

## Keep Your Joy!: Teaching Critical Pedagogies in Spaces of Intolerance and Resistance

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### Abstract

Black female educators continue to face racism and discrimination in educational settings (Davis & Brown, 2017). Compounding these realities, Black female educators of multicultural and/or critical pedagogies can face resistance from their majority-white student populations in a number of ways. This autoethnographic study reflects on my experiences as a Black female instructor of a multicultural education course at a predominantly white institution (PWI). I reflect on and analyze the student opposition I experienced teaching an undergraduate course on critical pedagogies to pre-service teachers and provide much-needed respite and encouragement for other Black female teacher educators on how to maintain their joy when facing such resistance. Grounded in Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000), this article has implications for teacher education programs, higher education, and teachers of multicultural education.

### Keywords:

autoethnography, critical pedagogy, Black feminist thought, multicultural education

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*The most disrespected person in America is the Black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the Black woman. The most neglected person in America is the Black woman.*

*-Malcolm X*

The oppressive experiences of Black women educators span decades of educational research (Croom & Patton, 2012; Davis & Brown, 2017; Hinton, 2009). Although historically and contemporarily positioned at the helm of educational equity and excellence in the Black community throughout elementary, secondary, and higher education (Allen, 2023; Hill-Jackson, 2017; Madkins, 2011), Black female educators have also shared experiences that render their expertise, knowledge, and commitment to liberatory education as less than, and utterly invisible in the eyes of hegemonic groups

(Christopher, 2016; McGowan, 2000). Historically, their often culturally relevant and responsive ways of being in the classroom via critical, politically, and culturally informed pedagogical practices, which uplift Black learners, have yet to gain the recognition they deserve (James-Gallaway & Harris, 2021).

Additionally, educational research has focused on how forms of oppression manifest through race, class, and gender, and on how these dynamics exhibit themselves within P-12 and higher education settings (hooks, 2014; Collins, 2020; Crenshaw, 2013; Lorde, 1977). For many Black women educators, resistance to

their presence, participation, and contributions in educational spaces remains prominent and can cause various forms of physical and psychological racial harm and stress (James et al., 2021). This is intensified in courses where the content matter is to address inequities in the form of race, gender, sexual identity, and culture in teacher education (Choi & Lim, 2021). Validating these experiences and encouraging Black women to maintain positivity and joy within such contexts can be challenging for many - but it *can* be done.

In spaces where Black female educators are tasked with preparing future educators for the current and increasingly diverse student population, resistance and backlash towards their approaches to critical pedagogies can take various forms and compound their efforts to maintain positivity and joy in education (Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012; Padilla, 1994; Sule, 2023). Resistance to their culturally relevant and responsive ways of being are often in conjunction with these dismissive attitudes towards Black women's contributions (Author, 2020; Horsford, 2012). Scholars such as Crenshaw (2017), hooks (2000), Sommersell (2004), and others have critically analyzed these intersections of being Black, female, of certain social classes, and of certain educational standings. They elaborate on how carrying multiple marginalized identities (Black and womanhood) provide experiences which are not singular but interconnected and overlapping. Nevertheless, incorporating critical multicultural pedagogical elements such as culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and social justice education (among others) into traditional teacher preparation curriculum is imperative.

The long-standing racial, ethnic, and linguistic disparities (among others) in education are long overdue for redress. Since the inception of *Brown v. Board* (1954), when Black teachers were demoted and removed from classrooms, white teachers have dominated the educational field and been at the forefront in educating our nations' diverse student populations (Yuan, 2018). This cultural mismatch continues to pollute advancements towards truly equitable educational opportunity for all as research continues to demonstrate that many white educators are unprepared to effectively teach diverse learners (Coleman-King et al., 2021; Fasching-Varner & Seriki, 2011). Educational statistics showcase how Black, certain Asian/Pacific Islander, Latina/o/x, and Native

American/Indigenous learners are placed at academic, social, emotional, and disciplinary disadvantages due to the lack of cultural competence their majority white teachers embody (Easton-Brooks, 2019; Jupp et al., 2019; Sleeter, 2017). Scholars and educators of critical pedagogies have prescribed and proven (Alim et al., 2020; Gay 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2014) the effectiveness of critical multicultural pedagogies, yet the utilization of these methods in the preparation of teachers and the supporting of in-service teachers remains scattered at large (Massar, 2022). Operationalizing at greater levels the transformative power of multicultural learning is critical to reducing and eradicating the long-standing inequities marginalized students continue to face (Young & Young, 2023).

For Black teacher educators, we are faced with a pre-service teacher population which at 79% remain steadily white, middle-class, heterosexual, English-only speaking, and female (Spiegelman, 2020). This cultural mismatch has been a point of contention for Black teachers and faculty for decades (Ladson-Billings, 1996; Kadowaki & Subramaniam, 2014; Moore et al., 2010; Vargas, 2002). As a result, Black women educators find mostly white pre-service teachers and PWIs to be more challenging environments within which to teach critically (Choi & Lim, 2021; Moore et al., 2010; Pittman, 2010; Reynolds, 2011). Challenges within their dual minority status often makes them recipients of deficit beliefs that they are not capable academics, educators, or researchers (Parker, 2017). When such resistance comes to the surface, "specific words and phrases from white students (intentionally or unintentionally) invoke hurt, hostility, and trauma for faculty of color (FOC)" (Scott, 2021, p. 1). Such phrases manifest in classroom interactions, email exchanges, and in student evaluations and can curtail the passion and love for remaining in the classroom (or university) for Black educators (Griffin et al., 2011; Pasquerella et al., 2019).

In the current climate of anti-equity legislation affecting not only P-12 but universities (Author, 2022), teacher educators more than ever need to remain committed to developing culturally relevant/responsive educators for today's culturally and linguistically diverse 21<sup>st</sup> century learners. However, the previously mentioned challenges and more mean some pre-service teachers may not be receptive to incorporating culturally responsive practices into the classroom. Yes, these students want

to be teachers, yet many are resistant to developing the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that will prepare them to be effective for the future students they will teach. They also struggle to learn from and communicate positively with Black female teacher-educators whose life experiences and pedagogical knowledge challenge their hegemonic views of the world which are often rooted in the dominance of whiteness (Picower, 2009; Sleeter, 2017; Gorski, 2019). Due to these realities, Black female teacher educators need to be especially prepared for the opposition they may experience as a result of these forces. Continued exposure to such resistance can squelch the passion and joy many critical multicultural educators embody and result in racial fatigue or the leaving of the teaching profession altogether (Guillaume & Apodaca, 2020; Kelly et al., 2017). As a Black teacher shortage remains consistent (Wiggin et al., 2021); I seek to counter such outcomes by validating their experiences through my own and to provide encouragement for those with similar experiences to stay the course.

As such, this paper takes an autoethnographic approach and adds to scholarship regarding Black women's experiences at the intersection of not only race and gender, but specialization as well. Discussing my experiences as a Black, female, critically conscious teacher educator teaching multicultural education content to pre-service teachers at a predominantly white institution (PWI) is my attempt to provide respite and much-needed encouragement for other educators with similar positionalities. I hope to contribute to ongoing discussions on how Black educators experience and cope with opposition teaching for critical pedagogies and in the teacher/faculty evaluative process and provide solutions to withstand and redress such occurrences.

### **My Positionality**

Holding social identities that intersect with the complexities of marginalization produces life experiences that require skilled maneuvering in an oppressive society. As a Black female scholar and teacher educator, my life experiences within those intersections have taught me many lessons in resilience and perseverance. After enduring years of racial harm, microaggressions, racialized selective perceptions, tone policing, neglect, erasure, and otherwise hostile educational environments, my character is built (emphasis on the 't')! Compounding

these experiences is my commitment to creating more equitable, culturally responsive, and anti-oppressive learning environments for all students in the form of preparing more culturally responsive teachers. I am particularly concerned about the difficulties and constraints I see in schools and colleges of education in relation to preparing pre-service teachers to educate all children. I am also a mother of Black children who attend public schools and who have experienced their own forms of oppression at the hands of former pre-service teachers. I continue to concern myself with how stereotypes about children of color (particularly Black) and our communities manifest in the minds of those tasked to instruct them. Put otherwise, I am not in any way apathetic or indifferent toward this subject.

