Schooled Out:
Black male teachers experiences schooling in, teaching and leaving New York City Public Schools

by

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Abstract

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Black male teachers make up less than 2% of the American public school labor force (Brockenbrough, 2008; Dee, 2005; Lewis, 2007). We know little about their life histories and teaching experiences. This qualitative study draws from concepts on languaging (Garcia, 2006) and African oral tradition (Smitherman, 1977) and life history (McAdams, 2008) and critical race theory. I utilize life history interview methods and narrative analysis to examine the narratives of seven Black male teachers. Former students of urban schools and current teachers in New York City public schools, these “inner-city griots” (Freestyle Fellowship, 1993) speak their truths to power.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Waiting for Black Superman

Black male teachers make up less than 2% of the American public school labor force (Brockenbrough, 2008; Dee, 2005; Lewis, 2007; Lynn, 2007; Lynn & Jennings, 2009; National Council for Education Statistics 2003). Given their widespread underrepresentation, it is likely that more students see Black men in schools working as janitors, school safety agents or physical education teachers (Kunjufu, 2004) than as classroom teachers. The absence of Black male teachers is a disparity worthy of further exploration; especially given the myriad crisis in the U.S. public education system. Segregation, student-teacher mismatch, the achievement gap and the school-to-prison pipeline overlap, complicated issues that seemingly define the most racially-charged and impoverished sites of U.S. public education: urban schools.

Educational stakeholders have recently suggested that Black male teachers are the key to helping students in urban schools develop the skills to succeed in school by acting as role models. In his remarks to the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, Secretary Duncan (2010) explained:

> As a nation, we have far too few teachers of color. We have been far too reluctant to put the issue of race on the table. More than 35 percent of public students are black or Hispanic, but less than 15 percent of our teachers are black or Latino. It is especially troubling that less two percent—less than in fifty—of our nation's teachers are African-American males.

> When I was CEO of the Chicago Public Schools, I used to go into elementary schools that did not have a single black male teacher, though most of the students were black and grew up in single-parent families. How can that be a good thing for young children, especially boys? The under-representation of African-American and Latino men in the teaching profession is a serious problem. And, as we have seen, it is not self-correcting.

While the Teach[1] campaign is raising public awareness about the underrepresentation of Black male teachers in public classrooms as a phenomena that heretofore has not been widely discussed outside of academia, embedded within Duncan's rationale for recruitment and placement is a racialized and gendered dominant narrative about Black families and Black men. Duncan suggests that raising Black female-headed households is somehow "not a good thing," particularly for Black boys. His undercutting attack on single Black mothers contributes to the dominant, negative ontology of Black women who are incapable of being "good" mothers and raising their children (Hill-Collins, 2005). Further, Duncan seemingly asserts that national action is required to install men of color in schools to become role models to replace the absent fathers in the lives of youth of color. Duncan's assumption that the absentee fathers are the problem in the lives of boys of color also implies that Black men are incapable of raising their sons. His solution of taking national action by calling on surrogate Black men to install themselves in schools and become role models to Black male youth positions Black male teachers as the key to resolving the Black male educational crisis while relying on a monolithic construction of Black male identity. Educational stakeholders like Duncan wait for Black Supermen—a

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[1] The Teach Campaign is Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's initiative to recruit, prepare and place more teachers of color in U.S. public schools

homogenous cohort of soldiers who will use their blackness and maleness to lead Black male youth to academic success—presuming that Black male teachers *can* and *want* to be role models and that these figures can single-handedly take on the Herculean task of saving Black male youth from the crisis. Teaching Black male youth in urban schools means working in difficult contexts and facing socioeconomic conditions beyond the purview of control of the classroom teacher. Offering up Black male teachers as a panacea to the Black male educational crises absolves the institution of public schooling in the U.S. of its role in creating and sustaining the conditions that foster the failure of poor students of color in general and Black male youth in particular within urban schools.

Located in impoverished and residentially segregated communities, within cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Boston, Washington D.C., Detroit, Houston and Atlanta, urban schools have high proportions of students of color, lack adequate funding for basic resources, are often staffed by the least experienced teachers, and frequently experience teacher shortage, as well as high rates of attrition (Alonso, Anderson, Su & Theoharis, 2009; Anderson & Kharem, 2009; Anyon, 1997, Books, 2008; Kozol, 1991; Lareau, 2003; Noguera, 2003,Oakes & Lipton, 2007; Tyack, 1974). Approximately 90% of public school teachers are white (Saffold & Longwell-Grice, 2007), while Black and Latino youth comprise the majority of student bodies clustered in urban schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). All students attending these schools face enormous and unfair challenges in acquiring an adequate education. Black males, however, are perhaps our most vulnerable students (Edelman, 2011). The Black male achievement gap and the overrepresentation of Black males in the school-to-prison pipeline make up the

Black male educational crisis plaguing this nation and leading to the desperate call for more Black male teachers in U.S. classrooms.

Black male educational crisis

Recent data indicates that Black boys in urban school districts are performing significantly lower on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) examinations relative to their white counterparts (S. Lewis et. al, 2010). Table 1 illustrates the proficiency rates of Black and White 4th graders and 8th graders in reading and math on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). As shown in Table 1, African American fourth grade boys scored approximately 32 percent lower that White boys in reading and math. The achievement gap in fourth grade mathematics is even wider, with White boys scoring 39 percent higher than Black male youth in the fourth grade. Furthermore, this gap widens in middle school: approximately 90 percent of Black male youth did not achieve proficiency in reading and math on NAEP exams while between 33 and 44 percent of their white counterparts successfully passed these exams.

Table 1: Proficiency Rates in 2009 on NAEP

	4th grade reading	4th grade math	8th grade reading	8th grade math
Black Male	11%	14%	8%	10%
White Males	38%	53%	33%	44%

In high school, Black male youth are less likely to take advanced placement tests, graduate on time or enroll in four-year universities relative to Black females, Latinos and Whites (S. Lewis et. al, 2010). Holzman's (2010) research on national high school graduation rates reveals that only 47% of Black males earned high school diplomas in 2008 compared to 78% of white males.

According to the Center for Labor Market Statistics (2009), 23 percent of young Black male dropouts are incarcerated in a juvenile facility, jail or prison, whereas approximately six percent of White, Latino and Asian dropouts end up in jail. As a result, Black males are overrepresented in the prison industrial complex (Holzer, Offner & Sorenson, 2005; Pettit & Western, 2007; Mauer, 1999; Raphael, 2004). Research on Black male youth incarceration reports that:

- Although Black males represent 13 percent of the total United States population, they occupy 49% of the prison population
- 32 percent of Black males age 20-29 are imprisoned, on probation or on parole
- The offenses of young Black males are four times more likely to lead to arrest than those of their White counterparts

Thus, Black males are more likely to be arrested for their offenses and a larger proportion of young Black males, are imprisoned although they represent a minority of the total U.S. population.

Black male youth living and schooling in urban centers face extraordinary academic and social hurdles. Their success in school is dependent upon both resiliency in the face of these challenges and positive academic experiences in classrooms. Offering up Black male teachers as a panacea to resolving these myriad issues is both troubling and unrealistic. Although “Black” is not a monolithic racial category, the United States federal government categorizes all people of African descent as Black/ African-American. Accordingly, the statistics on Black male teachers in New York City do not disaggregate African-Americans from Afro-Caribbeans or from African immigrants.

Statement of Problem

While the recruitment of Black male teachers is a crucial educational reform effort, the assumptions embedded within this campaign raise several concerns. These concerns emerge from the expectation that Black male teachers will be role models for Black male youth and that this role modeling will shift the Black male educational crisis. While role-modeling could be a crucial aspect in reaching and teaching Black male students, the recruitment efforts assumes a monolithic racial and gender identity in which all Black men behave in a particular way that will be effective in teaching Black male youth.

We know little about the life histories of Black men who become teachers in urban schools. We also know little about their experiences teaching. In light of these knowledge gaps, this dissertation will explore the following question:

- *What can we learn from the personal narratives of a group of Black male teachers working in urban schools?*
- *What implications about schooling, teacher education, teacher recruitment and teacher retention emerge from their narratives?*

In the context of a highly charged dialogue around the Black male educational crises and the recruitment of Black male teachers, these questions demand further probing. In the following section, I discuss how critical race theory undergirds this study.

Theoretical Framework

I entered this study through a long journey as a Black female classroom teacher in New York City public schools in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. In these schools with predominately Black youth and white faculty, black males were marginalized to the least desirable placements in the building. For example, Black male youth were frequently sent

out of class and suspended. They spent the greater part of their days in the Schools Against Violence in Education (SAVE) room. Sometimes they were expelled and absent from the building for weeks. In addition, I can recall only four Black male teachers as colleagues when I taught English at two different secondary schools on Marcy Street in Bedford-Stuyvesant. However, the school safety agents, discipline deans and custodial staff were predominately Black men.

Teaching in Black schools in a Black community, I found it ironic that so few of my professional colleagues were Black men. It was also strange when some days, I'd teach classrooms with mostly girls or the girls and the *quiet* Black boys. I'd ask the class, "What happened to Barkim" or "Where's Sean?" and they'd respond with a story about how this one got in trouble or that one wasn't coming back for a while. I never received a written communication about a suspended students' whereabouts in all my years of teaching. Students would disappear from class one day and reappear days later having missed out on lessons, assignments and assessments.

If I went searching through the school building to the back corridors or basement classrooms, I'd find the suspension room where they were held for the day. Ironically, the custodians, deans and school safety – essentially the crux of the Black male staff in these schools – could also be found in these somewhat obscure locations, far from the typical pathway of most staff or visitors. It was troubling that Black males were marginalized from the traditional sites of learning within the school building. I began to see the absence of Black males in classrooms and their significant presence in areas emphasizing punishment, physical activity and manual labor as manifestations of larger issues of marginalization worthy of further exploration.

Sprague writes, “Black women have epistemic advantage because marginalization has distanced them from hegemonic thought and practice and facilitated the development of a critical attitude” (2010, p. 68). My personal lived experiences as an African American woman teacher and teacher educator compel me to adopt black feminist epistemology in my approach to this study. I witnessed a frustrating cycle that began with the absence of curriculum that was relevant and responsive to these young men’s lives and their opposition to oppressive school norms and ended with their frequent over-punishment for both innocuous behaviors and firm expressions of defiance. I felt powerless in my ability to save the Black male youth who were my students from a system that seemed to be designed for their failure. I questioned how they were impacted by the absence of Black male teachers to look to for advice, models or empathy. It became apparent to me that the best people to tell this story—to shed light on the complexities of the Black male experience in the urban school context—were those who had navigated this institution and became educators themselves.

Former students of urban schools and current teachers, the Black men in this study are “inner-city griots” (Freestyle Fellowship, 1993) speaking their truths to power. I draw from life history and critical race theories to privilege the voices of Black male teachers and to better understand their sense-making of the events that led them to teaching as well as their current experiences in urban classrooms.

This study rests on a conceptual framework (Diagram 1) derived from theories on languaging (Garcia, 2011), Black oral tradition (Smitherman, 1977), critical race theory (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006) and life history narrative (McAdams, 2008). Language is a socially constructed action, and languaging refers to our sense-making speech acts (Garcia,

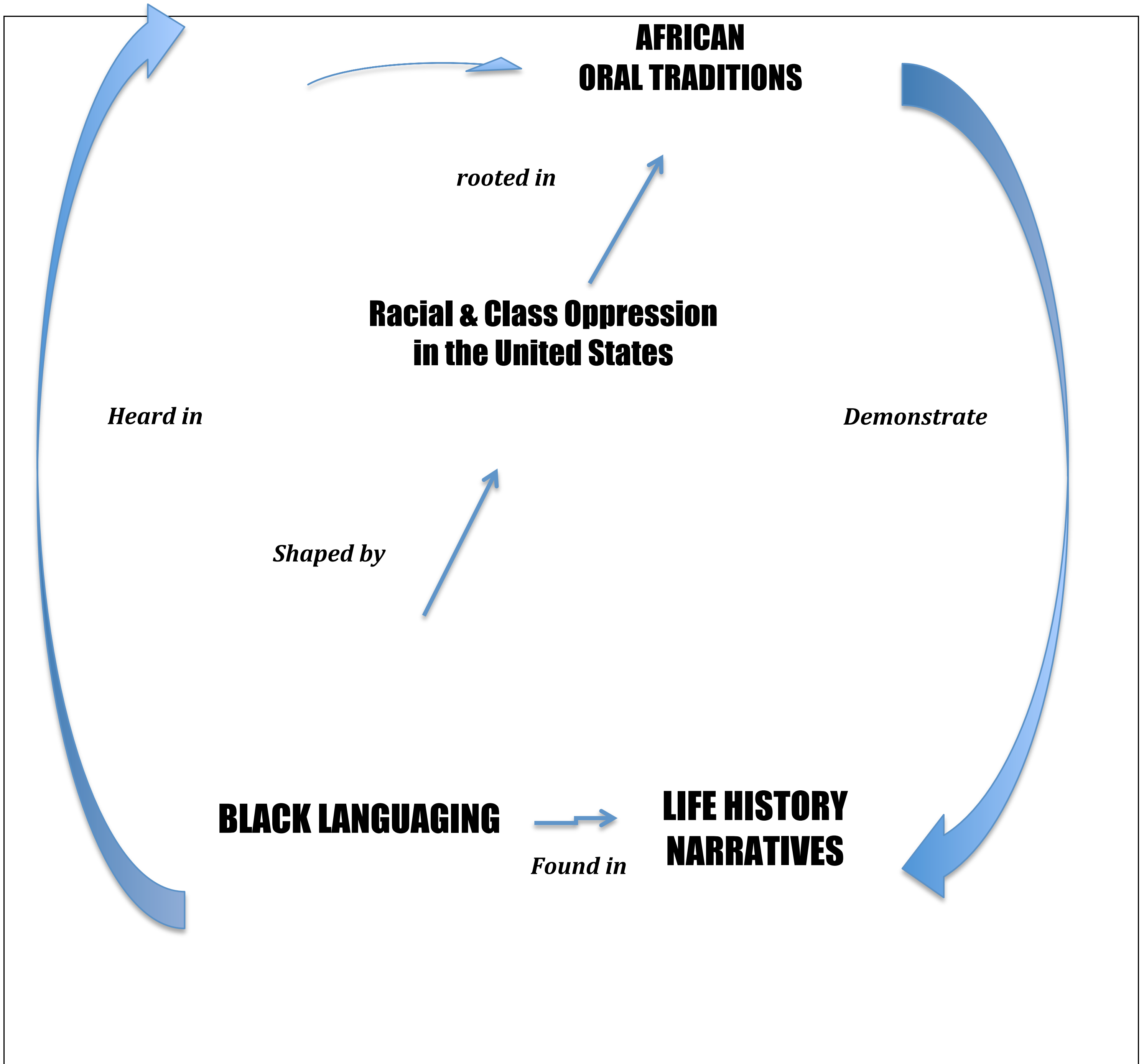
2011). The term Black languaging refers to the oral communication practices of people of African descent currently living in the United States. These practices include structural features of African American Language (Paris & Ball, 2009) often employed by Black people and discursive modes including call-response, signification, tonal semantics and narrative sequencing (Smitherman, 1977). Drawing a connection between our shared histories with racial and class oppression of people of the African diaspora and our ancestral roots in Africa, Smitherman (1977) maintains that people of African descent privilege oration over written word. She states:

> The oral tradition, then, is part of the cultural baggage the African brought to America. The pre-slavery background was one in which the concept of Nommo, the magic power of the Word, was believed necessary to actualize life and give man mastery over things (p. 78, 1977).

Thus, Black languaging (Figure One) is shaped by our recent history within the cultural, political and economic landscape of racial and class oppression in the United States and is rooted in African oral traditions. Black languaging, like that of all people is performed (Garcia, 2011). Smitherman identifies purpose in contemporary Black speech acts:

> We’re talking, then, about a tradition in the black experience in which verbal performance becomes a way of establishing ‘yo rep’ as well as a teaching and socializing force…Black talk is never simple cocktail chit-chat, but a functional dynamic that is simultaneously a mechanism for learning about life and the world and a vehicle for achieving group approval and recognition (p. 80, 1977).

FIGURE ONE: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



The functional aspect of teaching and socializing through languaging is evidenced through everyday conversation as well as sayings, storytellings and sermons (Smitherman, p. 79, 1977).

Paris and Ball (2011) build on Smitherman's research in their analysis of African American Language (AAL) in the educational complex. Like Smitherman, the authors suggest that AAL is a means of communication for Black Americans that emerged from the historical context of slavery and the inter-mixing of African languages and Englishes. In the contemporary context, AAL persists as a primary means of communication for many African-Americans because children are segregated from their white counterparts in schools and in their residential communities. Although not all Black folks use AAL and Paris (2009) documents the inter-ethnic use of AAL by other racial groups, it is widely represented via popular culture through hip-hop, television and literature. Despite its visibility, however, AAL is still perceived negatively and is a source of racial discrimination. Paris and Ball state, "…There is a long way to go for it [AAL] to be viewed as a legitimate form of communication, [and] a useful resource for education" (2011, p. 93). The implications of their study on the conceptual framing of *this* study were two-fold: I anticipated that 1) as a Black woman speaker of AAL interviewing Black men, we were likely to use AAL in our languaging with one another; 2) the participants would use AAL as they storied their lives (McAdams, 2008); 3) the use of AAL in the classroom space as a valid means of communication would emerge in their discussions of their teaching practices.

This study rests on the aforementioned conceptual framework and principles from life history and critical race theory. McAdams' (20008) theory that: 1) the self is storied; 2)

stories are told in social relationships; and 3) stories are cultural texts, lends validity to the use of life history narratives as a unit of analysis to better understand Black male teachers' sense-making of Black male teachers.

In addition, tenets of critical race theory undergird my lens for approaching research. Like other critical scholars, I:

1) recognize that race is endemic to American life;

2) express skepticism toward neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness & meritocracy; and 3) insist on recognizing the experiential knowledge of people of color (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006).

My own personal journey as Black woman/mother/scholar is a testament to the challenges of navigating institutions in a racially oppressive society. I chose to focus this study on Black male teachers to *shed light* on the ways they negotiate systematic and institutionalized racism within the U.S. urban public schools and to *highlight* Black male teachers' intellectual contributions to larger society.

Life history narratives are a means to make visible the invisible; of making heard the stories that go untold. At four percent of the national labor force, Black male teachers are statistically underrepresented relative to their white male, white female and Black female counterparts. Their stories are distinct from dominant narratives about teaching by virtue of their marginalization in schools and in U.S. society. Relative to dominant narratives about teaching, the narratives of Black male teachers exemplify counter-stories (Delgado, 1989). This study privileges these voices by giving Black male teachers agency and space to talk back to majority stories through their narratives.

The conceptual framework situates the life histories of Black male teachers as Black languaging that—while shaped by a shared sociopolitical context of racial and class oppression and rooted in African oral traditions -- provides a rich medium to understand their sense-making of their experiences as students and educators. In the following section, I review the relevant literature about Black male students, Black teachers, and Black male teachers.

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

In this section, I discuss the bodies of literature relevant to this study including Black male students, Black teachers and Black male teachers. Within these broad categories, several subcategories emerge that are also treated. I apply the theoretical framework discussed in the previous section to address the strengths and weaknesses of this literature relative to my research questions.

Black male youth

Several scholars have examined the Black male educational crisis and posited reasons why Black male youth underperform in schools. The literature on Black male youth in urban schools can be divided into two threads. One thread suggests that Black males have an oppositional stance towards education that sabotages their opportunity for academic success in school (Ogbu, 2004; Patterson, 1998). The second thread examines the institutional conditions that oppress Black male youth and contribute to their failure in school (Fashola, 2005; Foster & Peele, 1997; Kunjufu, 2004; Maton & Grief, 1998; Noguera, 2006; Porter, 1998).

