify barriers that may preclude them from becoming teachers. Secondly, we draw from the microaggression taxonomy described by Sue, Bucci, Lin, Nadal, and Torino (2007b) to provide a thorough examination of the experiences of this African American male kindergarten teacher and to describe how microaggressions serve as a rationale for the underrepresentation of African American males barriers to entering in the profession.

### **African American Males' Plight to and in the Teaching Profession**

The history of African American male teachers is mainly rooted in the history of two groups – White male teachers and African American female teachers (Brown, 2012; DuBois, 1903; Friedman, 2010; Haase, 2010). This noteworthy connection yields an unbalanced understanding of the African American male teacher, which limits our understanding of why African American males rarely choose teaching as a profession.

However, contemporary researchers (e.g., Kunjufu, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Mezuk, 2009; Losen, 2011) suggest that there is a nexus between African American male students' school experiences and their virtual non-existence in the teaching profession; and it is well documented that K-12 schools have not been a welcoming and nurturing space for African American male students. In fact, schools have been hostile places for many Black males, and this lack of cultural responsiveness to this group has painted bleak and distorted images of the academic and professional trajectories for this population at all grade levels, even before school begins. Among them are disproportionality, high school dropout rates, suspension and expulsions, special education, and the underrepresentation of African American males in gifted and advanced education classes (Ford, 2010, 2001, 2013; Kunjufu, 2007). More daunting is the chilling phrase about African American males, which is often viewed as reality, that is, Black males are 'convicted in the womb' (Upchurch, 1997).

The structural and institutional inequities faced by African American males in K-12 settings are not just limited to those spaces. Such inequities continue within higher education and the social arena, thus resulting in a lower percentage of African American males graduating from college and obtaining a degree, as compared to their White counterparts (Palmer & Maramba, 2011). This, too, has an effect on the shortage of African American males entering the teaching profession.

The macro-level devaluation and marginalization of African American males within public schools and higher education (K-16) provide a clearer understanding of why few males from this population desire to select teaching as a profession. Entering a profession that has degraded, undervalued, and marginalized African American males is not a welcoming and inviting profession in which to work. If a more diverse teacher population is to be realized, more effort must be made to provide a welcoming and affirming space for African American male students (Harper & Davis, 2012).

The *Call Me Mister*, *Griot Program*, and *Ready to Teach* programs (see Baskerville et al., 2008; Lewis, 2006) were designed to address the critical shortage of African American male teachers. However, few studies (Baskerville et al., 2008; Jones & Jenkins, 2012) have documented the effectiveness of these programs relative to recruitment, retention, and outcomes. While these initiatives should be applauded for responding to the underrepresentation of African American males in teaching, they may have overlooked structural and institutional barriers that have contributed to or exacerbated this condition. Such barriers manifest themselves in the form of national assessments such as the Praxis exams that serve as gatekeepers to the teaching profession (Nettles, Scatton, Steinberg, & Tyler, 2011). Likewise, the roles that African American males are expected to perform could also become structural barriers.

### **Problematizing the Expectations of the African American Male Teacher**

When African American males enter the teaching profession, they are faced with challenges that occur partly because of how they have been positioned within education and the larger society, especially, media and social media. Brown (2012) suggests that African American male teachers are mainly viewed as coaches and disciplinarians, not teachers in the classroom. Lynn (2006) challenged traditional notions of African American male teachers (e.g., role models) by enabling them to examine their perspectives about roles and identities in the classroom. Martino and Rezai-Rashit (2010) warn against the homogenization of African American male teachers because it limits the diversity and number of African American males who enter the profession. Brown (2012) argues that such deficit notions encourage African American men to be viewed as “pedagogical kinds” or “a type of educator whose subjectivities, pedagogies, and expectations have been set in place prior to entering the classroom” (p. 299). Additionally, when unable to live up to these majoritarian, distorted, and one-dimensional expectations, they are not considered to be the ‘right kind of men’ for the profession.

To debunk such distorted and negative notions, the image of African American male teachers must be reexamined. Examples of successful African American male teachers capable of providing appropriate academic support to all students is an important area to consider while

expanding the research on ways African American male teachers can impact the educational outcomes of the students they teach (Howard, 2012).

### Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in racial microaggressions. Sue et al. (2007a, 2007b) define microaggression as racial putdowns towards African Americans and other marginalized groups. Oftentimes these acts can cause its victims to experience feelings of isolation, exclusion, and rejection. Racial microaggressions have been extensively studied, examined, and connected to the lived histories and experiences of people of color in extant educational and legal research. This research has been contextualized within predominantly White institutional settings, including public schools, colleges, and universities (Ford, Trotman Scott, Moore, & Amos, 2013; Jay, 2009). Some researchers have classified microaggressions in two forms—non-verbal/verbal and non-visual/visual—and they suggest that these behaviors could be covert or overt in manner (Sue et al., 2007).

Sue and Constantine (2007) assert there are three variations of microaggression experienced by and geared towards marginalized groups — microassaults, microinsults, and micro-invalidations. *Microassaults* are explicit, offensive acts of racism (i.e., name calling) that is designed to do harm to people of color. For example, on college and university campuses African American students may be referred to as “Affirmative Action beneficiaries,” and may be given lower grades on academic assignments than their White counterparts. *Microinsults* are culturally insensitive and demeaning comments/statements about the cultural heritage or identity of racial minorities. In such case, African American males may be asked about how they were admitted to a prestigious, competitive, or Predominantly White college or university, since so few attend these institutions. *Microinvalidations* are “words and actions that convey rudeness, insensitivity or demeaning attitudes toward the racial or ethnic heritage or identity of people of color” (Sue & Constantine, 2007, p. 138). For example, African American males may be overlooked and/or ignored in class when they attempt to contribute, and they may be questioned about whether they should be in a given course or class.

On the other hand, Sue and colleagues (2007a, 2007b) identified nine themes, which they associate with various types of microaggressions (see Sue et al., 2007a, 2007b). These themes are as follows: (1) ascription of intelligence; (2) second class citizen; (3) pathologizing cultural values/communication styles; (4) assumption of criminal status; (5) alien in own land; (6) color-blindness; (7) myth of meritocracy; and (8) denial of individual racism (see Sue et al., 2007a, 2007b).

Because little is known about African American male teachers who matriculate through predominantly White pre-service teacher education programs, those who work in the teaching profession, and those who work with young children, their lived experiences must be documented, barriers that hinder their progress must be identified, and mainstream ideologies that marginalize them must be debunked. In this study, we used a microaggression taxonomy to examine the context of experiences encountered by an African American male early childhood education teacher. The three research questions which guided this study were:

1. What are the lived experiences of an African American male kindergarten teacher before, during, and after his pursuit of post-secondary education at a Predominately White Institution (PWI)?
2. How have these lived experiences affected him as an aspiring teacher, pre-service teacher, and a professional teacher in the field of early childhood education?
3. How has an African American male been positively portrayed as he overcame structural and institutional barriers that could have negatively impacted his professional future?

## **Method**

This qualitative case study was used to capture the unique voice of an African American male kindergarten teacher, while also capturing the authenticity of his pre-service and in-service teaching experience. Case studies enable research participants to share experiences and phenomenon in which they live in personally enriching ways (Delamont, 2012). As aforementioned, the voices of African American male teachers have been excluded from extant literature, privileging the voices of individuals from dominant culture groups in pre-service and in-service teaching.

### *Participant*

The participant was a 26 year-old African American male kindergarten teacher, whom we refer to as “Henry.” Henry was enrolled in an early childhood education program at a PWI in the Southeastern United States. At the time of this study, 2% of the university’s students were African American and less than 1% were African American faculty. Henry worked at a predominately African American Title I school in the same geographical region. He taught two years in this setting; and also served as an assistant football coach at a nearby high school. Henry openly expressed his commitment to improving the lives of students. According to him, his desire to do so began during his high school years.

Convenience sampling was used to select Henry. Henry and the second author had a collegial relationship prior to the study. They attended the same district-wide professional development meetings, and their conversations always focused on topics relating to education and sports. Henry volunteered to share his experiences with us and he gave us his written consent to share his experiences in a scholarly work. Henry was the only African American male kindergarten teacher in his school district. The other researcher in this study, also an early childhood teacher, taught at the same school.

### *Data Collection*

To explore the lived experiences of the participant, we used a qualitative semi-structured interview approach. Semi-structured interviews were used because they provide very flexible and reliable data (Delamont, 2012) and they allowed the researcher to interject questions into the interview process based on the participant’s responses.

Both researchers interviewed the participant. Two interviews were conducted and tape-recorded in the school setting where he taught. The first interview was conducted to establish a trusting, respectful, and professional relationship with the participant and to clarify the goals of the research study. The second interview was designed to gather data to co-construct a narrative relative to his experience in a predominantly White female pre-service teacher education program and the teaching profession at large. This interview was conducted in the same format three weeks after the initial interview. Each interview lasted approximately 75 minutes. As a way to member check and to ensure trustworthiness, the research participant received by mail a copy of the interview transcripts and was asked to confirm the accuracy of his statements. These methods enabled us to triangulate the data sources and engage in inductive reasoning.

### *Data Analysis*

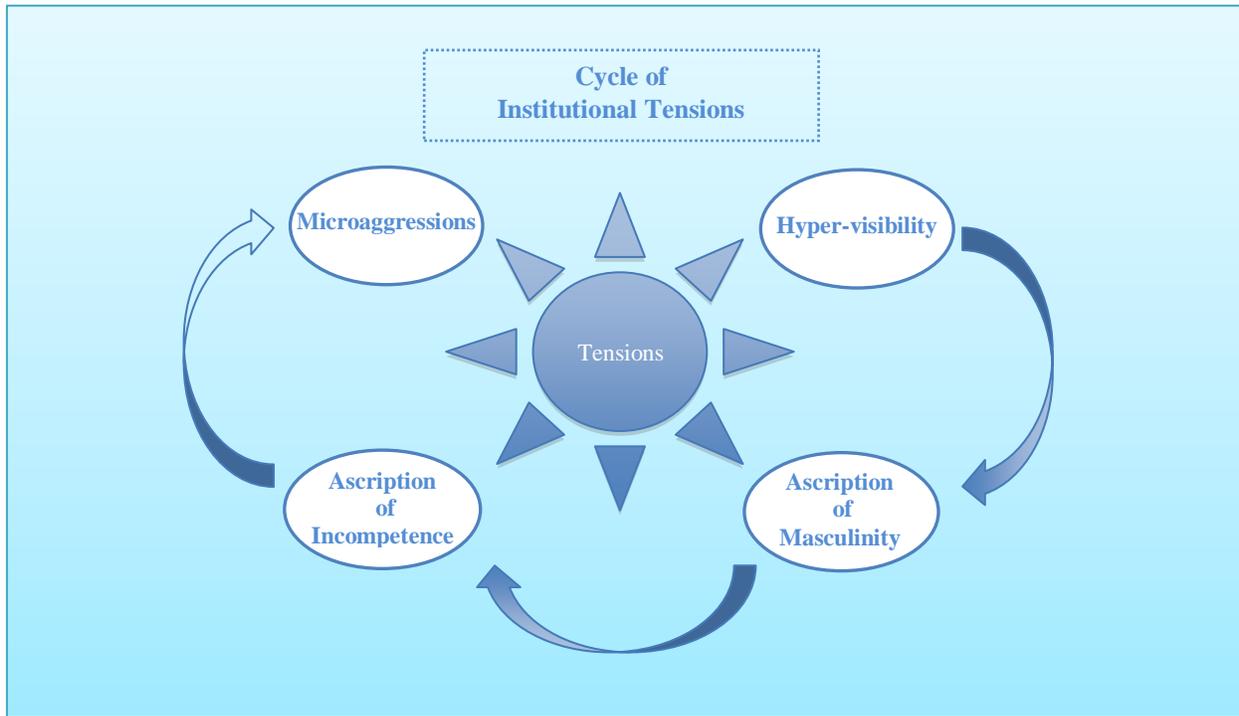
Data were analyzed independently by each researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the Henry's experiences throughout his matriculation at a PWI. Based on interview data and written interview notes, codes and patterns were identified (Delamont, 2012) and the researchers constructed central themes essential to the scope of this study to arrive at answers to the research questions. In order to do so, each researcher read and re-read transcripts and interview notes twice, focusing on specific details relating to the research participant's lived experiences in pre-service and in-service teacher education and ways he dealt with these experiences. The interrater reliability was 100% for our analysis. Thereafter, a qualitative data analysis software tool (ATLAS.ti) was used to assist in the management of codes.

## **Results**

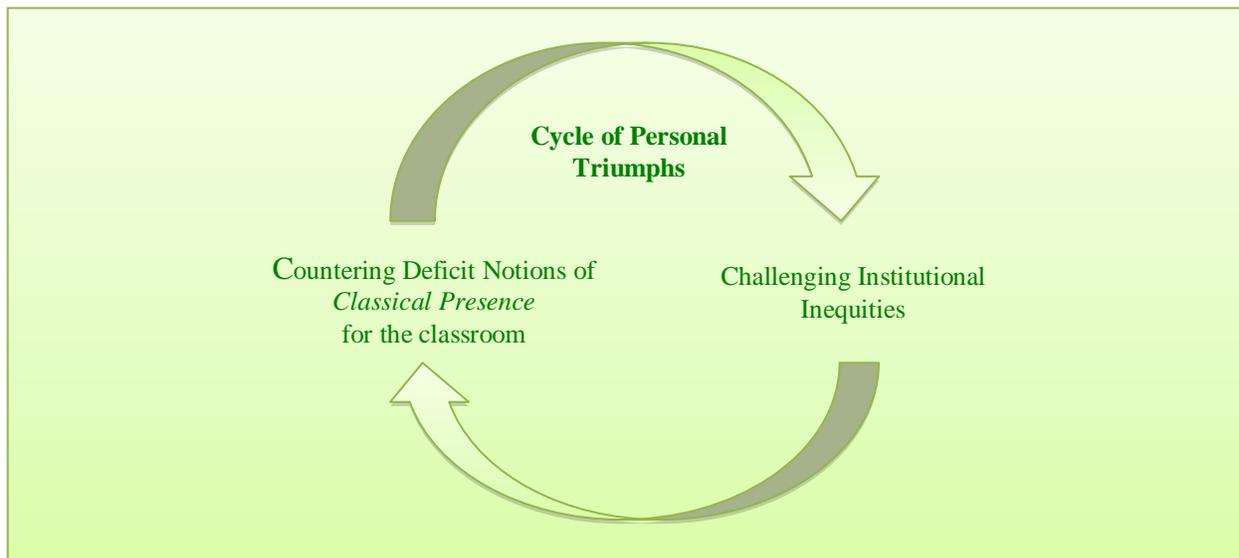
There were a number of tensions that emerged during Henry's experiences, as a result several themes emerged from the data. Based on these themes, we constructed two cycles (see Figures 1 and 2). We refer to one of the cycles as the "Cycle of Institutional Tensions" (see Figure 1). Within this cycle, we used the work of Jay's (2009) concept of hyper-visibility as a theme. Jay's concept (2009) suggests that the racial identity of people of color is always at the forefront of their lived realities to explain these experiences. Although Jay (2009) describes hyper-visibility from a racialized perspective, we suggest that Jay's theory of hyper-visibility could be further expanded to support other identified forms to include gender - other identities can cause individuals to become hyper-visible in any given context. Such was the case for Henry. And, we added two ascriptions — 'ascription of masculinity' and 'ascription of incompetence' — to the microaggression themes. We describe 'ascription of masculinity' as assigning a lack of masculinity on men who teach or desire to teach young children; whereas, we describe 'ascription of incompetence' as assigning a lack of competence and/or efficacy on men who teach young children.