As a result, holding space for the inclusion of critical multicultural pedagogies in educational environments (P-12 and higher education) that are resistant to it (such as PWIs) has become my forte. For educators committed to equity work and the continued learning journey of becoming a culturally conscious educator (Author, 2020), this journey can be difficult if not impossible within the confines of traditional racist and discriminatory U.S. public school practices, policies, and culture. I seek to encourage other Black and female teacher educators committed to equity in education to continue to fight the good fight and maintain their joy in the face of opposition.

### **Problem Statement/Research Question(s)**

Prior studies indicate that Black educators at PWIs experience elevated levels of alienation (Butner et al., 2000), microaggressions (Constantine et al. 2008), and marginalization (Collins, 1998). This paper seeks to expand on such research and underscore how white student resistance is a form of structural opposition which seeks to continue the institutionalization of racism in education and the maintenance of white supremacy (Diamond, 2018; Evans-Winters & Twyman-Hoff, 2011; Tanner & Miller, 2024). I seek to propagate the continued relevance of the experiences of Black female educators who are specifically positioned to be successful educators of pre-service teachers who will be in classrooms with diverse students. The purpose of this autoethnographic study is to understand my experiences as I struggle to remain positive and joyful in teaching authentic culturally responsive and equity-based pedagogies in higher educational settings. My story is defined as the description of the events I

encountered, my reflections of the events I experienced, and the epiphanies which emerged. This study is guided by the following research question:

- 1) What kinds of resistance can Black female educators experience in teaching critical pedagogies to predominantly white pre-service teacher populations at PWIs?

## Current Research/Literature Review

### Black Female Educator Experiences

Black female educators in higher education navigate a landscape marked by both profound challenges and remarkable resilience. Their experiences are shaped by a dual struggle: contending with systemic racism and gender bias while striving to impart knowledge and foster academic growth. Despite these obstacles, Black female educators bring a wealth of cultural insight, scholarly rigor, and pedagogical innovation to their institutions (Garry, 2017; Johnson, 2000). They often serve as mentors and role models, providing essential support to students of color and advocating for inclusive and equitable academic environments (Johnson et al, 2014; Loder-Jackson et al, 2016). Their contributions are vital to the enrichment of higher education, yet their journeys are frequently characterized by a need to prove their competence, their experiences, and dedication in the face of persistent stereotypes and institutional barriers.

Research on Black female educators and faculty in higher education has evolved over decades to include more than just the isolated experiences of being Black, being a woman, or being a certain social class. Seminal scholarship by Collins (2000) and hooks (1984, 2000) articulate the interlocking components of oppression that function within the spaces that Black females can occupy. With Black educators continually being underrepresented in higher education at just 5.5% of doctorates and Black women at only 3.2% of these degrees (NCES, 2019, 2020), the historical roots of this phenomenon are grounded in anti-Blackness within education (Dumas, 2016). Manifestations of anti-Blackness emerge in multiple avenues within Black women's experiences.

D'Amico et al. (2017) denote the difficulty Black educators have in the hiring process. The researchers investigated the rates at which white and Black applicants applied for teaching positions, comparing those rates to the hiring rates and the demographics of

the schools where they are placed. The authors provide proof of prejudice in the hiring process. Results reported that 70 percent of white applicants received 77 percent of job offers while the 13 percent of Black teacher candidates only received 6 percent of job offers. As such, the likelihood of receiving a job offer was much lower for Black applicants compared to white ones. They also discovered indications of workforce segregation where Black teachers were far more likely to be employed and assigned to schools that were struggling or had a high proportion of students of color and children living in poverty. Similarly, Walkington's (2017) study, which looks at sociological research on Black women's experiences from 1995 to 2015, concentrates on how Black women navigate inequality in employment, uneven access to resources, and resistance tactics. Although evidence points to numerous advantages of the inclusion of Black educators, such as increases in success for Black students (Blake et al., 2016; Dancy, 2014; Goldhaber et al., 2019), Black educators are increasingly underrepresented and have their competencies questioned in their occupational settings (Brown, 2019; Frank, 2018).

Student assessments of Black female instructors have also been found to contribute to the negative teaching environment Black women experience. According to a study by Drake et al. (2019), teachers of color are disproportionately more likely than their white counterparts to receive assessment scores of minimally ineffective or ineffective. According to the report, from 2011–12 and 2015–16, a low evaluation rating was given to around 19 percent of Black teachers and approximately 13 percent of Hispanic teachers in Michigan, while just 7 percent of white instructors earned the same grade. Additionally, teachers of color are even more likely to obtain low scores in schools where the faculty is overwhelmingly white. These evaluations, based on students' feedback on the instructor's performance can be skewed due to student biases about Blacks and women. With these variables present, student evaluations are overall a poor indicator of the performance of Black educators (Flaherty, 2021).

Some researchers reveal the roots of these biases as due to some white students' lack of interaction with Black people. Studies consistently show the continued lack of interaction between the average white citizen and people of color with 21 percent of whites stating that they seldom or never

interact with people of color (Ingraham, 2014; Tulshyan, 2021). This lack of interaction combined with the consumption of racist media stereotypes may contribute to their negative perceptions of their Black instructors (Castle-Bell, 2017). Such factors contribute to the creation of hostile environments for Black female educators. In spite of all this, keeping Black female teachers in the classroom and at the forefront of teacher preparation courses is critical to increasing levels of cultural competence in teachers on the whole. Historically and currently, many Black female educators' praxis is deeply-rooted in such liberatory stances and should be utilized as a strength in the preparation of other educators as well (Farinde et al., 2016; James-Galloway & Harris, 2021).

### Teaching Critical Pedagogies

As teacher preparation programs continue to be dominated by white women (Liu & Ball, 2019), the persistence of whiteness in teacher education and the issues it causes in the classroom (such as the school-to-prison pipeline, deficit thinking, tracking, and disparities in school discipline) have been highlighted by academics for decades (Howard, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2011; Milner, 2008; Sleeter, 2017). With roots in white supremacist and patriarchal norms (Leyva, 2021), manifestations of the presence of these interlocking oppressions in teacher preparation expose themselves when white students experience counter-stories to hegemonic narratives and norms during coursework (Evans-Winters & Hines, 2020; Morales et al., 2024). Scholars Evans-Winters and Hines (2020) categorized common manifestations of resistance as displays of passive-aggressiveness, hostile stance, groupthink, lynch mob, and the bystanders' effect. Within these reactions, white teachers' ability to deeply understand critical pedagogies during their pre-service experiences leaves them ill-equipped to interrupt long-standing inequities such as those mentioned above at the expense of historically and currently marginalized learners.

To redress, reduce, and eradicate the replication of these occurrences, teacher education programs are inclined to add courses and field experiences that will better prepare teacher candidates to engage with an increasingly non-white student demographic and reduce racial inequities in schools (Liu & Ball, 2019). However, many programs that prepare teachers only touch the surface when it comes

to equity education, offering a minimum of one or two required diversity courses that aim to educate candidates with everything they need to know about the spectrum of diverse learners, families, and communities (Sleeter, 2017, Williams & Glass, 2019). This is not enough (Author, et al., 2022b). A more critical and effective approach provides ongoing instruction in critical pedagogical practices and incorporates themes that support at minimum: (1) an understanding that racism impacts schools; (2) acknowledging and drawing on the racial and cultural backgrounds of their students; and (3) understanding the value of culturally relevant pedagogies (Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002; Ullucci, 2010). The development of pre-service teachers' critical consciousness and cultural competence within these practices is paramount and foundational to these previously mentioned overarching themes (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Unfortunately, many white teacher candidates often resist this type of learning (Dixson & Dingus, 2007; Evans-Winters & Twyman-Hoff, 2011, Nyachae & Pham, 2024). Resistance is often exhibited through displays of white fatigue when learning about race and racism (Flynn, 2015); evading discussions about race by engaging in silence (Case & Hemmings, 2005; Morales et al., 2024; Trepagnier, 2017); resisting understanding structural and institutional racism and privilege (Crowley & Smith, 2015); and retaliation against educators of color (particularly Black) who teach about race and racism (Evans-Winter & Hoff, 2011; Evans-Winter & Hines, 2020). All of which are expressed to actively protect white supremacist ideologies (Picower, 2009), whiteness, and white interests (Sleeter, 2017) and to maintain the status quo of racial inequity in education. The "tyranny of the majority" can rear its ugly head in courses and/or dialogues which aggravate these deeply held convictions are often met with resistance and hostility (Cohen, 2024; Dixson & Dingus, 2007; Gorski & Parekh, 2020; Matias, 2016).

