Unsilencing the Silenced Black Voice in Education Courses and Professional Development: Partnering with Educators to Create Equitable Environments

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Abstract: The silencing of Black voices in education has occurred in the United States for hundreds of years, and its impact creates a power dynamic in educational settings with negative consequences for Black educators and students. Black teachers continue to be marginalized, seen as less competent, and experience racial trauma through microaggressions. When Black educators do not feel welcomed, Black students are impacted through the creation of inequitable and unsafe environments. In this ethno-case study, two researchers, one white and one Black, research, implement, and evaluate the process of centering Black voices in education courses and professional development. While there are overarching themes related to the inclusion and exclusion of Black voices and differing levels of support within coursework, the process of reflection and owning one's voice for the Black researcher was also prominent in the study.

KEYWORDS: Black educators, education courses, professional development, antiracist pedagogy, whiteness

NAPDS NINE ESSENTIALS ADDRESSED:

1. A professional development school (PDS) is a learning community guided by a comprehensive, articulated mission that is broader than the goals of any single partner, and that aims to advance equity, anti-racism, and social justice within and among schools, colleges/universities, and their respective community and professional partners;
3. Professional Learning and Leading A PDS is a context for continuous professional learning and leading for all participants, guided by need and a spirit and practice of inquiry;
4. A PDS makes a shared commitment to reflective practice, responsive innovation, and generative knowledge;
5. A PDS is a community that engages in collaborative research and participates in the public sharing of results in a variety of outlets

Background

Silencing Black voices has been part of American history for generations (Cargle, 2019). Arguably, the silencing of Black voices began in this country during slavery through the denial of education and the barriers to literacy skill acquisition. The silencing continued through the elimination of cultural context by splitting families apart throughout slavery, and then hundreds of years later, removing Black teachers from classrooms so white teachers could have their jobs during desegregation (Charles, 2020; Fairclough, 2006). For generations, Black voices, Black people, and Black bodies have been denied the decency of equitable education, an equitable voice in American history, and a historical truth in our education system.

Truly understanding and accepting American history, which has denied the educational rights and voice of Black people, is the foundation of this research. Specifically, the authors of this study recognize the whitewashed university course material and teacher professional development that is prominent in the educational landscape. Due to this reality, we, the authors of this paper, decided to take action and investigate whether Black voices can be represented in a historically accurate and realistic manner within professional development and teacher education. This work not only provides a "truth" history, but also access to representation for Black educators.

As is often stated, representation matters. However, Black educators are often not seen in classrooms around the United States, even though students of color are the numeric majority in schools (Geiger, 2018). Specifically, in 2015, the United States crossed the threshold of Black, Latinx and Asian children representing the majority of the newborn population (Krogstad, 2019). With that being stated, it is implied that the preschool class of 2020 was the first time the school environment was no longer majority white (Krogstad, 2019). The increase of children of color in the classrooms being taught by predominantly white, female teachers has further increased the cultural gap or the fact that most teachers are white and most students are people of color (Aronson & Meyers, 2020). Therefore, Black teachers, and other teachers of color, are needed in classroom settings to ensure students experience representation and equity in school buildings. However, if Black teachers do not see themselves represented in education departments at the university level and within professional development workshops at the state or local level, encouraging silenced Black voices to join the professional field of education is hard, and sometimes impossible.

The work in this study is directly related to the Nine Essentials of Professional Development Schools, specifically in the context of ongoing professional development to meet the needs of participants/teachers/students. While this project does not outline a specific school-university partnership, the university included in this study has a focus on institutional diversity and inclusion as a way to reach the wider public-school community, specifically classroom teachers in the surrounding area. In this specific area, there is a history of segregation, discrimination, and wide-held beliefs of white power and privilege. Therefore, modeling a way to include Black voices into education is a need in this specific Illinois community.

Furthermore, the university and professional development system included in this study both have a collaborative mission to advance equity and social justice throughout the state of Illinois. They share the NAPDS Essential 1 standard, which is "a comprehensive mission through planning practices focused on creating equitable learning environments" (napds.com). Through university outreach and the professional development system, a shared goal of creating equitable learning environments for all is at the core of this work. Partnering with public schools

as a way to increase the impact of this work and focus on equity is the specific piece outlined in this study, however it is part of a larger mission.

While the history, impact, and perceptions of Black educators have been researched for generations, this project specifically focuses on how Black voices are silenced at a state university located in a community that has a majority white population. The surrounding area demographics, also being majority white, further support the basis for restructuring professional development opportunities for educators who are not attending undergraduate or graduate courses. Finally, the scope of this project is not to look at the impact of change but rather the process of change itself.

While the impact of change is important, the process of change needs to happen first. Therefore, in this study we look at how undergraduate and graduate courses are changed as a way to include Black voices by transforming the coursework. This directly relates to the NAPDS Essential 1 standard, which was outlined above. Through this change at the graduate and undergraduate level, there is an implied impact to PK-12 classroom settings.