Moreover, because it was our goal to reframe the ways of knowing and understanding African American males, we thought it was appropriate to highlight a few triumphs to celebrate Henry's successes. We refer to this as the "Cycle of Personal triumphs" (see Figure 2). This is an important concept because most research has focused on the collective deficits of African American males (Ford, 2010).

**Figure 1. Cycle of Institutional Tensions**



**Figure 2. Cycle of Personal Triumphs**



To further investigate the “Cycle of Institutional Tensions” and “Cycle of Personal Triumphs”, we organized central themes (see Figure 3) to analyze these experiences.

**Figure 3. Central Themes for Cycle of Institutional Tensions and Personal Triumphs**

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## Central Themes

### *Cycle of Institutional Tensions*

### *Cycle of Personal Triumphs*

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>1. <i>Experiencing Hyper-Visibility</i><br/>African American males may be hypervisible in predominantly White female teacher education program at PWIs.</p> <p>2. <i>Experiencing Microaggressions</i><br/>African American males may be victims of institutional inequities in the forms of gender and racial micro-aggressions that exist in PWIs and predominantly female schools.</p> | <p>1. <i>Challenging Institutional Inequities Within PWIs</i><br/>African American males are courageous as they challenge institutional inequities that exist in PWIs.</p> <p>2. <i>Moving Beyond Mr. Classical Presence</i><br/>African American males are successful in countering the deficit notion of <i>the classical presence for the classroom</i> (e.g. mentors, coaches, father figures, etc.) and are proven to be effective teachers.</p> |
|--|---|

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For clarity, we discuss each theme individually and provide evidentiary support that was shared with us by Henry. In so doing, we realized that several examples extracted from Henry's experiences could be placed under more than one of the proposed themes. However, we hesitated to do so in our effort to avoid redundancy and to be more concise in our analysis.

### **Cycle of Institutional Tensions**

#### *Theme 1: Experiencing Hyper-Visibility*

One situation that is experienced frequently by Henry is what Jay (2009) refers to as hyper-visibility. Henry's racial identity was always at the forefront of his experiences:

When my mother and I decided to visit the university's campus to explore my options for playing football and majoring in Early Childhood Education, it was an interesting experience. When I stepped onto the campus to take a tour, I was really not in the mood to tour, but my mother insisted. I was concerned at first because within my 50 member tour group, my mother and I were two Black people out of the four black people in our entire tour group. I felt uncomfortable because we were the only Blacks... I felt we stood out within the crowd. I wasn't sure this would be the place for me.

Henry vividly described how he felt as one of the few African Americans within his group. Despite these feelings, Henry still made the decision to attend the university and major in Early Childhood Education.

In addition to disclosing experiences related to race, Henry also shared an experience where administrators questioned his presence at early childhood professional development sessions because he was a male:

When I attend district professional development sessions, I am always questioned about why I attend early childhood professional development sessions. I stick out because I am a man. On one occasion, I was even directed to attend the professional development session for physical education teachers. I guess this happens because people expect me to be a P.E. teacher.

In this situation, Henry's gender was continuously placed at the forefront in traditionally female spaces.

### *Theme 2: Experiencing Microaggressions*

When Henry entered the classroom of his first early childhood course, the White female professor questioned whether he was in the right course. In this course, the majority of students were White female early childhood preservice students. Henry recounted:

When I attended my first early childhood course, I was asked by my white female professor, "Aren't you in the wrong class?" I had to convince my professor that I was enrolled in the course. I sat down and I noticed I was the only African American male. The class was full of white female Early Childhood majors.

When asked how he really felt about the incident, Henry retorted:

I was used to people treating me like this because I was the only African American male in the Early Childhood program...but this was strange... I thought this was going to be one of those classes...a class where the professor doesn't like black males.

Evidence of acts of gender- and race-related microaggressions were evident during Henry's first year of teaching. For example, there was a parent who was in disbelief that a Black male (Henry) was his child's teacher. Henry shared this incident:

During an Open House night in my first year of teaching, I was greeted by a parent at my classroom door looking for his child's kindergarten teacher. He [the parent] stated, "I am looking for Mrs. Jones, the kindergarten teacher." I replied, "I am Mr. Jones, the kindergarten teacher. The parent just stood in disbelief and said, "That can't be possible. Are you sure you know what you are doing?"

Henry said the parent began to question his efficacy, which, according to him, was most likely because he was a Black male. This action is what we refer to as microaggression 'ascription of incompetence.'

As stated earlier, microaggressions are racial putdowns that devalue people of color (Sue et al., 2007). These "put-downs" became evident throughout Henry's experiences.

I was enrolled in a Creative Experiences course. Again, I was the only African American in the course. The rest of the students were White females. The professor gave a writing assignment that required us [the class] to reflect on a topic from the course. One of the White female students asked if it were possible to reflect and write on the field experiences we did during the semester. The professor willingly agreed. I decided to consult with the White female student. We both wrote our reflections on our field experiences. I made every effort to make sure my paper was perfect before I gave it to the professor. When I received my paper, I was surprised. I got an “F”. The White female student with whom I consulted with got an “A”. I was upset so I went to the Dean to protest my grade. As a result, the Dean agreed with me. My grade changed.

Henry reflected on this experience:

I had a course under this same professor before and I failed. I just thought she hated me because I was Black.

### **Cycle of Personal Triumphs**

#### *Theme 1: Challenging Institutional Inequities Within PWIs*

We revisit the incident where Henry received an “F” on an assignment in a Creative Experience course. Henry was courageous as he challenged his professor:

I was really upset with the grade I received. I scheduled an appointment to meet with the Dean to challenge the grade. I knew something was not right about this situation. The Dean asked the professor to change the grade I originally received.

Further, he made crucial adjustments to change his academic and personal trajectories:

My GPA was not high enough to enter the early childhood program at first; however, I took courses during the summer to improve my grades so I could enter the professional program.

#### *Theme 2: Moving Beyond Mr. Classical Presence*

Henry was not only viewed as a mentor of young children, but a teacher who was highly qualified and competent within his professional space. He stated:

I am not only a mentor and a coach, but I am also a successful teacher who is able to teach my students how to read and write so they are prepared for the rest of their lives. I spend hours preparing lessons that meet the individual needs of my students. I use a lot of technology to engage my twenty-one African American students... I am always proud of the progress they make on school-wide and district-wide assessments.

## Discussion and Implications

The findings of this study supports the extant literature on African American males and African American male kindergarten teachers in many ways by suggesting that structural and institutional barriers that hinder the academic and professional plight of African American males extends beyond the K-12 educational contexts (i.e. higher education and professional spaces). However, these findings also expand the literature by specifically naming those barriers (i.e. racial and gender microaggressions and hypervisibility) within these spaces, while providing a deeper social justice and critical investigation (not frequently sought after) for why few African American males enter early childhood.

As stated earlier, there is an urgent need for more African American males to enter the teaching profession. However, the campaign for more African American males to enter the teaching profession has consistently disregarded the structural and institutional barriers (e.g. hypervisibility, microaggressions, etc.) that hinder this reality. These barriers have created tensions within this African American male's pre-service and in-service experiences and have produced unwelcoming and uncomfortable feelings within him. Such uncomfortable feeling is oftentimes one from so many African Americans in similar situations where they have been minoritized or *hyper-visible* (Rodgers & Summers, 2008).

Moreover, racial and gender microaggressions also contribute to such unwelcoming and uncomfortable feelings as they occur day-to-day in overt and covert ways. In many cases, the experiences that Henry encountered were racial and gender microaggressions. This notion was clearly seen in the professor's reaction to Henry's entrance into the classroom comprised of White female preservice teachers. Stereotypically, men are not expected to teach young children. As Carrington and McPhee (2008) point out, this touches on the feminine domain of early childhood education. When men defy societal expectations, such as moving into predominantly female professional spaces, this deification oftentimes leads to biased actions and reactions towards them. Additionally, Foster and Newman (2005) assert that men who are interested in early years teaching are oftentimes victims who are regarded as 'perverts', 'homosexuals,' and 'dangers to children.' When the aforementioned reactions and stereotypes are coupled with racial issues, the problems become more complex and entrenched with the interplay of race and gender—in this case, African American male. If Henry were a White male, his presence may have been better received in a predominantly White female space. While we understand it is rare to have males, especially African American males, in early childhood classes. We also recognize that there are very few African American men in the field of education, regardless of grade level (Aud et al., 2013; Brown, 2012). Therefore, such suspicions of males and the inequitable treatment of this population who attempt to become a part of the field, is one reason why few men pursue careers in education.

The challenges and setbacks of African American males relating to female (both Black and White) dominance in both pre-service and in-service teaching is not surprising since research in teacher education (e.g. Haase, 2010) continuously report female dominance in the field of early childhood education. Based on our findings, we also suggest that such challenges and setbacks occur because societal expectations view teachers of young children as nurturers. This explains the difficulty that men have, especially African American men, when working with young

children in early years settings. Men are rarely seen as nurturers compared to women, regardless of race (Carrington & McPhee, 2008). Further examination of such phenomenon is needed and could aid in dismantling the leaky pipeline towards the educational profession (Bianco, Leech & Mitchell, 2011), while also challenging dominant ideologies about who should and can work with young children.

African American males bring a multiplicity of talents and abilities to the classroom from which all children can benefit. However, they must be viewed beyond the prevailing deficit expectations (e.g., coaches, mentors, and disciplinarian) for them as teachers (Brown, 2012). While traditional ideologies dominate educational discourses concerning men who teach, they hinder the positive views of men as pedagogically competent and effective teachers. We suggest that these men possess what we call a 'classical presence for the classroom'. This is consistent in several research studies (Brown, 2012; Rentzou & Ziganitidou, 2009). However, Henry counters such stereotypical notion. Furthermore, we theorize that the lack of appropriate positioning of African American male teachers could affect African American men who desire to teach. Though we believe that African American men can be viewed as effective disciplinarians, mentors, coaches, and father figures, we also believe they can be viewed as effective teachers who promote academic achievement.

Although the literature has unremittingly focused on the negative outcomes of African American males in education and society, it should also focus on the negative outcomes when African American men are absent from the education profession as well as the positive outcomes of African American males when they exist in the education profession. Henry's transformational approach yielded positive results. He could have easily abandoned his studies due to academic deficiencies and personal, structural and institutional challenges. However, he was an overcomer.

The findings of our study implies that pre-service teacher education programs should explicitly address issues of equity and diversity (i.e. race and gender) within preservice education curricula, as to help dismantle negative stereotypes and microaggressions (both racial and gender) towards men in general, but African American males who desire to teach young children in particular. Also, preservice education programs may need to better support African American males who desire to become teachers of young children by providing them opportunities to partake in male teacher support groups. School districts should also provide professional development sessions on equity and diversity issues as to better support, recruit, and retain African American male teachers.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

We acknowledge that there were two limitations to this qualitative case study. First, there are few previous qualitative studies (Lynn, 2006) on African American male kindergarten teachers, thus limiting the knowledge base on African American male kindergarten teachers. To date, there are no quantitative studies on African American male kindergarten teachers. We encourage further qualitative and quantitative research on African American male kindergarten teachers as to capture their lived experiences and to come to an understanding of why few African American males choose early childhood as a professional option. Second, we acknowledge that more questions could have been included within our semi-structured interviews as to provide more details of the in-service teaching experiences of our research participant.

We encourage future research to focus more on in-service teaching experiences of African American male kindergarten teachers. We also implore scholars to conduct research on ways African American males can be seen as effective teachers instead of mentors and coaches and victors instead of villains. The construction (and reconstruction) of positive images of African American males as teachers of young children helps to dispel prevalent and prevailing myths about which these men are, and to increase awareness of their positive professional contributions to the early childhood field. We hope to contribute additional studies that are essential to portray African American males as needed and positive educators who have committed themselves to children's academic and social development. This, alone, counters negative media portrayal of these men--an idea that aids in creating non-discriminatory spaces for them in society and professional spaces in general.

### Conclusion

Throughout this study, we called for a closer examination of the racialized and gender realities and experiences of an African American male who desired to work in the field of early childhood education. We engaged in this research to understand and hopefully improve the pre-service and in-service teaching experiences of men, particularly African American men, who are (or desire to become) early childhood teachers. Also, we noted inequitable systems and institutional inequities in the forms of gender and racial microaggressions, which oftentimes victimize African American men. These barriers continuously widen the gap between those who teach and those who do not by gender, race, or a combination of both. And, given the experiences shared by our research participant (Henry), we recommend that higher education and P-12 administrators become more cognizant of African American males' experiences within predominantly White pre-service teacher education programs and public schools, and examine ways to make their experiences more equitable in these spaces.

### AUTHOR NOTES

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# Educating Black Males With Dyslexia

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Much of the scholarship on Black males in the educational literature focuses on the achievement gap; their underrepresentation in gifted and advanced placement programs; their overrepresentation in special education programs and their high rates of school suspensions and expulsions. Although overrepresented in special education, Black males with dyslexia are seldom given attention in scholarly works; and an extensive review of the literature yields a lack of empirical research or articles on Black males with dyslexia. This article focuses on Black males with dyslexia and provides recommendations for appropriate classroom practice based on the author's lived experiences.

**Keywords:** Black males, dyslexia, learning disability, Project Success, special education overrepresentation

Effectively educating Black males with dyslexia is of utmost importance. Scholarship addressing Black males in special education who are not receiving effective intervention and diagnosed with needs other than dyslexia should be an urgent matter for administrator's practitioners, researchers, policy makers, and teachers. The purpose of this article is to emphasize the need for scholarship (theory and literature) on learning disabilities, specifically dyslexia, among Black males, its impact on their reading proficiency, and the importance of appropriate classroom pedagogy to address their unique academic needs. Indeed, the need is great given the realization that many Black males have poor or dismal school outcomes, more than any racial and gender group (e.g., Aud et al., 2012) and seen in various reports on the educational status of Black males (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012; the U.S. Department of Education, National Center of Education Statistics, 2013).

This article focuses on the learning needs of Black males with dyslexia and provides recommendations for appropriate classroom practice. The article begins with a review of the literature pertaining to Black male students and the achievement gap as a whole, and reading in particular. Next, the article reviews the intersection of race and dyslexia among Black males. Suggestions are recommended as interventions for Black male with dyslexia. The article concludes with a narrative of my personal pre-college and college years as a Black male with dyslexia.