However, even within these circumstances, my persistence in engaging in this work remains. The following will expose my experiences thus far as a Black female teacher educator committed to preparing predominantly white teacher populations (and all teachers) in critical multicultural pedagogies. Theoretical underpinnings which expand on these experiences are critical understandings in embodying acts of resistance and persistence in preparing such a population. Below, through the lens of Black feminist

thought, I share reflections on student interactions, email exchanges, personal communications, and student evaluations. I conclude with recommendations for maintaining joy in the face of negative and resistant encounters in the pursuit of teaching critical pedagogies.

### Theoretical Framework

Black feminist thought provides a crucial theoretical lens for comprehending the multifaceted experiences of Black female educators in higher education. Rooted in the unique historical, social, and cultural contexts of Black women, this framework offers a comprehensive understanding of the intersecting oppressions they face, including racism, sexism, and classism. By examining the lived experiences of Black female educators through this lens, we can gain deeper insights into the systemic challenges they encounter, as well as the resilience and strategies they employ to navigate and transform the academic landscape.

Patricia Hill Collins (2000) employs Black feminist thought to analyze the prevalence of negative stereotypes, which she refers to as "controlling stereotypes" about Black women. Common tropes of the mammy, the argumentative, the attitudinal, and the hypersexual Black woman have existed for centuries (French, 2013; Townsend et al., 2010). In Collins' view, stereotypical images of Black women are part of a "general ideology of oppression" and "dominance" (p. 69) that stem from white supremacy, capitalism, and other oppressive contexts Black women experience a complex and socially manufactured set of social inequities as a result of these stereotypes. As such, our epistemological stances vary from those of hegemonic groups and have produced differing ways of analyzing, manifesting, and validating knowledge (Collins, 2000).

Four fundamental tenets of Black feminist thought (Collins 1989, 1990, 2000) support Black women's ability to center themselves, counter white male positions, and work towards their empowerment and liberation. Black feminist thought: a) validates the lived experiences of Black women by making them experts in their own encounters; b) connects dialogue between other members of their communities as essential to their validation; c) establishes an ethic of care as inherent; and d) welcomes the personal and pushes back against western society's deference to disassociation in academia. Combined, validating the

knowledge of Black women plays a crucial part in educational institutions. In this study, I glean heavily on the first tenet of validating lived experiences or "concrete experience as a criterion for meaning" (James-Galloway, 2024, p. 3). In this pursuit to validate my experiences and those with similar ones, Collins' contention that 'for ordinary African-American women, those who have lived through the experiences about which they claim to be experts are more believable and credible than those who have merely read or thought about such experiences' (Collins, 1989, p. 759) is at play.

In what is also described as a form of self-love, Collins elaborated on how self-definition, self-worth and respect, self-reliance, independence and personal empowerment (Collins, 2000) uplift Black women. I encourage Black women to draw upon these characteristics as deterrent tactics against their many oppressive experiences of racism and sexism (among other isms) in their secondary and postsecondary institutions. Within such a framework, I examine how these oppressive contexts operate within my life as a Black female educator of critical pedagogies and how I have sustained myself through forms of self-love in the preservation of joy.

### Methods

Qualitative researchers use narratives to explore life experiences and give them meaning (Byrne, 2001). Scholars have discovered that many of the things we are interested in are intricate and necessitate both in-depth introspection and equally incisive investigation (Poulos, 2021). This study does as much through an autoethnographic approach. Autoethnography "is an autobiographical genre of academic writing that draws on and analyzes or interprets the lived experience of the author and connects researcher insights to self-identity, cultural rules and resources, communication practices, traditions, premises, symbols, rules, shared meanings, emotions, values, and larger social, cultural, and political issues" (Poulos, 2021, p. 4). This article seeks to draw upon my personal experiences and provide meaning, value, and encouragement to others in an effort to articulate the retention of joy within such circumstances.

## Data Collection

Utilizing student feedback from mid-semester and end-of-semester evaluations during the Fall of 2023, classroom interactions, personal communication, email exchanges, and personal reflections, I demonstrate the continued forms of resistance Black female teacher educators committed to preparing pre-service teachers to be culturally and critically conscious can experience. The combination of these artifacts for analysis seeks to expose the multitude of ways that resistance and opposition to such educational experiences for white pre-service students can manifest. Recommendations for persistence in pursuing this work and encouragement will follow.

## Data Analysis

This study relies on ethnographic content analysis (Altheide 1987, 1996). Ethnographic content analysis (ECA) is a qualitative tool used to thematically analyze documents and social interactions. As an inductive method, ECA uses a reflexive approach to interpret texts, media, documents, and social contexts to better understand human behavior and cultural insights (Altheide, 2002). The variety of documents and evidence collected via student feedback, email communication, and in-class interactions offer rich insights and after collection, were identified for key themes and coded according to such developments. Included in the categories are sub-themes of push-back, resistance, defiance, retaliation, dissonance, weaponized silence, and emotional/physical outbursts. Overarching themes are discussed in the findings.

With a focus on the meanings and significance of each occurrence, narratives and interactions produced within these documents and social settings revealed interconnections which speak to the cultural and social environment of the majority-white pre-service teacher classroom involving critical pedagogies with Black female instructors. Black feminist thought helps to contextualize these experiences within broader systemic patterns of discrimination, highlighting how institutional structures and cultural norms perpetuate inequalities. In short, these seemingly isolated data points fit into larger societal narratives around some white students' resistance to Black female educators' critical pedagogical stances and content. Below are several descriptions of

statements and interactions which reveal the frequency and intensity of the resistance I experienced.

## Findings

This autoethnographic reflection focused on continued forms of resistance Black female teacher educators committed to preparing pre-service teachers to be culturally and critically conscious can experience. Black female teacher educators committed to preparing pre-service teachers to be culturally and critically conscious often face continued forms of resistance in their professional environments. These educators strive to cultivate an awareness of social justice and equity in future teachers, emphasizing the importance of culturally responsive and critical pedagogies.

However, their efforts are frequently met with opposition, ranging from subtle dismissals to overt pushback from students who may be uncomfortable with or resistant to these transformative approaches and/or the Black female instructors teaching them. This resistance can manifest in challenges to their authority, questioning of their methodologies, and a lack of institutional support, all of which add layers of difficulty to their mission. Despite these obstacles, Black female teacher educators remain steadfast in their dedication to fostering inclusive and reflective educational spaces, demonstrating resilience and an unwavering commitment to shaping a more equitable educational landscape. Black feminist thought underscores the importance of these contributions, framing them not as ancillary but as integral to the mission of higher education. By emphasizing the value of diverse voices and experiences, Black feminist thought advocates for a more inclusive and equitable academic environment. Below are excerpts of evidence to the above from the collected feedback forms, interactions, and personal communications between myself and my pre-service teachers. This collection of artifacts speaks to the historical and contemporary gendered and racialized experiences many Black female educators of critical pedagogies contend with. These concrete experiences provide meaning and validate knowledge claims myself and other Black women express when discussing the nuances of such oppressive occurrences.

## Student Evaluations

End-of-semester evaluations revealed mixed results at two extremes. Some feedback was relatively

positive and constructive, indicating students valued their learning experiences. Other students were particularly critical and hostile, noting their displeasure with the course and my personal teaching practices. One significant theme found within the negative evaluations were dispositions which exposed students' perceptions that I used this class to assert an agenda biased towards Black people.