The impact of this study is wide-reaching. Through this study, school districts and professional development organizations will be able to understand the importance of including Black voices, as well as gather some strategies that either support or do not support the inclusion of Black voices. The guiding research questions directing this study were:

1. How are Black voices integrated into course material or professional development for educators?
2. What supports are in place for Black voices to be encouraged or added to educational discourse?

These questions are addressed within the context of coursework at a predominantly white institution (PWI) and the state's professional development workshops.

Positionality

Stating our positionality as researchers facilitates the dialogue of conversations that are often fear and anxiety-provoking for individuals, such as the discussion of racial inequity. Specifically, "in any classroom, beginning a dialogue about race or opening an anti-racist agenda must be preempted by these introspective assessments of our own social locations as educators" (Rebollo-Gil & Moras, 2006, p. 391). Therefore, the positionality of the researchers is important because it influences the process of change for course and workshop materials.

One of the researchers is a mid-30-year-old, white, Christian, heterosexual, mother, professor, education consultant, whose first language is English. She is the mother of a biracial son who identifies as Black and lives in a racially diverse community. She has been in the field of education for over fifteen years and has taught in various educational settings.

The other researcher in this study is a mid-30-year-old, Black, Christian, heterosexual, mother, educator, and graduate student, whose first language is English. She was raised by her Black mother and white step-father. She lives in a racially diverse community. She has also taught over the last ten years in various educational settings.

Theoretical Framework

We, the researchers of this study, used a combination of two theories to frame the research project. Taking pieces from each of the two theories, specifically the actor-observer

theory and anti-racist theory, a foundation for this work was developed. Each of the two theories are described in detail.

The actor-observer framework (Jones & Nisbett, 1971) states that people tend to explain their own behavior with situation-causes and other people's behavior with person-centered causes. For example, students of color who are struggling with academic achievement as compared to their equivalent white peers in college courses, can be described by the observers (i.e., white teachers) as lazy, displaying low expectations and motivations, or having many family obligations. However, when speaking directly to Black students, who are the actors, it was discovered that campus wide marginalization of students of color impacted their academic success (Steele, 2010). The solution, in turn, becomes organizational change rather than further marginalization of the observed actors.

Building on the actor-observer theory, the anti-racism theory, or what Columbia Center for Teaching and Learning (2020) calls 'Anti-Racist Pedagogy in Action' focuses on five action steps:

1. Self-educate and acknowledge racial trauma
2. Interrogate your positionality and (un)conscious biases
3. Address curricular gaps with intentional course design
4. Foster a compassionate class community and meet students where they are
5. Engage the wider campus community and commit to action beyond the classroom

While there are five in total, our research project focused specifically on the first three, with extra attention to number three.

We acknowledge that racial equity in education is hard to achieve without organizational change through an anti-racist lens (Welton et al., 2018). The actor-observer theory focuses on understanding marginalization and inequity from the "actor's" perspective (i.e., Black educator). Being able to understand the lack of Black educators and the silencing of Black voices through an anti-racist lens and through the actor-observer theory is important and at the core of this work. Ultimately, the two merged theories served as a foundation for the work of identifying, understanding, and changing education course materials at a predominately white institution (PWI) and within a professional development system. These two theories guided the research and ultimately were the basis for the findings.

Literature Review

As stated by a co-host of the *Learning Vibes Podcast* in December 2020, "We know it is not on the shoulders of Black and Brown people to educate non-Black and Brown people on the injustices that are happening, the marginalization, the history of cultural and ethnic erasure" (Reinking & Knowlton). However, much of the scholarship available focuses on how Black individuals are providing or shouldering that education, devoting sweat equity to further the education of the majority white educator population, and fighting against an assumed history; a history that leaves out or erases Black voices from the historical context or current reality.

Black educators being marginalized in the field of education, which has long-lasting impacts, is supported in research. Specifically, TeachPlus and The Education Trust (2019) documented the challenges and experiences of teachers of color in the workplace. They interviewed 88 teachers who identified as Black or Latinx. The individuals in this study reported that they were experiencing a hostile work culture, felt undervalued, deprived of agency and autonomy, and were left to navigate unfavorable work conditions.

Building on those findings, this review of current literature will provide information on where Black educators work, the perception of Black educators in the communities where they work, the racial trauma Black educators experience in their community interactions, and where Black voices currently show up in professional development for educators. Each portion of the literature review adds context, background, and a needed foundation to move forward.

Where are Black Educators

In 2015-2016, seven percent of all the full-time and part-time public school elementary and secondary educators in the United States were Black (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). The statistics go on to show that this low percentage of Black educators are often placed in schools that serve a high number of children of color and hold lower expectations for their success (D'amico et al., 2017). Basically, Black educators are hired or placed in areas around the country that have a high percentage of students of color, a high percentage of students living in poverty, and a high percentage of transient students, which are the categories of students that are deemed "more difficult" or "less capable" (Institute for Education Sciences, 2020), while simultaneously offering minimal support for teachers. These circumstances can help explain lower recruitment and retention rates for teachers of color.