Black male youth & oppositional behavior

Fordham & Ogbu (1996) posit that Black youth associate academic success with acting white. In rejection of this label, Black youth adopt oppositional behaviors in schools. These behaviors cause them to perform poorly in school (Fordham and Ogbu, 1996). Ogbu (2004) furthers that Blacks have enacted oppositional identities as coping mechanism since slavery.

In other words, like Black adults, Black youth develop strategies to cope with "the burden of acting white" (Ogbu, 2004, p. 28). This burden is defined as the expectations of attitudes and behaviors from other members of society. Ogbu states:

> Suffice it to say that at school, students responded to required attitudes and behaviors, labeled 'White' like adult Blacks in White institutions and corporate America. Among students, as among adults, there are assimilationists, accommodators without assimilation, ambivalents, resisters and encapsulated (Ogbu, p. 28).

Resistant and encapsulated youth embody an oppositional identity. This opposition hurts their academic performance because these youth do not have a set of attitudes and behaviors that enable them to perform well in school. Ogbu (2004) explains "The students reject that hurt their academic performance are 'White' attitudes and behaviors conducive to making good grades" (p. 28). The attitudes and behaviors associated with 'acting white' include the ability to speak Standard English, enrollment in advanced classes, being smart during lessons, having many white friends, studying a lot or doing homework, taking math and science classes, and spending time in the library. In addition, Black youth are often pressured by their Black peers who discourage them from affirmative behaviors. Black youth go as far as camouflaging their academic abilities by immersing in Black activities, helping friends with homework, allowing friends to copy homework, acting out in class, studying in secret, and paying bullies for protection.

The "cool pose" (Major and Billison, 1992) is another anti-intellectual stance adopted by Black male youth in schools. This "ritualized form of masculinity that entails behaviors, scripts, physical posturing, impression management, and carefully crafted

performance" (Patterson, 1998, p. 4) adopted by Black male youth to counter negative forces in their lives actually hinders their academic performance. Black males use the cool pose as camouflage to mask their intelligence and escape ridicule from their peers (p. 279). By ascribing to a "distorted, inauthentic version of black masculinity" (Patterson, 1998, p. 279), they are prevented from experiencing school success.

Fordham and Ogbu (1996), Ogbu (2004), and Patterson (1998) make the claim that Black male youth who are failing in school lack a set of characteristics necessary for school success. This thread of literature asserts that because Black male youth fail to adopt attitudes and behaviors they ascribe to being white and instead maintain a cool pose, they underperform in the academic setting. Monolithic descriptions of Black male behavior are not useful for understanding the continuum of Black male racial and gender identities. Furthermore, the policing of Black maleness as it takes place in this thread of literature reinscribes notions of hegemonic masculinity (Lemelle, 2000). My interests lie in understanding how individual Black male teachers have been shaped and are shaping urban schools.

Furthermore, the context of urban school classroom context is hardly addressed in this thread of literature. Rather than examine the factors that may contribute to a hardened disposition towards schools and schooling, this scholarship blames the victim for his failure in environments that are not designed for his success. Urban schools can be hostile, punitive institutions led by administrators and teachers who understand little about the lives of Black male students. The institution of school delegitimizes the cultural capital of marginalized groups like young Black males that leads to their further alienation from the academic process (Bourdieu, 2000). My interests lie in further understanding how Black

male teachers support Black youth and Black male youth in particular in navigating challenging educational terrain.

An alternative thread of literature situates the experiences of Black males in the context of oppressive urban schools (A. Ferguson, 2001; Noguera, 2008). It is that literature to which I now turn.

Black male youth and punishment

In the second thread of literature, A. Ferguson (2001) and Noguera (2008) examine how the institution of schooling in the U.S. fails Black male youth through disciplinary systems of exclusion and punishment. While acknowledging poor academic performance and disengagement with schooling among some Black youth, this research argues that discipline practices are significant factors contributing to the Black male educational crises.

Even at the elementary school level, school personnel employ rules and procedures in response to the behaviors of Black male youth in order to maintain racial order (A. Ferguson, 2001). Within the U.S. public school system, there is “a pattern in which the kids who are sent to jailhouses and dungeons in school systems across the United States are disproportionately Black and male” (A. Ferguson, 2001, p. 7). The enforcement of systems of punishment aimed at Black male youth reinforce racial inequality.

For Black boys, the consequences for misbehavior that is typical of young kids, including talking out of turn, talking back to teachers, and breaking low-level school rules are much higher. These children are described as “at-risk of ‘failing’, ‘unsalvageable’ or ‘bound for jail’ by school personnel” (A. Ferguson 2001, p. 9). They are labeled as *Troublemakers* and distinguished from the high-performing *Schoolboys*. The

Troublemakers are frequently removed from classrooms and sent to the *Punishing Room*. Black males – perceived by school personnel and larger society as embodying a set of characteristics that are maladaptive – are subject to redress through removal from the regular classroom settings. *Punishing Rooms* are designed to confine Black males who do not conform to the normative set of behavior:

> It is a location from which to investigate the ways that the contemporary discourses about black masculinity become authoritative resources for school adults in the construction of school identities of 'bad boys'. The Punishing Room is also a site to explore how these boys negotiate individual identities and life histories in the collective experience of race/gender (A. Ferguson, 2001, p. 40).

Discipline systems based on racially-biased assumptions over-target Black males and maintain racial hierarchies in schools. A Focauldian analysis of power within the everyday experiences of the Troublemakers reveals that schools utilize disciplinary control as a way to police bodies, emotions, and presentations of self; and classify individuals through performance ranking, testing, grading, rewards and punishments. The dynamic of power between the Troublemakers and school authority figures includes displays of "disruption, defiance, or disrespect" (p. 67) on the part of the former, and interpretation of these behaviors as a "threatening…bad attitude…black lower-class style" (p. 68) by the latter. Within this power structure, Black male youth lose. Black males are assessed by teachers in schools based on these behaviors, and decisions about their academic futures are solidified. A. Ferguson (2001) states:

> Cultural modes of emotional display by kids become significant factors in decisions teachers make about their academic potential and influence decisions teachers make about the kinds of academic programs in which they will be placed (p. 68).

Suspension rooms, remedial classes and special education classes exemplify the school placements in which Black males are overrepresented (Noguera, 2008). The behaviors of many Black male youth and the ways in which that behavior is perceived and punished contribute to their lack of academic success in schools (A. Ferguson, 2001).

Noguera (2008), like A. Ferguson, contends that Black male youths' experiences in schools are often punitive and exclusionary. However, Noguera departs from Ferguson (2001), Majors & Billison (1992), Ogbu (2004), Ogbu and Fordham (1986) and Patterson (1998) by raising two arguments: (1) the problems that Black males face in schools and their punishments are normalized; and (2) there is a lack of outcry amongst educators to punitive practices in schools. Indeed, some Black male youth engage in problematic behaviors within the school setting. However, failing to take notice of the institutional practices that discriminate against young Black men decontextualizes these behaviors. Black male youth who act out in school are not "innocent victims of unfair treatment" (p. xvii), but when teachers marginalize and discourage, when their failure is perceived as normal, when punishment and exclusion from classrooms is employed as a natural response to that failure, a failure-punishment paradox is enacted with no end. Noguera (2008) states:

> In many schools in the United States, educators have grown accustomed to seeing Black male youth drop out, fail, and get punished…their plight is barely regarded as a cause for alarm (p.xviii).

It is hard to believe that despite bodies of research which have proven that punishing “troublemakers” and grouping “underachievers” actually reinforce negative behaviors, more educators are *not* calling for Black male youth “to be removed from basements, detention centers, and classrooms where they are not learning” (Noguera, 2008, p. xx). Several stakeholders are accountable, including Black male youth themselves, teachers and school leaders.

The critique on systems of discipline that over-target Black male youth is beneficial to this study on the teaching practices of Black male teachers of Black male youth in the urban context. Schools, lacking culturally relevant curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 2009) and personnel harboring narrow visions of acceptable behavior, oppress and police Black male bodies (Bourdieu, 2000; Lemelle 2009). I appreciate Noguera’s attempt to link school-level policies to the larger criminal justice system to make the claim for the trajectory from—or out of—schools into prison where many academically and socially struggling Black male youth are headed. This is the subject of the following section.

Black male youth and the school-to-prison pipeline

Disciplinary practices in urban schools such as zero tolerance policies exacerbate the academic struggles of Black male youth by pushing them out of schools and into the criminal justice system (Glennon 2003; NAACP Legal Defense Fund, Noguera, 2003; Stanczyk, 2007; Wald & Losen, 2003). Black male youth are more frequently disciplined for minor infractions by subjective and/or questionable criteria (Ferguson, 2001; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; McFadden et. al, 1992; George, Noguera, Skiba et. al., 2002; Wald & Losen, 2003). Suspension and expulsion policies coupled with the increasing presence of metal detectors, disciplinary classrooms (in which students who are referred by teachers

are sent as an alternative placement); discipline deans, security guards and even police create a climate that resembles a prison rather than a school.

The school as prison analogy reflects the experience for many Black boys in urban schools. Underperforming Black males in urban schools are particularly at-risk for entering the school-to-prison pipeline. A. Ferguson (2001) writes:

> Time in the school dungeon means time lost from classroom learning; suspension, at school or at home, has a direct and lasting negative effect on the continuing growth of a child. When removal from classroom life begins at an early age, it is even more devastating, as human possibilities are stunted at a crucial formative period of life. Each year the gap in skills grows wider and more handicapping, while the overall process of disidentification that I have described encourages those who have problems to leave school rather than resolve them in an educational setting. There is a direct relationship between dropping out of school and doing time in jail: the majority of black inmates in local, state, and federal penal system are high school dropouts. Therefore, if we want to begin to break the ties between school and jail, we must first create educational systems that foster kids' identification with school and encourage them not to abandon it. (p. 231)

Black boys' experiences in school with discipline causes a disengagement from school. That disengagement is heightened by their lack of academic success due to their time out of class serving punishment sentences. Educational reform at the school level includes putting an end to the hyperpenalization of Black male youth; a practice that pushes them out of classrooms and into the criminal justice system.

As it stands, Black youth are more likely than White students to be the targets of discipline procedures. Although they represent only 17% of the total U.S. student body population, Black boys make-up 34% of those suspended (NAACP Legal Defense Fund, Stanczyk, 2007;Wald & Losen, 2003). Furthermore, students who have been repeatedly suspended and expelled from school are more likely to end up in youth detention centers, the juvenile justice system and the prison industrial complex (Wald & Losen, 2003). Undereducated and over-disciplined by schools, Black males are being ushered into state and federal detention at alarming rates. M. Alexander (2010) explains:

> More black men are imprisoned today than at any other moment in our nation's history…We may wonder aloud [as Secretary Duncan seemingly did in his Teach campaign speech] 'where have all the Black men gone?' but deep down, we already know. It is simply taken for granted that, in cities like Baltimore and Chicago, the vast majority of young black men are currently under the control of the criminal justice system or branded criminals for life. (p. 176).

The alarming overrepresentation of Black males into the prison industrial complex fuels a greater sense of urgency to the Black male educational crises and the recruitment of Black male teachers. With little prospect of gaining a high school diploma or college education, there should be little surprise that there is a shortage of Black male teachers. The prospective Black male teachers are in the same place where many other Black men have gone – jail.

The literature on the school-to-prison pipeline and the Black male overrepresentation in the prison industrial complex is critical for thinking about education reform. The U.S. public school system can't continue to provide inadequate education to

our Black male youth, engage in practices that punish and push them out of schools and into prisons, and then wonder who will become the next generation of Black male teachers to solve this crisis.

This literature calls attention to the need for educational reforms at both the institutional and classroom levels. By valuing and supporting the academic and social needs of Black male students, urban schools can reverse the trend of disengagement, discipline, drop out and detention. Reforming schools to better support Black males can occur through school level polices that value the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2000) of Black male youth and at the classroom level through practices that are culturally relevant to their lives (Ladson-Billings, 2004). In addition to the modification of hyper-punitive discipline procedures, some scholars suggest that classrooms led by African American teachers can engage Black students. The body of scholarship that suggests that Black teachers are highly capable of relating to Black youth and are best poised for this role will be further discussed in the subsequent section (Dee, 2005; Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lynn, 2006; Kunjufu, 2004; Porter, 1998; McDougal, 2009).

Black teachers

A body of literature on teaching Black youth points to the rich tradition of fostering the intellectual and sociopolitical uplift of Black youth within the community (Anderson, 1998; Anderson & Kharem, 2009; Fairclough, 2007; Foster, 1997). This tradition is steeped in the work of Black teachers that dates from the Reconstruction-era, one-room Southern schoolhouse, to the Civil Rights Movement. Although this literature does not discuss the work of contemporary Black teachers, it provides significant insight into the

contributions of Black teachers to the public education system and grounds the current call for their recruitment in the historical context.

The literature on Black teachers can be divided into two categories: (1) historical experiences (Anderson, 1998; Fairclough, 2007; Foster, 1997); and (2) appropriate pedagogy & practices (Ladson-Billings, 2009 & Murrell, 1999). The research on Black teachers distinguishes their experiences from other groups and—while not all in concurrence about the nature of those experiences—affirm the significance of their contributions to the public education system in this country.

Historical tradition of Black teachers and teaching

The current shortage of Black teachers can be traced to the 1900s. At the turn of the twentieth century, the small pool of formally trained Blacks posed significant challenges to the establishment of Southern Black schools (J. Anderson, 1998). Although a significant number of white Northern missionaries came to the South to teach Black children in common schools, they were still insufficient in number to teach the masses of Black school-age youth at a rate compensatory with other twentieth century classrooms in the U.S. (p. 110). Anderson writes:

> In 1900 in the sixteen former slave states, there were 26,770 black teachers for the 2,485,737 black children ages five through eighteen, or one black teacher for every 93 black children of school age. The black teaching force in the southern states would have to double if it were to supply one teacher for every 46 black children of school age, a ration well above the southern white ratio of 57 school-age children per teacher (1998, p. 111).

Furthermore, training Black teachers was a high priority in order to reduce the teacher shortage and further the development of universal education for Black children. The Hampton-Tuskegee Institute was one such model for training Black teachers in an industrial education. The curriculum – divided into academic and manual labor strands – included reading, writing and arithmetic, gardening, cooking, woodwork, laundering and manual labor (p. 143). While the teacher candidates also learned about observation, pedagogy and school management, this model of teacher preparation was far below standard relative to the national requirements for professional teaching certification. While schools such as Hampton-Tuskegee were just beginning to prepare Black teachers with a high school education—a degree that would qualify them for elementary school teaching at best—White teachers were far more educated and were keeping up with the pace of national perspectives on adequate teacher training. Thus, Black teacher training reproduced conditions whereby Black teachers lacked sufficient preparation to attend four-year universities and teach in secondary classrooms. The miseducation of Black teachers by industrial training programs made them underqualified in the context of increasing certification standards (Anderson, 1998).

Anderson's research examines the entire Black educational system in the South from Reconstruction until the Civil Rights Movement, and thus, the discussion of the role of Black teachers is limited in scope. The emphasis on their lack of adequate education and training suggests that the masses of Black teachers were not that much more educated than their pupils. Only until the establishment and expansion of Historically Black Universities – a topic also extensively documented in Anderson's text – did Black teachers in the South

begin to acquire education and teacher training to support the academic development of their students.

Anderson's finding that many Black teachers were trained informally is consistent with Fairclough's (2007) in his study of Black teachers in the South from Reconstruction to Integration. Some of the first Black teachers learned to read by chance having been taught by slave owners and preachers. Despite this lack of formal education, it was widely believed that Black teachers made significant contributions to the lives of Black children:

> By the 1880s, the AME's [African Methodist Episcopal Church] argument that black instructors were the best people to educate black children had become widely accepted by African American teachers. Some developed the argument along pedagogical lines. Others emphasized that black teachers had to cease relying upon whites if they were to develop racial pride and acquire the ability to stand on their own two feet (Fairclough, p. 92).

While asserting that Black teachers teach Black children, the AME also called for the removal of white Northern female missionaries from Black classrooms. However, this strategy enabled White supremacists to further their cause and damage Black education. Fairclough (2007) states:

> Eliminating the 'Yankee schoolmarms' lowered the educational ceiling and deprived blacks of influential northern allies. Replacing white teachers with blacks reinforced racial segregation and made it easier for whites to neglect black schools as black political influence declined and then vanished. (p. 62)

Thus, the downside of rallying for Black teachers for Black children was the loss of Northern support and the further segregation of Black people to the periphery of educational priorities. Fairclough (2007) explains:

> Teacher preparation programs in the South imbued their candidates with a sense of moral responsibility to the Black community. However, these high expectations for discipline and modesty were challenged by actual day-to-day experiences of classroom teachers. Before even walking into a school, Black teachers faced the scrutiny of certification board examiners who determined the grade of each candidate's certificate and his/her salary. Superintendents frequently assessed Black teachers at the lowest levels, and thus they received the lowest salaries. These administrators justified their decisions by arguing that Blacks were intellectually inferior and had fewer social needs and could live more cheaply than White teachers (p. 127).

At the beginning of the 20th century, newly hired Black teachers were responsible for the organization of the school. Once a school was set up, Black teachers had to contend with parents whose response to the establishment of schools ranged from "enthusiasm to indifference" (Fairclough, 2007, p. 102). In the classroom, Black teachers faced challenges including inconsistent attendance, poor discipline, feelings of isolation and alienation.

Like White teachers, Black teachers taught alone in one-room schoolhouses and were charged with instructing as many as 100 children up to age fifteen. Most children in the South missed from one-third to one-half of school, as many of the families were sharecroppers and led mobile lifestyles. In addition, although threats of corporal punishment mitigated many discipline problems, Black teachers were challenged by older

male students in their classrooms. Finally, Black teachers faced the consistent threat of and actualized violence, at the hands of White supremacists (Fairclough, 2007).

Black teachers faced challenges in developing Black schools during Reconstruction and during Integration, and a new generation of Black teachers faced challenges maintaining their positions in Black schools. Some Black teachers did not support Integration. Fairclough (2007) explains:

> The disruption of school routine and discipline violated the professional instincts of many Black educators. It threatened both their own authority and the process of education itself. Moreover, teachers often distrusted the motives and questioned the legitimacy of intruding civil rights workers. They charged these activists with deliberately fomenting class divisions within the black community, undermining respect for traditional leaders and using gullible students as cannon fodder in their confrontations with police. (p. 382)

Some Black teachers felt that they were already engaged in practices that encouraged racial pride and that, in fact, were the catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement. Fairclough explains (2007) "Black teachers had also encouraged a more general sense of racial pride that played an important role – so pervasive that is was often taken for granted – in motivating the Civil Rights Movement" (p. 389). Indeed, their fears came to pass after the passage of Brown vs. the Board of Education. When placed in integrated schools, Black teachers were subject to a higher level of scrutiny than their White counterparts. Black teachers' traditional teaching style made it difficult to adjust to teaching in White schools. In addition, a significant percentage of Black teachers lost their jobs completely as all-Black schools closed and a limited number of teachers moved to integrated schools. In

addition, integration decreased the number of Black male educators when Black schools closed and their Black principals left the field entirely, became classroom teachers, or took less prestigious clerical positions in central offices. According to Fairclough (2007), the current notion of a Black male teachers shortage education is overstated relative to Integration-era numbers:

> Black teachers constitute about the same proportion of the nation's teaching force as they did in 1960, about 8 percent. Historically, too, the relatively small number of black male teachers is an old phenomenon – women dominated the teaching profession, especially elementary, throughout the twentieth century. (p. 416)

Fairclough's suggestion that the current Black male teacher shortage is overstated because teaching has always predominantly been a woman's profession overlooks the historic role that Black males played in the development of Black schools – a role that, along with classroom teaching, has been diminished. If, as Fairclough suggests, many Black males were forced out of their leadership positions during Integration, then the overall numbers of Black males in the educational setting was reduced. And even if, as Fairclough argues, the relative number of Black male teachers has held stable since the formation of Black schools, the implications of this disparity necessitate exploration. Fairclough's discussion of Black male teachers is quite limited in scope.