*(Student) Although the course description is as stated, "Historical, philosophical and cultural foundations of education emphasizing education for a multicultural society," we only discussed African American oppression and how white people were the cause of it all. I personally feel that any discussion of any other culture that we had could be told in one singular breath. This class although described to teach "education for a multicultural society," I do not feel has prepared me to teach students of other cultures such as Caucasian, Hispanic, Asian or any other for that matter.*

*(Student) The course objectives seem to emphasize on diversity very heavily. However, there was only one group we focused on during class. We studied the history and perspectives of Black Americans so much that there was virtually no mention of any other groups such as East/Southeast/South Asians, Native Americans, Hispanics, Non-American Whites, Immigrant/Refugees, Arabs, etc. There were many opportunities to be inclusive towards those groups, yet every topic we discussed was narrowed down to White vs Black. When discussing privilege, we only talked about White privilege, and while that is a prevalent issue, it's not fair to ignore other forms of privilege, such as being rich, or your education level. Even when discussing privilege, it seemed to be only about how white people are more privileged than black people through the lens of race. How about the fact that some POC (like me, for example) are more privileged than others, even white people, because of our wealth? My parents went to college, though some of my white peers' parents did not, and that put me as more privileged than them. I find it concerning that examples like these were not mentioned, and instead the issue of privilege was simplified down to how White people have it easier than Black people (not even POC as a whole, just black people. At least that's what I got from class, since no other race is ever mentioned).*

*(Student) In this class I often felt that if I shared what I was thinking, I would be seen as racist or would be shut down because I did not agree with what was being said. Therefore, I do not feel I had the opportunity to share my thoughts without judgement.*

*(Student) The target audience in this class was a rich, white, educated American. The goal was to teach this small group of people on the issues that a poor, black person may face. I don't think this really counts as diverse ideas or perspectives. Students who did share diverse perspectives were shut down, as well. I wish there was more focus on other races, religions, and socioeconomic groups, but there really was not. I don't recall Asian people (no one from the entire continent) being mentioned once, yet we studied black history and issues so deeply that we had half a day dedicated to lynching. And there's nothing wrong with us studying the history of other races, but when we are studying one group's history so much that other groups that are just as important to learn about get EXCLUDED, then there's an issue.*

*(Student) I feel this class was telling me how I should feel about certain topics rather than encouraging my own ideas or perspectives. Aforementioned, we really only discussed two cultures throughout this course.*

*(Student) [This school] is a conservative school so I understand that it's going to be hard to teach these people about the topics that we talked about in class. But many of the peers around me were not open at all to the class's topics since they felt that it always made feel like white people were bad. I know that's not the goal of the class, but when all we talk about is how white people are privileged and they oppress black people, that's the message you're sending out. If the class was more diverse and talked about how other forms of oppression can affect all sorts of people, I think people would be more receptive to the class.*

*(Student) I do not feel having an open mind was encouraged in this class. The learning environment held tension between those who agreed with the content and those who did not.*

*(Student) I feel the way the content was handed to us was biased based on the instructor's preexisting narrative surrounding the topics.*



*(Student) I enrolled in this so-called "multicultural" course with high expectations, only to be sorely disappointed by the narrow focus and the stifling atmosphere for dissenting opinions. The course, ostensibly about diversity, seemed more like a platform for the incessant victimization of one specific group—black individuals. While acknowledging the importance of addressing the challenges faced by this community, the complete disregard for other perspectives and experiences was disheartening. It felt like any attempt to present a different viewpoint was met with not just resistance but outright hostility. Diversity implies an exploration of a multitude of perspectives, not the relentless emphasis on victimhood that this course seemed to propagate. If the goal is to foster a truly inclusive environment, then a broader examination of the challenges faced by various communities is imperative. This class desperately needs a reality check. Encouraging critical thinking and allowing for a range of perspectives should be the cornerstone of any multicultural course. Instead, the environment created was one of fear—fear of expressing opinions that didn't align with the preconceived narrative. Suggestions for improvement include diversifying the curriculum to include a more comprehensive examination of multicultural issues, inviting speakers from various backgrounds, and creating a space where students feel free to express themselves without the fear of being berated for holding a different view. In conclusion, this course falls short of its promise to provide a truly multicultural understanding. It's not about suppressing dissent but about embracing the richness of diverse perspectives. A major overhaul is needed to transform this course from a one-sided narrative into a genuinely enriching educational experience.*

From these comments, it seems like Black women professors are poised to indoctrinate white students into a style of thinking that deviates from the norm and is not consistent with what it means to be an equity-minded person. This theme of the perceived presence of a lack of open-mindedness throughout the course revealed itself in the analysis of similar phrases. On a similar note, the disdain expressed for what some perceived as an imbalanced approach to multiculturalism via an over-emphasis on the Black experience is interesting. To show the variety of topics this course did cover, I have provided in the appendix my syllabus showcasing the variety of multicultural topics we explored throughout the semester. As such,

our topics not only touched on multiple experiences of Black students with historical references as to the roots of current inequities along with those of Latina/o/x, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native/Indigenous, differently-abled, linguistically diverse, and religiously diverse students (among others).

Specifically, the first part of this course focused on making connections for students regarding their social identities in relation to those of their future students. This self-reflective process helped them situate themselves and their positionality in a racialized society (Matias, 2016). We later dove into a brief historical analysis of education through multiple perspectives with texts by Tyack (1974), Anderson (1988), Adams, (1995), Blanton (2007) and Tamura (1994). Familiarity with these seminal texts provided a much-needed look at the historical harm U.S. public educational policy inflicted on people of color and their communities over centuries. These examples along with my continual showcase of multicultural book collections for them to peruse throughout the semester was my attempt to broaden their understandings of their racialized educational contexts beyond the Black/white binary. The highlighted comments from the students above felt like a dismissal of the critical and multifaceted approach to critical pedagogical content and a hyper-focus on my experiences as a Black woman. I believe the perception of an 'over-emphasis' on Blackness may have been caused by the ability to voice my perspectives and experiences as a Black woman in society alongside the experiences of other marginalized groups.

However, not all evaluations were negative. Some mid-semester evaluations and end-of-semester evaluations gave some students a chance to reflect on their overall experiences in my class.

*(Student) This is one of my favorite classes. [Professor] does a very good job at engaging the entire class in discussion and assigns relevant activities that help me better understand the content.*

*(Student) This class makes me feel uncomfortable in ways unimaginable. However, I feel like [Professor] handled the uncomfortable situations gracefully.*

*(Student) This course allowed me to understand the need for culturally relevant teaching and how we, as teachers, can meet students where they are.*

*(Student) It was mostly an open classroom where people can talk.*

*(Student) The strengths of this course include a manageable course load and class engagement.*

*(Student) The strengths of this course are it allows for many different perspectives and for the class to become comfortable with each other. It also has the class do different activities that keep the class engaged with is very important. Lastly, the professor is very easy to talk to and great at teaching her class.*

*(Student) [Professor] isn't just a great instructor but she's an amazing person who cares a lot about her job. She does more than [sic] what is expected and that's hard to find in this day and age.*

As student feedback continues to be utilized as an element in determining instructor “effectiveness,” it is also insufficient in determining such subjective conclusions. In the midst of receiving both positive and negative feedback from students, I was perplexed as to what was real and what were projections of selective perceptions of me as a Black woman. Although the negative comments left me feeling angry, hurt, and a bit confused, I knew that as an educator, I am supposed to maintain my professionalism when dealing with improper remarks, flawed reasoning, and racist views from students by remaining composed and level-headed. And so, I did. Although I did not agree that the course was taught with an imbalanced focus on Black people, I still reflected on my course content and made note not to focus “too much” on Black people with my students. However, the positive feedback I received confirms my belief in continuing to conduct my courses in similar manners as those students that are open to multiple viewpoints and having their hegemonic views challenged appreciated my efforts. Although feedback analyzed in this study pertained to one semester, other semesters have revealed similar results with either extremely positive feedback or considerably negative during both mid-semester and end of semester feedback cycles. In a similar fashion, course evaluations were not the only point of contention during this course. Classroom interactions proved challenging at times as well.