In response, schools, organizations and educational institutions are working to develop programs to help recruit teachers of color. During his presidency, President Barack Obama created the White House Executive Order on Educational Excellence for African-Americans. The purpose of the order was to "improve the recruitment, preparation, development, and retention of successful African American teachers" (The White House, 2012, para. 14). This order was built to support the hiring and retention of Black educators because the retention rates of Black educators are much lower than the retention rates of white teachers (Coffey & Farinde-Wu, 2016; Ingersoll & May, 2011).

Microaggression Experiences

In addition to serving in schools with complex needs, another reason for low retention rates is due to the daily microaggressions Black educators face from students, colleagues, families, and others in the community (Kohli, 2016). When Black teachers are hired to teach, they are faced with obstacles that generally stem from society's stereotypes and perceptions based on their race. These challenges often take the form of microaggressions, which is the language of implicit bias (Melik, 2021). Specifically, racial microaggressions, according to researcher Derald Wing Sue (2010), "are the brief and everyday slights, insults, indignities and denigrating messages sent to people of color by well-intentioned white people who are unaware of the hidden messages being communicated" (para.9). The microaggressions Black teachers experience, specifically in education settings, are broad, and can include being seen only as a disciplinarian, being perceived as less competent, or being hired to fulfill a 'diversity quota' and not truly having the knowledge or experience to be an impactful educator.

One microaggression Black educators often experience is based on their level of competence. The concept of competencies is historically based on the stereotype of Black people being labeled as lazy, violent, and unintelligent (Taylor et al., 2019). This falsehood results in microaggressions, specifically how administration and colleagues interact with teachers of color. Overall, Black teachers are often treated as being less capable than white teachers. For example,

when interviewed for a study (Dixon et al., 2019), one Black teacher stated that her opinion was often ignored in staff meetings. However, when a white colleague would suggest the same idea, the idea was celebrated. Furthermore, DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2019), found that Black teachers feel that they must be twice as good or work twice as hard as their white counterparts in order to be valued in their school community.

While repeated microaggressions can be detrimental to the overall well-being and brain health of Black teachers, it also has repercussions for career advancement (Agarwal, 2019). For example, some Black educators testified in interviews that they were often overlooked for a promotion in their own district. Additionally, Black educators stated that during professional goal setting conversations, or other interactions with administrators, they were not validated when discussions were brought up about becoming a leader in the building, outside of the classroom setting (Griffin & Tackie, 2016).

A second type of microaggression Black educators often experience is the perception that they are purely disciplinarian focused in educational environments. Due to this perception, many Black teachers are made to enforce the school rules. Specifically, one Black educator stated in a research study that he was seen as the "white muscle in black skin" (TeachThought Staff, 2018, para. 5). This is seen as a type of microaggression known as an invalidation. Specifically, a Black teacher being perceived or identified as someone who only disciplines and does not teach students is invalidating or insulting the education and experience of the Black educator.

Furthermore, Black teachers have learned, through mentorships with other Black educators, to "get with these kids." This statement implies that Black educators need to provide tough love if they are going to be successful (Cashdollar, 2017). As Black teachers and mentors share these types of strategies for classroom management with each other, and implement the strategies, they unintentionally reinforce the stereotype of Black teachers as the school disciplinarian. Regardless of how the label was created, being seen as only a disciplinarian limits the teacher's ability to advance their career and be seen as more than the authoritarian educator.

 Regardless of what type of microaggressions are experienced, Black teachers often respond with silence. One teacher wrote, "I think it's hard, at times, in education, where you find that it's predominantly White, and the majority of supervisors are White. I think that there are times that you don't feel as safe or you don't feel heard" (Dixon et al., 2019, p. 16). When Black educators are not in leadership roles, the result is that Black educators silence their voice due to fear of being seen as a troublemaker, or experiencing gaslighting, which is the manipulation of another person into doubting his or her perceptions, experiences, or understanding of events.

Black Educator Representation

When Black educators are asked, "Why do you teach?", many respond with the theme of passion for the profession and the importance of empowering students (Griffin & Tackie, 2016). This supports the idea that Black teachers serve as role models for Black students. For example, having Black educators in the classroom allows Black students to be able to "see themselves" in a successful, professional setting. This representation of a successful and professional Black individual, something that is often not portrayed in media, creates a learning environment for Black students that is positive. This can result in Black students performing higher academically, getting suspended less, and graduating high school at higher rates (Kamenetz, 2017).

Furthermore, teachers who identify as Black are more likely to be able to connect with students of color. Lindsay and Hart (2017) found "consistent evidence that exposure to same-

race teachers lowers office referrals for willful defiance" (p. 485). These research results support the findings from Darensbourg et al. (2010). They found that Black teachers and Black students have a socially perceived cultural and experiential shared background. The shared background allows Black teachers the insight needed to assist students in navigating the microaggressive environment of schools, hence interrupting the preschool to prison pipeline (Darensbourg et al., 2010).