Fairclough's study on Black male teachers is complex. His scholarship makes a significant contribution to the body of literature by deconstructing romanticized notions of Black teachers and revealing the significant challenges they experienced from both the Black and white communities in establishing Black schools. However, the discussion on the role of Black teachers in the lives of Black youth at times undermines the significance

of their contributions to education. The emphasis on Black teachers' lack of formal training and the subtext that suggests that the Black community was misguided in their attempt to push for Black teachers for Black youth distorts the insights we learn from Fairclough's close examination of Black teachers. Perhaps this has to do with the lack of representation of Black teachers' voices. His objective approach to telling history falls short in capturing the nuanced themes in the lives of Black teachers. Fairclough tells the story of Black teachers without the richness of Black teachers' voices. This literature makes no attempt to provide a counter-narrative (Delgado, 1989) of Black teachers. Fairclough tells the story of Black teachers from the lens of an outsider. My research will address this shortcoming by discussing the lives of Black male teachers in their own voices.

Foster's life history study (1997) constructs a narrative about Black teachers from the Civil Rights Movement into present day in their own voices. Foster takes issue with both the underrepresentation of Black teachers in general in the workforce and the lack of scholarship about their contributions in academic texts. She explains:

> Given the significance of teaching as a profession within the black community and the growing scholarship examining occupations that have typically employed large numbers of blacks, the absence of a book devoted to black teachers is both puzzling and disturbing. (Foster, 1997, p. 29)

Black teachers have played an important role in the Black community, and thus should be more visible within the scholarly literature. Foster's research is a groundbreaking contribution to the body of literature on Black teachers. The life histories of twenty Black

teachers comprise the first scholarship on the experiences of Black teachers told from their own perspectives. The silencing of these voices ends with Foster's text:

> Black teachers' unique historical experiences are either completely overlooked or amalgamated with those of white teachers…In the pages that follow, teachers talk about racism in segregated and desegregated schools, the repeated cycles of attempted and aborted reform efforts, and the different perceptions of black and white teachers about the ability and needs of black students, parents and communities…It is my hope that these accounts will provide a voice for an historically marginalized group, that in the process they will enhance our capacity to understand the experiences of black teachers… (Foster, 1997, LI)

Most Black teachers continued to teach exclusively in Black schools during the Civil Rights Movement – even in the Northern State – because they were thought to be intellectually and socially inferior by white society. Members of the Black community held competing perspectives about integration (Foster, 1997, p. 30). Some rightfully predicted that integrated schools would lead to unemployment because Brown vs. The Board of Education assumed that all black, segregated schools could not be equal to all white schools. Thus, some Black teachers felt that their job security would be threatened, and that they would be subjected to more professional scrutiny. Their fears were valid because despite having training and experience, Black teachers' intelligence and competency was increasingly questioned in integrated schools as a result of *Brown.* Despite these circumstances, many Black teachers remained deeply involved in political activity in order to secure equitable salaries and reform tenure rules (Foster, 1997).

After the Civil Rights Era, historically Black colleges began graduating fewer teachers. Several factors led to the reduction of Black teachers. Foremost, the overall number of Black college students decreased and of those who attended, an increasing number were choosing careers other than teaching. In addition, standardized tests results were increasingly being used to determine acceptance into teacher education programs. Finally, the number of black teachers was declining at a time when the number of Black youth in public schools was increasing. The combination of these events led to the Black teacher shortage that began in the 1980s. Among Black teachers, at the time of Foster's study, only 21% of approximately 440,000 black teachers were male (Foster, 1997). Thus, the life histories of the Black teachers in Foster's study are situated within a context of 1) intellectual assaults against Black teachers during the Civil Rights Era; 2) decreased job security and increased scrutiny during integration; and 3) a reduced pipeline of Black teachers from HBCU's as a factor leading to shortage.

Unlike Fairclough's emphasis on exploring the historical context of Black teachers and the education system, Foster provides a forum through which Black teachers share their personal experiences in schools and in classrooms as both teachers and students. Foster gives agency to Black teachers' that were formally silenced and ignored. Everett Dawson, Leroy Lovelace, Edouard Plummer, Lerone Swift and Leonard Collins – the Black male teachers in Foster's study – discuss their schooling experiences, their trajectories to becoming teachers, their philosophies of teaching, their classroom experiences, their critiques of the public school system and their roles as teachers in the Black community. The narratives that emerge are distinct: some nostalgic about the difficult but rewarding times learning and teaching in segregated schools, some lamenting

the state of Black education, some tinged with matter-of-fact humor, some serious and Afro-centric. For example, Mr. Dawson's brief narrative account provides a detailed snapshot of a teaching moment that reveals the relationship between his philosophy of teaching and pedagogy. The narratives of the other Black male teachers in this study include similar, albeit less thorough accounts of their classrooms. Nonetheless, taken as a whole, several themes emerge about teaching philosophies and practices from the life histories of the Black male teachers in Foster's study including: 1) holding high expectations of students; 2) maintaining structure and discipline for an optimal learning environment; 3) bringing ones personal experiences into the classroom to share with students; 4) education as integral to improvement within the Black community.

Foster makes a significant contribution to the body of literature on Black teachers by providing the historical context and allowing Black pedagogues to tell the story of their experiences in their own words. In this way, Foster allows for a counter-narrative (Delgado, 1989) of Black male teachers to talk back to dominant narratives of White, female teachers (Rousmaniere, 1994) to emerge. A close examination of the narratives of the Black male teachers in her study reveals a philosophy of teaching and educational practices geared towards the academic success of Black students. These themes are closely aligned with pedagogies of effective teachers of Black youth that are well-documented in the literature (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Foster & Peele, 1995; Murrell, 1999). The practices will be further discussed in the following section of the literature surrounding the pedagogies of Black teachers.

Pedagogies of Black Teachers

Ladson-Billings (2009), Foster and Peele (1999) and Murrell (1999) have generated a body of scholarship about the effective pedagogical practices of Black teachers of Black students. Ladson-Billings *culturally relevant pedagogy,* Foster and Peele's *effective teachers*, and Peter Murrell's *responsive teaching* (1999), comprise similar teaching philosophies and practices of educators that positively impact the socio-emotional and academic progress of Black students. This scholarship concerns best practices to support the learning of African American students, a smaller thread within this body of research places special emphasis on teaching African American male students.

Foster and Peele (1999) discuss the pedagogies of successful teachers of African American male students. These teachers develop positive personal relationships; adopt dominant but respectful teaching styles; maintain high academic and behavioral expectations; connect curriculum with students personal lives; believe students can learn, and take responsibility for inspiring them to learn (p. 13). Good teachers of African American male students consider teaching as more than just rote learning of academic skills and concepts. Foster and Peele (1999) state:

> Successful teachers of African American males concern themselves with the development of their pupils, not just with their cognitive growth. Teachers who are effective with African American males conceive their roles more broadly than that assigned them by narrow, utilitarian purposes of schooling. Thus, although they accept the institutional goal of promoting cognitive growth, their personal definition of the teachers' role is not merely confined to developing academic skills but includes the social and emotional growth of students. (p. 15)

Effective teachers of Black male youth offer an alternative curriculum that supports students' abilities to negotiate inequality and develop personal values.

Murell (1999) calls for change in the teaching of Black youth – particularly Black male youth – towards pedagogies of understanding. The structure of schools is the problem within the educational system – not the students. Murrell (1999) writes:

> The problem is how to structure school cultures so that the quality of nonmainstream students' educational experience or the integrity of their identity development does not depend on the degree of assimilation to mainstream culture (p. 86).

Responsive teachers understand the behaviors their students demonstrate and utilize that knowledge to enact pedagogies that support these styles. Murrell (1999) defines:

> Responsive teachers recognize and capitalize on the frames of discourse within which African American male students routinely operate. These include: question-posing, teacher challenging approach; a preference for request for information teacher inquiries; an eagerness to show off knowledge they possess; a penchant for extended explanations; and a preference for 'getting over' rather than admitting ignorance. (p. 95)

By engaging pedagogies that consider the cultural and behavioral practices of some Black male students, culturally responsive teachers, according to Murrell, are able to successfully teach (and reach) their students.

Ladson-Billings' (1994) research examines the pedagogies of a group of mostly female Black teachers. Ladson-Billings describes their teaching practice as culturally relevant pedagogy. According to Ladson-Billings, the teachers in this study (1994):

> 1) have high self-esteem and high regard for others; 2) see themselves as part of the community; 3) see teaching as giving back to the community and encourage students to do the same; 4) see teaching as an art and see themselves as artists; 5) believe that all students can succeed; 6) help students make connections between their community, national and global identities; 7) and see themselves as 'digging knowledge out' of students. (1994, p. 55)

Culturally relevant pedagogy is distinct from other teaching practices in which teachers contend that they are colorblind. In those classrooms, the teachers position themselves as the head authority figure and often hold a set of assumptions about his/her students that result in a relational dynamic whereby she/he has the most power. This hierarchical structure occurs frequently in the classrooms with students of color (Ladson-Billings, p. 55). In contrast, culturally relevant pedagogues value the whole learner and the academic and social skills that s/he brings:

> Culturally relevant teaching fosters the kinds of social interactions in the classroom that support the individual in the group context. Students feel a part of a collective effort designed to encourage academic and cultural excellence. As members of an extended family, the students assist, support, and encourage one another. The entire group rises and falls together. Thus it is in everyone's best interest to ensure that the others in the group are successful. (Ladson-Billings, p. 76)

The literature on the practice of culturally relevant teaching makes a significant contribution to the scholarship on the pedagogies of Black teachers. This scholarship calls attention to the classroom practices that emphasize both academic and social development of Black students. By acknowledging that racism exists in American public

schools, expressing skepticism towards colorblindness as an approach to pedagogy, and recognizing that African American students have an experiential knowledge that differs from other students enacts critical race theory (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006) as a practice in the classroom. However, there is limited discussion on how Black male teachers enact culturally relevant pedagogy or how this philosophy of teaching specifically supports the academic achievement of Black male students.

This study will build upon this research and further examine the teaching philosophies of Black male educators. Embedded within the discourse around the recruitment of Black male teachers in particular is the notion that they can do something through their relationships and their teaching of Black male youth that can shift the course of the Black male educational crisis. An examination of the body of literature on Black teachers beginning with the history of Black teachers sheds light on the nature of these relationships as well as the classroom practices employed to reach and teach Black youth in general and Black male youth in particular. My study will explore whether all Black male teachers see themselves as able to help Black male youth and act on practices and pedagogies that the literature suggests is essential. Since Black male teachers are the object of my study, I review below the literature that have looked at their recruitment and retention; pedagogies and practices and role models, race and masculinity.

Black Male Teachers

There are a number of scholars who have conducted empirical studies on Black male teachers. This research can be divided into four strands: 1) recruitment & retention; 2) pedagogies and practices; and 3) role models, race & masculinity. This body of

literature, while scant and dominated by male scholars, continues to grow in light of the recent attention in the popular press regarding the shortage of Black male teachers.

Recruitment and Retention

In his provocative manifesto about the education of Black males, Kunjufu (2004) argues that significant recruitment efforts are needed to recruit, place and retain Black male teachers in order save Black male boys. Because Black boys have difficulty transitioning to the fourth grade, they begin to do poorly in school. He writes:

> African Americans constitute 17 percent of the total public school enrollment, yet were 21 percent of the dropouts, with African American males constituting the largest category. Thus, the pool of potential college-bound students is effectively reduced. (p. 38)

Black male youth are more likely to see Black men in positions such as janitors or physical education teachers than as classroom teachers – especially in the elementary grades. Kunjufu (2004) says: “African American males can spend an entire career in the public schools and have very little interaction with an African American male teachers, counselor or administrator.”

Contrary to Fairclough (2007) Kunjufu (2004) concludes that there are not enough Black male teachers in schools and that the academic experiences of Black boys are limited as a result of their absence. These circumstances contribute to the conspiracy to destroy Black boys because they rarely have the opportunity to see adult males as intellectuals within classroom spaces (p. 39). When they do, those Black male teachers take on the role of strict disciplinarian as they are placed in classrooms with students with the most behavioral problems (p. 38). Therefore, the Black community must pressure schools

districts to recruit Black male teachers. Colleges and universities must engage in recruitment programs by going into the community to find teachers and provide scholarships (Kunjufu, 2004).

"A Black male classroom" is one way to improve the school experience for Black male youth (Kunjufu, 2004). This classroom would include a Black male teacher, an Afro-centric curriculum, cooperative learning, summer employment and parental involvement (p. 50). An all-male classroom would remove the pressure of competing against female students who have both developmental and academic advantages. Since Black males are over-represented in existing special education and remedial classrooms, the Black male classroom would not be dissimilar to the existing practices of isolation. Kunjufu (2004) sates, "What my detractors don't understand, though, is that with 75 percent or more of African American boys in special education and remedial classes, classrooms are already segregated".

Porter (1998), like Kunjufu (2004), contends that the public education system is designed to fail Black males and that more Black male teachers might alleviate this. Special education laws in particular pathologize Black males by categorizing their behaviors as maladaptive:

> Thus, the American public education system made 'Black male' synonymous with 'disabled'. This was done through the creation of labels 'behavior disorders' and 'emotional disorders'. These labels say that African boys behave without special treatment, juvenile probation, and, in many cases, drugs. This label condemns African boys to the very bottom of the education ladder –few architects, teaches, business owners, doctors, or others will come out of BD classes. African boys have

> become public education's monster ---feared, mistrusted and hated, mere animals to be confined to cages (special education classes). (p. 5)

Black teachers can be complicit in the destruction of Black boys when they view them negatively and treat them poorly. Furthermore, school curriculum fails to teach children about self-awareness and self-image (p.24). The solution to this crisis is to change curriculum, pedagogy, and to diversify the teaching staff. The adoption of an Afro-centric curriculum and teaching practices and the recruitment of Black male teachers are – like the Black male classroom – framed as a gendered and philosophical alternative to the traditional classroom.

Kunjufu (2004) and Porter (1998) posit bold arguments about the state of education for Black males in this country and argue that these circumstances are intentional and part of a conspiracy to destroy them. One solution both authors agree on is the increased recruitment and retention of Black male teachers. Although their arguments are provocative, seemingly Kunjufu (2004) and Porter (1998) rely on personal observation and existing statistics to present mostly theoretical positions with some practical implications. Lacking from their research is substantive empirical data to support their contentions. Perhaps, however, the use of simplistic notions of "blackness" and "maleness" to advance their argument for single sex classrooms and the recruitment of Black males teachers are the most problematic. In their call for Black male role models to save Black boys, Kunjufu and Porter reduce Black maleness into a fixed raced and gendered category. This model ignores the range of diversity within the Black experience and suggests an orientation of masculinity steeped in a heteronormative identity. Kunjufu and Porter present an essentialized, hegemonic version of Black male patriarch as the ideal role model for Black

male youth that ignores the multiple, layered and individualized selves that make up any one Black man (Lemelle, 2009).

Rather than rest on assumptions about Black maleness derived seemingly from personal experience, Lewis (2007) examines why a group of Black male teachers in three urban school districts in Louisiana became teachers and their reasons for remaining in education. Based on these understandings, Lewis suggested strategies for recruitment and retention of Black male teachers to school district personnel. Lewis (2007) wrote:

> In this study, the top three recruitment mechanisms that were most important to African American male teachers were (1) helping young people, (2) needing a job, and (3) contributions to humanity . . . School district officials must continue to stress at various job fairs the critical role of teachers, specifically African American male teachers, in helping young people reach their educational goals and become productive members of society. Second, as another recruitment mechanism, school district officials must continue to inform African American male college students that teaching positions are readily available upon graduation from college in a variety of subject areas. Third, school district officials must remind potential African American male teachers that their efforts are an excellent way to contribute to humanity in a way that cannot be done in many other professions. (p. 240)

Lewis' recommendations give agency to Black male teachers while offering specific policy recommendations. Although these findings build on the idea of Black males as role models, Lewis avoids essentialist stereotypes of Black maleness and demonstrates their deep social commitment to teaching and educational reform. This study is helpful because it employs a framework to allow Black male teachers to speak back to educational policy

relative to their experiences as students and teachers while also emerging as a thread of scholarship that problematizes the notion of Black male teacher as role model. This study lacks an in-depth analysis about the work that Black male teachers do to engage with Black male youth in their classrooms. We know little about the pedagogies of Black male teachers. I seek to fill this gap in the literature in this study. The following section examines the extant literature on the pedagogies of Black male teachers.

Pedagogies & Practices

The body of literature on the pedagogical practices of Black male teachers in urban classrooms is limited. Few scholars have conducted recent in-depth research that examines the practices of Black male teachers. Like Foster (1997), Lynn and Jennings (2009) contend that the scholarly literature does not sufficiently document the pedagogical practices of Black male teachers and their contributions to society. The authors maintain that Black teachers support the raced, gendered and classed learners in their classrooms and that this work is not reflected in the discourse on critical pedagogy. Because studies of critical pedagogues call attention to the transformative work of students and teachers (Lynn & Jennings 2009), and studies of critical pedagogy examine systems of power in schools and classroom (McLaren 1994; McLaren & Kincheloe 2007), Lynn and Jennings call for more research that addresses the critical work of Black teachers in classrooms. An exhaustive review of the relevant literature reveals that Brown (2009), Lynn (2006) and McDougal (2009) are the only scholars who have examined the teaching practices of Black male teachers.

Brown (2009) concurs that the research on what Black male teachers do in their classrooms is scant. Implicit in the efforts to recruit Black male teachers is the belief that

their teaching will transform Black boys; however, there is limited research to support this assumption. Thus, the purpose of Brown's study is three-fold: 1) to broaden the body of research on Black male teachers; 2) to develop a more complex understanding of their pedagogies; and 3) to discuss the diverse ways that Black male teachers work with Black male youth. His study of nine Black male teachers in a Midwestern, high-poverty urban school employed the concept of performance to examine the pedagogical practices of the teachers. Performance includes physical demonstrations and social engagement in the act of service to students.

Three dominant performative, pedagogical styles emerged from this study on Black male teachers: enforcer, negotiator and playful. Although each style has a dominant set of criteria, these categories nonetheless describe different ways that Black male teachers support Black boys in their classrooms. Thus, the enforcer "seeks immediate enforcement of defined expectations" (p. 426), the *playful* possesses "a carefree approach to their teaching" (p. 427), and the *negotiator* regularly employs "discussion, counsel and questioning as a method for arriving at new solutions" (p. 430). Black male teachers in this study demonstrated and expressed their commitment to transformative education for Black male students. Their styles are context-based performances enacted for the purpose of equipping their students with an understanding of how they are perceived as Black males by the larger society. Thus, Brown's study adds to the body of research by naming performative agency or "a unique kind of verbal capacity, interaction style, authority and personal connection" (p. 417) as one aspect of teaching amongst Black male teachers.

Like Brown, Lynn (2006) responds to the call for research about Black male teachers' pedagogies. He contends that little has been written about Black men's ways of

knowing and their contributions to urban schools. Although other scholarship discusses Black men teachers' perspectives about their lives, how they came into teaching and how they view their profession, it was important to generate research that explores their pedagogical practices in classrooms.

Lynn employs culturally relevant teaching (as discussed in a prior section) as a methodological framework to examine the pedagogies of a group of Black male teachers. Racial and ethnic identity could potentially be productive in engaging young Black youth. Black male teachers embody characteristics of culturally relevant teachers to engage their students through expressions of passion and commitment. As a result, their students saw them as parents. In addition, Black male teachers shared their struggles with oppression as a way to understand their students' struggles with racism and classism.