## Literature Review

### Black Males and the Achievement Gap

The achievement gap between Black and White students is widely recognized as an urgent crisis (Barton & Coley, 2009; Buly & Valencia, 2002; Moats & Dakin, 2007; Parkinson & Rowan, 2008). This is evidenced by Barton and Coley (2009):

Most of the progress in closing the achievement gap in reading and mathematics occurred during the 1970s and 1980s. Since then, overall progress in closing the gaps has slowed. With the exception of the gap in reading for 9-year-olds in 2008, the size of the gaps seen in the late 1980s has never been smaller (p. 7).

Nationally, Black males who make it to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade are performing at least four years behind White males in reading and math. The Black-White achievement gap can be examined in several ways, among which are teacher quality, academic rigor, high academic expectations, family involvement, and exposure to literacy-enriched environments, all of which significantly influence students' achievement (Barton & Coley, 2009; Edwards & Turner, 2009; Van Kleeck, 2004; Wasik & Hendrickson, 2004). A lack of these dynamics can contribute to racial achievement gaps but due to space limitations, I focus on only three contributing factors.

One indicator of the achievement gap between Black and White males is the difference in graduation rates. During the 2009-2010 school year, the Schott Foundation for Public Education (2012) reported that 52% of Black males graduated from high school compared to 78% of their White peers. In the District of Columbia, the graduation rate for Black males was 38%; 44% in Nebraska; 37% in New York; and 55% in Wisconsin, compared to their White peers, which were 88% in the District of Columbia; 86% in Nebraska; 78% in New York; and 92% in Wisconsin.

A second indicator is performance on statewide tests. The Schott Foundation for Public Education (2012) reported that in four major cities, the percentage of Black males with above average reading proficiency scores on statewide tests was Boston (10%), Charlotte (12%), Miami (11%), and New York (13%), compared to their White peers, which was 45%, 50%, 41%, and 32%, respectively. Even worse, this report revealed that two cities had tremendously low levels of Black male test proficiency - Cleveland (3%) and Milwaukee (3%)—compared to their White peers, which were 17% and 21%, respectively.

A third indicator of the achievement gap relates to suspensions and expulsions, which affects the educational performance of Black males and their ability to achieve acceptable school outcomes. Information from the U.S. Department of Education, Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC, 2012) revealed that Black males were three times more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than their White peers.

## **Defining Dyslexia**

Before moving forward, it is critical to establish a definition of dyslexia. The definition of Lyon, Shaywitz, and Shaywitz (2003) seems to capture the essence of this reading disorder. They defined dyslexia as a:

... Specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experiences that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge (p. 2).

Despite having average or above average intelligence, students with dyslexia have difficulty acquiring reading skills at a proficient level (Berninger et al., 2006; Byrnes & Wasik, 2009; Catts, Hogan, & Adlof 2005; Gustafson, Ferreira & Ronnberg, 2007; Snowling & Hulme, 2005; Snowling, 2000; Troia, 2004; Wolf, 2007). They may also have difficulty learning the alphabet, rhyming words, and connecting letters to their sounds (Cassar & Treiman, 2004; O'Connor & Bell, 2004) as well as a plethora of other associated conditions.

## **Intersection of Race and Dyslexia**

Race and dyslexia is an area that needs more research (Blanchett, 2010; Blanchett, Klingner, & Harry, 2009). Lindo (2006) examined 10 years of articles in this area from *Reading Research Quarterly* (1994-2004), the *Journal of Educational Psychology* (1994-2004) and all volumes of the *Journal of Scientific Study of Reading* (1997-2007). Lindo's analysis revealed that none of the research articles reported conclusions by race and suggested that in addition to increasing the quantity of rigorous studies for this population, more reading interventions need to include Black students (Hoyles & Hoyles, 2010; Proctor, Graves & Esch, 2012).

Scholars have suggested that the specific study of Black males with dyslexia has been long neglected. For example, D.Y. Ford (personal communication, Jan 5, 2012) stated, "Little to nothing exists on this population and topic" and J. Moore (personal communication, May 18, 2012) stated, "It is a topical area that certainly needs a lot of attention".

To investigate the extent of research on Black males with dyslexia, an experienced library operations manager/reference librarian whom I will call T. X. Alpha conducted a search using SAGE Premium Journal and the keywords Black students AND dyslexia, gender AND dyslexia, and Black AND dyslexia. T. X. Alpha (personal communication, October 7, 2013) noted:

So far I have been unable to find any research paper that ties dyslexia and Black males. I searched primarily in the SAGE journal database and there are a few articles that mention race as one of the factors of their research, but there is no conclusion that generalizes reading disabilities to Black male students. There are a couple that address the gender factor, but not race and gender together.

Next, T. X. Alpha provided insight regarding another database that could be searched – ProQuest Educational Journals. The specific content of this search focused on education topics and resulted in 283 articles. However, none of these articles focused on Black males with dyslexia nor did they concentrate on the unique academic needs of Black males with dyslexia. These articles focused on general studies of dyslexia. In contrast, there were 9,008 articles on Black males in special education and Black males 'at-risk'. An imbalance of literature on Black males with dyslexia may reflect misguided thinking about Black males with dyslexia not having this learning disability diagnosed and, instead, placed in special education classes for emotional or behavioral disorders.

## **Black Males with Dyslexia**

The extent to which dyslexia contributes to gaps in reading levels among Black males and other students is unclear. The lack of data is evidenced as Black males with dyslexia are understudied (Connor, 2008). The rate of dyslexia among Black students has not been well researched, and

according to researchers associated with The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity (2014), approximately one in five (20%) of all students (i.e., 6 out of 30 students in a typical classroom) suffer from dyslexia. Black males with dyslexia may have even more challenges because they face both racial discrimination and are overrepresented in special education, which can contribute significantly to the reading gap.

Therefore, it makes sense that studying Black males with dyslexia and identifying ways to address this condition could make an important contribution toward reducing the reading gap. Among the factors contributing to the reading gap are lack of awareness of the intersection of race and dyslexia (Connor, 2008) and the inadequacy of remediation and intervention programs in response to the needs of Black students, in particular, Black students with dyslexia (Lindo, 2006).

Black males who have dyslexia potentially face a ‘triple’ burden. They face the mutual problems of other Black students such as prejudice, discrimination, and inadequate resources (Ladson-Billings, 2012; de Valenzuela, Copeland, Qi, Park, 2006; West-Olatuji, Baker & Brooks, 2006). They face the common problems often associated with dyslexia (Byrnes & Wasik, 2009; Catts et al., 2005; Vellutino & Fletcher, 2005). And, they are confronted with racial stigmas such as being labeled ‘at-risk’ and dysfunctional. Unfortunately, with such labels, Black males are often misdiagnosed and placed in special education for behavioral or cognitive disorders rather than programs for remediation of their dyslexia (Gardner & Hsin, 2008). As a result, they may not receive appropriate intervention; and they may be isolated from standard academic programs, despite being capable of achieving in a general classroom, if given appropriate accommodations.

### **Deficit Thinking**

Deficit thinking cannot be discounted in scholarship on Black males with dyslexia in special education. This kind of thinking undermines the proper diagnosis of dyslexia, which could add to the increasing number of Black males who do not know they have dyslexia and thus are not receiving effective remediation (Donovan & Gross, 2002; Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Feggins-Azziz, 2006).

Teachers who exhibit deficit thinking place Black males in dead-end situations that can lead to frustration and alienation (Ford, 2013, 2010). Their deficit-oriented views can influence students’ behavior, perhaps causing withdrawal from school, acting out, low self-efficacy, poor attitudes, and eventual low academic success (Whiting, 2009; Young & Ley, 2002). Students displaying such behaviors may relate all too well to Young’s (2007) refrain in his manuscript titled *Your Average NIGGA Performing Race Literacy and Masculinity*, in which he describes an almost universal attitude that may be possessed by Black males who display deficit-thinking regarding their academic abilities, in particular, and life in general. When behaving in this manner, as a result of feeling neglected, it is not surprising that Black males often experience academic difficulties and ineffective instruction in academic institutions (Anastasiou, Gardner, & Michail, 2011; Bailey, 2003; Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Grantham et al., 2011; Horace, 2006; Hosp & Reschly, 2003; Jackson & Moore 2006; Lee, 2008; Noguera, 2008; Tatum, 2005, 2009; Taylor, Pearson, Peterson & Rodriguez, 2003).

## Culturally Appropriate Assessment and Interventions

### Culturally Appropriate Assessment

Dyslexia and how it contributes to achievement is relatively absent in educational literature and failure to highlight Black males with this developmental reading disorder inhibits professionals from developing an understanding of the resources and interventions needed to enhance academic achievement. An essential factor in the remediation of dyslexia is culturally appropriate assessment. If dyslexia is not accurately diagnosed, Black males with dyslexia will continue to experience academic problems, be seen as defiant, and receive the label of emotional or behavioral disorder (Gardner & Hsin, 2008). Standardized norm-referenced tests alone do not accurately measure a student's intellectual and academic ability (Ferguson, 2003; Ford, 2013). For a strong assessment system, teachers should have knowledge of formal and informal measures of reading proficiency and be skilled in the use of these measures. Leslie and Caldwell (2009) provided important direction for the use of assessments by emphasizing that researchers need to question traditional views of validity and reliability. Like Ford (2013), they also provide examples of assessments that provide implications for best practices in reading achievement such as informal assessments (i.e., think – alouds). Ford (2013) recommended a greater reliance on performance-based assessments and non-verbal intelligence tests. Non-verbal measures reduce the reliance on language and social-cultural influences.

Appropriate and culturally responsive assessment is essential for effective pedagogical practice. Therefore, teachers need to be careful when evaluating students because an incorrect evaluation could hinder cognitive development, which ultimately will set them apart from their peers (Ford & Helms, 2012). Teachers also need to realize that no single assessment is sufficient for diagnosing dyslexia. To be effective, multiple measures should be used over time to assess, facilitate, and monitor students' academic performance, especially in spelling and reading. Multiple measures provide a more complete evaluation, which is essential to guiding instructional practices. While there are many forms of assessment, those comprised of multiple-choice questions generally focus on lower-level skills. To evaluate students' abilities, assessments that measure intelligence, achievement, and reading across multiple contexts are needed.

### Interventions

According to Gavelek and Bresnahan (2009), classroom instruction is viewed through a sociocultural lens and how students make meaning from texts and personal experiences. While there are a number of factors that shape students' learning, I selected four to discuss—classroom organization, instructional strategies, remediation, and culturally relevant pedagogy.

*Classroom organization.* A well-organized classroom is crucial to learning. Teachers should provide opportunities for Black males' interactions in the classroom as much as possible as this is an effective way for them to learn, especially when it comes to spelling and reading. Organization provides much needed structure for Black males with dyslexia; it helps with order, focus, and concentration. With this in mind, as I reflect on my past experiences, there were some special education teachers I had who provided little classroom organization, which left students

unsupervised and not academically engaged. Consequently, with such disorganization, I was disengaged and viewed as defiant and labeled with a behavior problem, instead of those teachers implementing classroom practices that were designed and organized to keep my attention.

Classrooms can be organized in a number of ways, and teachers should incorporate different organizational structures to meet the learning styles of Black males. Examples of organizational structures are individually assigned seating, small groups, student dyads, and peer tutors. Strategically identifying content area peer-tutors in areas such as mathematics and English can be a cost-efficient solution for providing more individualized instruction and mentoring (Fuchs et al., 2011) for Black males.

*Instructional strategies.* There are a number of strategies that teachers can use to address instruction. For Black males with dyslexia, scaffolding is one such strategy that can be used to help them become engaged with content in their texts (Palincsar & Schutz, 2011). Scaffolding techniques may include, for example, direct instruction (e.g., my turn-your turn model), making connections to students' prior knowledge, and teaching vocabulary by using visual aids (i.e., graphic organizer). Not only have I found these strategies valuable from my personal experiences and performance, but also, have found them beneficial when teaching Black males with dyslexia how to spell and read.

Teachers' learning from students is another very useful instructional strategy. By asking specific content questions, teachers can encourage Black males with dyslexia to participate in meaningful conversations that stimulate learning and their motivation (Guthrie et al., 2009; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Miller & Faircloth, 2009).

Questioning can also be used to deepen and enrich knowledge as well as expand their understanding of content. For this strategy, Black males are taught to self-question by modeling, leading, and then releasing responsibility to other students. Specific content questions not only engage Black males with dyslexia in divergent and evaluative reasoning, these types of questions also tap their knowledge. Martin and Duke (2011) stated that questioning is important because it can help students make links between texts and background knowledge, think about exact content within the text, draw out meaning in order to make coherent explanations, develop inferencing skills, and construct key points to build mental representations.

Another effective strategy is think-alouds. This strategy requires students to extract, construct and think about the content, which facilitates their knowledge. Think-alouds tap a metacognitive process where students monitor their reading before, during, and after reading (Baker & Beall, 2009). This instructional strategy can provide valuable insight and information about what cognitive strategies students are using to comprehend text. The foundational framework for think-alouds is the constructivist idea of gaining knowledge.

The specific classroom pedagogies discussed here are necessary to engage Black males with dyslexia in learning because it allows them to make connections between information learned from texts, school, and home. This observation is also shared by Tatum (2005) who stated, "Classroom materials that are effective with adolescent students of minority groups are those that

provide them with multiple opportunities to create links between the text and their prior knowledge” (p. 75).

*Remediation.* Pure and Complete Phonics (PCP; Nash 2012) is a remediation strategy that can be used to correct the language deficits of Black males with dyslexia. PCP employs the concept of direct and explicit instruction and specific references and formats to effectively use the language’s 26 alphabet letter and 103 phonemes or phonemic units to identify 441 assignments for spelling words and 472 assignments for reading words.

PCP identifies instruction across several areas: (a) the dictionary’s diacritical marks; (b) an identification of the six kinds of syllables; (c) a method for teaching and learning how to spell and read words by their left to right sequential sound structure; (d) the use of sequential steps in completing five formats—two for spelling and three for reading; and (e) the use of a special format for teaching the concept of “reverse chaining” in order to enunciate multi-syllabic words.

The objective of PCP is to allow Black males to master the entire phonemic sound structure of the American-English language, which influences cognitive development, increases competence, and helps students become independent learners (Nash, 2012). I selected the word APARTEID to show the instructional procedures for implementing PCP. In so doing, I include: (a) the dictionary’s diacritical marks; (b) an identification of the syllable types; and (c) the use of reverse chaining.