Black students are not the only students that benefit from having a Black teacher; all students benefit from having diverse teachers (Phillips, 2014). Specifically, Phillips (2014) found that diversity provokes thought because it encourages the consideration of an alternate view. Furthermore, Perry (2019) wrote, "Ultimately, all students benefit from teachers of color, as exposure to individuals from all walks of life can reduce stereotypes, prevent unconscious bias, and prepare students to succeed in a diverse society" (para. 3). Overall, this supports the shared understanding of implementing lessons that provide students the experience of seeing the world through windows and mirrors. Mirrors that reflect the student's own culture and the windows that offer the students a view into someone else's experience (Warner & Duncan, 2019). This intentional practice of mirrors and windows in a learning environment creates a more inclusive curriculum that pushes against the often biased school-issued curriculums (Duncan, 2020). Overall, having Black educators creates an environment that brings in diverse experiences and authenticity to instruction that is less whitewashed and more inclusive (Roberts & Anthony, 2019).

While it is important and beneficial for all students to have Black educators, the burden of code switching is still on the shoulders of Black people to conform to the reality of professional educators, as deemed by white colleagues through microaggressive interactions, such as expressing discomfort around a Black teacher's tone of voice, use of Black language, or differences in the concept of "being professional" (Griffin & Tackie, 2016). Black people also have the burden of supporting the whole child through what Griffin and Tackie (2016) frame as:

> a sense of obligation to teach Black students well beyond the academic curriculum. Because of this, they experienced additional professional and personal stressors. It was often noted that their sense of obligation and the stress that goes along with it, were intensified by their limited representation in the teaching workforce and the field of education at large (p. 6).

Furthering this concept, The Education Trust (Griffin & Tackie, 2016) questioned 150 Black educators in public and private districts. From these interviews, the researchers found the same results: Black teachers felt the burden to connect with all students of color while also staying professional so as to not impact their career path (Griffin & Tackie, 2016). For example, Black students may rely on Black teachers to be a role model who addresses the child at the holistic level. It was stated by one of the teachers in the study, "I don't think I taught today. I felt like I was a nurse, a therapist, a fan, a mentor" (Griffin & Tackie, 2016, p. 9).

While this holistic relationship is beneficial for the student, it often leaves the Black educator feeling exhausted and burned-out due to the inability to adequately support the students of color and still complete all the required classroom preparation and curriculum implementation. Overall, the burden of support, representation, and teaching is heavy on the shoulders of Black educators.

Current Reality: Professional Development and Coursework

While it is important to know where Black educators are located, how they are perceived in education settings, and how they are treated within their profession, it is also important to know what opportunities outside of the school walls Black educators have access to that include Black voices. Through observation, it has been noticed that there is a multitude of anti-racist workshops, diversity, equity and inclusion workshops, and other, sometimes disjointed, workshops available for educators to attend. This was especially true during the Covid-19 pandemic where everything moved to virtual interactions. However, prior to the pandemic, the wide-reaching availability was subjectively minimal, and scholarship is not abundantly available on the wide-reaching professional development opportunities.

One way teacher programs and school districts collaborate to bring in more diverse voices is through Grow Your Own (GYO) teacher training programs. These programs focus on recruiting teachers of color and supporting them as they complete their teacher certification, often with the guarantee of a teaching position once their teaching certification is acquired. Through the GYO programs, candidates are given financial, emotional, and academic support to help them complete their degree. The overall goal of GYO programs is to increase diversity in the teacher workforce (Muniz, 2018). GYO Teacher programs are being used in states such as Washington, Tennessee, Mississippi, Missouri, Pennsylvania and Illinois. In Illinois, there are currently 123 GYO teachers in 88 schools teaching more than 2,000 K-12 students.

Finally, Illinois is continuing the work of including diverse voices and mindsets in educational settings through the implementation of Culturally Responsive Standards. Specifically, the Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning Standards outline what practicing teachers should implement in their classrooms from developing self-awareness and relationships with others, to understanding and educating on systems of oppression, to engaging students in activism. The Standards consist of five categories that focus on anti-ism practices, while also bringing in the voices of people of color to PK-12 settings. The five standard headings are (Illinois State Board of Education, 2020):
1. Teachers and Students Working Together
2. Developing Language and Literacy Skills Across All Curriculum
3. Connecting Lessons to Students' Lives
4. Engaging Students with Challenging Lessons
5. Emphasizing Dialogue over Lectures

Through this work at the state level, the importance of Black voices and voices of color in PK-12 settings is supported and perceivably valued through this work. While they were recently signed into rule (2021), they have the potential to support educators of color by creating learning environments where the onus is on everyone to support all students, including students of color, rather than placing the assumed sole responsibility on the shoulders of Black educators. Furthermore, these have the potential to create equitable environments for students and educators to understand and appreciate racial and cultural differences. However, as with any new mandate, the success or failure of the new standards relies on the fidelity of implementation.