The thread of literature on the culturally relevant practices of Black male teachers begins to shed light on their philosophies and pedagogies. This emerging body of scholarship suggests that Black male teachers enact varying pedagogies in their classrooms. This literature demonstrates how some Black male teachers utilize their knowledge and experiences as Black males to connect in the classroom with African American students. My study will build on this scholarship by studying the life histories and philosophies of a group of Black male teachers. Like Brown (2009), Lynn (2006) and McDougal (2009), my study does not assume that a Black man at the head of the classroom will become a role model that enacts a specific understanding or mode of teaching that will transform Black male students. While this research is dedicated to a search for the goodness in the work of Black male teachers of Black male students, it also recognizes that individuals enact race and gender identities in a variety of ways and not all

these ways might cast Black male teachers in a favorable light. Deconstructing assumptions about what Black male teachers are expected to do relative to their perspectives and practices is at the center of this dissertation. This study probes how Black male teachers' life histories (McAdams, 2008) shape their teaching philosophies and practices.

An existing thread of literature about Black male teachers also seeks to further complicate assumptions about their work. Brockenbrough (2008), Martino and Rezai-Rastiti's (2009) and Maylor's (2008) research on Black male teachers probes questions of Black maleness, race and masculinity. This thread of literature is further discussed in the following section.

Role modeling, race & masculinity

A recent body of scholarship that probes the issue of Black male teachers as role models has challenged many widely held beliefs about Blackness and masculinity. For example, whereas Martino & Rezai Rastiti (2009) acknowledge the Black male teacher shortage, they contend that the call for more Black male teachers to serve as role models is problematic. The authors call for the disarticulation of discourse between role modeling and representation beginning with:

> …a separating out of role modeling as a flawed conceptual framework grounded in reductionist and essentialist notions of racial and gender affiliation from a discussion about the need for a greater presence and visibility of minority teachers in urban schools (p. 38).

Disentangling the discussion of Black male teachers and role models from the underrepresentation of Black male teachers in schools challenges the limitations of

discourse on role modeling. Martino & Rezai-Rashtiti's case study of one Black male elementary school teacher in an urban school in Toronto employs feminist, queer and antiracist theory to examine the intersectionality of identities and develop a more nuanced analysis of the work of Black male teachers:

> … invoking Black male teachers as a basis for addressing the plight of Black boys in urban schools can lead to a focus on the idealization of teachers as role models. The result is a decided failure to give due consideration to the pedagogical requirements and resources needed to address the systemic and structural influences of racism and the economic disadvantage experienced by minority groups. (2009, p. 45)

Given the significant challenges of teaching in urban schools – challenges that are embedded in institutionalized racial and class oppression – the call for Black male teachers to save Black boys ignores this context and the set of necessary and complex skills that makeup the art and science of teaching. Therefore, the goal of Martino and Rezai-Rashtiti's research is to generate a series of case studies about race, gender and teaching that respond to the literature on Black male teachers as role models.

Andrew, a forty-year-old Afro - Caribbean elementary school teacher in an urban community was interviewed by Martino and Rezai-Rashtiti (2009) about the following questions:

1. his decision to become a teacher
2. how his background influenced his teaching
3. how his gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity impact his teaching.

In the process thought of interviewing Andrew, Martino and Rezai-Rashtiti discovered that he had thought extensively about role modeling and teaching. Andrew rejected role modeling because the overemphasis on race and gender as a basis for influence limits the understanding of the socioeconomic and cultural nexus between teaching and learning:

> According to Andrew, this overreliance on role modeling results in a burden being placed on the Black male teacher to take full responsibility for addressing the problem and, hence, is accompanied by a requirement to save these Black boys from forces that are literally beyond the control of the teacher. (2004, p. 52).

Thus, while Andrew understands the logic of racial/gender match between teacher and students, he rejects the notion of Black male teacher as role model in favor of being a good teacher. He argues that teachers need to generate "intellectually demanding and engaging curriculum" (p. 48) that is relevant to the students' lives. Furthermore, while Andrew thinks that it is important for minority students to see Black male teachers as intellectuals, in his own experience as a student, the teachers that influenced him were those with whom he developed significant relationships inside and outside of the classroom. In his own practice, Andrew considers developing relationships with students as central to being an effective teacher. Andrew also suggests that simply because a teacher is Black and male does not mean that he will be an effective teacher. In fact, Martino & Rezai-Rashtiti posit that effective teaching necessitates a disposition of high expectations for students, a commitment to community building, and an ethic of caring.

Through their case study of an Afro-Caribbean elementary school teacher, the Martino & Rezai-Rashtiti find that the discourse around the lack of Black male teachers must be disambiguated from that of Black teachers as role models for two reasons: 1)

improving structural and economic inequalities endemic to urban schools are beyond the purview of any one teacher; and 2) teaching is a complex endeavor that requires a relevant curriculum, pedagogical skill and the ability to foster relationships with students. Martino & Rezai-Rashtiti (2009) summarize:

> It is not that gender and race do not matter. Rather, as we have illustrated in this article, the problem appears to lie in the homogenizing tendency to invoke role modeling as a basis for conceiving an urban school reform agenda for Black boys that implicitly places the burden for transformation on the individual teacher's shoulders without taking into consideration both the cultural and structural impediments to the classed and gendered dimensions of racial inequality. (p. 60)

This study complicates the assumption that Black male teachers will serve as role for Black male students. This is important scholarship that challenges studies that rely on monolithic constructions of racial and gender identity to posit Black male Supermen for Black male youth while ignoring the context of urban schools. However, the limitations of this study relative to this dissertation are its applicability to the American context. Given the historical conditions in the United States that have made race endemic to American life (Dixson & Rousseau, 2007), how might Black male teachers in the United States view their roles as teachers of African American male students? In addition, we know little about the experiences that lead teachers like Andrew to draw strong opinions about Black male teachers as role models. Further research on the educational life histories of Black male teachers that shape their philosophies about teaching – including role modeling – is necessary to strengthen this thread of research. My study fills this gap in the

existing literature on Black male teachers. It will also build upon Brockenbrough's (2008) study. That discussion follows.

Brockenbrough's (2008) qualitative study of eleven Black male teachers employed in an urban school district in an Eastern city further examines the role of race and masculinity in the lives of these educators. His research question "What challenges and opportunities do Black male teachers encounter as they conduct their work as Black men in urban public schools?" (p. 4) explores their perspectives relative to their work while complicating assumptions about their work as role modeling for students. The recent push for the recruitment of Black male teachers rests on notions around black masculinity and patriarchy that may or may not be relevant to the lived experiences of Black male teachers. Furthermore, the pedagogies of Black male teachers are under-examined in the literature and therefore the questions "are there, in fact unique insights [Black male teachers] bring to bear on their work with Black students, and if so, how can those insights be shared with other educators" (Brockenbrough, 2008, p. 4) is worthy of further probing.

Grounded in a conceptual framework of Black masculinity studies and critical educational theory and guided by a theoretical framework of phenomenology and life history narrative inquiry, Brockenbrough's use of in-depth interviews of his participants gleans significant insights about Black male teacher identities and pedagogies. The findings suggest that master narratives about Black men teachers are actually relevant to the identities and pedagogies of his participants. Specifically, the Black male teachers felt that Black maleness was an appropriate and useful identity to fostering relationships with Black male students. Coincidentally, these same monolithic constructions of Black maleness fail to consider the diversity of identities and pedagogies of Black male teachers

and undermine relationships with students. Thus, Brockenbrough (2008) concludes that there are "critical blind spots cast by racially essentialist constructions of black male teachers" (p. 338). That is, the expectation that Black males perform their Blackness and maleness in particular ways generates tensions that are not, at first glance, noticeable. Several areas were identified within the participants' teaching experiences where essentialist identity constructions strained their relationships with students, colleagues and school leaders. The expectation that they perform as authoritarian figures drew animosity from students and unwittingly earned them the role of school disciplinarian. Brockenbrough states (2008): "While patriarchal gender politics circulated in other realms of participants' lives, their emergence in the predominantly female domain of teaching fueled significant quandaries in participants' experiences as Black male teachers" (p.338).

Brockenbrough's findings contribute greatly to the scant literature on Black male teachers and propel the discussion forward beyond simplistic notions around Black masculinity. This study also brings to light new dilemmas in the study of Black male teachers. Brockenbrough (2008) writes:

> Despite the decidedly anti-essentialist leanings of this dissertation's analytic framework, the dilemmas of anti-essentialist black scholarship suggest that just like the master narrative on Black male teachers, well-rehearsed critiques of essentialist racial and gendered narratives also may deliver only a partial rendering of the experiences of Black men in the teaching profession. (p. 340)

Therefore, in addition to the substantial empirical data, Brockenbrough also challenges researchers to push the boundaries of theory in order to illuminate the blind spots in the study of Black male teachers. Thus, he calls on future scholars to take up a multi-layered

theory to engage in further study of Black male teachers. This study responds to this call by taking up theories of social and cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 2000) culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2009), black masculinity (Lemelle, 2009) and life history theory (McAdams, 2006).

Conclusion

A review of the relevant literature includes a discussion of Black male students, Black teachers and Black male teachers. The scholarship on Black male youth most useful for this study recognizes that Black males attending schools in America's urban centers are our nation's most vulnerable youth, struggling to survive in a "toxic cocktail of poverty, illiteracy, racial disparities, violence, family incarceration and family breakdown" (Edelman, 2011, p. 1). Thus, some Black male youth in urban schools may be disengaged with the academic process but, school discipline procedures over-target them for punishment, re-inscribe systems of racial inequality within schools and lead them to further setbacks in their coursework through suspension and expulsion (A. Ferguson, 2001; Noguera, 2009). As the school to prison pipeline continues to push African American male youth out of schools and funnels them into the criminal justice system, a great sense of urgency about the Black male educational crises has emerged (NAACP Legal Defense Fund; Stancyzk, 2007; Wald & Losen 2003).

The question of how to reach and teach Black male youth has recently been raised and some scholars have suggested that Black teachers have the potential to engage this population through their pedagogical practices (Dee, 2005; Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lynn, 2006; Kunjufu, 2004; McDougal, 2009). There is a rich history of Black on Black education dating from the Reconstruction to Integration and Black teachers have

made significant contributions to the social and academic development of their charges in the face of racial bigotry (Anderson, J. 1998; Foster, 1997). However, the current surge of attention around the recruitment of Black male teachers to assuage the Black male educational crises does not draw from this body of scholarship. In fact, there are few empirical studies of the work of Black teachers and even less on Black male teachers. While the popular press frequently oversimplifies the potential impact of Black male teachers by suggesting that a Black male role model is all that is needed to fix Black boys, the emerging scholarship on Black male teachers is actually deconstructing this race/gender construct.

Recent scholarship on Black male teachers has raised compelling critiques of the existing literature and advanced the intellectual conversation. For example, Lewis' (2006) survey of effective strategies for recruiting and supporting African American male teachers and Lynn's (2006) analysis of the culturally relevant pedagogical practices of Black male teachers explore the lived experiences of contemporary Black male teachers in urban school districts. In addition, Martino and Rezai-Rashtiti's (2009) disarticulation of discourse on role modeling and representation, and Brockenbrough's (2008) examination of notions of Black masculinity and teaching in the urban context, complicate widely held beliefs about race, gender and heteronormativity and Black male teachers. These studies probe previously underexplored and under-theorized areas of research within the body of literature on Black males.

Despite this progress, an exhaustive review of the literature reveals that we still know little about the life histories of Black male teachers in urban schools and the forces that have led them to become teachers and to have developed their philosophies and

teaching practices. Although some studies document the experiences of Black male pre-service teachers (Jones, 2011) and others examine their teaching in urban classrooms (Brown, 2009), empirical investigations of Black male teachers in the urban school context are lacking. Filling this gap in the literature on Black male teachers is central to the purpose of this dissertation.

By probing the individual life stories and philosophies, this study disrupts essentialist assumptions about who Black male teachers are, how they became teachers, what they think about teaching, and how they teach in classrooms. Furthermore, by privileging the experiences of Black male teachers in urban schools, this study sheds light on the challenges and supports that have impacted both their pathways to becoming teachers and their current practices. This dissertation contributes to a more complex understanding of Black male teachers' contributions to the teaching profession from their own perspective in their own words.

Chapter 3

Research Design

This qualitative study -- undergirded by a conceptual framework of languaging (Garcia, 2006), African oral tradition (Smitherman, 1977), life history theory (McAdams, 2008) and critical race theory (Dixson and Rousseau, 2006) – employs life history interview methods and narrative analysis to examine the narratives of Black male teachers currently working in New York City Public Schools. Like other qualitative, life history research, I seek to understand the sense-making that the participants draw from their experiences (Chase, 1995; Mishler, 1999) and re-present these findings in their own voices. Thus, my commitment to qualitative research lies in: 1) honoring the individual stories and meaning-making of Black male teacher participants; 2) employing their words to make sense of their lives; and 3) utilizing a bricolage of theoretical lenses to gain an understanding of the world of the participants (Luttrell, 2010). This study adds to the limited scholarship on Black male teachers by examining their pathways to becoming teachers and their current experiences in New York City urban classrooms.

Whereas a quantitative research study seeks to make causal determinations, predications and attain generalizability and validity, this study makes no such claims. I am not concerned with a representative sample of the larger population (Mishler, 1999). Rather, I want to understand how these participants came to teaching and how they make meaning of their teaching. My approach to life history study is that these socially constructed interviews are a dialogue in which participants engage in identity performances (Chase, 1995; Mishler, 1999). Thus, I have a role as the interviewer in the ways that the participants engage in the telling of their stories. (Mishler, 1999). This

understanding of variability and discontinuity aligns with my methods of analysis. I created profiles of each teacher and comparatively analyzed their distinct and connecting experiences. This methodology will be further discussed in a subsequent section.

Research Questions

The research questions to be answered are:

1. *What can we learn from the narratives of a group of Black male teachers working in urban schools?*
2. *What are the implications of these lessons for the education of Black male youth and the recruitment, education and retention of Black male teachers?*

Setting/Context

The setting for this study is New York City. New York City is the largest urban center in the United States and home to over eight million residents, of which approximately twenty five percent are of African descent (World Urbanization Prospects, 2007). By definition, many New York City Public schools are urban as they are: 1) located in a densely populated, major U.S. city; 2) have a high relative poverty rates as per free/reduced lunch data; 3) predominately serve students of color; and 4) are designated as high need (Russo, 2004). However, because many Black New Yorkers reside in Brooklyn, Harlem, Queens, the Bronx and the North Shore of Staten Island (American Community Survey, 2009), these schools tend to be all-Black, racially segregated urban schools; particularly in historic center of urban Black culture like Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn.

Black New Yorkers include native born African-Americans – whose numbers predominate but are decreasing – as well as foreign-born immigrants from the Caribbean and the African continent. The Caribbean Black group has grown in size in the last twenty

years (Rogers, 2001). First and second generation Caribbean immigrants from island such as Jamaica, Haiti, Trinidad & Tobagos, Guyana, Barbados, and Belize challenge monolithic definitions of Blackness in New York City. In addition to Afro-Caribbean, African immigrants also shape the landscape of Black culture in New York City. In 2000, approximately 100,000 African-born immigrants resided in New York City (Takougang, 2003). Black New York City has a diverse population of cultures, histories and identities (Vickerman, 2001). In this study, I use the term Black as a racial category to refer to people of African descent currently living in the United States. I capitalize the "B" in Black when writing my own statements but use lowercase when quoting another author if this is how the text appears in his/her statement. When quoting the participants, I use the exact term that the stated verbally – either African-American or Black and capitalize the "B" in Black.

Based on the most recent available statistics, only four percent of New York City's 80,0000 public school teachers and 17 percent of New York City's one million public school students are Black males (Holzman, 2010; New York City Department of Education, 2011). That is, there are approximately 3,200 Black male teachers to about 170,000 Black male students.

Participants & Participant Selection

I conducted purposeful sampling to select seven rich cases for in-depth study (Patton, 1990, p. 169). To do so, I shared with university and public school administrators and teachers that I was conducting a study about the lives of Black male teachers. They put me in contact with people who might potentially be interested in participating. Out of the eleven candidates I contacted, eight were willing to participate. One participant dropped

out of the study. Because this study focuses on the life histories of Black male teachers in urban schools and their experiences as both Black male youth and teachers, I selected U.S. born who self-identified as Black or African-American and who attended urban schools as students. I also sought participants with at least two years teaching experience. The variation among individuals is consistent with the goal of highlighting both individual and shared experiences through narratives. Table Two identifies the participants and their ages, place of origin, subject area and teaching grade level. Three of the participants Kamari, Jovan and Wilfred are New York City Teaching Fellows[2] who teach in special education settings. Both Jamel and Wilfred pursued degrees in special education in order to meet certification requirements to become full-time teachers from their positions as day-to-day substitutes. Wilfred completed his degree during the study and is still looking for a full-time teaching position. Lastly, although this study included seven participants, in the following two chapters of narratives and data analysis, I present and examine four cases.

Methods of Data Collection

I selected qualitative research methods for this study because I want to privilege the words and sense-making of the participants (Luttrell, 2010). I conducted in-depth, life history interviews to gain a subjective understanding of the participants' experiences and the ways in which they have carried out these experiences (Seidman, 2006).

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[2] The New York City Teaching Fellows is an alternative certification program sponsored by the New York City Department of Education.

Table Two: Study Participants

Name	Age	Birthplace	Subject Area	Grade Level	Case Title
Byron*	37	California	Special education	Secondary	*Saving souls*
Jamel*	29	New York	Special education	Elementary	*Tracked into silence*
Justin*	26	New York	Math	Secondary	*Jumping through hoops*
Kamari*	24	New York	Math	Secondary	*Up and down the ivy*

*These participant's complete narratives appear in the following chapter.

Life history interviews

I adapted Seidman's (2006) process of three-step life history interviews. I conducted two 60-minute interviews with each participant, combining the discussion of life history and sense-making up until becoming a teacher in the first interview. For the second interview, I focused on the participant's present life as a teacher and their sense-making of that experience. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed.

I used very open-ended questions to allow the participants to reconstruct their experiences and build upon and explore their responses. The two interviews employed the following format:

1. *Focused life history on becoming a teacher*

"I want to talk about your life up to the time you became a teacher. Tell me in detail the experiences you've had as a Black male child, adolescent and student. Tell me what in these experiences brought you to teaching."

a) Can you tell me about your childhood? Your parents? Your family and their education?

b) Can you tell me about your education? Schooling? Teachers?

c) Can you tell me about a time when x happened in school? What happened? Why does this moment stand out?

d) What was your teacher preparation experience like?

e) What led you to teaching? What teaching experiences have your had prior to teaching?

f) How do you understand what brought you to teaching?

2. *Focused life history on teaching*

"I want to talk about your teaching. Tell me in detail the experiences you've had as a Black male teacher."

a) Tell me about your life as a teacher in school as a Black male.

b) Can you tell me about a significant experience you've had teaching? What happened? Why does this particular moment stand out for you?

c) How do you understand your present experiences teaching?

d) How do they relate to your experiences having been a Black male student?

In addition to these, broad questions, I used probing questions such as "What do you mean by that" and "what was that experience like for you" to further encourage participants to construct their response.