## Classroom Interactions

Some classroom interactions were challenging and attempted to disrupt a positive learning environment. On one occasion, after a discussion and video footage of the phenomenon of white women calling the police on Black men, women, and children for benign offenses, a heated banter erupted between myself and a white male student of mine after I asked the class about the perception of threat in the case of ‘Dog Park Amy.’ This student, in response to this inquiry, professed his support of the white woman, Amy Cooper, who called the police on the Black man she was having a verbal disagreement with. When I asked him to elaborate on his perspective of the perceived threat Ms. Cooper was under while having this disagreement with a Black man, he became visibly flustered and frustrated at me asking him to provide evidence to support his position and instead shot up out of his seat, sucked his teeth, and yelled “this class is over!” He then picked up his belongings and walked out of the room before class was dismissed. This was the first time he reacted like this, his typical demeanor in class was aloof as he spent most of his time on his cell phone during discussions. Even still, I sent him an immediate follow-up email that day asking him to meet with me during office hours to discuss the incident. His reply is below.

*[Professor],  
I do not particularly want to speak on it again. I'm completely busy all-day Wednesday and Friday anyways. I apologize for walking out of class early, and if you felt disrespected by it.*

After reading his response I chose not to push him any further and decided not to continue to put myself through any more emotionally draining back and forth with students. He did not show up to class the next day but when he did come back, he seemed to be in better spirits, and he did not exhibit any further outbursts in class.

One other interaction with a biracial white and Hispanic female student also generated aggression from her. After discussing elevating marginalized languages to the same status as English, she interjected during my discussion and professed her displeasure with that stance as she believed it would lead to discrimination against those who only spoke English. My rebuttal to her comment included how I

understood that elevating marginalized languages may feel like something will be taken away from English speakers, however, research doesn't support that stance as reverse discrimination is unsubstantiated (Rousell et al., 2019; Woo, 2018). I continued that if the fear stems from a loss of privilege, then yes, that would be an outcome that some may have an issue with. She replied that she felt that she could not voice her dissent freely (i.e., unchallenged). She then made a brief comment under her breath about how "things in this class always go one way." I composed myself, smiled in response, and asked if there were any more questions or comments on the subject. The silence among the class indicated to me that I could move on to the next topic.

On a few other occasions, white male students would "test" my knowledge and expertise by asking me to define words or phrases from our discussion topics. My answers were then double-checked by them (in front of me) by Googling the definition on their cell phones. After they concluded that my definition was similar to that of Merriam-Webster, they would nod in agreement and continue with their class interactions. Outside of these events, most students chose avoidance and silence in whole group discussions. After realizing this, I allowed them to discuss topics in small groups. This seemed to work better for most, though others were still disengaged. In contrast, the few students of color (particularly Black females) tended to be more vocal in our whole class discussions. Similar to the reflections in Ladson-Billings's (1996) experience, it seemed the more vocal students of color became in class, the more white students exercised silence.

### Student Assignments

A few of our journal assignments sparked interesting responses from students. These assignments were meant to provide opportunities for students to further reflect on class discussions and assignments and write about their thoughts, questions, or epiphanies that emerged as a result. On one occasion, after watching the short documentary, *Stolen Education* (2013), a film about Mexican American children who testified in a federal court desegregation case after they were discriminatorily placed in first grade for three years due to a perceived language diversity. A white male student, in his journal reflection, expressed what he described as a

contradiction between class content, the documentary, and what he believed was "judging others." Part of his journal response is below:

*Although the video made some really interesting points, I do not think it did a really great job with helping my understanding of the topic. I felt like the video was focused a lot on the court case, whereas [sic] in class we talked a lot about the underlying tones of what different people were saying. Personally, I felt it was a little contradictory to what we have said in class. Early in the semester we spoke on different demographics and their home backgrounds. And as a teacher we have to be understanding as why certain kids act out the way they do, and we cannot always hold it against them. It is the same with the people in the video. How are we to hold what the people in the video are doing against them. They were raised thinking that what they and the people before them was right. Why is everyone in class so quick to judge these people and be so against what they are saying, when we talk about understanding where people come from and not being quick to discipline them.*

Part of my response to him is below as well:

*Thank you for your insights. This is the part that gets tricky...judging marginalized groups for having perspectives, values, and beliefs that are contrary to white dominant norms are a major topic in this class. We have seen how these differences have led to enslavement, genocide, and land theft (among other things) of marginalized groups. Not holding people (particularly white folks) accountable for racist and/or discriminatory practices/beliefs simply because "that's how they were raised" is an issue we are actively working on in this class as well.*

*The difference between the two is the harm inflicted due to those "beliefs." How have marginalized groups (systemically) harmed whites with their cultural beliefs? Now, how have white cultural beliefs about marginalized people harmed them? Our impact is greater than our intent. If we have the mindset that perpetrators of racist and oppressive acts and beliefs can be absolved because that's how they were taught to believe, we are allowing these harmful practices to continue because "no one is at fault." Having the attitude of "that's just how it is" is the definition of dysconscious racism (as we discussed).*

I understand it can feel "judgy" to hold people accountable for prejudiced beliefs but we must. The discomfort people may feel in the process of this accountability is far more tolerable than the impact those beliefs have on others. We cannot be neutral when it comes to standing up against prejudice, discrimination, and oppression...there is always a choice!

This brief exchange highlighted what Sleeter (2017) has described as "tools of whiteness." In this instance, he equated the need for the inclusion of perspectives, values, and beliefs of marginalized groups as the same as accepting the racist beliefs of some whites simply because they were "raised that way." This gross misinterpretation of what it means to accept others can create tensions in courses such as these. Yes, we want to accept others, however, multiculturalism never means to accept bigotry and racism in the name of the inclusion of all beliefs. My rule of thumb regarding this issue is as follows: if a belief does not support the equal human worth of all individuals and groups, it does not belong in teachings of equity and inclusivity.

### Personal Communication

On a few occasions, a handful of students would pull me aside after class to ask questions or clarify misinterpreted comments. A biracial white and Japanese female student curiously asked (after being the third student I politely corrected in class) why it wasn't ok to call Black people 'Colored.' She appreciated the patience I had in explaining the inappropriateness of this term to date. I also had a white male student try to make amends with me after his off-color joke offended the two Black female students in my class. I wasn't personally offended by the commentary, but he was sincere in his regret at how others may have felt.

As for the two Black female students in my class, we formed a bond throughout the semester as they both gravitated toward me during class and after class to go over the day's discussions. They both expressed to me on numerous occasions how much they enjoyed having me as their professor and I was the first Black female professor they had ever had at this PWI. These relationships mirror what research already says: students of color will search outside of their departments for faculty members of color who are aware of the particular difficulties and situations they

confront at PWIs (Boger et al., 2024; Patton & Harper, 2003; Tuitt, 2009). These ladies looked to me as a safe space during their time in this class as many of the comments and anti-equity dispositions of their white classmates were triggering for them. Unfortunately, the comfort these two ladies expressed towards me during class was a point of contention for some of the white students. These ladies not only expressed that I was a source of comfort for them due to my racial and gender identification but also because they felt excluded by the other classmates. On several occasions, they made me aware of email and group chat communications that they uncovered amongst their classmates that they were not invited to. This and other forms of exclusion were common experiences for them within this course. I too, had challenges with electronic exchanges between myself and other students as well.

### Electronic Communications

I saved this one for last due to the triggering (Scott, 2021) nature of this email exchange for me. The following email expert illuminates the assumptions made about myself and the two Black females in my class after a biracial white and Hispanic male student decided to confront me via email after being alerted to the university's attendance policy. This student, after reviewing the university's attendance policy, (he also missed several class sessions up to this point), sent this email to me as his first response to this information. This email was over 1,000 words. I have condensed it for word count and provided only specific statements.