Methodology

For this study we used the ethno-case study methodology, which is a systemic recording of human cultures in the form of a case study. The ethno-case study is essentially the combination of an ethnography and a case study (Angers, 2004; Harwarti, 2019; Parker-Jenkins, 2016; Yin, 2003). We used the case study methodology, in conjunction with the ethnography methodology,

to deliberately study the context of course and professional development materials as part of the overall change to include Black voices in educational settings (Creswell, 1998, Yin, 2003).

Furthermore, we used the ethno-case study methodology to observe the process of change in the natural higher education setting and professional development systems with pre- and in-service teachers. Using this method, we were able to study how three courses at one PWI in Illinois attempted the process of change to include more Black voices, as well as how a large professional development system strategically included Black voices in the implemented workshops.

Finally, the "culture" or piece of culture that was researched in this study was an overarching education system, more specifically the education system in Illinois. Specifically, both of the researchers were deeply embedded into the two systems studied in this project through the specific theoretical framework of the actor-observer theory. The actor, in this study, was one of the researchers, while the observer was the other researcher. Through this process, we, the researchers, embedded our own positionality when applying anti-racist theory to the analysis phase. Therefore, we brought our own subjective insights through the findings process, which is a recognized limitation.

The community where the research study took place has a racial makeup of 8.3% Black and 85.5% white overall population. A large school district in the county reports 79.4% white students and 7.6% Black students, with 94.9% white teachers and 2.1% Black teachers. Furthermore, the county has a longstanding recorded history of segregation practices. As outlined in a historical report, "Illinois General Assembly passed legislation in 1987 requiring the public school system to admit Black students. Communities reacted by creating separate public schools for African American children" (Madison County Historical Society, 2020, para. 4). After a hard-fought battle that spanned decades, schools in the county were integrated "well into the twentieth century" (Madison County Historical Society, 2020, para. 10). However, it is important to note that "some rural schools… were never segregated. The one-room Wood School… built in 1859, taught both Black and white students when they weren't working on their family's farms" (Madison County Historical Society, 2020, para. 11).

Prior to gathering syllabi and discussing course and professional development materials, the researchers developed two guiding research questions, which were stated previously. Once the guiding research questions were developed, the researchers began identifying pieces of curriculum at one large state university and the professional development provided within a statewide system. The gathered data included materials from one undergraduate/ graduate early childhood course, two courses within a diversity and education graduate program, and workshop materials developed for early childhood educators as part of continuing education credits. In all, the researchers gathered one syllabus to evaluate the overall course structure and implementation, two syllabi and materials to evaluate how Black voices could be supported and added to critical discourse, and access to a wide range of professional development materials for early childhood educators and families.

The first syllabus gathered was from a course designed for both undergraduate and graduate students at a PWI. The course was face to face in a traditional format and taught by a white professor. The course focused on effective strategies for collaborative relationships in the field of early childhood. Specifically, in this course, students learned about the diversity of families, how to communicate with colleagues and other stakeholders in a professional way, and the diversity of children from brain science to academic and social growth. During the data gathering phase, we realized that specific pieces of the coursework were not redesigned to

include Black voices and perspectives, but rather the entire course was intentionally designed to create an environment for marginalized voices to be heard, valued, and accepted.

The second two pieces of data gathered were two syllabi at the graduate level only at the same PWI. One of the two courses focused on philosophical and historical issues in education and the other focused on the analysis of socio-cultural educational issues. Both of the courses were asynchronous online and taught by a white professor. The syllabi, the assignment descriptions, and one Black student's work, specifically discussion board responses and end of semester written reflection, were gathered for data analysis of these courses. Additionally, email communication with the professor was gathered as the Black student advocated for more Black voices to be embedded in the courses over the two semesters of interactions. These courses were chosen because they were part of a Master's program in Educational Leadership called Diversity and Equity in Education. These courses took place over two semesters and were mandatory courses for program completion. The specific student work was gathered because she was the sole Black student who enrolled in both of the required courses for those two semesters.

Finally, the last pieces of data gathered were materials from a statewide early childhood professional development system. That statewide professional development system is a grant funded entity that provides professional development to early childhood professions and those adjacent to the early childhood profession. Workshops that are provided range from curriculum implementation to strategies for planning lessons, to incorporating trauma informed practice in early childhood settings. The data gathered for this portion of the study included marketing materials, an overview of their calendar of events, and book studies provided to educators and families. The materials were gathered through web searches, access to course materials, and discourse the researchers had in their given field.

Once all of the materials were gathered, we discussed the materials synchronously. Through ten, hour-long research meetings, we grounded ourselves in the theoretical frameworks, specifically the observer-actor theory, and guiding research questions. Our emphasis on the observer-actor framework became the focus due to our different positionality lenses. Our discussions included evaluating the materials, engaging in discourse, and expanding our research through questioning each other, as well as the materials. Some of the questions we asked each other focused on our positionalities, realities, and personal journey's focused on the realities of Black voices in educational discourse. During these sessions, our attention was purely on evaluating the inclusion or absence of Black voices. In all, our process for specifically identifying our final themes involved the process of inductive coding (Thomas, 2006). We identified common ideas through coding, applied the coding notes to our theory and guiding research questions, and ended with our common themes.