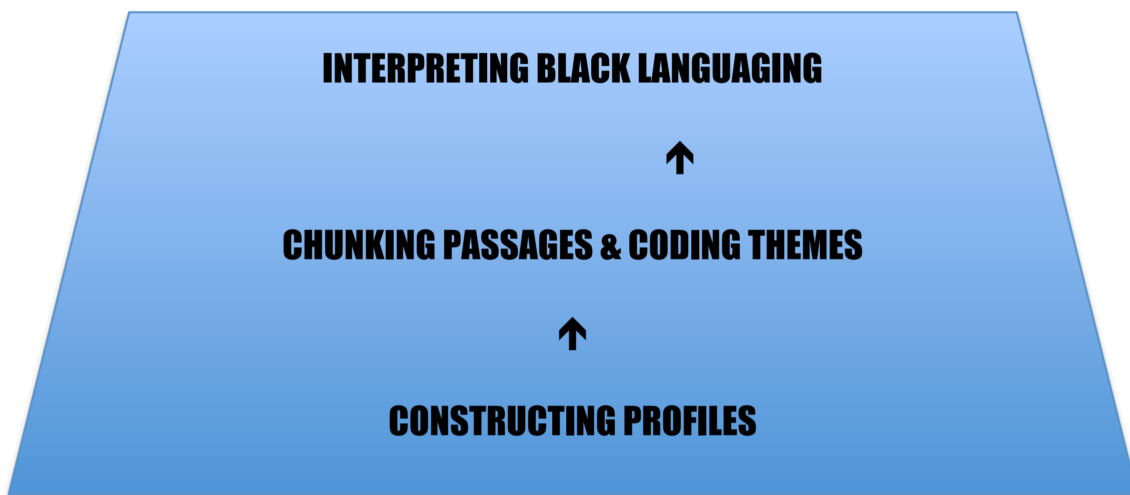
Based on Chase's (1995) research, I anticipated that participants may find difficulty in discussing issues of race and gender and employ "careful, angry or distracted speech" (p. 16). When this happened, I treated this type of speech as relevant, and, like Chase (1999), considered the notion that participants employ distinct discursive realms of speech—one that is about work and is often race/gender neutral, and unself-conscious and another about inequality that is self-conscious and demonstrates an awareness of reproach

or criticism. Rather than ignore these discursive realms, I paid close attention to both the content and form of their speech in the analysis.

Methods of Analysis

The analysis of interviews began with methodically transcribing the interviews and then scrutinizing the transcripts through close and repeated listenings (Reissman, 1993). After these repeated listenings, I engaged in three levels of analysis: constructing profiles from interview transcripts; 2) chunking texts and finding themes across participants; and 3) interpreting Black languaging (Figure Two). In constructing the profiles, I used

Figure Two: Analytic levels



pseudonyms to protect the identities of the participants. I kept the exact words of the participants whenever possible and made minimal grammatical edits for clarity. I omitted my speech including questions, statements and utterances. The purpose of this approach was to present the transcription of the narratives without my analytic lens. Through this space, I urge the reader to hear participants' stories on their own terms to the extent possible within a bound and socially constructed conversation (Reissman, 2006). The

result of this process was seven profiles derived from life history interviews focused on the participant's schooling and teaching.

Next, I adapted Reissman's (1993) method of reducing texts by marking passages into chunks to instead pay close attention to moments that stood out to me as the participants told their stories. These included: 1) moments when they physically expressed emotions such a laughter, tears or frustration; 2) moments when they repeated a statement they had previously made before to elaborate on a point; and 3) moments where they seemed to avoid a question that I posed.

I organized these passages into a matrix for each participant, re-read the passages carefully and named the theme that seemed to emerge from each passage. I labeled them as "moments" and indicated whether they had a positive, negative or neutral association for each participant. Looking across the participants' matrices, the moments discussed in common by the participants included: 1) feeling smart; 2) feeling supported by a teacher; 3) feeling supported by family; 4) feeling like being in two worlds; 5) feeling inadequate; 6) feeling discouraged; 7) feeling discriminated against and; 8) feeling bored and/or isolated from school experiences (Table Three). I created provisional memos headed by these themes with chunks of text ascribed to participants.

Table Three. Moments that stood out in participant's lives

<table>
<tr><th>Positive association</th><th>Neutral</th><th>Negative</th></tr>
<tr><td>Feeling smart</td><td rowspan="5">Feeling like being in two worlds</td><td>Feeling inadequate</td></tr>
<tr><td>Feeling supported by a teacher</td><td>Feeling discouraged</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Feeling family support</td><td>Feeling discriminated against</td></tr>
<tr><td>Feeling bored & isolated from school experience</td></tr>
</table>

I then engaged in a third level of analysis for the purpose of better understanding how the participants made meaning of these moments in their lives. Using Smitherman's (1997) classification of Black modes of discourse, I examined the chunked text within the memos for similarities and differences in the ways that the participants used: 1) call and response; 2) signification; 3) tonal semantics; and 4) narrative sequencing. I returned to the audio-recordings and written transcripts for an additional round of repeating listenings and re-readings. I took notes in the margins of the provisional memos and then revised the memos into thematically-based, analytic drafts. These drafts are organized as follow:

1. thematic title
2. transitional paragraph
    a. either introducing the participant for the first time; or
    b. transitioning from previous paragraph when participant has already been discussed
3. chunked text from participant's narrative
4. discussion of content and form
    a. in relation to other participants
    b. in the context of Black languaging

This process demonstrates the learning about schooling and teaching gleaned from the narratives of Black male teachers and the ways in which these life histories access the participants' meaning making.

Lastly, I used my notes on the ways that the participants involved me in their storytelling as a means to check against my interpretation. For example, at times the participants engaged in what I interpreted as call and response with me and they seemed to

expect an affirmative response. By responding with an “mmhmm” or “that’s right?”, I implicated myself in their narratives and validated their statements by sharing my personal reactions. At other times, when I interpreted their statements as intentional bragging or boasting, I laughed along and demonstrated that I understood these significations as comments not to be taken personally. Further, I paid attention to the rhythm and pitch of their voice and used those cues to decide when a story was beginning or ending and which parts were most significant. Finally, I noticed how my participants used rhetorical strategies to explain, persuade me as the listener to their point of view. I did not discard the parts of their stories that might be considered off topic. Smitherman states: “This meandering away from the ‘point’ takes the listener on episodic journeys and over tributary rhetorical routes but like the flow of nature’s rivers and streams, it eventually leads back to the source” (1977). I connected deeply with even the seemingly tangential parts of the participant’s stories and gave them ample space to meander. As a result, in many of the interviews, the participants talk for long blocks of time without interruption. In addition, the interviews were about one and one half hours each rather than the anticipated 60-minutes. For Byron, I conducted a third one and one half hour interview to talk about his teaching, as the prior two had been about his schooling.

The limitations of this study are four-fold. The first area of limitation is that this study is not generalizable to Black male teachers as a group of educators in urban schools. The small sample size of seven participants makes it impossible to suggest that all Black male teachers in urban schools have similar pathways to becoming teachers or philosophies of teaching. In fact, I make no claim for generalizability and this study challenges the notion that there is one homogenous Black male teacher identity. This

design of this study lifts up the individual narratives who are classified in the same racialized and gendered categories but who have very distinct stories, experiences and perspectives. However, while this study argues for the recognition of the varied and unique experiences of Black male teachers, it simultaneously recognizes the shared experiences they have as both students and teachers in the urban school context. These shared experiences emerge as themes and speak to the ways that process of earning an education and becoming a teacher presents similar challenges for Black men.

In addition, as previously stated, I anticipated that participants may have some reservation about discussing issues of race and gender inequality (Chase, 1995). These reservations may be related to my researcher identity. Even though my participants and I shared a similar racial background as Black people, this commonality in and of itself did not necessarily make them more at ease to talk about race. Furthermore, as a woman researcher interviewing male participants, I acknowledge that the participants may have been less inclined to discuss gender issues than with a male interviewer. In addition, participants performed gender in particular ways based on their understanding of my positionality as a Black woman. I paid attention to and documented the self-conscious and unself-conscious discursive patterns that emerged as a result of tensions around discussing race and gender with a Black female researcher.

Further, the power dynamic between the participants and myself emerged as a limitation in this study. I am a researcher with the CUNY Graduate center, teacher educator at a university, and former classroom teacher and staff developer with the New York City Department of Education. I followed Seidman's (1991) recommendations in selecting participants to minimize this limitation. None of the participants were the

teachers whom I currently supervise, current students or personal acquaintances/friends (p. 33). However, my affiliation with large New York City institutions granted me a set of privileges that created some tension between the participants and myself and potentially shaped the extent of information they shared. I was mindful of this limitation in my approach to interviewing and, like the discussion of racial and gender inequality, treated the self-conscious and unself-conscious discourse as valuable data.

Finally, although I strived to re-present the voices of the participants extensively, I also had the academic responsibility of presenting coherent data for the reader. Negotiating the tensions between honoring the voices of the participants, operationalizing my conceptual framework and responding to the research question was difficult. However, one way that I sought to create some equilibrium within this paradigm was providing the participants with their profiles and my analytical matrices and asking for corrections and comments. I incorporated the feedback provided into my drafts when I grossly misheard and thus misinterpreted what was said. During other instances, I kept my version. I acknowledge that despite good intentions, the authority in this work is mine. I don't feel great about this dilemma.

Another way that I attempted to resolve this tension between my voice and the participant's voices was by including four profiles without analysis. In the following chapter, you will meet Jared, Justin, Kamari and Byron. Each of these Black male teachers tells the story of his life becoming a teacher that is largely focused on his schooling experiences. As previously mentioned, the profiles are nearly exact transcriptions from the interviews with my utterances, comments and questions omitted. Although the interviewee's utterances, repetitions, pauses and other parts of speech have been edited for

clarity, the content of the interviews is intact. Each participant has read and approved the structure and content of his profile.

Chapter 4

Selected Narratives

In this chapter, I provide the complete narratives of four of the participants: Jamel, Justin, Kamari and Byron. I chose these four narratives because they fully demonstrate the range of complexity of experience of my participants with being pushed, pulled, sorted, thrust forward, held back and dismissed by the educational complex as both students and teachers. The narratives of the participants reveal negative experiences as students including being academically tracked, discriminated against, isolated from other students of color, taught culturally irrelevant and unresponsive curriculum, stereotypically cast as nerds, athletes or gangsters by teachers and peers, denied essential academic advisement; bullied by peers and punished disproportionately by authority figures. As teachers, these Black men also negatively experienced school including being:

1) denied professional support from colleagues or administrators;
2) pressured to standardize curriculum;
3) called to serve as school disciplinarians;
4) made to feel inadequate and ineffective; and
5) witnesses to the process of miseducation of their students.

In addition, these four narratives demonstrate how the participants' social networks supported the participants. Family members, teachers and peers loved, advised and encouraged participants to persevere.

Further, the participants demonstrated incredible resiliency despite the negative experiences. As students, with the odds were stacked against them, the participants matriculated each grade, graduated high school, entered college, completed Bachelor's

degrees and teacher education Master's programs. All of these accomplishments led to their employment as certified classroom teachers. Their narratives reveal how they resisted negative forces as students by adapting to multiple environments and social contexts; having skill and determination to complete difficult coursework; and maintaining religious faith. Further, the narratives reveal how languaging, avoiding ridicule, acting cool, resisting authority figures and being defiant functioned as coping mechanisms to maintain personal identities and integrities.

However, as teachers, evidence within the narratives for the sustainability of these or other coping mechanisms and resiliency in the urban school context diminished. The participants reveal how the challenges of teaching are seemingly insurmountable given the absence of adequate professional support, pressures to standardize their practice, requirements to be the school disciplinarians, and feelings of being inadequate. Furthermore, teaching Black boys is a reminder of the challenges they themselves experienced as students and draws upon social and emotional reserves that are not being replenished by social networks of family, friends and peers. This burden, coupled with their marginalization in the school building fosters discontent and leads them to reconsider their career choice.

What follows are the educational and professional narratives of Jamel, Jermaine, Kamari and Justin told as much as possible in their own words as they were told to me and audio-recorded. In some places, edits have been made to maintain the fluency of the story and details that would have breached participant's confidentiality (i.e. names of places, people) or that they asked me to strike have been removed. Still, the bulk of each narrative is a re-telling of each teacher's story in his own voice.

JAMEL: Tracked into silence

Throughout his primary and secondary schooling in Brooklyn public schools, Jamel was academically tracked in classrooms labeled as low-performing. He points to his experiences of being academically tracked as the factor that made him internalize feelings of intellectual inferiority. Jamel suggests that his lack of success in school, coupled with the influence of older males who he witnessed participating in the underground drug economy led to his involvement in drug dealing.

After some involvement with drug dealing, Jamel began his undergraduate degree and worked as a computer programmer after graduation. A career-changer, Jamel became a special education teacher to do work that he found more meaningful but after three years as a full-time sub, does not see himself staying in the classroom.

I always wanted to be in the top class but I never made it

I was never a bright student. I'll tell you that much. Never a bright student. How I know that? Basically, I was never in the '1' or the '2' classes mostly. I can remember back to the fifth grade. I think I was in a '5', '6' class. 5-1 would be your extremely smart students. And 5-2 would be the students that, they're not great or excellent, they're good. And 5-4, 5-5, 5-6, need a little bit more help, they were say "approaching standards". And the teacher, I remember Ms. Armstrong, one day she was like "What's the difference between us and 5-1?" And I said "We're not smart enough." And she went into this whole big thing saying, "No, you guys are smart enough, it's just that there's not enough room for everybody to be in the 5-1 class." And I was taken aback, thinking "This is kind of bogus because I'm in a class with, you know, all these trouble makers, I 'm not a trouble maker, why am I here?" Come to think about it, it's academics you know. I didn't prove or

do well on the Citywides or the Statewides, that's how I was placed in a 5-6 class. And in, in junior high school as well, I was in 6-4.

I went to P.S. 91, so Albany Avenue and Maple Street. And I.S. 61, which is on Empire Boulevard. New York Avenue is right around there. Not too far from the 71st street stop on the D train. And even in there I was a 6-4. I remember 7-3, that was what I was when I got out there and I think after that, I was in 8-4. So that right there was, that was kind of a stigma as well too, because you know you're not in a 8-1 or 6-1 or 7-1. Most of the trips and academic stuff that they did, which I probably would've benefited from, we never got to do. So I kind of was traumatized from my elementary and high school. I always wanted to be in the top class, but I never made it.

I got lucky not falling into anything

There was an African American lady Ms. Fields, and she always had the bright students. I never had her. I thought, "Wait a minute, everybody has Ms. Fields, except for me and a couple other of my friends. Something doesn't look right. Are we not smart enough?" So I even started thinking "Am I smart enough?' But on the flip side to this was my third grade my teacher. She'd have me help her and do little chores like grade the math and pass stuff out. I was considered the teacher's pet. I kind of felt good you know cause it's something that the other students aren't doing. I kind of felt proud.

Mr. Brown, he just kept on pushing us and he was just great. He was an African American male. He wouldn't take no shorts. He wouldn't! I remember one day he gave me back my exam and I was happy, I think I got a 75 but he was kind of disappointed. He said something like, "No you could've applied yourself more, you could've gotten better." So I studied and the second exam my grades actually went up. For all of us African American

kids, I guess he probably seen something that we didn't. You know just giving us that structure and everything that we need to help prepare us for the future instead of, you know, going through the cracks. And, Mr. Gray, he was also a good teacher. I had him for fourth grade and he was sort of a father figure for most of the students in the class; especially to me and David because we never had our fathers. So actually seeing a Black man in the class compared to having all white women, was a very big plus for me. It made me think, "Alright he made something of his life, I think I can make something of my life too." I tried to become successful. And those were the three main teachers I could pull back.

At home, I always had my mother. But, we never had male role models. We had to teach ourselves how to be men. And seeing the people in the community, that's what the ideal man was to me. It's these guys, they have the nice cars, the latest clothes, the money and they didn't work for it, you know? It just comes free when you one of them. Just Seeing that it's easy to just get what you want rather than work real hard for it in my heart, I wanted the same thing too. I was very young, probably elementary school. I wanted to be just like this guy Leroy. He always had nice cars. He had nice jewelry. He used to buy us sneakers, take us to get haircuts and McDonalds. He'd spring out this money and I'd be like "Oh my god, wow!" That really shaped my experiences seeing individuals like him. I was envious. I just wanted what they had and I saw the glory of everything and not the downside. There were people who were just going away and never coming back you know. I thought to myself, "Is this something I actually really want to do." I really wanted to at first but then I thought about my mothers and sisters, you know?

In junior high school with my friends were Garven, Kirk, Lonnie and Enrique. Everybody was watching what you wear and what you have. My mother was in between jobs at the time and when I needed something, she couldn't give it right away, you know? It was me and my four sisters. Five of us. So my mother can't up and buy me $180 pair of sneakers, a $200 coat, an $85 pair of jeans, you know? I couldn't get none of that. So I figured if I just do it on my own, I could be able to feel good about myself and pretty much fit in.

So me and David got into it selling a little marijuana. I was able to buy myself new sneaker, clothes and a little jewelry. I used to go shopping every week. Until it all came to a big halt when one of the guys from the neighborhood died. Bad transaction and somebody took his life. I realized then that I'd better just stay in school. I was thinking I should just go the straight and narrow path. No zigzags or cutting corners. Now I realize it wasn't worth it at all cause of the trouble I could've got in. It wasn't worth the sneakers or the chains, or anything. I was just really caught up in the materialistic stuff.

I used to tell my friend Sheek we were cursed. We're black. We're born poor. And we're male. I don't even remember my father. He was never there. Sheek's father used to sleep on the stairs. He was a drug addict you know and his mother, she was out there. Every time I came over she'd say, "This is uncle such and such." So you know, we didn't have the proper guidance. Had we been born in a more affluent community then probably things would've probably been different. But I mean growing up poor, this is what it is. This is life, you know. I look back and think about the academics. Me being in the fives and the sixes, even in the fours, made me internalize thoughts that I was stupid. I figured the only thing that I could change was the financial situation. I was seeing what all the

other black males were doing so I thought I mine as well take my turn and have fun with it too. Now I think back on it, I'm surprised I'm not in jail or dead. My friend Anthony, he was young, he died. I've counted many friends that passed away you know over things that could've been avoided.

My favorite artist is Tupac. I used to listen to one of his songs "Troublesome" and he says he's hopeless. He talks about being born black and you know, this is it! You already have you're label on you. It's like the caste system in India, that's how I view it. I never met anybody in my neighborhood that actually achieved anything except for one guy Alex and he was always a homebody. And Brian. He was always in church. They weren't considered like one of the dudes on the street. And coming up, you don't really wanna be a Brian or an Alex. Everybody else was becoming a statistic.

I was reading a book once and it was it was funny because a young lady was saying how she graduated, she did her college and everything and people from the neighborhood weren't that thrilled. But then a guy comes home from jail and everybody's thrilled and that's how it pretty much was. Its like she goes to school it's just, it's not nothing, she's not doing anything special. Doing something negative will get you more attention than doing something positive. I guess I got lucky. I got Lucky, not falling into anything.

Growing up throughout my years actually made me figure that school is the only thing that I have. I don't play basketball, I can't sing, I can't dance, I have no talent I can't rap. I can't draw so art is out of it. So pretty much, the only thing for me to do is just go to school. I also loved just being in the classroom. I love learning and exploring academically. And there were teachers. Mr. Ito taught English and he'd bring this rich literature inside the class. He even took us to a show and I was just thrilled. Mr. Grant, he

was another one who was just with us, not giving up on and making sure we achieved and got through the class. I had him for ninth and tenth grade social studies. Those are the two people I can say impacted my love for learning and actually my love for school.

That's why I stayed in school while everybody else dropped out. I was having a conversation with my friend Erin and he said, "Oh, so you're teaching now? You're the only one out of everybody that made it." And I realized that's he's right. I never had anything and I just tried to persevere. I tried to go for what I really wanted.

I decided to change my major and go into the teaching field

At first, I went to At the University of Hudson Valley. I think it was only me and this other guy that were Black in my classes. The classes were okay but overall it was not so welcoming to people of color. I can remember one day there was this party and they asked us to leave. It was Michie (he's Asian), Christian (he's Spanish) and Josh (the other black kid). Like the four of us we kind of like, stand out. I'm not sure how they got invited but they asked me if I wanted to come and I was like sure. And when we were there this guys says, "Oh umm, we're running out of liquor, you guys have to go." It's like, "We're not even drinking!" He was like, "Oh, well still you guys have to go." And then we went to eat some place and when we walked in the store, it was like everybody stopped and looked at us. Even walking on campus, I felt so uncomfortable. I'm nowhere near my neighborhood, and I'm just trying to you know, trying to do something decent with my life. I got a lot of stares.