In *Merriam-Webster’s Colligate Dictionary* (11<sup>th</sup> edition, 2009), the word APARTEID is written out twice in bold and regular print. The bold print identifies the phonetic assignments of a given letter or letter-combination(s). The regular print identifies the whole word pronunciation by syllable.

|                   |                  |
|-------------------|------------------|
| Bold Print        | Regular Print    |
| <b>Apart•heid</b> | /ə-ˈpär-tāt-tīt/ |

|                 |                    |                                      |
|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|
| /ə/             |                    | /ā/ /t/                              |
| <b><u>A</u></b> | p <b><u>ar</u></b> | t h <b><u>ei</u></b> <b><u>d</u></b> |

Each letter/letter-team has a diacritical mark placed above it to illustrate the way the graphemes are identified (i.e., sound-by-sound). The letter “A” is identified as a vowel and is an open syllable (OS) because an OS contains an isolated vowel or vowel representation that is not followed by one or more consonants in the syllable. The phonetic value is defined as having the sound represented by the schwa (/ə/), which is the sound the letter ‘u’ represents in the word up. The letter “p” has no mark, while the letters “**ar**” become an R-Controlled syllable because the sound of the vowel or vowels proceeding (r) are masked by the overwhelming sound of the (r) in the syllable (Nash, 2012).

The letter “t” has no mark and the letter “h” is a silent letter. The letter-combinations “ei” make the sound(s) /ā/ or /ī/. What this means is that the letters “ei” are representing the *long-sound* of the letter “A” or “I” and the first most common way to read is “A” and the syllable type is a

vowel team. A vowel team contains two or more adjacent vowels that combine to make one vowel sound in the syllable.

The last sound you hear in the word APARTHEID is the sound 't' and the letter "d" makes the 't' sound and is a Closed syllable (CS) because a CS contains an isolated vowel (or vowel representation) followed by one or more [voice/non-voiced] consonants in the syllable.

The above example demonstrates how the phonetic assignments of a given letter or letter-combinations are identified and how the three-syllable word is to be pronounced from left to right. After Black males have independently mastered the entire sound structure of the American English language, they would be able to automatically read the word from right to left order [reverse chaining] to enunciate the word APARTHEID. Reverse chaining procedure would have them read the last syllable first, sound-by-sound, repeat with the second and first syllable together and then include all three-syllables simultaneously.

*Culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy.* The last area, culturally relevant (or culturally responsive) pedagogy is an instructional practice that enhances students' learning by using cultural referents.

Gay (2002) defined culturally responsive pedagogy as a teaching practice that not only considers students' cultural backgrounds, but also acknowledges their lived experiences. In addition, culturally responsive pedagogy is a framework that can be used to directly connect teachers with students (Ladson-Billings, 2012, 2000). This pedagogy is a process by which teachers can leverage Black males' connections to historical, social, and cultural situations associated with their backgrounds to provide opportunities for higher-level thinking and classroom participation. It is also a venue for teachers to relate to the cultures of students and acknowledge their lived experiences (Paris & Ball, 2009).

Culturally relevant pedagogy not only recognizes students' cultural backgrounds, but also uses a teaching pedagogy to modify teaching practices to embrace students' culture. Ladson-Billings (2012, 2000, 1995) noted that this pedagogy is effective for teaching African American students and relies on students maintaining academic success and cultural competence, and gaining consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of order.

Culturally relevant pedagogy is based on research which asserts that reading is a social practice that is not only influenced by culture and historical contexts [sociocultural context] but also influences reading development (Gavelek & Bresnahan, 2009). Teachers who use culturally responsive methodologies recognize and acknowledge students' cultural background and they use instructional practices that embrace students' culture (Harmon, Kasa-Hendrickson & Neal, 2009; Fairbanks et al., 2009; Ford, 2013; 2011; (Ladson-Billings, 2000).

Teachers must develop a cultural diverse knowledge base in regards to their classroom population and the content in order to avoid a mismatch (Gay, 2002). Having such skill will allow the teacher(s) to build a bridge between Black male' home and school experiences, which will increase their classroom engagement because their cultural or home practices are modeled and valued (Tatum, 2011). Overall, teachers must also raise the bar and have high academic

expectations for their students, especially Black males with dyslexia (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2012).

To connect with Black males, teachers need to step outside the classroom and into their communities to build relationships (Gay, 2002). Instructional practices that incorporate this technique could provide a venue for Black males to feel safe in sharing their backgrounds, which could offer teachers more insight into how they see the world. It may also help teachers to develop a level of trust and gain a deeper understanding of students' views and insights (Gay, 2002).

Another way to understand Black males is to consider how texts can be used as a strategy to engage them academically. Engaging Black males through readings on topics of interest, as well as writings [narratives] or text-based discussions can be empowering by letting Black males see their experiences reflected in books (Tatum & Muhammad, 2012). Teachers should realize that topics of interests can be empowering because when students feel their voices or cultures are being valued, it can lead to a sense of personal liberation. Ford (2011) recognized the power of books for transforming the lives of Black males who can learn from the stories (Ladson-Billings, 2012; 2000).

### **Personal Vignette**

Writing about dyslexia is my self-therapy. I am a Black male who was in special education (grades 3-16), completely illiterate – unable to perform the most basic elements of reading, writing, spelling, and grammar – and, as a result, was filled with academic frustration and rage. I started college with elementary spelling and reading levels in my freshman year at the University of Wisconsin – Oshkosh. However, while there, I was exposed to the Project Success, a program that transformed my life. Based on my experiences—both positive and negative—I feel obligated to become an advocate for assessing and remediating Black males with dyslexia by sharing my story.

Throughout my entire academic journey, I have been faced with difficulties compounded by ineffective instruction in the areas of spelling and reading. Being in special education as opposed to general education between third and twelfth grade exacerbated the problems. In elementary school, testing was conducted and the results of the evaluation revealed the following diagnoses: LD, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), and Behavioral Disorder (BD). The school that I attended at that time did not offer special education services, and I had to transfer to a school that offered smaller classes. The class I was sent to was comprised of all Black males, a White aide who rested her head down on the desk, a White female teacher who was disconnected from the students, and students running around the room. I recall the classroom resembling a prison, as it was extremely institutionalized and quite depressing. Teachers offered little instruction in basic skills like reading, spelling, writing, and math, and there were no opportunities to engage in high-level thinking or problem solving.

Fast-forwarding to six years later, I enrolled in high school and experienced another environment in which there was minimal teaching and learning for my LD. After a turbulent three years of high school and two years attending an alternative school where I continued to underachieve, I

wanted to attend college. I made an appointment with the high school counselor but this person had no interest in helping me. In fact, during the meeting, the following was said, "...You are not college material and should look at mechanics." My dreams plummeted, but I did not let the misguided and unprofessional counselor deter me. After doing some investigating, my mother discovered that there were colleges for students with LD. My mother helped me complete college applications because I was too illiterate to complete them on my own.

As an 18-year old, I took the Woodcock Johnson Achievement Battery subtests to measure my achievement level in the areas of letter-word identification, passage comprehension, spelling and word attack. My grade equivalent scores were as follows: (a) 5.4 for letter-word identification; (b) 2.3 for comprehension; (c) 2.3 for spelling; and (d) K.7 for word attack. In spite of my abysmally poor preparation, I was accepted and enrolled in the University of Wisconsin—Oshkosh and the Project Success program. Dr. Robert T. Nash, was able to see past my frustration and anger, and recognized my talents when others were convinced that college was not an option for me.



*Dr. Robert T. Nash (l), the man that saved my life.*

As a freshman, being one of the most disabled spellers/readers in a summer cohort of about 55 students was demoralizing; however, my spirit did not allow me to give up—I worked tirelessly. Two years later, testing was conducted again to measure my achievement levels. The evaluator selected several Woodcock-Johnson Achievement Battery subtests and the results revealed the following in terms of my grade equivalent: (a) 6.7 for letter-word identification; (b) 11.0 for comprehension; (c) 3.9 for spelling; and (d) 2.8 for word attack.

With results such as these, attending an institution of higher education should not have been an option for me; however, the intent of the Project Success program was to remediate students' language deficits. Following extensive remediation and participation in PCP (Nash, 2012), a reading intervention that focused on multi-sensory and explicit instruction, I gradually became academically independent. The Project Success program uses a Simultaneous Tri-modal Multi-Sensory Instructional Procedure (SMSIP; Nash, 2012) that emphasizes grapheme-phoneme representation (Ehri & Snowling, 2004; Gustafson, Ferreira, & Ronnberg, 2007; McMurray, et al., 2008; Parker & Riley, 2010; Rost & McMurray, 2009).

SMSIP procedures are based on the teaching principles of direct instruction where teachers first model the desired task and then lead students through the task on a step-by-step basis before testing for independent mastery. In addition to assisting me with my reading skills, the Project Success staff allowed me to voice my anxieties and limitations, and also taught me strategies I could employ to diminish the effect of my learning disability in college and thereafter.

The Project Success helped me develop perseverance, which helped me earn a bachelor's degree in Human Services. It took six years because I needed to learn things that were not taught to me

during my secondary education, in addition to new college material, which was extremely challenging. Once I graduated with my Bachelor's degree, I wanted more education and five years later graduated from DePaul University with a Master's degree in Education.

Now, I am a doctoral candidate, in a Language and Literacy program, a field I had not studied and knew little about, but have flourished in my academics. Aside from the writing requirements, the course content (i.e., learning the rhetoric, vocabulary, and theoretical perspectives) has presented many challenges that initially seemed insurmountable. Reflecting over the course of my academic journey, I wish I had received a balanced approach to teaching, which included not only spelling and reading remediation, but also writing instruction. Learning to write is not any easy task, especially at the doctorate level where a student should already know the art of writing. For instance, I had to quickly learn the art of writing in order to navigate and survive in the doctoral program, which has not been an easy task. I am progressing, and share my journey to hopefully galvanize scholars to increase research on the intersections between race and dyslexia, which is limited, as evidenced from the review of the literature.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Given the state of affairs for Black males in the academic arena, it is not surprising that they continue to face both racial and disability problems. Black males are still subject to institutional racism; and inequalities are still prevalent within the academic system and classrooms.

The purpose of this article was to call attention to the need for research on Black males with dyslexia, its impact on their reading proficiency and on appropriate assessment and classroom pedagogy to address their academic needs. Currently, there is limited research on theories and models of reading, identification strategies, appropriate classroom pedagogy, and remediation or intervention strategies for Black males with dyslexia. Yet, Black males continue to be misdiagnosed for dyslexia (Hoyles & Hoyles, 2010; Lindo, 2006), which contributes to the reading gap. Addressing the factors that contribute to the misdiagnoses of Black males with dyslexia can be detrimental, especially when there is a significant passage of time without remediation. I provided several instructional strategies that can be used to help Black males with dyslexia achieve academically. It is my hope that this article provides the framework for collaboration about appropriate assessment, classroom pedagogy, and research on Black males with dyslexia.

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# The Utility of Empathy for White Female Teachers' Culturally Responsive Interactions with Black Male Students

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Teachers aiming to become culturally responsive must be concerned with negotiating professional interactions that produce favorable outcomes for the culturally diverse students under their charge. Very few studies offer empirical evidence of empathy's utility in the culturally responsive classroom, especially when the teacher is culturally different from his or her students. This study is an examination of empathy's benefit for improving the student-teacher interactions of four White female educators and a group of their Black male students. Findings suggest that empathy helps: a) facilitate teachers' instructional flexibility and risk-taking; b) establish trusting student-teacher relationships; and c) support teacher's ability to intervene proactively to ensure students meet high academic expectations. The nature, importance, and usefulness of empathy for helping teachers maintain interactions with youth that produces evidence of cultural responsiveness are discussed.

**Keywords:** empathy, multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching, student-teacher interaction, Black males

The literature on culturally responsive teaching provides a platform for helping teachers recognize, appreciate, and build on the cultural differences students bring to school (Gay, 2002, 2010, 2013). However, scholars have found that teachers who identify themselves as culturally responsive are either not clear about what it means to be culturally responsive or they think of themselves as culturally responsive, but maintain deficit perspectives of diverse youth (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Warren, 2012; Valencia, 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). This line of thinking can be especially problematic for White teachers who unintentionally oppress students because they have failed to resign dominant frames of reference when attempting to determine which examples, activities, and instructional experiences are culturally responsive. That is, ways of seeing the world and cultural norms that are anchored in the histories and heritage of the dominant racial group in the United States.

In the multicultural education literature, empathy has been theorized as a useful tool for responding to the aforementioned issue by closing the perception gap between teachers and their students (Dolby, 2012; Marx & Pray, 2011; McAllister & Irvine, 2002). Empathy, the act of acquiring perspective and adequately responding to the needs of others based on an interpretation of their immediate needs (Davis, 1994), is highly beneficial for producing culturally responsive interactions with youth. Still, too few studies have documented the tangible benefits of teachers applying empathy in an effort to be culturally responsive.

## Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Gay (2010) insists that culturally responsive teaching includes, “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them.” (p. 31). A primary responsibility of a culturally responsive teacher is to tailor instruction and negotiate interactions that duly consider the intelligence, expertise, and competence students bring to the classroom. Thus, culturally responsive pedagogy can be conceptualized as an intellectual, moral, and socio-political awareness of student diversity that informs multiple aspects of the teaching and learning process, including how teachers negotiate interactions with youth and families of color (Gay, 2013). Teachers who employ culturally responsive teaching practices in their work comprehend the influence of race and ethnicity for shaping how students define and express culture, and they use this knowledge to broker interactions that account for and directly respond to the social and cultural *perspectives* (or points of view) each student possesses. Culturally responsive teaching begins with acknowledging the considerable intellectual, experiential, and perspectival diversity students bring to the classroom. It builds on the unique contributions of *individual* students regardless of the overt or seemingly obvious cultural or racial similarities among them.

Hence, *culturally responsive interactions*, an outgrowth of culturally responsive pedagogy, can be viewed as student-teacher interactions that directly cater to the social and cultural needs, norms, realities, experiences, and preferences of racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students. Over the course of a school year, students will have hundreds of interactions with their teachers and every interaction has an intended outcome and an *actual* outcome.

## Teacher Empathy

One is hard-pressed to find a conclusive, all-encompassing definition of empathy in the literature. The construct has been studied from multiple perspectives in fields that range from psychology and psychotherapy to evolutionary biology and social neuroscience (Bohart et al, 2002). This study has settled on a baseline understanding of empathy useful for discerning its expression in social relationships. That is, looking at empathy as the act of acquiring perspective, demonstrating sympathy, and adequately responding to the needs of others based on an interpretation of their immediate needs, and feedback from the person whom the empathetic response is targeted (Davis, 1994).

Empathetic teaching is central to culturally responsive interactions, and by extension, essential for cultivating culturally responsive professional teaching practices. Empathy has been thought to be especially important for individuals teaching across differences, including but not limited to race, socioeconomic class status, and gender (Dolby, 2012; Howard, 2006; Howard, 2010; Milner, 2010). Teachers who demonstrate evidence of empathy in their teaching are more likely to negotiate interactions that produce favorable student academic and behavioral outcomes, which may include increased student engagement and assignment completion (Warren, 2013).