*You see, I genuinely liked you at the beginning. You seemed like a very nice lady who actually cares about her students' education. However, as we moved forward into the semester, things began to push towards one narrative and that narrative went against the point of "multicultural education." When students spoke of their beliefs, which was preached about day one, you, [Professor], spoke out to them and you had the tone of taking it personally. I'm not the only one to feel this way either, about 75% of the classroom that I know of, feels this way as well...*

*P.S: It pains me to have to write this letter because I genuinely liked you as a professor in the beginning. Although, due to the arbitrary nature of your grading*

*criteria, I and many others will take legal action if an agreement isn't met.*

Receiving this message the day before a holiday break was disheartening as it was a continuous personal attack on my ability as an instructor and my personal character as well. This student also expressed how I should be careful to apply all grading criteria to all students equally. He insinuated that I would not penalize the two Black women in my course for their absences due to our friendly encounters in class. Although I was disappointed in receiving this email, I was not surprised. This email, which the student recanted after I replied that threatening a professor goes against the university code of conduct, fell right in line with the rest of the interactions I had with students who were resistant to engage in their development of critical pedagogies as part of their dispositions as future teachers and resented the Black female educator who made them do it.

The inclusion of the previous artifacts give voice to my experiences where some students use evaluations and personal interactions with Black female educators as weapons to push back against engaging in the development of critical teaching pedagogies due to their counter-hegemonic narratives which challenge white students' deeply held views of the world. These instances of students lashing out, becoming emotional in interactions, challenging my authority and intellect were amplified as expressions connected to their discontent with the content and who was presenting it. The blatant manner in which these events occurred showcase the lack of respect I received from students who felt challenged by my pedagogical approaches and content. The lack of isolation of these events in the experiences of Black female educators indicates a phenomenon is at play. The validation of our experiences is wanting, even still, these occurrences can discourage Black educators from pursuing this kind of work and stall the preparation of culturally responsive teachers.

### **Discussion**

Black female educators continue to have negative experiences in educational settings. Our experiences handling hostile student behavior are a prominent theme in the literature about Black faculty experiences (Dixson & Dingus, 2007; Evans-Winters & Twyman-Hoff, 2011, Nyachae & Pham, 2024).

Validating the inclusion of those experiences and utilizing our knowledge constructions to create more positive educational spaces for us is critical. This autoethnographic study revealed my personal experiences with resistance and opposition from some white pre-service teachers at a PWI during a course on critical pedagogies in education. Assigned to instruct them in critical multicultural pedagogies such as culturally responsive, culturally relevant, and culturally sustaining teaching, this exposure proved challenging to many. As a result, the veneers of white hegemony and supremacy remained present as witnessed through silence (e.g. students withdrew from engaging in meaningful dialogue on race in education); evaluations were weaponized (e.g. some students lambasted me on comment sections of their evaluations); and social interactions within the classroom attempted to create a hostile learning environment for myself and others. When considered as a whole, these occurrences show that, in many respects, some students appear to be even more resistive to the "messenger" than they are to the "message." The discussion that follows shows how students use a range of strategies to intimidate and, in some cases, completely disregard me as a Black female instructor. This serves as illustrations of the difficult landscape of teacher education and the challenging circumstances that many professors of color face on a daily basis. Answering the main research question regarding the experiences of resistance for Black female educators can be addressed through the following themes.

### **Weaponized Silence**

In weaponizing silence by refusing to engage in class discussion, it appears that for some students, it was easier to remain silent than endure the discomfort of having their ideas and perspectives that did not align with equity and culturally responsiveness challenged during class discussions. The claim that some students' perspectives were not accepted and thus rendered them to remain silent was disheartening. Yes, it is true that this particular cohort of students were especially difficult to engage with in difficult dialogues (Love et al., 2016). Other classes have had less difficulty in discussions and were more cordial in expressing their dissent. However, the perception that diverse perspectives were not tolerated was inaccurate as the entire course was a presentation of such

perspectives. However, much of the displeasure expressed by students was due to the lack of understanding of one of our core objectives: understand tolerance and intolerance and have knowledge of when it is appropriate to be intolerant of specific behaviors/activities that violate our core values (Levin, 2024). Reminiscent of Karl Popper's 'paradox of intolerance,' my ability to push back on ideas and discussions that do not align with equity-focused discourses is part of my responsibility as the instructor (O'Hear, 2024). Students often viewed my challenges to their misaligned comments as an affront to the inclusion of multiple perspectives. As a critical educator, I cannot validate dehumanizing dialogues in the name of inclusivity.

Other educators of color have documented the negative responses they received from white students and their peers when they tried to broaden the scope and include viewpoints that do not center the conversation around white students and their experiences (Davis & Cross, 2024; Henry, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1996; Williams & Evans-Winter, 2005). They too have received the silent treatment from students and witness them engage in 'conspiracies of silence' that ensure white students' comfort when they feel triggered or unsafe in racial dialogues (Sue, 2016). On the other hand, the two Black female students felt encouraged to speak up in class. My position as an unapologetic instructor helped encourage them to share their stories and experiences at the university and in society. Black feminist perspectives are signified in these events as although students with hegemonic perspectives were displeased when their dominant and mis-aligned comments were challenged, marginalized students' concrete experiences were validated and led to feelings of empowerment within these contexts.

### **Hostile Interactions and Negative Evaluations**

When students were vocal, intentional attempts to discredit my reputation as a professional were prominent. The persistent referral to what some believed the objective of this course to be ran counter to the stated objectives in the syllabus. This course was explicitly designed to explore discrimination and oppression by examining the history of education in the United States and how it shapes education in today's multicultural society. Some students felt that this class was just supposed to cover cultural facts and events about people of color. They were expecting an additive

approach to multicultural education (Banks, 2019) as this is what many are familiar with in pre-service teacher preparation courses (Silva, 2022; Williams & Glass, 2019). This course, however, focused on deeper meanings and understandings of multiculturalism in a pluralistic society and purposely pushed students out of their comfort zones to explore how race and other social identities impact opportunities and oppression for marginalized groups in education. The transformative nature of course assignments, projects, and readings were specially designed to support the developments of pre-service teachers' ability to embody equity-focused and critically conscious demeanors and dispositions. When up against hegemonic norms, resistance is expected.

Similar to the experiences of Dixon & Dingus (2007) over a decade ago, challenging "students to focus on their own belief systems, the sources of their beliefs, assumptions of cultural hegemony, and asymmetrical power relations associated with their beliefs...manifests in high levels of resistance" (p. 644-645). Many students who expressed negative sentiments towards me mistook challenging "intolerance" and knowing when "it is appropriate to be intolerant of specific behaviors/activities" as me having an agenda outside of my prescribed professional duties. This assumption exists although this course was developed before I was assigned to teach it. In essence, while I believe that students should voice their disagreement with specific ideas, it is apparent that such dissent is normed against that which is comfortable for many of my students, most of whom identify as white.

To be sure, as a critical multicultural educator, one who teaches beyond cultural facts about groups of color and instead dives deeper with focuses on power, privilege, oppression, and social/educational inequality (Cohen, 2024; Rentzi, 2024), I am aware of the practice of critical self-reflection throughout my continued journey as a conscious educator. I am not immune to bettering my pedagogical practices and take all feedback seriously. Similar to what Wilson (2002) expressed when discussing the contradicting perspectives of students of color under the tutelage of white teachers in which students of color express hostile learning environments in opposition to what their white teachers profess, some of my white students' proclamations of me creating a hostile learning environment alongside proclamations which speak to the positive learning atmosphere I created

lead me to believe that such negative interpretations are really more reflections of some white students' deeply rooted anti-Black psychological dispositions. Yes, students are always welcome to share their diverse ideas, experiences, and beliefs. However, it is imperative for me as a critical multicultural educator to push back on perspectives, values, and beliefs that reinforce the silencing and dehumanization of historically marginalized people and identities.

### **Giving Power to Knowledge**

Validating knowledge plays a crucial part in educational institutions. More academics who are prepared to question the inflexible boundaries impeding the field's progress in developing critical and multicultural educators are needed. According to Collins (1989), the "Eurocentric masculinist knowledge validation process" is still the norm in many spheres of society, most notably in academia and education. This oppressive process can be stopped by the inclusion of the knowledge and experiences that Black female educators bring to the academy and the world of teacher education.