I was only there five weeks and I don't know how I made it up there. If I was raised out there or like with accustomed to the lifestyle, I probably wouldn't have seen it as a problem. But being, from a predominately African American community and moving into a

rich white neighborhood with all these like, these white folks …The people looked at me like "Oh, how did you come here?" I was there on a scholarship. But my parents could have been wealthy too and you know like paying for my tuition. So I was like, "I can't. I can't stay there."

I started doing programming when I left Hudson Valley. Cobalt, C++ and HTML. I really enjoyed that. But I felt that by me continuing programming and not actually giving back was cheating myself. I started going to Urban University to study math. When I first came to Urban University, I heard the school was racist; that the minority students have to work harder than the white students. But in the classrooms I never saw it. In my experience, the classroom was pretty good. It's similar to the University of Hudson Valley because there are not that many minority students in the classroom except for myself. It's like everybody looks at you to see what's your next move and see are you really going to make it.

I tried to stay focused on my classwork by keeping the assignments on schedule. I was just basically trying to excel and I needed a lot of help. I needed A LOT of help. I pretty much spent most of my time in the learning resource center trying to get like help with the math with writing papers. It wasn't that bad actually. It was kind of interesting.

So I was taking courses, the math courses and it was ridiculous. Because like most of the classes, I'm not going to lie, I had to take like a few of them over because of the intensity of it. I decided to change my major and go into the teaching field. I took a class called, "Urban Theory and Inequality" which was interesting because it spoke about the social injustices. We read a lot of books, like Jonathan Kozol. We looked at demographics and differences in neighborhoods. We compared a rich neighborhood and the resources

they have to a poor neighborhood. We learned about how the schools are and how students are not given a chance. That helped shaped me to go into the teaching field.

I went to the education department and changed to secondary math. But then I changed to childhood. I started working as a para and then as a sub. That way, I was able to pay for the six credits from the career-training program with the DOE. I also had to take the child abuse workshop and a test to get my credentials. After I graduated, I must have emailed 23 schools for teaching positions and I didn't get anything back because they weren't looking for the common branch. I did go on a couple of interviews and the first thing they asked was "Do you have anything in special ed?" And unfortunately I didn't at the time, so it's like, "Oh, wow, we would love to keep you or we'd love to hire you, but there's a hiring freeze." So I think in speaking to the certification officer, I found out my best beat was just to take a couple of credits of special ed because that's where like the high needs area was. So that's when I decided just to go into that for my master's. Because of the DOE, I was able to pursue my degree further. And I decided that I mean, I love the kids and I have a lot of patience and this is where I pretty much feel comfortable at. I was able to land an interview for a paraprofessional position with the principal at M.S. 99 in Park Heights. That's where I'm at now. I've been there since 2006.

Thinking back to my education, it wasn't bad, but like mostly everything that I learned was on the job. Some of the stuff I remember from my undergrad, I can't really apply it to what I'm doing now. And I can apply more from my special education master's program cause like the substance, the applications are really helping me in the classroom. But for my undergrad degree in childhood it wasn't like that. The preparation courses for

the basics, it just sounds good on an interview. Getting to know all the modern day lingo of the education system was the only thing I benefitted from in that.

<u>No matter how hard they push me, I'm not going to give up on them</u>

My philosophy of teaching is still a work in progress. With my experiences in the neighborhood, I guess kind of like put everything together and realized I have to better myself. I also l feel like giving somebody else a chance. I'm still finding out right now how. I'm with students with emotional disturbances. I see that most of the students have obstacles or challenges that they face. I see myself being more or less like a role model for these African American youth in that program. I mean some of them they, still cuss me out. But a few of them, I actually feel like I am actually reaching and that nice to me. Most of the people in the school are predominately white and they can't relate to them or really share their experience or know where the students are coming from. From my experiences in the community, I'm able to like identify with them in a way. So it's more or less like my community experiences helped me shape my views and this is where I have to be for the students.

I was hired with a young white girl named Carol and I don't know what school she went to out of state but she knows the principal and she knows the assistant principal's son and other girls. She knows everybody! The resources she has as far as them showing her this and that, websites to go to and other things, I never really had that. One day my colleague Shanelle pulled me aside, she was like, "Look you have to get on the ball. You have to!" Because it really is as they see it, us being there, we don't really know what we're doing. So I have to be well informed. Shanelle pretty much opened my eyes to certain things like how to differentiate more, how to come up with better ways of trying to make

the students feel you. So that's been my experience as a Black male teaching in this school. I mean it's not excellent. It's kind of like, I'd say up and down. I mean up in a good sense being that I'm the only one standing out. There's not that many male teachers at the school so I have an advantage. I don't want to sound like a racist but you know it's like pretty much everybody looks the same so being that I'm the only one standing out so this is my chance like in the classroom to do culturally relevant teaching. Certain aspects of the curriculum I can meet. Last school year, we did a lot about the Bantu. We did a lot about like African American history. Not to say that the other teachers could not have done a greater job than I did. But being that I'm more familiar with the students' background, I was able to do great and my assistant principal acknowledged that. And that was like a very, very positive experience. I felt the same when I was in teacher education and I took classes that incorporated social justice in math and I was able to relate my own experiences in math word problems and graphs. Most of my colleagues hadn't shared the same experiences and were unable to do it. So I guess that, that's where I could see it that my experiences help me stand out in a way.

As far as Black male students, there was one kid who was talking to me about the behavior of the students in the class. He said, "The reason why we act like that with you Mr. Franklin, is because you are soft." I was like "What is that supposed to mean?" And then later on I spoke with a colleague of mine, Dan. Mr. Dawkins is also African American but he's older. He was like they're not used to seeing individuals like myself and him. The typical guy they see is a thug. Compare that to a person dressed up in a suit and going to work every day and treating the kids with respect and trying to reason with them. I wasn't considered tough. The student was like "You have to be more firm with us like Ms.

Battle." Ms. Battle, she's from Brownsville and she had many rough experiences. She is like real world with the kids. I never felt like it was my place to try to discipline or even be like really hardcore with the students. But, that's not what I'm here for. The other teachers have an expectation that you are firm rather than soft. They don't hold their tongue, they just tell it like it is. I figure as a new teacher, I am still on probation and everything. I'm trying to just fit in as best as possible. With the boys, some of it is very challenging. They don't do their work. I mean, out of twelve students I have two or three students that are actually doing something.

I remember one time, we were on a trip in Prospect Park and there was a little pond with garbage and the boys were playing with it. So I told them they had to come back to where everybody was at. I didn't want anything happening to them. These two white police officers approached them and they completely stopped everything they were doing. So I asked one of them, "How come when I spoke to you, you didn't answer me." He was like "Oh, because he's an officer and he has a gun." He must have been six or seven at the time and I was kind of shocked. I am there for them and I'm actually trying to look out for their best interests and they basically ignore me and a person comes by, lays down the law and they guys listen? I was like wait a minute; is this like a training ground? Like, "Okay I don't have to listen but white is right." That is how I felt. It's like they only listen when it's an authority figure or somebody going off on them.

I have been trying to incorporate women's history in my lessons especially for this one student, Star. I wanted to show the students to have respect for women and to show her that she doesn't have to come out of character. I wanted her to be comfortable with who she is because there are a lot of African American women, minority women in general that

have achieved a lot. That lesson plan didn't go so well. I don't know, she kind of like flipped; started cursing and yelling and stuff like that. Instead of going back and forth with her I was more or less trying to understand her angle and where she was coming from. In a sense, I was giving up my power. She more or less dominated the situation. I was trying to smooth out the situation; trying to soften it. But then the rest of the class just started with "Oh, you act like that because you soft. You not hard. You not hard on us." Their other teacher, he was crazy so I'm not sure if the students respected that or they came to acknowledge his typical behavior so they wouldn't mess around. So like with me in the classroom, soft spoken trying to make everyone feel comfortable they saw it as ultimately, " Let's cause havoc in the classroom." That is my biggest challenge in teaching African American students.

But I never gave up on them. I told them that. I told them as many times as you guys like try to make me upset, I'll just go home with a headache. I'll be physically and mentally drawn but I come back for a better day. No matter how hard they push me I am not going to give up on them because I don't want to see them fail. I want them to succeed and I'm going to try as hard as I can. I have been doing anything in my power to make sure they don't fall into a similar situation that I had. I am trying to be a father figure -- not even a role model. I've been just a reasonable person that they can come to. Actually when I found out they were gonna be leaving because of the whole phasing out I was actually sad. I really wanted to do more with them this year.

With me, they are testing the waters to see how far they can go or see my reaction or my responses. I am not putting my hand on anybody. Teacher or no teacher, I won't do that. For me to establish that discipline and authority, I think more or less it's about trying

to reason with them. This kind of sounds a little awkward coming from a Haitian background because adults don't reason with children. But I won't be loud and I won't use profanity. My thing has also been calling the parents and speaking with them. Sometimes, actually pleading for their help. Some of the parents weren't very supportive. That was an issue.

One time, a student Maalick started throwing things, kicking on chairs and desks and ripping up classwork. I got on him. I said, "Maalik, what is wrong with you? You are not mentally challenged!" I probably said it in a real sarcastic way. Everybody heard what I said. The other teachers didn't know what had went on but they had been saying I have to be firm before a student goes off. I wasn't reprimanding him, I was just talking to him. But another teacher who didn't see the whole thing said my comment didn't sound kosher at all. So I guess you have to conform.

I hope nobody knows I'm teaching this

I sit with Ms. Battle, Ms. Jessica, Ms. Jean -- they are all white --- and try to get as much information as I can and try to get as much help as I can from them. Nothing is really happening with my mentor because when he does come, there's a lot of other stuff happening. I figure that my best chance at surviving or trying to make it, staying afloat, is trying to do what I see everybody else does. I'm always in class with those ladies and seeing the way that they do things and seeing what works for them. I figure I try to adapt some of these behaviors. So I ask, "Do you mind if we plan together to show or come up with like our curriculum map or which activities we are going to do?" I mean for me to continue to keep where I'm at and to do good on my observations, this is what I have to do.

I don't feel like conforming is good because it is conflicting. It conflicts because like I see myself as being scripted. We have an Equals program that we do in math with the students. They tell you everything you have to say. I like to think for myself. We have to do stuff with the kids that I don't see benefitting them in anyway. But being that this is the curriculum and this is what we have to follow I am pretty much not free to have that leeway to do as I please. Sometimes I question some of it, like what am I doing? I feel like I am doing the students an injustice. With the population of students I have, I think the ADL stuff (activities in daily living) would be more beneficial for them. Even when we do the curriculum just gearing it more towards what is beneficial for them in a sense. But everything is all scripted. This is what you have to follow and this is what it is.

Last year being a cluster teacher, I had more leeway to what I wanted to teach and pretty much be on my own devices. I was pretty much floating in the sense that I could do whatever I wanted to do. This year, the principal was like, "Oh why don't you do drama for the kids?" I was like "Drama?" Am I supposed to be dumbing down the stuff? I already know they are in special ed but I feel like now its just insulting because I don't have anything in drama. I don't have anything in art for me to just do on the spot. Like here, go and teach it. I feel like I am also doing myself an injustice. I don't have the proper guidance and I am supposed to be educating these students. I'm like "What is happening?"

Being that we are learning about Black History, I was able to bring in like Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King and something that I know my students can identify with. Let me bring in stuff about African American history. Let me bring in more things that I think students need or stuff that will benefit them. Back in December, we were discussing the

holidays. I have one student who is half Jewish, so I brought in stuff on Hanukkah. I also have one student, she is from Mexico. I tried to incorporate something about Las Posadas. In the Christmas books that we had nobody looked like the students. So I picked up stuff about Kwanzaa and started going over the seven principals. I was even saying to myself, "I hope nobody knows I'm teaching this." I hope nobody walks in the room so I don't get called on what I am doing. The first thing would be "What are you doing? This is not part of the program. This is what you are supposed to be doing." And I would have backed it up. I had my lesson plans. It was relative to the curriculum. It was about holidays. I teach the kids and this is what they need. But I was also trying to figure out a way so it won't look like "Oh, he went out the program."

When I introduced Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jackie Robinson, the students had fun. We learned about baseball, we learned a lot. I think that is what they need. And this is what I felt more comfortable with what I was teaching. The heroes that they had in the curriculum from the school were like Kelly Clarkson and George Washington. I don't think Kelly Clarkson is a hero. George Washington had slaves. Why am I going to introduce this type of material to my students knowing it is wrong and knowing I am not comfortable with it. So I figured this is what I have to do. And this is what I feel more comfortable with. We are still learning about heroes, but learning about people that made a change and people that did great things. The heroes that I selected.

I feel like I'm selling out

I don't think my administration would understand. I don't think they probably would be comfortable with my views because once again, they spend so much money on this unique curriculum so this is what we are following. By me not actually following it …

that's a good question. For example, during the math period, my co-teacher is supposed to do what they want her to do. But being that she spent so much money over the summer buying materials and this whole stuff on teaching math how she wants to use it. The other teachers are complaining about that. My administration didn't really have a problem with it until the other teachers really started complaining. So I feel like pretty much in the hot seat. Like next month, I really want to do introduce something more on culture but we are going on to hygiene. And like everything is mapped out. We have a curriculum map. Medical charts. I can't even read my own medical chart. How is this population of students supposed to medical chart, are you crazy? When they start ripping up the paper and going crazy they will say, "What happened?" It is what I'm introducing. That is the problem.

When I come in when we go back in January, I have my observation group. If I am not doing what I'm supposed to be doing it's like I don't get a good grade. I don't even feel like I am doing it for the kids. I feel like I am putting on a show. I feel like I'm selling out, honestly. Its like its hard for me to even apply effective teaching practices. I feel hopeless. This is a situation I can't do anything about it and like I am trying to you know, better myself and do new things. It's hard because it's like you have all the words to the song but you're unable to speak. That is how I feel. That I have this wealth of knowledge – these great resources but it is hard for me to even – even present it because of fear over what will happen. Once again back to the neighborhood. This is a situation that is not going to get any better. I have to either do as everybody else does or just be left on the sideline. And now I mean, the whole talent management -- this is how we are graded. I don't think that it would be in my best benefit if I do happen to stay on the sideline. I pretty much feel like selling out.

I see this is as pretty much giving the students what was given to me. The teachers just came in and said, "This is what you have to learn. I am not going to tell you why you have to learn it. It is not going to benefit you in any way. This is what you have to learn. Anybody walks in, this is what we are doing." I just figure it's just a banking system. I am just putting the information in and putting the information in and I am not really getting anything back from the students. Just putting it in. Hopefully, one day they will be able to retrieve it and regurgitate everything I said without thinking for themselves. This is what I feel that my other colleagues may feel comfortable doing it, but I don't.

I feel like we should be bringing in more of the student instead of more of what they want to bring in. Even writing a lesson plan, it is like they have everything outlined. It is like a step-by-step thing. Sometimes I even cut some of the stuff short and try to do one thing before the other or do it in a way I think should be. One time, we were doing Ben Franklin once again and it was this whole thing about Ben Franklin's jobs and all the jobs that he did. How are we going to introduce that? I figured instead of reading the book first, I had all the students do their regular classroom jobs and then asking them using communication devices and picture symbols how they like their jobs. I kind of go backwards and try to find different ways I think I can make it more meaningful to the students.

In one lesson that the assistant principal didn't enjoy, I introduced Bob Marley. There was a book I had I read about his life. And I played some of his music. We also did an art activity with it. Everything was incorporated and I had the lesson plan. The a.p. gave me this look like "What are you doing?" I think the students should learn about other individuals in music and film and stuff like that. If we can do everybody else under the sun,

why not do other people that I think is interesting? I introduced George Washington Carver. We ate peanuts. Some of them need the sensory stimulation. I thought it was excellent and I was trying to meet some of their IEP goals like identifying facts from the story and number representation. It's not like I am sitting down not doing anything. I thought it was great.

In between now and tenure, I guess when we have our meetings, I'll try and little suggestions to see if it is okay. I'll probably email the assistant principal to say, "I have this great idea is it okay if I can use it. So I'd make like a suggestion first to see if it is okay. Once again, I don't want anybody walking in the room like, "What are you doing?" Some of the administration is very bold like that.

Some days I feel it is like, "Is it 2:50, already? Or, "I will be better at 2:50." Or, "When is Friday coming?" And that is not my way of thinking. That troubles me a lot. I didn't go to school for this. I went to school to be there for the students. I feel like I am hoaxing them now. It makes me sad. I don't want to cry. It just … it really hurts. I will just have to know in my heart what is right but do what everybody else does. I don't feel good about it, but I don't know what else to do. It makes me feel like I should be doing something else.

I think next for me is administration. I think it would be more or less helping the teachers that really need help. I mean, in a sense that if I see something working well, I'm not going to be a ball buster. If it's working well and students are learning and they are engaged and they are active, that's fine. After my three years I over, that is when I'll start exploring.

Jamel begins his narrative by describing his experience with academic tracking in low performing classes. When he states, “I always wanted to be in the top class but I never made it,” he shares his desire to be regarded by his teachers as intelligent and his feelings of failure at having never been able to attain this goal. As he entered young adulthood, Jamel began to socialize with other young men who were involved in criminal activity. Jamel recognizes his good fortune in being able to avoid getting arrested when he says, “I got lucky not falling into anything.” Despite his academic struggles and personal involvement with the wrong crowd, Jamel graduated high school and entered college with plans to complete a Bachelor’s degree in computer science. However, he struggled in the math coursework and even with tutorial support, Jamel found himself overwhelmed by the difficulty of his assignments. In the context of this challenge, Jamel took a course in educational foundations that inspired him to want to become a teacher. Upon completing the course, he recounts, “I decided to change my major and go into the teaching field” because the subject matter encouraged students to examine social injustice within education.

Initially, Jamel’s entry foray into teaching emphasized his own education, finding a job and professional growth. He talked at length about paying for his coursework, applying to several jobs, being subject to a hiring freeze, becoming a paraprofessional and learning more on the job than in his teacher education program. However, once he got into the classroom, he began to face challenges. One of the initial challenges was student resistance and his approach to classroom management. Rather than use his physical presence as a Black male to establish authority in his classroom, Jamel preferred to reason with students. He recalls that they saw him as weak and used that characterization as a rationale to act out

in class. However, Jamel suggests that he will not let this deter him in stating, “No matter how hard they push me, I’m not going to give up on them.”

As Jamel continues to develop his teaching practice in his first years in the classroom, he realizes that his more seasoned colleagues are urging him to conform to a scripted, standardized curriculum. Jamel recognizes that this curriculum is not relevant to his students’ lives and begins to incorporate more figures from African-American history that his students can relate to—against the stated school curriculum. In stating, “I hope nobody knows I’m teaching this,” he voices his concern that he not be caught teaching this alternative curriculum. However, when faced with the prospect of a formal observation, Jamel has to reconcile with the fact that he will be expected to teach from the standard curriculum. He shares, “I feel like I’m selling out,” to describe his internal struggle with wanting to teach relevant curriculum and being required to put on a show for administrators. Ultimately, Jamel describes feelings of hopelessness when reflecting on his career as a teacher and he plans to stay in the field long enough to get tenure and then move on to school administration.

JUSTIN: Jumping through Hoops

Like Jamel, Justin was academically tracked in New York City Public Schools in the borough of Queens. However, Justin was placed in the classrooms labeled as high achieving. He describes his father, a basketball coach and leader of a non-profit athletic organization, as highly influential in his upbringing and points to him as leading him to become a teacher. Last year, Justin taught math and science in a special education classroom with all Black male youth and was distinguished by his principal for helping his students successfully pass standardized exams. This year, Justin is teaching in a general

education classroom as the school administration would like him to replicate this success with more students. Justin immediate plans are to continue as a classroom teacher. He is the only teacher in the study who plans to stay in the classroom or who does not have immediate plans to leave teaching. He's also the only participant who discusses his father at length as a positive influence in his life and part of the reason he became a teacher.