When considering the overrepresentation of White female teachers in K-12 public schools (Toldson, 2013), it is essential to tell stories of White female teachers who demonstrate success with students of color and to document the dimensions of that success. Empathy has been theorized to improve the quality of teacher interactions in multicultural classroom settings (Dolby, 2012; McAllister & Irvine, 2002). In other words, it is useful to learn more about how

empathy supports a White teacher's ability to effectively communicate and respond to student needs across difference. It is likely that White female teachers who are effective with students of color exhibit evidence of empathy in their interactions. The urgency to provide the field with tools that will improve social and academic outcomes for Black males, for example, is of paramount concern for the author. Too many public K-12 education institutions in the US consistently fail to provide African-American males (or Black) males an adequate education (Davis, 2003; Noguera, 2008; Toldson & Lewis, 2012). The present study is an attempt to better understand the potential outcomes of empathy's application as a tool for improving cross-cultural and cross-racial student teacher interactions. The findings shed light on the utility of empathy as a teaching disposition useful for bolstering one's culturally responsive pedagogy.

### *Differentiating Empathy from Sympathy*

Both sympathy and empathy stem from separate intellectual traditions. Up until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, sympathy was the term of choice for describing a human's ability to imitate or imagine the perspectives of another human being (Wispé, 1986). Although much research has been conducted to trace the distinct origins of empathy versus sympathy (Hunsdahl, 1967; Gladstein, 1984), much of this work has led to conflicting understandings of the relationship between the two constructs.

Sympathy, according to its earliest roots in 18<sup>th</sup> century moral philosophy, is characterized as "feeling for someone, and refers to feelings of sorrow, or feeling sorry" (Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987, p. 6). In recent years, scholars have generally agreed that sympathy is analogous to the shared affect one person has for another in a distressing situation, and that it is a necessary aspect of empathizing with someone (Wispé, 1986). While social psychologists concur that empathy requires some form of sympathy in its application, sympathizing alone does not constitute empathy's full expression (Davis, 1994).

In social psychology literature, sympathy has been widely referred to as empathic concern. Davis (1994) and Eisenberg and Strayer (1987) agree that empathic concern is characterized by an emotional connection or "feeling with" an individual that creates a heightened awareness of that individual's plight. Empathy can and does include feeling with or for someone, but it also includes the adoption of other people's psychological perspective in order to see the person's circumstance from his or her point of view.

While sympathy is viewed as a way to relate, empathy is regarded primarily as a means of knowing (Wispé, 1986). The word empathy was translated from the German aesthetic word *Einfühlung* and introduced by German scholar Theodor Lipps to describe a means of projecting one's self into others (Tichenor, 1909). It is actualized as the "inner imitation" or internal resonance an individual goes through when observing another person's emotional, physical, or situational condition (Stueber, 2006). This internal resonance produces an emotional *and* a physical response intended to alleviate personal distress or minimize the adverse impacts of an individual's confounding or precarious circumstance.

### *Understanding the Function of Empathy in Human Interaction*

The full expression of empathy includes both empathic concern and *perspective taking* (Batson et.al, 1991; Eisenberg & Miller, 1987; Wispé, 1986). Davis (1994) defines perspective taking as "the tendency to spontaneously adopt the psychological point of view of others in everyday life",

while empathic concern is “the tendency to experience feelings of sympathy and compassion for unfortunate others” (p. 57). Acquiring or adopting others’ points of view and using these points of view to determine how to communicate and respond with them is no easy task. The capacity to empathize adeptly develops over time and is affected by numerous social variables such as social context, personal distress, and familiarity or closeness to the person who is on the receiving end of the empathetic response (Batson, 1991; Decety & Ickes, 2009).

A process for educators to apply empathy in student-teacher interactions includes perspective-taking, using students’ social and cultural perspectives to guide subsequent interactions with them, and capitalizing on student feedback to adapt and repeat the process (Warren, 2013). Empathy functions as a mediator between what the teacher (thinks he or she) knows about students’ own needs in any given interaction, and students’ perspectives about what they need. This becomes especially important when considering where and how teachers’ points of view diverge from students or families around issues related to diverse cultural approaches and instructional decisions.

### *Culturally Responsive Interactions as Building Blocks of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy*

Irvine and York (1995) insist that student-teacher interactions are the places where learning takes place. Similarly, the core of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) is the interactions between teachers and their students. Making sure each interaction appreciates, builds upon and affirms the cultural identities of youth can be extraordinarily challenging work. Morrison, Robbins, and Rose (2008) concede that engaging in culturally responsive pedagogy seems “herculean” to teachers who are attempting to balance the many demands of their jobs. They also argue CRP “clashes with the traditional ways in which education is carried out in our society” (p. 444). Engaging in the arduous task of getting inside students’ lives long enough to begin to see the world through their eyes may seem impossible considering all that teachers are expected to accomplish with students daily. Still, just as Milner (2010) suggests, teachers must start where they are, but commit to moving forward by learning from and about students with each interaction. Empathy is one variable worthy of greater consideration for its utility to help teachers negotiate culturally responsive interactions.

Perspective-taking is central to applying empathy in social relationships. With that said, trial and error is fundamental to the perspective-taking process as practitioners will likely fail to accurately interpret students’ needs at some point or another. Nonetheless, every interaction with a student is a learning opportunity if a teacher is willing to accept student feedback (Warren, 2013). The feedback teachers receive is a form of perspective-taking. Teachers who develop perspective-taking or social perspective-taking skills (Gehlbach & Brinkworth, 2012) will learn to draw meaningful parallels between their own lives and that of their students.

### **Connecting Cultural Responsiveness, White Teachers, and Student-Teacher Relationships**

Gay’s (2002, 2010, 2013) works on culturally responsive teaching provides a robust framework for the use of culturally responsive strategies, methods, and practices for building on students’ culture to improve their academic and social outcomes. Building student-teacher relationships is one of the tenets of cultural responsiveness espoused by Gay. However, the teacher has to construct the relationship and determine how that “relationship” looks in practice.

Demonstration of cultural caring is another critical tenet of culturally responsive teaching espoused by Gay. According to Gay (2002), “Caring is a moral imperative, a social responsibility, and a pedagogical necessity” (p. 109) for teachers who aim to create classroom climates conducive to learning for ethnically diverse students. Although teachers are encouraged to be caring, Whiteness shades how teachers interpret and make meaning of such characteristics (Hinchey, 2006; Leonardo, 2009; Lewis, 2003; Marx, 2006). Whiteness represents a layer of social and cultural perspective most akin to White racial norms, truths, expectations, and experiences. Teachers bring their own set of perspectives to their work with students. They likely demonstrate care in cultural forms familiar to their own experiences and socio-cultural understanding of care. These forms may differ from students’ norms and perspectives of care. The result can be a series of conflicts that, unbeknownst to the teacher, are caused by the divergence of perspective between how students interpret caring behaviors versus how the teacher believes he or she is enacting care. Valenzuela (1999) brings this concern to the forefront in her discussion of the “politics of care,” which focuses on the possibility that care can be one-sided and self-serving. It must be noted that this is not a phenomenon exclusive to White teachers. Ullman and Hecsh (2011) assert that being a person of color does not mean that he or she will be more culturally responsive than a White person. The authors assert that being a member of a historically marginalized racial or culture group is not coterminous with understanding the everyday realities of contemporary youth from the same racial or culture group.

### *Charting the Outcomes*

Because teachers may bring limited knowledge about cultural differences to the classroom (Gay, 2013), those concerned with developing a more culturally responsive teacher workforce should give more attention to the academic and social outcomes that result from the use of culturally responsive strategies. This information will likely inform how said strategy needs to be modified. Central to how a strategy is interpreted and interpolated into a teacher’s practice are the social and cultural perspectives employed to frame its use. Ladson-Billings’ (1994) empirical work is most cited for the specific student outcomes or behaviors one should expect from teachers who incorporate culturally responsive (culturally relevant) approaches in their instruction. Ladson-Billings’ classic study of effective teachers of African American children provides the field with a set of indicators for which to measure a teacher’s ability to serve African American youth. Prior to this work, cultural deficit theories abounded for explaining why Black (African American) kids were not performing on par with their White counterparts. However, Ladson-Billings set out to demonstrate that any teacher, including White teachers, can and should be expected to be effective teachers of diverse students.

From the works of Ladson-Billings (1994, 2006), we learn that culturally relevant teachers can help produce students who are academically successful, demonstrate cultural competence, and have some sociopolitical consciousness. The first step for a teacher aiming to be culturally responsive is to adopt the student’s perspective to inform the strategy to be used, turn attention to the outcomes, and make the necessary pedagogical adjustments. If the aforementioned are evident in student behaviors, then it is likely a teacher is utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy. We can infer cultural responsiveness from tangible student-teacher interaction outcomes, as opposed to a narrow emphasis on a teacher’s description of herself or her teaching practices.

## Utility of Empathy for Culturally Responsive Interactions

Tangible indicators of success with students of color can better position stakeholders to measure the effectiveness of a teacher's cultural responsiveness. Evaluating effects of a teacher's cultural responsiveness by simply ascribing a value and meaning to their behavior, emotions, or specific actions can be highly fallacious. Similarly, it is less productive to attempt to name a teacher as more or less empathetic by the way he or she interacts with students. Feshbach and Feshbach (2009) argue that the application of empathy happens most poignantly during student-teacher interactions. Their premise serves as the basis for this study. It is theorized here that teachers who are successful with historically underserved student populations demonstrate empathy in their instructional practices; and Davis (1994) provides a useful interpretive framework for scrutinizing the social relationships of teachers (e.g., student-teacher interactions) aspiring to be culturally responsive. Hence, the current study adds to the empirical literature on culturally responsive pedagogy by first providing documentation of the nature and contours of the student-teacher interactions of four teachers identified as effective educators. Secondly, the interaction narratives to follow provide a record of outcomes resulting from such interactions. Because outcomes matter most when attempting to develop and enact a truly culturally responsive pedagogy, empathy was presumed to be a factor that influences the interactions of effective teachers selected for participation in this study.

### Methodology

The purpose of this study was to systematically document the benefits of empathy in the student-teacher interactions of four White female teachers and their Black male students. The study describes the explicit benefits of empathy in the day-to-day classroom interactions of teachers and students in a multicultural classroom setting. The primary research question underlying this study was: *What is the utility of empathy for helping White female teachers negotiate interactions with their Black male students?* The findings of empathy's utility suggest that the student-teacher interactions under investigation qualify as culturally responsive based on evidence of student outcomes characteristic of a skilled, culturally responsive teacher (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2010; Irvine, 1991, 2002; Paris, 2012).

### Participants

Teacher participant selection was based on principals' perceptions that they have White female teachers in their building who demonstrate cultural responsiveness based on indicators from the literature (Gay, 2002, 2010; Howard, 2010). These teachers were nominated using a modified version of Ladson-Billings' (1994) community sampling approach, and a group of past and/or present Black male students. One thirty-minute semi-structured interview (Rossman & Rallis, 2006) was conducted with the principals prior to their compilation of a list of White female teachers. At the conclusion of the interview, the principals submitted a list of five to eight names to the researcher for consideration. A snowball sampling technique (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981) was used to select the principals after an e-mail was distributed to the researcher's professional network of education practitioners. The principals involved in the selection process were administrators in a majority African American school district on the fringes of a major Midwestern city. Teachers in the district are predominately White topping more than 75% of the total teacher workforce. The district, which was at one time majority White, had now become predominately Black. The townships and villages where the high schools were located

experienced an influx of Black students from the big city in the last decade. This posed many new pedagogical challenges for the majority White teachers in each school. The district was now forced to deal with similar challenges of any large urban school district including poverty, underpreparedness, and student mobility.

Student selection of teacher participants involved three 1-hour focus groups (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005) with Black male juniors and seniors. Juniors and seniors are the oldest students and would have had the most experience and interaction with White female teachers in the building. These students were randomly selected by each school's administration and counselors to ensure a heterogeneous grouping of Black males with varying academic and discipline profiles. The students participated in a discussion of their experiences with White female teachers while in high school. Each of them took turns telling stories of frustration with White female teachers and the various factors shaping that frustration. They also discussed the qualities of White female teachers they found to be exemplary. At the end of the discussion, the students debated and ranked a list of White female teachers in their high school they believed negotiated really positive relationships and interactions with Black males. To finalize the selection of teacher participants, the researcher crosschecked the administrators' list with the student focus group list. Beginning with the top-ranked teachers, individuals whose name appeared on both lists were invited to participate in the study. Four White female teachers were recruited for participation in this study and each of them consented.

The following two sections are an overview of the research methods and analysis, which include classroom observations, student focus groups, and semi-structured interviews with teachers. Data sources included four in-depth, semi-structured interviews with each of the four White female teacher participants, over 40 hours of classroom observation, and data from student focus groups. Each teacher first participated in an initial interview. During this interview, the four White female teachers separately defined empathy and elaborated on its relevance to their classroom teaching practice, including their conceptions of empathy's significance to their interactions with Black males.

### *Procedure and Data Analysis of Classroom Observations*

Non-participant observation (Glesne, 2006; Rossman & Rallis, 2006) of each teacher's classroom was a particularly important method. The observations alternated between morning and afternoon classes once or twice a week over a ten-week data collection period similar to the approach taken by Ladson-Billings (1994) in her study. Whole class periods were observed. Each teacher received over five hundred minutes of classroom observation. Special care was taken to record student-teacher interactions during each observation using Bakeman and Gottman's (1997) sequential time interval analysis approach and "event recording" (p. 54) to document patterns in behavior. Each interaction was considered an "event" and was observed for an entire interaction (e.g., a teacher explaining lab instructions to a group of Black male students and the students' feedback to the teacher's directions).

After the observation, the behavior was recorded and coded based on the various aspects of the student-teacher interaction using Davis' (1994) process model for empathy expression, which is comprised of three major domains — antecedents, intrapersonal outcomes, and interpersonal outcomes. *Antecedents* represented anything that happened just prior to interactions that provided

a context for observed interactions. *Intrapersonal Outcomes* focused on what the teacher did after the initial exchange with the student. *Interpersonal Outcomes* were the internal processes that resulted from the interaction exchange between teacher and student, which manifested as physical outcomes of the interaction.

Figure 1 shows a sample line from the observation protocol inspired by Davis' (1994) process model of empathy and examples of EC and PT from the classroom observations. For the antecedent domain, the researcher recorded important words, the lesson instructions or objectives, and the student's physical behavior. There was also an attempt to balance reference to student-initiated interactions and teacher-initiated interactions. For the intrapersonal outcomes domain, the researcher recorded the teachers' physical behaviors and pertinent verbal responses (e.g., facial expressions; teacher-student proximity/movement towards the student; head nods, etc.). The teachers' physical behaviors were used to infer emotional responses. The researcher also noted particularly surprising, confusing, or interesting interactions that were later discussed during follow-up interviews with each teacher. Lastly, for the interpersonal outcomes domain, the researcher recorded how the student responded to or interpreted the teacher's actions during the interaction. The researcher periodically came back to this section of the observation protocol for each interaction to document whether the intended outcome was accomplished as well as to get a sense of the finality of the outcomes produced by each interaction or event observed during the class period. There was also a space to memo and jot down follow up questions for the teachers (see Figure 1).