Findings

Overall, the findings of this study support the research surrounding the concept that Black voices are present at times, but not fully supported. This all depends on the implementer and planner. The findings will be broken down according to the guiding research questions. The theoretical frameworks will also be embedded in the findings.

Integration of Black Voices

The inclusion of Black researchers, Black voices, and Black perspectives was clear in all three areas studied: undergraduate/graduate course, graduate courses, and professional

development. All three areas of data clearly had connections to anti-racism concepts and theory through the documentation that was provided, specifically the syllabi and workshop descriptions.

In the two graduate courses the book by Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Anti-Racist*, was included in the readings, as well as the foundational text by Beverly Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?: And Other Conversations About Race.* Finally, within the graduate course, reflections on the work of bell hooks, a person of color, was embedded into an assignment asking students to connect their identity to a wider sense of identity among and between students.

In the professional development system, there was a clear sense of working with all families, including all voices, and ensuring that materials were provided that displayed an asset-based mindset. For example, in a few of the workshops, participants were taken through the process of reflecting on their personal identity and how they filter life through their personal "identity lens." As part of this process the book, *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves,* by Derman-Sparks, was used, as well as the book, *Multicultural Teaching in the Early Childhood Classroom: Approaches, Strategies, and Tools, Preschool–2nd Grade (Early Childhood Education Series)*, by Souto-Manning.

While there were intentional practices of integrating Black voices, it was noted by the researchers that the embedded materials and assignments were more of an observer-actor implementation rather than a true implementation of Black voices. This finding was mainly due to the fact that the leaders of the professional development, as well as the professors designing the courses, were all white females. None of the "implementers" of the materials had lived experiences that could provide context and representation of real-world lived experiences. While seemingly unintentional, the actor-observer framework took firm hold in course and workshop development. The designers, specifically the professors and professional development providers, took the 'observer' point of view to describe the 'actors' or the marginalized Black voices, students, and communities in the coursework and discussions.

For example, as part of a workshop with white educators, the Oscar-winning short video, *Hair Love*, by Matthew A. Cherry, was shared as a way to reflect on cultural differences. Specifically, the cultural differences of confronting our bias towards Black fathers, the importance of people of color being their authentic self by wearing their hair in any state, natural, pressed, weaved, loc'd or braided, if they so choose, and the responsibility of the teachers to create an environment that respects all children and families' cultures. However, at the end of the video, when it was time for reflection and discussion, the white educators, unintentionally or intentionally, focused on what they could relate to as an observer. They paid attention to the last minute or so when it became clear that the mother had cancer and had lost her hair. Essentially, they were observing from their point of view and lens, rather truly understanding the actions of the actors, the actions that spoke to the importance of Black identity.

Support for Including Black Voices

The second theme within the findings was around the support for Black voices in the coursework or other learning materials. This did not coincide with the authors of the materials but rather the support for Black student and educator experiences embedded in the work.

The theme of support and organizational change can be simply summarized through the experience surrounding the marketing materials of the professional development system. When

critically analyzing the website, one of the researchers pointed out that there were no children of color represented, which is also known as a visual microaggression. Therefore, the website was unintentionally stating that the professional development system was only designed for white educators and white families. When it was brought to the attention of the professional development administration, it was changed and updated within 24 hours. It was noted and reflected by the researchers, however, that while the inclusion of Black voices was valued, it was on the shoulders of a Black educator to initiate the change. This relates back to the literature review where it is discussed that Black educators feel the burden of implementing an anti-racist framework by calling attention to injustices that their white counterparts often do not realize.

The support of including Black voices was also seen in the undergraduate/graduate course, focused on collaborative relationships, through the intentional addition of a Black educator to co-lead the course. This intentional inclusion was based on the needs of the students and the program faculty recognizing that the early childhood education courses lacked Black representation. The intentional restructuring of the course engaged a Black co-instructor to plan and teach with a white- professor of record. Through this addition to the course, the two instructors worked together to ensure that voices, readings, and perspectives were wide ranging, inclusive, and embodied an anti-racist ideology. While none of the actual course materials were changed, the way the course materials were taught was intentionally changed to include both the white instructor's perspective as well as the Black instructor's perspective, hence supporting the inclusion of a Black voice in the course.

The graduate course materials and implementation of coursework also reinforced the theme of supporting the inclusion of Black voices. Specifically, an email to the professor from the Black student-participant studied in this project illustrates this finding. The Black student wrote:

> *The Black, Female, and Academic chapter was very significant to me. The reason why I did not post it with my original discussion submission is because I felt uncomfortable. I have lived my life not wanting to be seen as the "angry, black, woman." I am aware that hooks said, "When we teach our students that there is safety in learning to cope with conflict, with differences of thought and opinion, we prepare their minds for radical openness" (hooks, p. 88). I feel as if I share my thoughts with my peers, some might give me the label of angry, black woman and I will lose my effectiveness to have quality dialogue. A part of me wants to not care what they think and share my thoughts but the other part of me wants to not be vulnerable for the fear of someone saying "Get over it." So instead, I will share them with you and this will be my safe place.*

As a follow up to that conversation, the student asked for synchronous time so that all of the students in the course could get to know each other and form stronger relationships. The professor did arrange a time for synchronous discussion and relationship building. When the synchronous discussion occurred, within the professor-set context of a critical consciousness discussion, the Black student reported that they "felt supported" and were able to develop better relationships with fellow students. The stronger relationships resulted in "better" discussions online because "I felt like my peers knew who I was, and I was not an angry Black woman."