Understanding the experiences of Black female educators through the lens of Black feminist thought has significant implications for policy and practice in higher education. Institutions must recognize and address the specific challenges faced by Black female educators, implementing policies that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (Burrows et al., 2022; Jones, 2006; Neal, 2023). This includes not only recruiting and retaining Black women faculty but also creating supportive environments that validate their experiences and contributions (Kelly et al., 2021). Additionally, curricula and pedagogical practices should reflect the diverse perspectives that Black female educators bring to the academic community (McNeil & Jefferson, 2024). Black feminist thought sheds light on the strategies that Black female educators use to resist oppression and empower themselves and others. These strategies can include developing pedagogical approaches that center the experiences and knowledge of marginalized communities (Crenshaw, 2021). By validating our knowledge bases, Black female educators can create spaces for critical dialogue and transformative learning. Black feminist thought thus provides both a diagnostic tool for understanding oppression and a roadmap for resistance and empowerment.

In light of these experiences, questions remain as to how do individual teachers (mainly Black female teachers) cope and persist when constantly faced with such backlash and opposition. How do we maintain our joy and commitment to social justice in education? How, under the weight of student scoring on teaching evaluations which can impose self-scrutiny for Black educators, do we continue to teach as we know best? How can one truly teach if they are also battling the consequences of being "too Black" in teaching critical pedagogies? Three fundamental strategies helped me throughout this trying semester and I wish to share them below.

### **Recommendations**

The findings above suggest that Black female faculty in teacher education face resistance from some white students in courses that use critical pedagogical praxes. Based on these results, this resistance can come in many forms. In the case of this study, weaponized silence and hostile interactions were prominent. Support structures would be beneficial for Black female faculty to endure sure environments which resemble opportunities to find support for their unique experiences and encourage them to continue in their pursuit of equity in education. As follows, recommendations on what such support and encourage could look like are presented.

### **Finding Support Systems**

Having like-minded and equally-yoked equity-minded academic partners in crime is invaluable. This is community-building work and it will sustain educators as they navigate the perils of this field. I am grateful for the trusted individuals who I can call and rant to or bounce ideas off knowing they will not only have my back but also inform me of my need to reflect on things I need to improve upon. My professional colleagues are major sources of strength for me; having folks who also specialize in an educators' area of expertise is an added bonus, as they will know more intimately about academic stances within classroom practices.

### **They Know Not What They Do**

This may be controversial for some, but I will proceed cautiously. Grace is a powerful tool. Understanding where people are, meeting them there

(and sometimes leaving them there) are essential coping methods when interacting with resistance to justice-oriented ideas. For some, the idea of teachers advocating for social justice in schools will never be something they get on board with. Ever. Moving on from taking personal responsibility for someone else's lack of openness to learning is par for the course. Some are so stuck in their ways of thinking and knowing due to their social positions in society it may be that much more difficult for them to see any other points of view. Whiteness, which situates individuals at the top of the racial hierarchy, can make it that much more difficult to see the trials of those situated below it.

### ***Just Plant the Seeds***

Educators should feel free to release themselves from being the sole game-changer in this long fight towards justice in education. Yes, we are committed. Yes, we are passionate. But we cannot do it all alone, nor should we try to. We are only here to plant the seeds. We can only lead our pre-service teachers to the waters of racial justice in education—we cannot make them drink it. Even with how often Black female educators are portrayed as strong and resilient, our superwoman schema (Erving et al., 2024) has its limits and thus should be respected and maintained for our safety and psychological well-being.

In the end, these brief, yet powerful suggestions have sustained me. Along with my personal faith, they are how I stay empowered and persistent in this work. This is how other educators can stay empowered to inspire others interested in pursuing this work, too. It's important to note that these experiences are not the sum total of my career as an equity educator up to this day. Many teachers have expressed their sincerest praises and mindset shifts after attending one of my workshops, professional developments, seminars, or reading one of my publications. Even as a primary school teacher, my negative experiences do not outweigh those who have expressed how much my approach to education has helped them, and their students. I thrive off of these experiences as well.

### **Limitations**

This study along with others is not without flaws and has potential limitations. Some shortcomings within this study could be viewed as a weakness in its generalizability. The anonymous nature of the mid-semester and end-of-semester evaluations make it

difficult to provide a full participant profile for all the evaluations I received. This limit in the data collection led me to use terms such as 'some' and 'many' when describing white students. Although the majority of my students in this course were white and female, I did not want to assume that all of my white students participated in creating negative reviews. Future studies could remedy this issue with instructor generated end of course surveys that include participant racial identity categories while also deidentifying student names.

### **Conclusion**

According to this analysis, not much has changed for Black women in higher education since we were first granted the legal right to pursue education as an occupation. The reviewed literature here suggests that educators who are Black and in higher education continue to face several oppressions. Black feminist thought is indispensable for understanding the experiences of Black female educators in higher education. By highlighting the intersecting oppressions they face and the strategies they employ to resist and thrive, this theoretical framework provides a comprehensive and nuanced perspective on their contributions and challenges. Embracing Black feminist thought in higher education can lead to more inclusive, equitable, and just academic environments where the voices and experiences of Black female educators are recognized, valued, and celebrated.

Preparing today's pre-service teacher workforce to be effective for today's culturally and linguistically diverse student population requires a revamping of traditional understandings of what characteristics a highly-qualified and effective teacher possesses. Today's educators need more than technical content knowledge, they need the skills and dispositions to be culturally competent and conscious as well. Teacher preparation programs are strategically positioned to create these learning experiences. In order to prepare these future teachers, we must support the teacher educators who are tasked with this heavy responsibility. If current trends remain, successfully navigating these experiences for Black women educators will continue to be a social and emotional burden for them, impacting the potential positive and irreplaceable contributions they make towards equity in education. I hope this manuscript empowers others and assists in helping them maintain



joy in the face of opposition. I look forward to seeing more educators continue to do good in their pursuit of a brighter and more equitable future for *all* students. Remember: Don't let them rob you of your joy!

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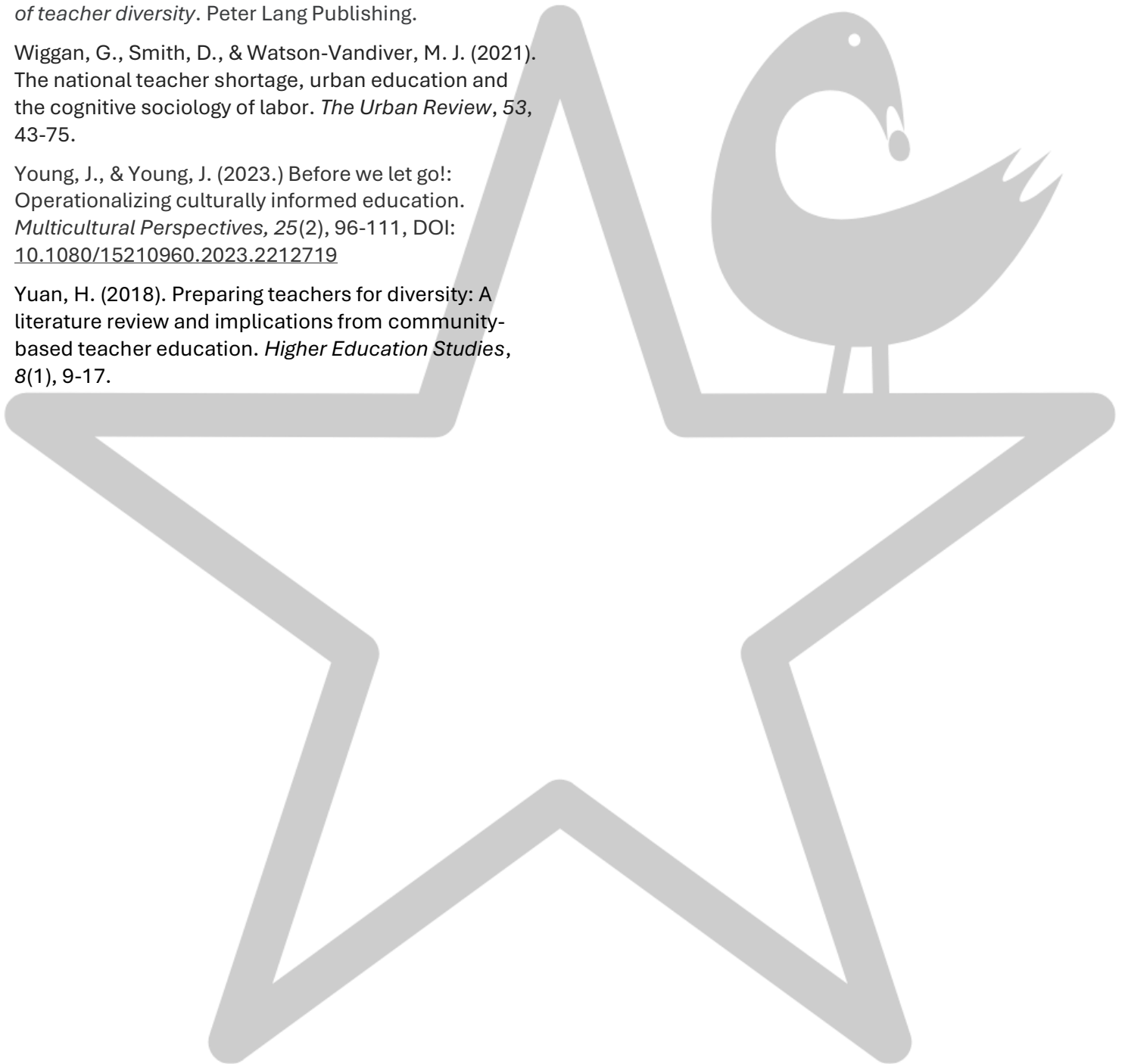
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## APPENDIX