<u>My mom and my dad always made time</u>

My parents always tell everybody this story about me. In the second grade, I started saying, "Mom, Dad, I can't wait to go to college." And they just used to be on the floor, besides themselves laughing.

My mom is from Trinidad. She came here when she was in high school at about sixteen years old. She had gone to King County College where she met my father and he's from Jamaica. He came over when he was five years old. My dad played on the basketball team. He was a real important piece to the puzzle. They ended up going to the Final Four his senior year and he was coached by the legendary Mark Ritley. My dad told me Coach Ritley definitely instilled a lot of discipline and wisdom in him. When my dad was young, he liked to do things his own way. He needed Coach Ritley to sort of straighten him out. I remember so many sayings that my dad use to tell me growing up that came from Coach Ritley. Even the basketball program that my father founded in 1993 -- which for a number of years was one the largest basketball programs in the outerboroughs -- was founded it on Coach Ritley's traditions. Academics first, basketball second, you know? They always said "A basketball is only eight pounds but what happens when the eight pounds goes out of the ball, what do you do?" They always drilled me, academics, academics, academics!

"Basketball will come but your intelligence will carry you much further than a basketball will."

So Dad and Mom, they were very hard on me. Very, very demanding. I was the first born also and I had to set an example for my two younger brothers. They didn't accept excuses at all. Hard work was definitely emphasized. I had to go here and do this. Or sometimes, I had a game there. Or I had to stay and come back and do homework. Or I had practice for three hours. It didn't matter. What mattered was at the end of the day, getting that A in the class. I never had any issue or excuses with, with anything because they said, "Listen nothing is too hard for you. Put your mind to it and put in work and you'll get results." Probably one of the biggest keys from Coach Ritley through my dad that he put in me at a young age was, "Success is what happens when preparation meets opportunity."

My parents were religious as well. So faith was a principal I was raised on whether it was on the court, in the classroom, or life in general. Life with my parents was great. I think they're the best parents a man could have. My dad and my mom always made time. And my dad was extremely busy; running three businesses, running the basketball program, taking me to every single game, being at all my games, traveling everywhere, seeing clients. They did a lot. They sacrificed tremendous amount for me. I can't thank them enough for that. I always had that outlet the opportunity to hear their wisdom and advice and also to express myself at the same time. They knew some of the issues I was going through as an adult and oh man, they had been there before. So they were able to coach me through those things and they let me know not to cast my confidence away. A verse in the bible says "Cast not your confidence away, because it has a great recompense

award for you." So no matter how difficult a situation in life can be as long as you haven't worn your faith in the Lord it gives you that confidence that things will get better and then they will get better.

My dad always taught me to never be too high or too low. When things are going good, it's not as good as they seem. When things are going really bad it's not as bad as they seem. It's best to be even keel throughout anything, because you're gonna go through ups and downs. So I mean all this, there's so much wisdom that parents empowered on me. Whether it was the Bible or whether it was their own beliefs, they really kept me grounded and helped me mature and become the person I am today. I'm pretty laid back and everything and in spite of how crazy a situation may get, or how out of control, or how overloaded the work may be, I always try to keep things in perspective. One of the things that's definitely helped me out has definitely been taking time out with the Lord each and every single day. I just thank the Lord for the blessings I received and the favor and grace he's given to me on a daily basis.

She thought I should be referred for special education services

I believe I had a pretty well rounded experience through school. I remember one of the first schools I went to was like around the corner from my house. P.S. 567 in Queens. And one of the first memories that I have of school was in first grade. I really don't know why it happened, you know I was kind of young. I remember bits and pieces. I had a teacher named Ms. Drake and she thought that I should be referred for special education services because I wasn't reading properly. I couldn't sound out words. So my dad told me she called home one day. He got upset and said, "There's no way that Justin should be in special ed! If anything he's probably bored and he should be actually moved to the second

grade." So obviously the teacher, who's in there on a daily basis, I guess had a lot of reservations about that. So she said, "Okay fine, if you think that should be, I'll arrange a meeting where Justin can meet with the principal, and they're gonna give him couple of tests to see how he does. If he does well then we may consider it. If not then I guess we'll have to keep him here or maybe consider other ways." So one day, I remember the principal brought me into the lunchroom. It was just the principal and myself. He was really nice. His name was Mr. Saunders. And one of the first things he said after he greeted me was "Justin, your dad says that you read the sports section of the newspaper every single day to him, is that true?" and I said, "Yeah." So then he said, "So okay, here's what I'd like you to do." He had just bought a and he gave it to me and he sat down and he said, "Okay read me the newspaper. Read me the sports section." So I opened it up to the back page and it was something about the Knicks. So I opened it up and I read right through. I guess I did pretty well because after that, he made a call home to my dad and my dad says he said, "Mr. Riccard I don't know how Ms. Drake is saying what she's saying about him not being able to read, because he didn't stumble over any words and he read right through." So the principal decided to keep me in the first grade but I went to the second grade classroom for reading. A second grader would come out of class and walk me down to the classroom. And that's what ended up happening my first grade year.

In second grade, what I remember about second grade is that I got a 96 on the state exam in reading and like a 94 in math. Third grade I ended up getting like a 94 on reading and like a 92 on math. So I mean, my grades were always top notch. After that year, Mr. Saunders, the principal, met with my family. He recommended that I transfer to Queens County Heights, P.S. 761 because that school had a gifted programs. So that's

what we did. It ended up going to that school about ten minutes away from my house in another neighborhood and doing extremely well over.

Sometimes when I try to recall my childhood, in terms of school, I really don't … it's like I wasn't there or something. I just remember bits from here or there. You know I did used to get a lot of homework. That much I do remember. It took me hours and hours to do that homework, and this was after I had basketball practice. I mean there, at a young age I was taught to balance both sides. The only teacher I recall in elementary school is Ms. Scott, my fourth grade teacher. She was really nice. I ended up going to junior high school to another gifted and talented academy as well. I had one black male teacher in the eighth grade, Mr. Lloyd. He taught me history. I honestly believe that's the only black male teacher I had. I went a lot of schools, but that's the only one I had. I went to about eight schools in my life so I definitely only had one. Well, at Assumption in my junior year in chemistry class, I had another. But he was an African teacher name Mr. Farku. I had a few black female teachers but only those two black males that I remember. I guess I never thought about it growing up. I don't know if it was just me or the general perception or a reality but I always thought most teachers had to be female, because that's all I was around. I never gave it thought, honestly, until I guess much later down the road. It never bothered me and it never affected me. Like I said I didn't really think about it.

There was more pressure on me than other kids

Everybody makes high school out to be the biggest thing in life. But there were so many pressures in high school. You start to have a locker and walk to get to your classes. For me high school was like an extended middle school. Even though it was definitely more challenging academically and socially because there were a lot of different things

that I encountered, it wasn't the height of expectation that everybody had. I was always more looking forward to college.

For ninth grade, I actually had a big change because up until that point, I'd only attended public schools. So for ninth grade, I went to Coleman School, out in Long Island. Very, very, very rigorous academic curriculum over there. So it was a big change going from mainly being surrounded by predominately African-Americans throughout my years. I was one of the few minorities in the school. I think it helped me to prepare for later on because in the world, we're not surrounded by just the minorities. There's a mixture of everybody. Coleman was my first big introduction to that. It's probably also the toughest school that I've been to.

I was used to being on the principals list everyday. When I got there, my grades dropped a little bit. I was like an 80, 83, but to me that's not where I was accustomed to being academically. That definitely taught me a lot. I took my first typing class and I had a lot of extra help sessions. That helped a lot. I also saw teachers who were always willing to go above and beyond what they had to do in order to get me to excel.

Mr. Brown, was my tenth grade American History teacher at Coleman. His class was the hardest I'd taken, but the most enjoyable I think by far out of my entire academic career. What made it so fun for him was that…well there were a number of things. Number one, he was incredibly well prepared and organized; meaning for every single test, he actually had four different versions. So one class would get a multiple choice, one would get a fill in the blank, one would get an essay, and one would get some type of oral presentation or something. But just think about. That took a tremendous amount of time and effort for him to do that. He was also the track coach so he knew how to balance both

sides as an athlete and as student. He helped a lot of the guys on the team out with that, myself included. But one of the things I really liked about him is on the far left side of the board, he always had a section with a random phrase or a random word. An example of that is one day I walked in and I looked to the left, then the word one day was 'Charity Stripe'. So then we had to guess "what is charity stripe?" or "what is he referring to?" And as soon as I walked in and saw 'charity stripe' on the board, the first thing that flashed into my mind were some basketball players because a charity stripe is a foul line. But I didn't want to say it. I just didn't want to. I wasn't sure if that was what he was looking for and I didn't know how it would make me appear being that I was a basketball player and I was African American. I decided to sit back and wait. Five or six students raised their hands offering all types of explanations and various answers. So then there were no more hands raised and I raised my hand and said "Mr. Brown, I think I know the answer to this one," so he said "Ok Justin, go ahead and answer." So I said, "I think charity stripe is the foul line when your play basketball. If you ever heard the announcer calling the game he would say 'he got fouled and now he's going to the charity stripe' which is the foul line. Then he told me I got it correct.

Another thing Mr. Brown did – and this was probably something I've taken as part of my teaching repertoire -- was making analogies. I think I'm pretty good at that and I know I've been somewhat influenced by Mr. Brown. There was one we were talking about war between the French and the British. He was describing how they were rivals at the time and how intense it was. So he compared the British vs. the French to the St. Louis Rams vs. the New England Patriots. It was Superbowl and the athletes in the room, we picked up on that. He always had an analogy for everything and that I think is what made

him so effective. He could connect the material and even though history wasn't my favorite subject, the way Mr. Brown taught it with making connections and relating information, made him such a good teacher, in my opinion.

Coleman was a really tough and rigorous academically. They had final and trimester exams that were like three hours long. You got to study and focus and really put your all into it. It really was more or less, like a mini-college experience for me. When I was getting to the harder classes, there was more pressure on me than other kids at that time. So the workload increased and then on top of that, I went to school in Long Island but I lived in Queens. So I'd take a bus out there, and it's about forty-five to fifty minutes to get to school. Varsity practice didn't start until about seven o'clock at night. I got out of school at three p.m. and had a big gap from three to seven. So I mean, I went to extra help after, for an hour or so in the subject I needed help with. But still, there was a lot of time to sit around and wait. I was doing homework but, I mean, it was sort of a distraction. With the extra time some things played off in my mind. I wondered if I'd get to play at practice or if I'd get the minutes I deserve. Then, I'd go to practice from seven p.m. to nine p.m. and I'd get home after ten o'clock. I'd get tired and then I'd need to do work. Sometimes, I'd fall asleep before finishing all my work. I'd have to wake up in the morning and…I mean, I guess, one thing rolled over to another and I guess I just wasn't performing the best that I could. I didn't have the concentrated time where I wasn't distracted to sit down and study and focus, where I normally would. In the classroom some of those thoughts would enter my mind, as far as the distraction from the court and so I guess everything played a part.

I guess as minority I was more self conscious of some of my actions or the way I was being perceived by others. In that school there were a lot high expectations. You could

get in trouble for any little thing. So the people who got in trouble maybe a little bit more frequently than others, happened to be minority students. There were a lot of incidents were you would sometimes think twice about what you're saying because someone might take it and they may feel a certain way about you and they may twist it around and make it seem like something its not. There were a lot of rumors going on as far as African American students in general, but not myself. I didn't want to be stereotyped as just an athlete and not as the strong student I was. I was being self-conscious on some level and just aware of who I was. I didn't want to be cast in a certain light and I wanted to separate myself from some of the other minorities. I tried to separate myself from the sub-culture, the sub-population of minority students. I was more reserved. I didn't necessarily do things that would get me in trouble. For me it worked because I got along extremely well with both sides: with Caucasian students as well as African American students. I got along with everybody, so nobody had problems with me. I just wanted to be different from everybody. I just wanted to stand on my own two feet and not let anything attribute to it all. Like people saying, "You know he is this way just because he plays ball, or he's this way just because he's African American" or any of that. I wanted to sort of make my own mark by myself and you know, just be considered a regular student not just as an African American student. Not just somebody that plays on the team, but just like a regular student!

I was in the honors class and I guess that's another thing, there weren't very many students in the honors club at Coleman. The majority of minority students were either in the B or C track. They had the students classified into A, B, and C tracks. A track was honors, B track was like the regular track, and C was I guess a little bit below average. I can probably count on my hands the minorities in A track. I was one of the few. I was

trying to keep my grades up and not fall down. I was holding myself to that standard. I grew up an honor roll student, my parents had high expectations for me and they knew me to be a certain way. So I didn't want to -- not only disappoint them -- but also myself. I wanted to stand on my own two feet, and basically maintain my reputation, my integrity. But sometimes it was hard being in between. Hard being able to distance yourself from the sub-culture and being able to socialize and be considered, you know, just like everyone else with the dominant culture.

It was their team and we were joining

I stayed at Coleman for about two and a half years and I ended up transferring. In a nutshell, there was a little bit of prejudice going on over at the school for us with playing basketball for the team. It wasn't academic related. The academics were great. I did great. The teachers were wonderful. It had more to do with what my family and I -- and a lot of other people --felt was discrimination. There was a lot of tension in the school as far as discrimination with the sports teams, you know? I played basketball. And what happened was there was an incident where there were three African American players on the team, myself and two others. In practice, we'd outplay everybody by a significant margin. It wasn't hard to see who was outplaying who. But in terms of the games, we didn't play a lot. There were a couple times where our team was up by thirty or forty points and everybody else on the team would play and us? We're still sitting on the end of the bench.

I grew up playing basketball since I was three years old. My father is a coach. He coached many players and helped them go on to receive Division 1 scholarships. So its not that I didn't know how to play, I was born with a basket in my hands. I really felt that the coaches and the coaching staff tended to favor the white athletes. The majority – about ten

white kids -- had come from an outside program called the Long Island Storms. Once they got into the school, it was basically set up for them to get all the minutes and all the shots. So myself and the other African American students, we basically were outsiders trying to find our way in to get playing time. There wasn't a lot to go around because, the whole team had grown up playing together; going to different tournaments in different states. They're familiar with one another. It was their team that we were joining.

I think that the coaching staff had ulterior motives and different agendas. There were a lot of politics involved. The white players families would make contributions towards the school. I found out that their parents had, you know, shelled out thousands of dollars towards all these charitable funds for the school. This allowed the school to upgrade their facilities, to get new uniforms, and get a new gym. So all the stuff that was really outside of my control directly impacted me on the court as far as being not able to get the time that I wanted. As an adolescent, things like that take a toll. You feel that you're definitely, clearly better than somebody and not being given a fair opportunity to showcase your talents. So I could probably say that that affected me in the classroom sometimes also as far as not performing to the best of my abilities because there was a lot going on. I had never experienced any type of racial prejudice up until that point so it was a brand new experience for me. My dad had gone through something when he was in college and he saw me going through it for and finally the start of the third year, it was time for a change because the same situation kept recurring over and over. It was even worse my third year because I only played one game.

Everybody new everybody, nobody got lost and you're around your own people

My family and I decided that it was best to get a change of environment. So I ended up transferring to Assumption High School for my last year and a half. That was almost like going back to how I grew up where there was predominately minority students. It was a small school whereas Coleman was huge. Coleman was from sixth grade all the way to twelfth with about 6,000 students in the school. Going from there to Assumption, which had about 500 kids, was a change for me. Basically everybody knew everybody, nobody got lost and it was more or less you're around your own people. There's a chance you're going to do better and you felt a little bit more comfortable during certain instances.

My dad is well connected in basketball and at high schools. One of his good friends, Thomas Jones, was the head coach of Assumption High School. So one day I just went over to an open gym and I guess he liked what he saw. He said he'd love to have me. It was great. Definitely a confidence booster for me. Even the players on the team, they were willing to give up their spots. So I mean, that blew my mind away. To come from basically a place where I was underappreciated, undesired and maybe not wanted to going to a situation where they definitely appreciated my talents and my strengths. They appreciated what I brought to the table as far as directing a team and keeping the team poised and making the right passes at the right time, not having turnovers, taking care of the ball – these are things that Assumption lacked at the time. So I guess it was a really good fit there and that's why I left Coleman.

I didn't know if I should laugh or react

I attended South Atlantic University. I didn't really think of the time as being an African American going to school because everybody was there. It was pretty fair

population: Caucasian, African American, Asian, Indian. Everything thing you can think of was down there. It's Florida so everybody wants to go where it's hot all year around. I didn't feel singled out as an African American. So I never really felt that out of place at any time. I had experienced everything up to that point from public school to Catholic school to a white Catholic school to a Black Catholic school. Florida was just a combination of everything. You know, it's a public university. It was just a great time. One of the best times of my life.

But there were times when I felt like I was sort of in between worlds. There was sometimes where things got a little bit uncomfortable depending on the conversation. Some things I wasn't totally familiar as far as -- I don't want to be stereotypical but -- types of conversations that Caucasian students would have vs. African Americans. Being that I was basically never been around Caucasian students to hear them talk about some of the things they spoke about and the way they spoke about them, I didn't know what they were talking about sometimes. I felt discomfort in general. I guess if you're not around something for a while and then you're just inserted into it and your trying to fit in, that would make anybody feel uncomfortable. I mean I had some Caucasian friends, African American friends, Hispanic friends; I had a mixture of everything. I got along with everybody, but it's just, you know, certain things I'd leave alone, I guess. Other people would be laughing and I really wouldn't know how to react. I didn't know what they meant. I didn't know if I should laugh or if I should react. Sometime I just held back and didn't say anything. But I guess you know, it was good in a sense. It exposed me to different kinds of people and the way in which they interact with one another in terms of different cultures.

I was there right before Katrina. Three storms back to back to back hit my freshman year of college, which was 2004. We had to evacuate because they reached the outside of the dorms where I was staying. If you didn't have a place to go, you had to go to a shelter. What was great about going to that school there was that it was only about an hour and fifteen minutes away from Port St. Lucie, which is where my grandparents and aunt lived. So when we had to evacuate, I packed up my stuff and I went to my grandmother's house. There's always food there all the time. My grandmother always said she treats me like her last son. Favorite grandson, that type of thing. So I mean it was great just to know that in the heat of the situation that yes okay, it's a hurricane. I had to pack and leave everything right now, but at least I had somewhere to go. That somewhere for me again was my second home, which is at my grandparents' house.

I stayed there and waited out the storm for a couple days and then they made the announcement that school was back in session, so I went back to school. And it just so happened the next week there was another hurricane. Same procedure so I went back to their house again. And then the third one came, and it was like damn, three in a row! My roommate came from Massachusetts. So what happened for each of the three hurricanes, he actually took a flight back home to Boston. That definitely was a time that told me, "Okay listen, even though you're out here from New York, you're still, your home, your still with family."

I studied criminal justice with a minor in Women's studies at Southeastern Atlantic. My childhood dream since the second grade was to become a lawyer. I still have the plaque in my room and it says "When I get to college, I want to go to Notre Dame University. I want to be a lawyer, and I want to play in the NBA." So I guess I was 0-3 on

that. I ended up going to South Atlantic and I didn't make it to the NBA. But I'm still changing lives and helping people, and instead of being a lawyer, I'm a teacher.

I studied criminal justice because I remember seeing a lot of news coverage and media showed a whole lot of negativity and stereotypes based on the ideal that minorities are the ones that get in trouble at a much higher rate or frequency than everybody else. So I figured that I wanted to help some of these people who may have been innocent or wrongly convicted of something. So my whole mindset there was as an African American, you're going to encounter the law in one capacity or another, whether you do something right or you do something wrong. Even if it's a traffic stop and you didn't do anything wrong; which I have experienced on a number of occasions. Just because you may fit the description or because they're looking for somebody and you just happen to be at that place in time. You're going to encounter the legal system at some point or another as a minority. That's another reason why I went into criminal justice.