Nonsupport for Including Black Voices

The theme of nonsupport was apparent in one of the graduate courses. It was also clear that empathizing with Black students, who have had the burden of speaking up and 'representing

their Blackness' their whole lives, was not fully considered in this specific course. Specifically, the Black student who was part of this study and reflection, recognized that one of the other students enrolled in the course displayed comments on discussion board responses that were overtly racist. The comments criticized almost every article put forth or said that the hardships of certain groups of people do not exist today.

For example, while reading *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (Rothstein, 2017), white students in the course commented that redlining was only part of the past and no longer has an effect on where people are able to live. One specific student stated that she, "…denied the de facto segregation as having influence on what neighborhoods Black people are approved for FHA insured loans and are welcomed in, even today." Another example was while students were discussing the reading *Lies My Teacher Told Me* (Loewen, 2018). One student questioned the author's knowledge of sundown towns. When two Black students testified that they were told by their families to avoid certain sundown towns in their reflective discussion responses, the student with the initial comment continued to hold onto the idea that the world is a welcoming place and the media is responsible for portraying "these lies" of safety issues in towns.

After realizing this unsafe environment, the Black student asked the professor to be "more involved in the discussion." The reasoning for this request, as reflected on by the student, was that, "having to live with the trauma of being Black and being made to post your reflections and to have to listen to someone who is denying your experience, became a lot for me. I think the hardest part of the class was watching some of my peers relate to the student's racist views."

Where the theme of nonsupport became clear in the data was the professor's response to the Black student. The Black student was told to "just ignore the comments and that student." The lack of empathy, support, and true understanding of racial trauma changed the interactions and feeling of safety for the Black student for the rest of the semester and at the PWI. Overall, the lack of support for Black voices can be summarized by the Black student in a reflection where she stated, "the discussions at a PWI puts pressure on the Black students to stand-up for the Black experience. While the reading material was about race, I felt unsupported in trying to give perspective to the readings. It left me feeling alone and discouraged."

The discouragement the Black student experienced is directly in opposition to the self-identified anti-racist mission of the PWI, specifically in the context of sharing a commitment to reflective practices of supporting, including, and creating a safe space for Black voices to transform educational practices. Additionally, the lack of encouragement to include Black voices shows the need for this specific PWI to focus on the NAPDS Essential 3 standard, which focuses on leading participants to a practice of inquiry. When Black voices are not included, the true process of inquiry is not present or welcomed.

Implications

The implications from this work span from course development to intentional hiring practices to focused professional growth in the area of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access (DEIA). Additionally, the implications from this study focus on the intentional reflective practices necessary for educators, especially white educators.

One of the biggest portions of our research study focuses on the development of curriculum that includes Black voices and the realities Black people face on a daily basis in America. Therefore, one of the implications from this study focuses on the third action piece in

the 'Anti-Racist Pedagogy in Action'. Specifically, educators address curricular gaps with intentional course design. As seen in our research, the development of curriculum for a course, as well as the intentional practices of implementing said curriculum, is imperative to the learning that occurs, as well as the safety all students or learners feel in a setting. Building on this implication, the Black student included in our study stated, "The curriculum did not create a space for me to feel safe. I had to intentionally create the space of safety through using my street smarts and finding people in the class who were like me. The professor never created a safe space, which created academic trauma for me moving through this graduate program." Therefore, intentional course design is an area all educators should focus on when designing courses and learning environments.

This research study supports the literature found by The Education Trust and Teachplus, which stated that Black educators feel undervalued and are unable to be their authentic self in school environments due to the constant microaggressions being experienced. Relating back to the actor-observer theoretical framework, the "implementor", or in the case of this study the college professor or professional development provider, must analyze their role in dismantling racism and use their privilege to create an equitable space for Black voices. Specifically, the implementor needs to engage in reflective practices regarding their own identity as a first step in their journey to include silenced voices into curriculum and addressing the microaggressions that are embedded into educational settings.

Furthermore, educators need to engage in personal and professional growth through intentional practices such as a personal growth journals or accountability thought partners focused on anti-racist education. A personal growth journal is more than general journaling and reflecting on teaching practices, but rather it is an intentional practice. The intentional practice of listening to podcasts based on racial injustices (ex. Codeswitch), reading books focused on racial implicit biases and the education system (ex. *We Want to Do More than Survive* by Bettina Love), and overall immersing into the world of social justice education while reflecting on personal mindsets will lead to more critical reflection. Overtime, growth will happen and will be visible through questions, reflections, and insights entered into the personal reflection journal.