Each interval lasted no more than one-minute on the high end and twenty seconds on the low end. Observing in intervals enabled the researcher to capture full details of a single interaction including the antecedents, social context, as well as student and teacher reactions during the interaction. These events served as the building blocks of the interaction snapshots or interaction narratives used to capture patterns in teacher behaviors, attitudes, and approaches. After 2 - 4 classroom observations, the events were analyzed to identify themes or patterns in teacher behaviors and to isolate tangible evidence of EC and PT. Also included in Figure 1 are a few of examples of actions or practices determined to demonstrate EC and PT.

Observation data informed construction of the interview protocol, but was analyzed separate from the interview transcripts. Patterns in teacher behavior under the columns labeled as interpersonal and intrapersonal outcomes were analyzed across the three different interaction types (i.e. academic, behavioral, and social/relational) in two phases. The first phase was an analysis of behavioral and pedagogical practices for each individual teacher. These were the recurring habits, physical gestures, and rhetoric in her interactions with students. These actions were later discussed with each individual teacher in her follow up interviews. The actual questions asked during follow up and exit interviews were derived from these themes in each teacher participant's classroom observations. Highlighting aforesaid behaviors in the follow-up interview provided the researcher with greater understanding of the source, origin, motivation, and intention in the teacher's professional decision making. The second phase was an examination of congruent behaviors exhibited in these categories by *each* of the four teachers and themes from interviews with the women.

**Figure 1. Sample Portion of the Observation Protocol and Examples of Perspective Taking and Empathic Concern**

| <b>Observation Form</b>  |                               |  |                                |
|--|-------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| <b>Teacher and School Name</b>   |                               | <b>Date</b>  | <b>Class Period</b>            |
| <b>Interaction Narrative</b>   |                               |  |                                |
| <b><u>Academic</u></b>   |                               |  | <i>Questions for Follow-Up</i> |
| <b>Time:</b>   | <b>Intrapersonal Outcomes</b> | <b>Interpersonal Outcomes</b>  |                                |
| <b>Antecedents:</b>  |                               |  |                                |
| <b>Miscellaneous Notes/Analysis Memos:</b>   |                               |  |                                |
| <i><b>Perspective Taking*</b></i><br>(Acquiring Student Perspective)   |                               | <i><b>Empathic Concern*</b></i><br>(Sympathy or Affective Sharing)   |                                |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequent oral and written communication (i.e. journaling, letter writing)</li> <li>• “Family Business”: Class Story Sharing or whole class “Rap Sessions”</li> <li>• Knowledge of the socio-political, socio-cultural, and community context</li> </ul> |                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using the theme of family to communicate academic and behavioral expectations</li> <li>• Adopting and utilizing aspects of students’ home language and cultural dispositions to maximize affective sharing</li> <li>• Acting in the interests of the “whole” child when determining instructional priorities</li> </ul> |                                |
| *See Warren (2013) for a more detailed explanation of Perspective Taking and Empathic Concern  |                               |  |                                |
| NOTE: This table would also include at least four more rows for behavioral interactions followed by another four rows for social/relational interactions   |                               |  |                                |

*Procedure and Data Analysis of Interviews*

The observations were useful for capturing the behavioral dimension of empathetic expressions. The follow-up and exit interviews were central to discerning inferences about the emotional and cognitive dimensions of empathetic expression. The two 1½-hour follow-up interviews and exit interview with each participant were mainly conducted to confirm and clarify patterns in behavior, and outcomes for the interactions observed. They were scheduled to occur after every 3 – 4 classroom observations. For example, the researcher noted that a participant rarely raised her voice during behavioral interactions despite how visibly frustrated she seemed. The researcher

pointed this out during the follow-up interview to get a better sense of the intrapersonal outcomes, or the teacher's motivation, intention, and priority for behaving in such a manner. This enabled the researcher to better infer the teacher's ability to demonstrate empathic concern and perspective taking in her interactions with students.

According to Davis (1994), empathy is understood as both intellectual (perspective taking) and emotional (empathic concern). Student-teacher interactions as described during the teacher participant exit and follow up interviews were analyzed for expression of empathic concern (EC) and perspective-taking (PT) using a phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenon under examination was the demonstration of empathy in student-teacher interactions. The researcher read the transcripts at least three times to identify key words, examples, and scenarios that suggested demonstration of empathic concern and perspective taking. The researcher categorized this evidence by teacher and interaction type. Then, he matched descriptions and justifications provided during teacher participant interviews to the various instructional strategies and approaches observed in each teacher participant's classroom interactions. Finally, the researcher cataloged the various student outcomes observed and discussed them in the exit and follow-up interviews to infer the benefits of empathy's application by each teacher participant.

Several steps were taken to ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Morrow, 2005). Interview and focus group data were used to triangulate (Patton, 2002) themes coded from the observation data. Taken together the observation data, focus group interviews, and teacher participant interviews were used to construct an understanding of the multidimensionality of empathy's expression in each teacher participant's classroom interactions. The follow up and exit interviews were also used to member-check (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) themes from the observations. These interviews provided the researcher with the opportunity to assess the accuracy and credibility of behavior patterns noted in observations of each teacher's classroom interactions. These conversations were the cornerstone to the data collection process as they were necessary for confirming and/or rethinking interpretations of the data from the classroom observations. At the conclusion of the data collection process, teacher participants were invited to review and provide feedback on themes derived from the interview data and early drafts of the research report. There was also an older colleague who acted as an external auditor and reviewed the data analysis process and transcripts. He offered feedback and considerations for modifying inferences about empathy's utility. Three overarching themes of empathy's usefulness emerged from the confluence of focus group, observation, and interview data. The combination of the three data sets helped crystallize descriptions of empathy's expression and framed empathy's utility.

## **Findings**

The various differences between the White female teachers in this study and their Black male students, which include race, gender, and socio-economic status in many cases, made studying the student-teacher interactions between them most compelling. Before moving to the crux of the research findings, it is noteworthy to highlight the teacher participants' conceptions of empathy and its role in their professional teaching practice. Additionally, it is equally important to point out that regardless of one's conception of empathy, its expression will look different for each teacher when observed from a third party perspective. The one thing that binds the teachers,

besides commonalities in racial background and gender is the outcomes of interactions with the Black male youth in their classes. The interaction styles, preferences, responses, and reactions may be different, but the common outcomes set the stage for discerning empathy's utility.

### *Teacher Participants Conceptions of Empathy*

Prior to their participation, each of the four White female teachers admitted to never discussing empathy in any detail. General conceptions by these teachers cast empathy as primarily emotional. They used words such as “feel” and “feelings” to answer the question “What is empathy?” Also, the teachers separately agreed that empathy is useful for “building relationships” and demonstrating “care”. In addition, the teachers concurred that care is central to their student-teacher interactions, but that “understanding student situations” is not a scapegoat for meeting high academic and behavioral expectations. They also emphasized numerous times throughout their interview that empathy in the professional context should not be used as an excuse for why Black males are not achieving in their classes. One teacher maintained that her “brand of empathy” in practice does shape her interactions with youth, but not to the degree that Black males are not held accountable for achieving and living up to his full potential, or her high expectations.

### *Variation in Teacher Participant Expression of Empathy*

Interestingly, the four White female teachers' expression of EC and PT looked and sounded differently based on a number of factors including personality and life experience. Two of the teachers confirmed they are not “touchy feely” or “a hugger” and were averse to demonstrating too much emotion or being too vulnerable with their students. Another teacher referred to herself as “very emotional”. She is almost the complete opposite of the first two teachers. The fourth teacher seemingly had a balance between the two extremes. Interactions and observations of her with students suggested she learned how to emote in culturally congruent ways with students, including adopting certain linguistic conventions and vernacular, without being a pushover, which was the concern of the first two teachers. Two of the four teachers taught in the school they had attended as high schoolers. A third taught in the same district where she attended school, but in the rival high school. The fourth had more teaching experience than the other three in a district very similar to the site where this study took place. The four teachers had between six and fifteen years of teaching experience at the time of data collection.

### *Interaction Narratives*

The author is using the term *interaction narrative* (IN) to describe a collection of student-teacher interaction snapshots or events taken from classroom observation data. These narratives were constructed by combining observation data with focus group and teacher interview data. Narrative is “used in making sense of all kinds of situations” (Eason, 1982, p. 143). In this study, INs are used to make sense of the teachers' interactions with their Black male students in a readable, easy-to-follow format. These narratives provide a global perspective of the interactions (e.g., interactions shaped by physical examples of empathic concern and perspective taking) of each teacher documented during data collection. All scenarios and quotes reported are real and unchanged from the original transcripts.

Multiple narrative formats were used to describe the elements of empathy observed in the teacher's behavior, which they demonstrated through their response or "reactions" (Davis, 1994, 221) to students. Understanding empathy's full expression requires a read of the entire context of the interaction including the teacher's intentions and some understanding of student needs driving the interaction. The IN format was found to be most beneficial for attempting to report each of these aspects in a seamless, cohesive way.

In this study, the interactions of teachers were collapsed into the instructional practices of "Ms. Johnson." Using the characterization of Ms. Johnson to recant the dimensions and nuances of each teacher's observed interactions was determined to be the most suitable for sharing the results from the study. Ms. Johnson is a "composite" (Rossman & Rallis, 2006, p. 345) of the four teacher participants. Her actions and thoughts are based on the combined actions and thoughts of the study's White female teacher participants (see Rallis & Goldring, 2000; Rallis & Rossman, 1995 for other examples of the use of composites). Like Brown (2013) and Hemley (2006), it was the goal of the author to protect the identities of the teachers in this study and simultaneously depict the overlapping similarities in each of their interactions with their Black male students. Rather than talk about each teacher separately, Ms. Johnson was created to represent the diversity of approaches taken by each teacher to produce favorable outcomes for individual students. In essence, the interaction snapshots represent the assortment of expressions, strategies, techniques, and behaviors of the expression and demonstration of empathy (i.e., empathic concern and perspective taking) exhibited by the teachers as well as some of the associated outcomes. Through the characterization of Ms. Johnson, the INs become descriptive of any one teacher's real-life attempt at negotiating culturally responsive interactions.

### **Themes of Empathy's Utility for Culturally Responsive Interactions**

Three salient themes of empathy's benefit to producing culturally responsive interactions emerged from the data set. Culturally responsive interactions are the result of empathy's utility for building and maintaining a safe classroom environment and trusting student-teacher relationships. The next and arguably most noteworthy outcome influenced by empathy is Ms. Johnson's willingness to take risks and demonstrate flexibility in her interactions with Black male students. The final benefit of empathy is Ms. Johnson's capacity to develop proactive academic interventions. These interventions marry Johnson's knowledge of students' personal experiences and circumstances to mutually agreed-upon terms and expectations negotiated with the student. All student names used in the IN are pseudonyms.

#### *Trust & Classroom Community Building*

With a big smile, Ms. Johnson enthusiastically greets her students, "Good morning young lovelies. Who has Family Business?" Johnson turns off her Michael Buble transition music, which signals the students to settle into their assigned seats. She knows that music is the center of much discussion in her class, so her music selection is a way that students connect with her. Family business is the first agenda item each class period of each day throughout the school year. Ms. Johnson only bypasses family business to prepare students for an exam they have to take or to set up an extensive, time-consuming lab experiment. Students talk freely and openly during family business about whatever is on their minds at that moment.

When asked how Ms. Johnson came up with family business, she points emphatically to trial and error. She declares:

Oh my God, it's the best thing I've ever done in my life! Seriously. It is the best thing that I...I literally, I go back and I like made it up. Like I made it up. I didn't read it in a book... Like just one day, I felt like this was a good idea...Kids come in and they all want to talk and whatever. So we like get it all done, and then we move on.

Ms. Johnson is very zealous as she reflects on family business' significance for reshaping how she thinks about and arranges interactions with students, Black males in particular. She has seen some students do a complete 180-degree turn in behavior. She attributes this success to the implementation of family business. Prioritizing time to get to know students in this structured way, on *their* terms, has had a major impact on the quality of her student-teacher interactions. The students are extremely comfortable with her. She acknowledges as a White woman, she did not always have such success reaching Black students. They were more closed off until she started utilizing family business. The class trusts her as evidenced by the sensitive topics that come up during family business related to death, dating, and future goals.

Donald, one Black male in Ms. Johnson's first period class happens to be a local rapper. Routinely, Ms. Johnson allows a student performance, but not often. She reluctantly acquiesces this particular day. Donald commenced performance of a freestyle rap. A *freestyle rap* is a form of rap music typically performed live as a duel between two rappers (Alim, Lee, & Carris, 2010). The percussion and lyrics are created in the moment. The lyricist has no preparation, but is expected to cleverly recite lines of improvised text related to the social context. In this case, Donald raps about being tired in first period, his classmates, Ms. Johnson, and how he feels about school and learning at that particular moment. The entire class immediately pulsates back and forth to the rhythmic flow of Donald's prose recited to the improvised, syncopated beat made by his classmates' fists pounding their desktops.

After about a minute of observation, Ms. Johnson joins in, first rocking and then jockeying her fist in the air just as the students were doing. She repeats phrases the students are saying in deference to Donald's provocation. In this moment, Ms. Johnson is sharing affectively in the moment. There is a sense of solidarity and linearity between the teacher and her students that marks this particular moment as extra special. Next thing you know, Ms. Johnson attempted her own freestyle rap as a followup to Donald's rousing performance. It is unclear whether Ms. Johnson was familiar with freestyle rapping or if she'd done it before. Embracing the student accolade and fist bumps, it appeared she had tapped into a cultural moment that would later earn her increased credibility amongst her predominately Black and Latino students. She entered that moment, a bit aloof at first, but without inhibition. Her awkward start turned into one cadenced line after the next. With the close of her hip-hop debut, the students cheer in adulation of their teacher's effort. The positive energy was palpable. "Okay, the objectives of the lesson are..." is the students' cue they must transition into a detailed conversation about the parts of the ear. You could still overhear the students' surprise and wonder seeing their teacher freestyle.

Prior to Ms. Johnson allowing Donald the space to perform in class, he was failing her class. He did not see himself as academically successful. She noticed this after her first time allowing him to participate in family business in this way. Donald began coming to class early and seeking extra help for his studies. Almost over night, he became more engaged in the learning environment and more invested in his academic performance. Ms. Johnson learned to partner with students to create moments like this that celebrate students' individual cultural expression. It sends the message to the student that who they are is enough. Ms. Johnson learned that carving out this time gave them a social outlet *in school* that removed the burden of having to be academic all of the time. This time was staged with the intention of garnering for herself specific, student-level insight she would later use to negotiate other interactions with youth; information she might not have accessed otherwise. The act of engaging in family business is perspective taking in action. The more the students talk, the more Ms. Johnson learns about them, their families, their community, and their points of view. As a result, she has developed a rather strong classroom community.