### Course Syllabus Sample

Class Meeting	Class Topic and Readings <i>*readings due prior to class meeting*</i>	Assignments Due Tuesdays at 11:59pm CST
<b>Week 1: Introductions</b>		
August 22	Syllabus and Canvas Course Design and Expectations Learning Community Placements & Info Sheets Why Teach?/Education as Equity	Diversity Pre-Assessment due August 29
August 24	<b>Readings</b> Groundwater Approach (Canvas) Diversity & Equity in the Classroom Ch. 1  <b>CRP in Practice</b> Courageous Conversations Compass	
<b>Week 2: What is Multicultural Education?</b>		
August 29	<b>Readings</b> Banks & Banks - Characteristics and Goals (Canvas) Teacher Education and Multicultural Courses in North Carolina p. 155-162 (Canvas) 7 Principles of Multicultural Education, 4 Es of Multicultural Education, and Constructivism (Canvas)  <b>CRP in Practice</b> Working definition of ME	
August 31	<b>Readings</b> Diversity & Equity in the Classroom Ch. 2 Diversity & Equity in the Classroom Ch. 3  <b>CRP in Practice</b> Small Group Level Activity: Get to Know Your Learning Community through Social Identity Wheel	Learning Community Information Sheets due August 31
<b>Week 3: What is Culture?</b>		
September 5	<b>Readings</b> Yosso's Cultural Capital (Canvas) Culture Clash p. 42-45 (Canvas)  <b>CRP in Practice</b> Who's Culture Has Capital?	
September 7	<b>Readings</b> Culturally Relevant Pedagogy- Ladson-Billings (Canvas) Culturally Responsive Teaching- Gay (Canvas)  <b>CRP in Practice</b> Cultural Groups KWTL Activity	
<b>Week 4: History of Oppression within the U.S.</b>		
September 12	<b>Readings</b> Diversity & Equity in the Classroom Ch. 4 Diversity & Equity in the Classroom Ch. 5	Journal #1 of 5 "Racial and Ethnic Identity Discussion" Due Sept. 12



September 14	<p><b>Readings</b> Diversity &amp; Equity in the Classroom Ch. 6 Diversity &amp; Equity in the Classroom Ch. 7 Diversity &amp; Equity in the Classroom Ch. 8</p> <p><b>CRP in Practice</b> Cultural Groups KWTL Activity (Revisit)</p>	<p>Make a plan to get your pictures taken across campus (Picture Project) **Cultural Plunge Project (ongoing)</p>
<b>Week 5: History of Oppression with U.S. Education</b>		
September 19	<p><b>Readings</b> Woman's High Calling: The Teaching Professional in America, 1830-1860 (Canvas) And Then There Were None... The Exodus of Black Women from the Teaching Profession (Canvas) Banks &amp; Banks - Gender Bias: From Colonial America to Today's Classroom (Canvas)</p>	
September 21	<p><b>Readings</b> Excerpts from Tyack (1974); Anderson (1988); Adams (2020); Tamura (1994); Blanton (2007)- (Canvas)</p> <p><b>CRP in Practice</b> Venn Diagram Activity</p>	<p>**Cultural Plunge Project (ongoing)</p>
<b>Week 6: Achievement Gap or Educational Debt?</b>		
September 26	<p><b>Readings</b> Educational Debt-Ladson-Billings (Canvas) The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy (Canvas) The Opportunity Myth (Canvas)</p> <p><b>CRP in Practice</b> NCES Achievement Data Dive</p>	
September 28	<p><b>Film</b> Stolen Education</p>	
<b>Week 7: Becoming a Culturally Conscious Educator</b>		
October 3	<p><b>Readings</b> The Cultural Plunge: Cultural Immersion as a Means of Promoting Self-Awareness and Cultural Sensitivity Among Student Teachers (Canvas) Banks &amp; Banks - Communities, Families, and Educators Working Together for School Improvement (Canvas) Discuss Cultural Plunge Project</p>	<p>Journal #2 of 5 Respond to a video: Stolen Education Due Oct. 3</p>
October 5	<p><b>Readings</b> Invisible Knapsack (Canvas) The Weaponization of Whiteness in Schools (Canvas)</p> <p><b>CRP in Practice</b> Marshmallow Activity</p>	
<b>Week 8: Issues in Education: Culture, Teaching, and Learning</b>		
October 10	<p>No Class-Fall Break</p>	
October 12	<p><b>Readings</b> Developing Cultural Critical Consciousness-Gay &amp; Kirkland (Canvas)</p>	

	<p>The Canon Debate, Knowledge Construction, and Multicultural Education (Canvas)</p> <p><b>CRP in Practice</b> Spectrum of Consciousness Discussion</p>	
<b>Week 9: Issues in Education: Culture, Teaching, and Learning</b>		
October 17	<p><b>Readings</b></p> <p>Banks &amp; Banks - Culture, Teaching, and Learning (Canvas) Diversity, Group Identity, and Citizenship Education in a Global Age (Canvas) Discuss Picture Project</p>	
October 19	<p><b>Readings</b></p> <p>The Politics of Children's Literature (Canvas) Guide to Selecting Anti-Bias Children's Books</p> <p><b>CRP in Practice</b> Small Group Level Activity: Book Tasting</p>	
<b>Week 10: Issues in Education: Special Populations</b>		
October 24	<p><b>Readings</b></p> <p>Banks &amp; Banks - Culturally Responsive Special Education in Inclusive Schools (Canvas) Banks &amp; Banks - Christian Nation or Pluralistic Culture: Religion in American Life (Canvas)</p> <p><b>CRP in Practice</b> Small Group Level Activity: Picture Project Discussion</p>	*Journal #3 of 5 "Picture Project" due Oct. 24
October 26	<p><b>Guest Lecturer</b></p> <p>Eboni Bango</p>	
<b>Week 11: Issues in Education: Language Diversity</b>		
October 31	<p><b>Readings</b></p> <p>Should Writers Use They Own English? (Canvas) <b>Film</b> American Tongues</p>	
November 2	<p><b>Readings</b></p> <p>Forward and Introduction to <i>Talking Black and White</i>, p. xi-xxii Banks &amp; Banks - Language Diversity and Schooling</p>	
<b>Week 12: Issues in Education: School Discipline</b>		
November 7	<p><b>Readings</b></p> <p>Is the Employment of School Resource Officers in High Schools Associated with Black Girls Discipline Outcomes- Williams et al. (Canvas)</p> <p><b>Film</b> Push Out</p>	Journal #4 of 5 "Current Event" due Nov. 7
November 9	This will be a work time for your Talkback Presentations and Cultural Plunge Project. Our classroom will be available if you would like to meet with your learning community in our usual space.	