The personal growth journal is also connected to the 'Anti-Racist Pedagogy in Action', step number two, which was discussed earlier. Specifically, it helps educators interrogate their positionality and (un)conscious biases. As educators intentionally practice growth towards an anti-racist pedagogy, interrogating one's own biases through a personal growth journal is an excellent way to be honest with personal unconscious biases, while also pushing towards creating a more inclusive environment for all voices to be heard.

Data from this study show that training and coursework being reflected upon need to include Black voices to give an accurate account for people of color. Even though higher education institutions are providing their staff with trainings to become anti-racist educators, we must acknowledge the honest truth that white colleagues get the opportunity to pick and choose when they want to think about racism and carry the burden of social justice work. However, people of color do not get the choice to be invisible in this work, but are constantly being asked to provide race-related support to students or colleagues, provide representation of diversity on committees, or be the sought-out voice of teaching.

The implications for PWIs from this research study, and the studies in the literature review, support the need for Black educators to be recruited and hired. As stated in the literature review, diversity of staff is beneficial to students and is instrumental in challenging stereotypes and bias. This can be accomplished through the employment practice of strategic hiring. A

strategic hire is the practice many higher education institutions employ as a way to intentionally hire people of color for tenure-track positions. This intentionality at many PWIs ensures that Black voices are present and heard, which therefore will support future educators. Through our findings we learned that adding a Black co-teacher to a college course transformed the course by intentionally integrating more Black voices through discussions, readings, and the co-teacher's personal background knowledge and stories.

Adding Black voices and personnel, however, will not automatically create inclusive and equitable environments. Goals of institutions and learning environments should be to create shared knowledge, develop and disseminate open-sourced materials, and intentionally focus on the NAPDS essential strategy of creating a comprehensive mission through planning practices focused on creating equitable learning environments. Supporting this implication, we found that racial diversity of staff can benefit all students, both white and people of color. In our research we learned that having one or more Black educators can reduce racial stereotypes in discussions and materials. This will help create an institution and learning environment where Black students can more freely participate with less racial microaggressions. A specific finding from our study, that supports this implication, is the experience of a Black student who did not feel comfortable speaking freely in the class discussion board due to her concerns of being perceived as the "angry, black, female."

Overall, it is important for PWIs and educator training systems to understand the need to include and hire Black staff members, engage in the work of unsilencing Black voices, and fully implement strategies to create safe environments for Black educators and students. This happens through analyzing whitewashed curricula and providing mental health services focused on the impact of racial trauma. The impact of racial trauma has been researched to the point of developing the 'Anti-Racist Pedagogy in Action,' which was discussed earlier. Building on the first action step, self-educate and acknowledge racial trauma, PWI's and educator training systems need to facilitate learning that includes more Black voices, which will create inclusive environments and negate visual microaggressions, as well as other microaggressions in the learning process.

As is evident in our research, one student engaged in personal coping strategies of reporting her feelings directly to the professor and limiting her responses on the wider discussion board to protect herself. In this example, mental health support is important because it has been found that many Black educators engage in adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies (DeCuir-Gunby, 2020). It is important to support Black students as they learn to navigate educational spaces and the harm they may present.

While our research focused on Black educators, it does not consider the dual role of being both a Black educator and a student at a PWI. As stated earlier, the majority of the "implementors" are white and female. Black educators stated that they felt unheard when they tried to give their input in PWIs (Dixon, Griffin, & Teoh, 2019). Our research does not extend to the additional pressure to speak truth as a person of color while still being seen as inferior (Tulshyan, 2015).

This concept also holds true when Black educators are required to attend Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access trainings led by white people and required to reflect on their own experiences without the support to navigate the re-traumatization of their experience as a Black educator. Overall, unsilencing the silenced Black voice in education, as a way to create equitable and safe environments, takes growth, reflection, and the boldness to speak up because silence is loud.

Limitations

An inevitable limitation of ethno-case studies is the evaluation of work from just two perspectives. A perspective from a white researcher and educator and a perspective from one Black educator and student. This limitation does not bring in a wide outlook to the data, but rather focuses on the lens of the two researchers and their positionality.

Another limitation, tied to the identity and positionality of the Black researcher, was the feeling of unworthiness, fear, anxiety, and a sense that their voice was not a voice that "should" be present. When the white researcher began to ask the Black researcher to reflect on those feelings, the Black researcher shared that they were raised in a community where feelings were not shared, thoughts around racial experiences were not shared with people outside of your race, and there was an overarching fear of offending others. In all, through this process of sharing her voice, the Black researcher felt the years of oppression and microaggressions while diving into writing and reflecting as part of this study. Therefore, this is a realization, as well as an inherent limitation and unintended consequence, as Black voices continue to be shared in an environment, where for generations they have been devalued and silenced.

Devaluing and silencing Black voices occurs in many facets of our communities. In this study we focused on including and transforming educational settings, with the hope that Black educators and students feel empowered and valued to share their voice.

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