Reggie's father was diagnosed with a terminal illness during the previous school year. Ms. Johnson went out of her way to make sure he had the proper supports during his coping period. She offered him the option to come to her class and talk whenever he needed extra support. And, she made arrangements with each of the Reggie's other teachers and checked in with him regularly throughout the day when she would see him in the hallway. She calculated when Reggie needed his space and when she needed to be hands on with him. She consulted his friends and his other teachers to ensure he had no excuse to disengage in school. Ms. Johnson was vulnerable to his needs and went above and beyond to ensure he had the social support needed. Almost in tears, Reggie reflects fondly of Ms. Johnson's flexibility as central to his coping during this very difficult time in his life.

Another student declares, "Ms. Johnson is not easily frustrated when a student doesn't immediately understand the content of a lesson. She's willing to talk to you and hear you out and listen to your opinions and your views". Ms. Johnson makes him *feel* heard in her class. Another young man goes on to say, "She never treats people differently...even if you're the class clown, she'll still answer your question or, still try to help you out". He emphasized that Ms. Johnson has high expectations and doesn't mind telling you exactly how she feels, but that she is patient and flexible. While Ms. Johnson admits that she has good days and bad ones, she does her best to never let students know the difference. With each interaction, her goal is to produce outcomes that are most favorable for the student even if the personal and professional adjustments she must make are uncomfortable for her.

At the beginning of the school year, Ms. Johnson stresses the importance of making students aware that she is available to both help and learn from them. She expounds:

I put myself out there...I tell the kids...when you first meet somebody, you don't trust them. You gotta get to know each other. I don't know you, you don't know me, but eventually we'll get to know each other and there will be a bond.

The metaphor of family is evident in the classroom. There is a subtle camaraderie between Ms. Johnson and many of her Black male students. She always asks them about topics of interest to

them, especially their participation on sports teams. This does not mean they are her friends, but rather that she works to maintain amicable relationships by investing time to know and appreciate the people they are and the young adults they are becoming. Some students take advantage of her kindness. She is constantly monitoring her level of vulnerability and flexibility as not to be perceived as a pushover.

### *Risk-Taking/Flexibility*

On another day, family business lasted for more than 25 minutes of a 55-minute class period. The tremendous loss of instructional time was a matter of concern. Ms. Johnson responds to the length of family business by affirming, “How do you price what somebody feels is important to them in their life? You can’t! There is no, ‘You can’t talk.’ Everyone gets to share.” Ms. Johnson emphasizes that family business generally balances itself out and that sometimes it is really short, but on occasion it can become long. Still, she compromises instructional time because she perceives the risk is worth it. Ms. Johnson warns, “If I don’t allow them to get this stuff off of their chests, I can’t expect them to focus on the lesson”. She consciously ignores school policy to do what she feels will honestly produce the best outcomes for students. The decision is based on prior experience. Ms. Johnson acknowledges that although her superiors could see this practice as problematic, she retorts that she would defend this practice based on the evidence of its effectiveness to accomplish the intended outcomes of each interaction. As a result of family business and her insistence that each student who wants to participate have the chance to contribute, she boasts extremely low incidences of in-class behavioral disruption and out of class disciplinary referrals for her Black males.

Ms. Johnson demonstrates a high degree of patience with her Black male students to maintain amity with them. Traditionally, many of the young men she teaches have had tumultuous relationships with other White female teachers. The focus group participants share story after story of feeling like they were under intense scrutiny and surveillance by other White female teachers. When they contrast their negative experiences with the positive experiences they’d had with “good” White teachers, patience and the ability of the teacher to “get” them was important. Trenton maintains, Ms. Johnson’s “expectations are high, but Ms. Johnson is patient”. She keeps her expectations high by modifying *processes*, or the approach(es) to reach high expectations, rather than modifying the expectation itself. Empathy is supposed to facilitate increasing expectations of students, not lowering them (Ladson-Billings, 2006). This requires Ms. Johnson to be willing to adapt to students more often than trying to coerce students to adapt to her. She constantly has to modify and renegotiate the boundaries of the instructional tasks without compromising the rigor of that task.

On the contrary, Ms. Johnson felt strongly that she treated all of her students the same regardless of race and/or gender. After multiple observations, she was exposed to patterns in her behavior related to her differential treatment of certain Black males in her classes. For example, Gerald, a student in Ms. Johnson’s third period class was always seen wearing headphones in class. Ms. Johnson disciplined other students for listening to music during class, but this particular student was allowed to wear his headphones regularly. When explaining her motivation and intention for allowing Gerald to wear his headphones, Johnson discloses, “He can’t sit still. He bounces around. He’s like a gnat. But he’s that way in every single class.” Wearing headphones during

independent practice actually helps him to concentrate. She did not initially see her approach with Gerald as treating him differently. She was vehemently opposed to being perceived as racist or favoring certain students over others. After more conversation, she concedes that students do need different strategies to help them realize success.

Gerald's behavior has been misread in the past. Once Ms. Johnson realized that listening to music increased his productivity, she consented that he could have his headphones on only if he committed to completing every assignment and living up to every single academic expectation of the course. This was a *partnership* brokered with Gerald despite her explicit disapproval with other students attempting to wear headphones. The other students seemed to understand this arrangement and acquiesced to her reprimand without reference to Gerald. Moreover, Ms. Johnson advocates for Gerald to her colleagues by saying, "If he misses something, send me the handout and I'll talk him through it later." As a result, this student is experiencing increased academic success: his grades are better; he has greater classroom participation and engagement; and his overall conduct has improved. The residual effect of Ms. Johnson's agreement with Gerald is that he has more confidence in his academic abilities. Black students who have positive interactions with faculty/teachers are shown to have a more positive self-concept and greater school efficacy (Cokley, 2000; Noguera, 2008).

Correspondingly, Ms. Johnson emphasizes that she doesn't write discipline referrals for students. She only writes them when she feels the behavior is "something egregious [she] can't handle in class." There is considerable risk she may lose the class' attention when it appears certain problem behaviors are allowed to persist. Vernon and Ronald are in Ms. Johnson's seventh period class. These two Black males are friends that if permitted, would talk to one another during the entire class period. Ms. Johnson laments, the class is structured around them. She modifies the learning activities and pace in this class. She also heightens expectations for class productivity to keep the boys engaged and on task for the duration of the final class period of the school day. Vernon is very smart and often has a correct answer to Ms. Johnson's questions. She recognizes that because the boys tend to "dominate" so much of her attention during class, she is constantly wrestling with how effective she is being at meeting the needs of other students. She lauds the two boys' ability to be role models. Students follow their lead. This is a matter that Ms. Johnson acknowledges is positive when harnessed appropriately. Therefore, she works hard to challenge the boys intellectually and keep them on task. Most days she is successful, while other days she is exhausted by her failed attempts to curb problematic behavior. The boys' grades are slipping and now they are earning a D in the course. They care about their grades and were observed arranging time to discuss what they could do to increase them. The amount of flexibility she has with these youths is overwhelming and she admits that other students may be losing out because she has not struck a balance.

Another student, BJ, a junior in one of Ms. Johnson's classes, gets up and sits down at his leisure. At times he sits on a big red bouncy ball in front of the classroom, plays with materials on Ms. Johnson's desk, or writes on the white board during her lesson. Ms. Johnson, unmoved and uninterrupted by his activity, conducts the lesson as if these things were not happening. The researcher was easily distracted by the student's behavior, but the other students appeared unphased. When asked why she allows BJ to get up when he wants and whether or not she is concerned about the risk that he will interrupt the flow of the class, Ms. Johnson nonchalantly

nods in dissent. She responds, “I know he’s a mover. He’s got to move. He’s got to do something. He’s got a little history behind him. He kind of knows how I roll, and like, ‘We’re going to do this.’” She is very flexible with meeting BJ’s needs, but she is also very proactive. She can only be this way because she has spent time observing and getting to know BJ through a lot of trial and error. Ms. Johnson knows that she needs to have a range of activities that will meet BJ’s needs as a kinesthetic learner. This is perspective taking. The two have an agreement, and as long as he holds up his end of the bargain, Ms. Johnson adjusts accordingly. This same student on another day was the first to complete a complicated classroom activity that required the students to identify the fourteen stops of the blood’s flow through the heart. After a year suspended from school, BJ is earning a B in Ms. Johnson’s class.

### *Proactive Interventions*

Ms. Johnson is always thinking about ways to prevent the Black males in her class from going off track. She tries to be very observant. One way she keeps students on track is by openly challenging them when she thinks they are losing focus. Ms. Johnson has been teaching long enough to know that being proactive yields far greater results than being reactive. She steps in when she believes it is advantageous, but is careful not to usurp a student’s own will to be successful. She is clear with the students about the consequences that result from their low academic performance in her class. Trenton laughs and shares:

If you slackin off in class, She might say “get your shit together”... She will give you time to like get the work done, or another day because she understands and she knows we can do the work, it might just be something holdin you back and that will really help because the assignment she gives, most of them are heavyweight. The points are high.

The boys trust Ms. Johnson has their best interests at heart and they interpret her behavior as care, even the use of expletives in her passionate plea for them to improve academically. The focus group participants excitedly contrast their experiences in Ms. Johnson’s classroom with experiences with other White female teachers in their school. Another young man offers:

She’s like a motivational speaker, like. She’s always hype or something. Its like, its like she wants you to do good, but she’s not the type of teacher that’s going to get an attitude with you if you don’t do good. She is going to be like playful with you and like make you actually want to like, “dang I can actually do this”, I gotta work harder.

Ms. Johnson’s prior knowledge from teaching in communities of color has given her some understanding of the unique challenges they may face during their educational careers. She pulls on this knowledge to help young Black men under her charge to see how some of their actions may produce adverse outcomes.

Many of the young men observed in her class and the students from the focus group feel a great sense of responsibility to do well in Johnson’s class. They don’t feel pressured to put on an academic identity that is unfamiliar to them, but they respect the fact that Ms. Johnson is

constantly stepping in to remind them of their potential. She comments, “I don’t take a lot of excuses”. And, she constantly makes judgment calls about the legitimacy of student’s issues. She confirms that she will not “budge an inch” if she believes that the student is not doing his best or is not being truthful. In each case, her intervention relies on her ability to fully comprehend the source of the student’s problem. Ms. Johnson respects the young men for who they are and she is always pushing them to become better.

Ms. Johnson quips, “the kids that give, I give back.” Other students like Jamon who Ms. Johnson considers to be a “pain” and “combative”, won’t get “ten minutes of my time because he just keeps throwing himself against the wall and nothing works.” She discloses that this student was “kicked out last semester...got arrested, booked for battery and burglary. And now he’s back, and he’s doing the same thing.” Upon his most recent return, Ms. Johnson confronts Jamon. She retells the encounter with him:

You realize you’re really fucking up! You understand that right? He’s like ‘yeah.’ I go, ‘What are you going to do?’ He’s like, ‘I got connections.’ And I said, ‘Jamon, you’re 15, almost 16, you’re going to be somebody’s patsy. And you don’t think before you do stuff. Let’s get out of high school.’ And he’s like, ‘Naw, I really don’t care.’ He’s honest...I can’t fix that part of his life.

If Jamon wants help, Ms. Johnson is willing to help. She has not given up on him, but settles that she will only intervene when he invites her to arbitrate his affairs. Ms. Johnson releases considerable control and takes multiple opportunities to reiterate her expectations. Jamon’s boldness translates to Ms. Johnson that he is not interested in her help. Hard conversations like these are a routine part of Johnson’s practice. She is unafraid of conflict and uses contentious interactions like the above as a means to prevent the student’s downfall. Nonetheless, as much as she wants to help each student meet his fullest potential, she recognizes there are limits to her helping.

Christopher, another Black male in Ms. Johnson’s class was found regularly sleeping in class and in danger of failing. She describes him as a nice kid. After a long talk, she finds out that he is financially supporting his entire family. He’s tired because he’s working late nights. If he stays in her class, Christopher will fail the course because he is not completing the work required. Instead of failing him because he is not meeting course expectations, she advocates for his placement in an alternative night school program in the district. By doing so, the young man can continue supporting his family *and* earn his high school diploma at the same time. Ms. Johnson worked with this student to identify a solution that allows him to be a student while also maintaining his important role at home as a provider. She acted in Christopher’s best interest (i.e. alternative option for earning his high school diploma) without compromising rigorous course requirements. Ms. Johnson had to make a decision informed by knowledge of student’s circumstance, interpret the legitimacy of his circumstance, and respond in a way that produces the most favorable outcome for him, which included ensuring he had the ability to keep financially supporting his family.

One of Ms. Johnson's classes is approximately 93% Black males. The course enrolls students who have failed one or more classes in a prior semester. The students may have up to eight credit-bearing classes on their schedule. The class functions like an advisory during the students' lunch period. Students are urged to check in regularly, but attendance is not compulsory. Yet, students often attend and bring their lunch because they know they will have one-on-one time to talk to Ms. Johnson about the range of issues they believe may be limiting their academic success. One way that Ms. Johnson gets the boys to come to the class is by keeping extra snacks in her desk. She keeps a steady stash of Granny Smith apples, because for many of the boys, having one in Johnson's class was the first time they had ever eaten one.

Several of the boys are jokesters, and Ms. Johnson does not mind fielding their punch lines and landing a few of her own. They have rapport with her that she uses to help them develop personal plans of success so that they earn their credits, and hopefully never end up in this particular class again. Ms. Johnson will leave her desk to sit with the students rather than always call them up to her desk. This is one way she makes each boy feel important. Another way is that she makes sure to reach out to their parents/guardians when they are making good progress. She does everything she can to minimize student anxiety related to their academic progress. The environment and the multiple interactions with students are arranged to make each student feel at home in a non-threatening, social environment. Ms. Johnson maintains that if she can get them to check-in with her everyday, it is more likely to ensure they earn the credit for each course(s) they failed. Johnson finds that students who come regularly are considerably more academically successful than students who do not.

### **Discussion**

Outcomes are what matter most for assessing how well one has developed into a culturally responsive pedagogue. That said, cultivating empathy as a professional disposition with the expressed purpose of enhancing the quality of student-teacher interactions has tremendous potential for improving student outcomes. Indeed, creating a more empathetic workforce does very little for improving student outcomes when teachers fail to understand the importance of empathy, or in other words, perspective taking.

It is perspective-taking that enables all teachers, regardless of race and ethnicity, to make culturally appropriate and affirming interpretations of student difference. Gehlbach and Brinkworth (2012) argue the significance of social perspective-taking for enhancing student outcomes. However, they found that little work has been done that unpacks the process of perspective-taking. Both perspective-taking and empathic concern make up empathy, but perspective-taking is at the core of empathetic application in social relationships. Some strategies for social perspective-taking in Gehlbach and Brinkworth's study showed up in the current study, including analogies of teachers' personal experience to the experience of students, drawing on background knowledge of students to inform decision making about the students, and consideration of the present context to infer how students experience their circumstances. Ms. Johnson learned to demonstrate joy like her students, share in her students' cultural forms of artistic expression, and utilize their points of view to make decisions with them that most benefit them.

## *Empathy and the Negotiation of Culturally Responsive Interactions*

Similarly, empathy has been theorized to produce such outcomes including, but not limited to higher academic expectations and success, productive parent partnerships, and instructional programs that affirm students' racial and cultural identities (Howard, 2010; Milner, 2010). Culturally responsive interactions are birthed from a teacher's ability to adopt perspective and share affect in sync with students' cultural norms and experiences.

Bestowing or attempting to earn a label as empathetic minimizes the significance of the utility of empathy as a disposition of culturally responsive teachers. Empathy improves the likelihood that teachers may build trusting relationships with student and families, establish positive classroom climates, take risks, be flexible, and take proactive steps to ensure each classroom interaction produces favorable student outcomes. The primary difference between being empathetic and cultivating empathy as a professional disposition is the intellectual, emotional, and behavioral orientations from which empathy is framed and applied in interactions with students. In other words, one size does not fit all, and empathy is the mechanism that allows the teacher to be sensitive to the needs of individual students within a homogeneous culture group.

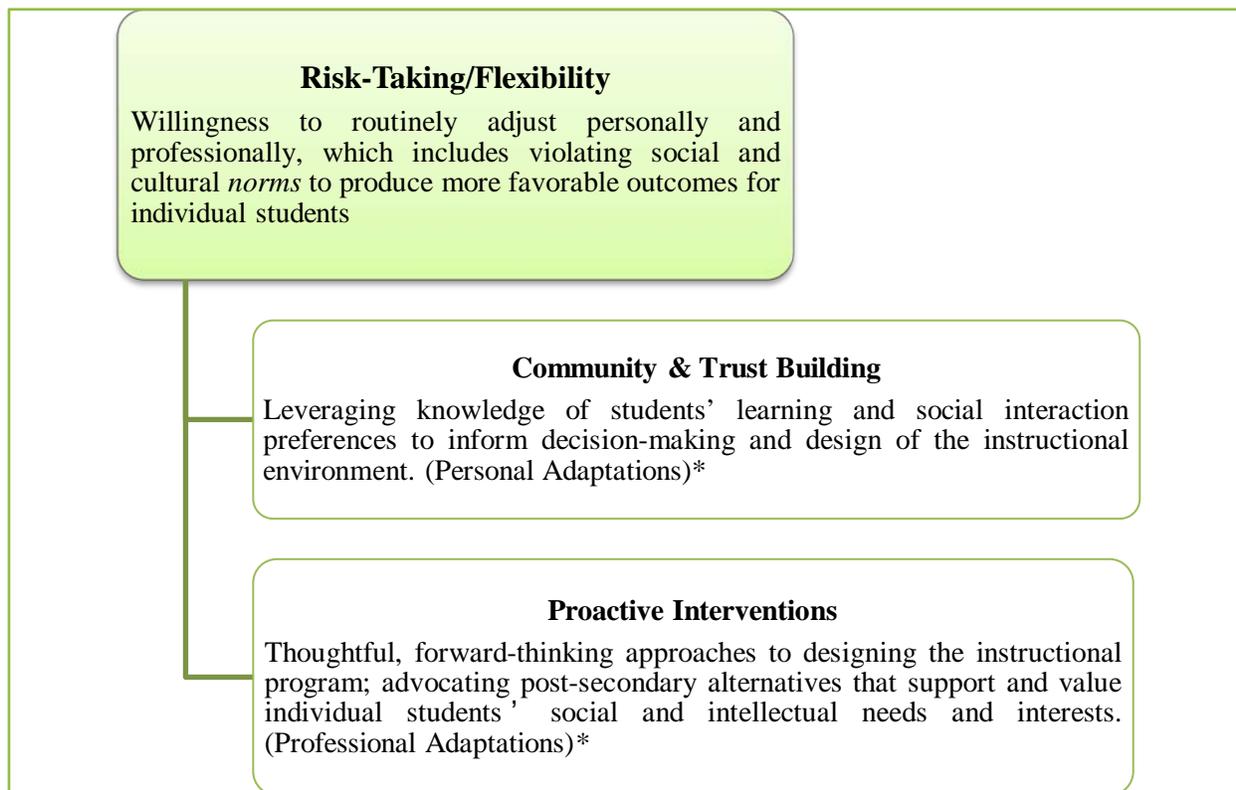
Ms. Johnson's interactions with students are substantive, each in a different way. The link between them is her attempt to partner with Black male students in such a way that they *feel or perceive* they have agency in their academic performance. The young men have a significant stake in his intellectual development and academic work. The effectiveness of her interactions and the utility of empathy for improving the quality of those interactions cannot be judged simply by what she said, how she behaves, or the intentions driving her actions. Ms. Johnson's capacity to make each Black male feel as if the classroom was a safe space for him to be himself, to fail with support, and have multiple opportunities to experience success was pivotal to her ability to be perceived as effective by her superiors, and exceptional by her students. Every young man knew that redemption was possible. Ms. Johnson communicated through her behavior in every academic, behavioral, and social/relational interaction that no student is ever completely lost. She learned how to frame interactions with the expectation that students would be successful, even if the decisions they were making in the moment suggested otherwise. Ms. Johnson made concessions in cooperation and collaboration with students. She solicited the terms of her relationship with them by using the language of family, creating space for them to talk explicitly about the matters on their minds (e.g. family business), and she did not make excuses for their failure. Instead, she looked for opportunities to adapt to their needs and then conciliate mutually beneficial terms of agreement to maximize their academic output.

### *The Utility of Empathy for Culturally Responsive Teaching*

Empathy, which includes the demonstration of empathic concern and perspective-taking, has been found useful in at least three ways when attempting to negotiate culturally responsive interactions. Figure 2 provides an overview of the benefits of the utility of empathy in this study. The utility of empathy was measured by how teachers responded or "reacted" to students (Davis, 1994). This includes the way Ms. Johnson applied her critical knowledge of students to the subsequent adaptations made to personal and instructional processes for which she was responsible. One teacher did not necessarily enjoy "hugging", but she would hug certain Black

males she knew really needed that type of affection. Still, it is important to point out that a necessary part of applying empathy to student-teacher interactions is receiving and using student feedback as a primary source for judging how to make the necessary adjustments (Warren, 2013; Davis, 1994).

**Figure 2. Benefits of the Utility of Empathy**



\***Personal Adaptations** are modest modifications to one's personality, thinking, and philosophy concerning a certain idea, or approach to social interactions with students; **Professional Adaptations** are accommodations the teachers make to the processes that pertain to instructional planning, class assignments, requirements for class participation, and lesson presentation.

Responding appropriately to the cultural diversity that students bring to the classroom benefits from the application of empathy in at least three ways. Despite the climate of high stakes testing, teaching ultimately rests on a teacher's ability to facilitate humanizing interactions with their students (Bartolome, 1994). This study sheds light on and brings attention to both the feasibility and benefit of empathy when it becomes an intentional aspect of negotiating student-teacher interactions. The sign of culturally responsive teaching should be in the outcomes that are produced, not one's ability to masquerade dominant cultural norms as best practice for Black and Latino children. Second, the Ms. Johnson composite could be any teacher in any school anywhere in the world. The application of empathy presupposes that the humanity of the teacher will intersect with the humanity of students in some meaningful way. The ability to take risks, be proactive, and build community will look and sound different for each teacher because of the many social variables mediating the interaction process. Stakeholders must work at leveraging the voices and perspectives of students as a baseline for negotiating instructional decisions that

ultimately benefit youth, rather than stroke the egos of adults or meet the bottom lines of districts. Finally, teachers and school leaders must work together to create opportunities for cultural learning to happen both inside and outside of the school building. Any opportunity for perspective taking is an opportunity to cultivate culturally accurate and appropriate frames of reference. These new frames of references are the interpretive filters that enable teachers to meet students where they are regardless of the difference that exists, while at the same time helping the teachers to resign deficit notions of success and preparedness.

### **Future Research and Limitations**

Future research in this area must include more systematic observations and teachers from across different races, ethnicities, and genders. Further, teachers who have been identified as culturally responsive based on indicators from the literature should be selected for participation. Studying strong teachers in diverse school settings (e.g., rural, urban, and suburban) across grade levels will contribute significantly to the literature on the application of empathy and its utility as a professional disposition. This will also challenge assumptions about the parameters of culturally responsive teaching. One limitation of the study includes not having a team of scholars who completed observations. Traditional studies of empathy include multiple researchers as a means to improve inter-subjective reliability of observation data. Studies of the usefulness of empathy for improving cross-cultural and cross-racial application is essential to further operationalize culturally responsive teaching in contemporary schools through student-teacher interaction.

### **Conclusion**

The application of empathy is essential for negotiating culturally responsive interactions with students, but it is not a linear process. This research confirms that culturally responsive interactions are best negotiated in partnership with students, not through power or control of students. Teachers cannot have sole authority for framing the boundaries of this partnership. Rather, the student must have some input about the nature of the relationship. Relinquishing control to negotiate culturally responsive interactions necessitates professional and personal adaptations on the part of the teacher that can make him or her particularly vulnerable in relationship with students. Notwithstanding, doing this likely improves culturally diverse students' investment and engagement in school. Empathy helps teachers more accurately and appropriately respond to students. When teachers share affectively with students and make active attempts to adopt their points of view, it is likely that evidence of culturally responsive teaching will be made present through the outcomes that are produced.

### **AUTHOR NOTES**

**Chezare A. Warren, PhD**, is a postdoctoral research fellow in the Division of Applied Psychology and Human Development, Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. There have been changes in the author's university affiliation subsequent to the time of the study. This study was conducted while the author was a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

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## Educational Tweets

*William E. Moore*

### ***Reflect on this . . .***

Acquiring good reading skills is a lifelong activity of thoughtful cognitive reflection and understanding of the printed word. In 2013, students use visual technology for appreciating ideas and principles. To overcome potential intellectual atrophy, we must make deliberate efforts to read often in the same way that we exercise to overcome the negative effects of transportation technology.

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### ***HBCU Teacher Productivity***

“HBCU teacher preparation programs have traditionally been the largest producers of Black teachers in the United States. In 2013, only seven (7) HBCUs are in the top twenty (20) producers of Black teachers at the undergraduate level (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Given the explosion of on-line programs, we must make a conscious effort to increase the technological capacity of HBCUs to be attractive to future teacher candidates.”

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### ***Failing Schools***

What if "Failing Schools" aren't? The late Gerald Bracey raised this question in his book, "On the Death of Childhood and the Destruction of Public Schools." Schools are usually labeled based on students' test scores. On standardized tests, average scores for students rise as the income levels of their families rise. Are we really measuring the quality of a school, or just the socio-economics of the community it serves?

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## Online Resources

*Peggy Snowden ♦ Chauncey Carr-McElwee*

**Library of Congress - Teachers** - a division of the Library of Congress which offers free teacher-created materials that align with common core, state, and national organization standards that are aimed at supplementing classroom instruction. Content on this website include, for example, lesson plans, document analysis tools, online and offline activities, and presentations and professional development resources.

**TED** (Technology, Entertainment, and Design) - is a nonprofit, which started in 1984 as a conference bringing people together from technology, entertainment, and design. Since then, TED has broadened its scope. The website has links to talks, speakers, playlists, translations, TED Conferences, and TED Initiatives, among which are TEDx Events, TED Prize, TED Fellows, TED Conversations, TED Community, TED-Ed, TED Books, TED Institute, and TED Blog. The link to the TED-Ed website is quite interesting. This website has dynamic and engaging videos, which can be easily used to create or adapt customized lessons from scratch or lessons created around educational videos on YouTube. The link to the TED Talks website is also quite interesting. This site has a large number of resources on topics ranging from “How schools kill creativity”, “Use data to build better schools” to “What we are learning from online education”. These short videos can spark discussion with students as well as colleagues.

**What Works in Education** - seeking to transform learning and the educational process, this website is dedicated to providing evidence-based K-12 learning strategies that empower teachers to improve education. The “Schools That Work” section of the website profiles schools, districts and programs that are significantly improving the way students learn. Recent blog posts provides practical classroom strategies, tips, lesson ideas, personal stories, and innovative approaches from expert teachers. Free classroom guides and educational resources can be downloaded from the “Classroom Guides” page.

**National Educational Association (NEA)** - is the largest national professional organization committed to advancing the cause of public education. This organization represents educators from all levels of public education ranging from pre-school to university graduate programs. The website has an “Issues and Action” tab, which offers information on a range of topics (e.g., common core state standards, school safety, No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)|ESEA, education funding, legislative action center). It has a “Tools and Ideas” tab, which has links to lesson plans, classroom management, school life, teaching strategies, advice and support. And, a “Grants and Events” tab, which provides information about grant opportunities and upcoming NEA events. Registered users have access to discounted professional development, association news and resources, as well as discussion forums.

## The Event Zone

*Martha Jallim Hall ♦ Michael J. Maiorano*

### **ELI Annual Meeting**

EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative  
February 3-5, 2014  
New Orleans, Louisiana

### **NEA ESP Conference**

March 7-9, 2014  
San Francisco, California

### **American Council on Education**

*Seizing Opportunity*  
March 8-11, 2014  
San Diego, California

### **NADOHE 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference**

National Association of Diversity Officers in  
Higher Education  
March 10-12, 2014  
San Diego, California

### **ASCD 69th Annual Conference and Exhibit Show**

March 15-17, 2014  
Los Angeles, California

### **SITE 25th International Conference**

Society for Information Technology and Teacher  
Education  
March 17-21, 2014  
Jacksonville, Florida

### **NAEA National Convention**

National Art Education Association  
*Spark! Fusing Innovative Teaching & Emerging  
Technologies*  
March 29-31, 2014  
San Diego, California

### **AERA Annual Meeting**

American Educational Research Association  
*The Power of Education Research for Innovation  
in Practice and Policy*  
April 3-7, 2014  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

### **NSTA Conference**

National Science Teachers Association  
April 3-6, 2014  
Boston, Massachusetts

### **NBASHLA Convention**

NBASLH National Black Association of Speech-  
Language and Hearing Convention  
April 10-12, 2014  
Charlotte, North Carolina

### **CEC Convention and Expo**

Council for Exceptional Children  
April 9-12, 2014  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

### **YAI International Conference on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities**

Young Adult Institute  
*Designing the Future*  
April 28-May 1, 2014  
New York, New York

### **Education Week Webinars**

#### *The Last Green Mile: Reducing the Environmental Impact of Instructional Materials*

February 27, 2014  
2:00 p.m. – 3:00 pm. ET

#### *Helping At-Risk Students Develop Literacy Skills*

March 5, 2014  
2:00 p.m. – 3:00 pm. ET

#### *Transitioning Elementary Schools to Common Core Math*

March 12, 2014  
3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. ET

### **Professional Resources**

*The Monarch Center*

*The IRIS Center*

*The Center for Learning*