I didn't get stopped before I went to college but I've been stopped a couple of times since. I don't speed at all, ever. I drive the speed limit. So there's no reason to pull me over. I stop at every red light, every stop sign. But a couple times, I've been stopped. One time they said the lighter on my license plate was out and I didn't even have one, so I knew they obviously needed a reason to stop me. Another one was because I made a left turn. They said there was a sign that said you can't make a left, but I went back and there was no sign there. So I mean there's been a couple of times when I've been stopped just for nonsense, but that happened after studying criminal justice.

But in terms of my courses, I had pretty good professors. One was Professor Morgan who used to work for the DEA in the highest immigration customs enforcement.

He had a lot of experience dealing with the FBI and the CIA and all these federal agencies. I was really interested in that. I took about three classes with him, and it was so interesting. He brought a lot of films. I just loved the way he approached his classroom with such an open mindset of answering all the off topic comments and questions that we had as a class. Just because we hadn't had those experiences like court or we see on TV we got to see how it really goes in real life or if you ever get involved in a drug raid. He'd always be more than happy and willing to share his experiences with us and I think that was really beneficial for all of us to not only get the content, but also get real life personal experience and combine both and get a full well picture. It separated myth from reality. So he definitely was one of my favorite professors at South Atlantic University.

I don't believe I ever had a Black male professor. I had a couple of Black female professor but no Black male professors that I remember.

I picked up the minor in Women's studies my sophomore year. I think I needed an elective or something so I just read the course description and it sounded interesting. It was taught by an Arab women who encountered discrimination and prejudice after 9/11. She had shared some experiences with that and also some issues women faced as far as them being just as qualified as males but not getting certain jobs because of their gender or being paid something like an average seventy cents per dollar that a man received. I mean things like that really opened my mind because I never really thought about some of these things. College has definitely broadened my horizons and opened my eyes to a lot of issues: socially, economically, politically, and other wise. While taking that class, I decided maybe about mid way into the semester this class is so interesting that I'd like to get a little bit deeper into this issue of how women are discriminated against and the

obstacles they face. So I went to my advisor and told him that I wanted to add on a minor of political studies to my degree. I ended up taking about five classes and I got a certificate of excellence in Women's studies. I really loved it and I even wrote a song about if for my end project for that class. We had to describe a way or share a way in which we discuss how something that we learned from the class plays into today's society. So I wrote a song called "Much More." Two verses I know. Imma try and rip the first one:

One of the problems today, women are being mislead
By the greedier mass media, feeding ya head
With a image, of a skinny girl lookin pretty,
It's a pity
The formula … sin in the city.
They searching for another hot girl right now,
Not a dark-skinned sistah,
They look for white or white brown,
Right around a hundred pounds.
Something they figure less is not enough
So they get implanted with bigger breasts and other stuff
Surgical procedures of interest, tough.
So some women become gold diggin' vets,
Lookin for change,
Givin' women a bad name,
The facts remain,
Some are just in it for change.
Say you have anorexic girls,
Claiming they're too fat,
Starving everyday,
But you don't have to do that.
The media advertising lies,
You have to seek through it,
Put it to the skies,
They're persistent to make you narcissistic.
But a body without flaws is unrealistic.
Nobody's perfect,
So don't fall prey to the way of the media and the image they portray.
It's a brand new day time to break down the doors
On the inequality of women because your much more.
I'm tired of women being swayed,
Getting played,
Portrayed by a house maid
Trying to get laid,

Being labeled by men
As a property to trade
And equally qualified but being underpaid,
They're being degraded and re-integrated
To a patriarchal society
We instigated.
Cause when a woman wants
To be an executive member in the corporate world,
The handicap is gender.
So we have to lend a helping hand,
To bend,
Amend,
End the stereotype,
So we can render more.
Opportunities for women to explore.
Than ever before,
Ya support open the door.
It's ya duty to breakthrough,
And cuties with fake boobs,
Make up ya mind,
Don't allow beauty to make you.
The person that you are,
Because you're brighter than that,
Don't let people make you wear clothes
Tighter than that.
Look inside of the map,
Your heart where beauty is at.
Whether you're white or you're black
There's no changing the facts.
You're beautiful the way you are.
Far from a superstar
But to find the right person with their heart ajar.
Use a smarter start,
The knowledge is your mind to overcome
And achieve much more in due time,
Because you're much more.

My ritual was writing

Growing up I always kept a journal. Every time I got upset and didn't feel like talking to my parents, I just wrote it down. If I had a really good moment then sometimes I wrote it down. Whenever I got free time, I'd just go back and look and read and get a laugh or two and think "Man, I remember that time…" or "I used to say think that way I used to

write letters to my grandfather in Florida. We use to correspond that way before cell phones and text and e-mail. Then I used to also write for my father. He owned a newspaper which was distributed door to door to about one hundred thousand homes in Queens. I used to write articles sometimes for him that he'd publish in his newspaper. The first thing that was published was a small quote. I was like in second grade and what I said was, "One friend is better than many enemies." So he just put that as the quote of the month in the paper. So anytime I had any free time he asked you know, "Justin I need one more article for the month could you write me a small article or an essay that you've written in school or something like that?" I'd give writings to him and he'd publish it. So I mean I guess my writing just evolved from journal writing to letter writing to articles. When I got to high school, it helped me out with my first start rapping.

I grew up listening to jazz and gospel. It wasn't until the eighth grade that I start listening to hip-hop. One of the first people I really got into was Tupac just because of the sheer emotion that he had. Even though he said a lot of negative things, the positive songs that he had were uplifting. He added so much soul to it and passion and desire that honestly made me think, man this sound so convincing what he's saying, I know I'm a great writer, I get A's in all my English classes, and I can put words together really well so I think I can do the same thing.

Another group that I listened to was called 'Sons of God', which was gospel rap. So I mean, I thought, "I'm born again, I'm a Christian and I can write." I'm not going to be like Tupac but I think at some point in time I could get a little better. So that's when I started. I wrote a couple of songs when I was fifteen. And then it really took off for me after I transferred from Coleman to Assumption. One of the traditions rap battles at lunchtime.

Somebody rhyming, somebody beating on the table and a couple of MC's jumping in and giving a quick sixteen here and a quick sixteen there. I wasn't at that level back then but it inspired me to know that if my friends and classmates could do it, I know I could. I got higher grades than them. I know I could write better than them. After basketball season was over, I had more free time for myself and that's when I would jot down a couple things. When I got to college to South Atlantic University, in my spare time, I was writing. My ritual was writing throughout the fall and spring and when it comes time to go back to New York for the summertime, I'd record all the songs. I'm all about the integrity of the music and that's what I plant into my songs. Overtime its expanded and now I share some of my songs in church.

I'd never thought about teaching in my entire life, but I'll try it out

Mr. Brown's analogies, Coach Ritley's journal writing and rhyming, didn't really bring me to teaching as much as they're apart of the practices I use now in my teaching. I wanted to become a lawyer and I got my degree in criminal justice. I remember when I got out of school, we were in this big economic crisis so nobody was hiring at all, anywhere. I came back to New York and I sent resume after resume and went on interview after interview. Nothing worked out. I ended up going back to getting a job at this catering place where I worked before. I still knew people there after I graduated, so I went back and they gave me a job back. I did that from November 2008 for about a year. A little bit before Christmas, I ran into one of my father's friends, who happened to be an assistant principal of dean at a NYC public school in Manhattan. He asked me how things were going and what I was doing, where I was working and I told him that I was back to catering again but I was looking for something more substantial in terms of economics. He

said I should check into New York City Teaching Fellows. I didn't know what it was but he explained that it was a program where they're looking for who are not necessarily education majors. He thought I'd be an excellent candidate for this program. He said all I had to do was go online to this website and fill it out then do an interview and take a test.

I'd always been helping kids work on basketball fundamentals because of my father's program. I taught kids all the basics and worked my way up. I guess if you want to put it in the context of teaching, it was modifying according to the needs of the individual so you can assess where they are. If they're a beginner, you gotta break things down and scaffold lessons. So my dad's friend says if I can do that on the court, teaching isn't really that much different. Your teaching somebody something they didn't know before or if they did, you're building on it. I'd never thought about being a teacher in my entire life, but I thought I'd try it out. Nothing to lose.

So I went home that day and filled out the information. I got an email maybe about a month later telling me they wanted me to come in for an interview. So I did that at Washington Irving High School and that went pretty well, I thought. Then after that maybe about a month, I got an e-mail saying I'd been accepted into the program starting June 2009. I was very excited by it and my family was proud of me. Again, I thank Coach George for recommending me for to try it out. That's how honestly how I ended up in teaching.

Teaching really fell into my lap

The story of how I actually got hired I attribute to my dad and also to the Lord again because the program that my dad co-founded gave me that foot in the door to get the job. After the summer class of the teaching fellows, we were all kind of nervous because

that's when the hiring freeze was instituted and no school was hiring. We all had to find jobs by a certain times otherwise we were getting kicked out of the program. We were all on edge. We had to upload our resumes to a couple places and I went on an interview in Brooklyn at a school in Crown Heights. I thought I would get it because it went really well but the principal I guess had different ideals. She said that I was a really strong candidate but she had somebody else in mind that she felt fit a little bit better. I was kind of disappointed at that one. But the Lord works all things out. He's good to those that love him and trust him.

One day I was sitting home and then all of a sudden my phone rang and I saw a number I didn't recognize. The person says, "May I speak with Justin Rich?" I said, "Yes, speaking, who's this?" He said, "This is Chuck McDonald from the Academy for Writers High School." He'd noticed that I lived a couple blocks away and asked me in for an interview the following day. It was funny because I had played championship ball there growing up because it was the neighborhood high school. So it was kind of ironic that the first person I got a call from was the closest high school. So when I entered the main office, and I saw a gentleman come out. He was a young guy and he didn't look at all like my ideal of a principal. In all my years, I've seen old guys with grey hair but looked like he was in his early thirties. I went into the office with a panel of other people who I later found out were the special ed teacher, the dean of special ed, the assistant principal and the parent teacher coordinator. I'm sitting there at the circle table and honestly for 95% of the interview, we didn't talk about anything academically related at all. What we end up talking about was what I been accustomed to talking about my whole life: basketball.

My dad's program opened up doors for a lot of people -- thousands and thousands of kids over the years. So it just so happened that one of the top players was a former student who was now in the NBA. We had known him since he was seven years old. He started off in our program so we taught him a lot and really helped him along. The assistant principal kept naming names and all those kids had gotten off to a good start academically as well as athletically. My father's program really opened up the door and that's how I got the job. The Lord really rang from him calling me, to it being the closest school, to him blessing my father with all the kids that are privileged to come through the program. And the type of quality, high character kids that we got to deal with really opened up my doors to the teaching job I got. Basically it fell into my lap. Not really anything that I went out to seek. I just up and got it.

Then of course by the end of the interview we're talking more about my ideals and what I bring to the classroom. I guess the principal was really impressed by what he heard and what he saw. Before I left he said "Okay you're definitely hired. No questions about it, you're hired. The only question we have is, do you want to do seventh or eighth grade?" That was the only thing missing. That was the only thing! Like I said, teaching really fell into my lap. It's not anything I ever thought about or dreamed about at all but the Lord worked it out for me and I'm blessed right now to be in this position.

<u>It can get overwhelming if you don't have somebody there to coach you</u>

My first year, I was thrown right into the fire through the Teaching Fellows in my first year. When I entered teaching 2009, I was also taking classes at The College of the Hamptons. So it wasn't like we had a lot of training, per se. I mean we all did a summer school session for about five weeks. In summer school, it's really hard to simulate the daily

grind; the lesson planning and the amount of things you have to balance as a teacher during the regular year. So, many of us, myself included, got a whole lot more on the job training in the fall. In the fall, we were still taking graduate courses in the evening. So after we did our 8-3, we'd take classes. Mentally it was taxing on the brain sometimes. But it did help to have the foundation as we progressed along with the actual experience and practice that we had learned. This way it wasn't more or less a textbook knowledge. We had to come back to it later and wonder how it really applied to our situation. We got a lot of useful advice and things to look out for and guidelines in our classes which translated. That helped us to make easier transitions to the classroom. But there were a lot of long, late nights between studying and writing papers and writing lesson plans and grading.

My school has a really big population with West Indian, Caribbean students. About half the students were born in the Caribbean and the other half were born here. I taught a self-contained special education classroom with all Black males. I asked them and they'd never had a Black male teacher before. That was kind of surprising for me. I guess another thing that sort of helped the relationship part of my students was that I was a Black male just like they were and I guess they saw some parts of myself in them.

In terms of some of the growing pains we all endured, I think mine were a little less. I had the advantage of sharing a classroom with a second year Fellow. We split it in half: she would take the seventh grade class for ELA and for science and I would do math and history. I didn't have a full course load in terms of teaching. I only had those two classes and SETTS or Resource room. Sometimes when I had a free period, I'd go into classrooms and visit a couple of other teachers during the day just to see sort their strategies and their approaches to teaching. They obviously were a whole lot more

seasoned than I was since it was my first year but you could learn a lot by sometimes just sitting back and watching others; especially those who've had success before. It helped a great deal to have Ms. Don because she was a Fellow at the same time so she knew exactly what was going on in terms of balance, the kids, the academic rigor associated with graduate coursework at the same time and personal lives at home. It can get overwhelming if you don't have somebody there to sort of help you and coach. I really give her a lot of credit for the time and opportunity to spend time with the kids and just learn.

I'd have fun with it

It was a great blessing for me to learn on the fly but also to have somebody there in my corner at all times. It was great also because it worked out for the kids. They are self-contained. They're used to being in one room, with one teacher for the entire day. It gave them a little bit of a transition because in the morning, they had Ms. Don who I guess was a little bit more firm or more strict in her approach then in the afternoon, they'd have me and I was more relaxed and laid back. If something happened in Ms. Don's class, she'd be right on them or threaten to do detention or call home or something that like. She was a little bit more quick to jump the gun. Me, I'd have fun with it.

I interacted a little bit more with them and shared common interests such as music. Sometimes when they had gym, I'd go to the gym class and play basketball with them. So I mean, they almost saw me almost like one of them in a sense. They understood that I was their teacher but at the same time, they understood also that I have a life too and I do and like some of the things they like also. That helped to motivate a couple of the students who maybe didn't try as hard as they should have for Ms. Don. They'd try a little harder for me

just because of the relationship I had with them which I guess more is a personal thing moreso than a pedagogical or teaching approach

They're kids, they are gonna try and test sometimes. So even though they knew they'd lose points off their participation points for things like throwing a piece of paper in the garbage from all the way across the room, you know, they would do it sometimes just to get a laugh from the other kids. Like if somebody threw a stick from all the way across the room, I'd say, "Ricardo, you got gym next period, you can be Kobe next period. I don't need you being Kobe right now. For now, be Shaq, go to the garbage can and dunk it in." Or if somebody was in there seat and they had their chair leaned all the way back, sort of like leaning up against the wall, zoning out in space, "I'd say, "Hey John, can you come back to earth, now? Its time to land all the planes, guys. Land all the planes. Ground all planes. Look outside, it's raining outside. Ground all planes." They'd look outside! It was great. I had so much fun with the kids. Being light-hearted was definitely a huge asset in my teaching. I let the kids know in not-so-subtle ways, okay you're doing something wrong right now but you can get right back on track. If they were in Ms. Don's class, they'd hear "You didn't do your homework so I'm calling your mom again." I used developed relationships and used humor to foster a connection with the kids.

Some things my dad taught me are the same things I do now

I learned a lot of this from my dad. I would say that my dad brought me to teaching. All my life, I've seen my dad coaching and teaching high school and college guys. My father, you know, he's never one to give up. He's the most competitive person I've ever seen; he'll race you to get dressed in the morning. He'll be the first one to get his car and to get to the stop sign at the end of the block. He doesn't like to lose at anything.

Sometimes, growing up we didn't have a gym or anything so we used to go out and practice in the park. Winter, spring, summer, fall. I remember one time it was like a really cold day; like two degrees and with the wind chill, like negative ten. We're outside in the park practicing because we played a really bad game. He'd tell the other kids to tell their parents that they were playing outside in the cold and we had to put on live six or seven sweaters and extra gloves. He actually kept the van running with heat outside the park because nobody was outside in that cold. Anytime somebody got cold and was shivering, he just sent us in the car and we'd get warmed up and we'd come back ready to play. He taught me to have the mental fortitude to persevere through anything.

Some of the things my dad taught me are the same things I do with the kids now. If I notice something is going on with them, just like him, I will take them aside privately just to see what was going on with them. Sometimes it really helps just to have somebody to talk to or sometimes or somebody to tell you one thing to make your day a little better.

As far as teaching, sometimes I have to do the same thing over and over and over again but I have patience to do it whereas a lot of teachers don't. I guess that comes from basketball practice. I won't have the same class doing the same thing over and over but, sometimes, I spend a couple of days doing similar types of problems. I say "Okay, today we're gonna do reflections, rotations, symmetry and graphing. And then tomorrow we're gonna apply it this way and apply it that way." So the students are getting constant repetition but in different forms. One time it may be with journal entries, one time maybe a textbook and another time it may be a handout. But, giving them the practice and repetition to do it over and over is definitely another approach that I utilize.

When I come to work, I come to WORK

Our school doesn't attract the top-notch academic talent. But still the same belief is I work with what I have. I don't make excuses for the talent. I mold it into what I want them to be and where I see them going and so if that means giving up my lunch break and tutoring and staying after school, five, six, seven o'clock, that's what I gotta to do. I gotta put in the time. I gotta put in the effort and the hard work in order for some of those things to come to fruition. I have the desire and the passion for success for myself and the students and I have high expectations and believe that if a student doesn't have an A in September, they can keep working and can get there and I will stay on their case whether they like it or not. This is a philosophy that comes home in my teaching.

I have an open door policy when it comes to my lunch period and anybody at anytime could come in and eat their lunch with me. They can listen to music or go to the computer or just relax. I give the kids time to just be kids because I know they have things to talk about and they have energy they need to get out one way or another. They've shared some pretty deep stuff with me that they've never shared with anybody else. It really helps a lot and lets them know, okay Mr. Rich, he understands. Sometimes somebody is having a bad day or they may have gotten into a fight at gym time or something come straight to my room and storm in the door and stomp down and put the things on the table. Instead of jumping on them for the first wrong thing that they do, you know I ask them, "What's really going on? What's really bothering you?" So, just having that, I guess, calming influence for the kids.

There's a lot going on in their personal lives where some of them don't have the best living conditions. They have situations at home where you know, some don't have

fathers; never seen their fathers. There's an aspect that's sort of missing in them in terms of having an African American male authority in their lives. Most of them have never had an African-American teacher. So that's one thing that they're not used to. I know that some things are going on in their homes and they are more or less walking over their mothers because they are with guys and there was nobody else around. Their moms aren't strict enough with them or they haven't disciplined them for certain things. Sometimes they get into trouble at home for staying out and not coming home till late in the night. All types of things that really happened outside of my classroom sometimes affected them the next day.

The say to me, "Mr. Rich, we never see you get upset. You never raise your voice." And I'm like, "God, you don't have to!" Its not my job to get upset at you guys. I'm preparing them for what high school is gonna be and teachers aren't always gonna be on their backs. I'm not always gonna be on their case. I'll do things like let them see their averages or just give them ten questions for homework. But then they have an excuse like they were on PS3 last night or on Facebook and forgot their homework. But I just break it down for them so that they share the responsibility and become more independent and more self-motivated.

One time early in the year when, they didn't really know me as well. One student was having a bad day. And I think he did something. He threw a ball of paper at somebody or something to that effect. And he got upset and he raised his vice. And then I raised my voice but I didn't yell or scream anything at him. I spoke to him a little bit more sternly than I have in the beginning so then they froze for a second and was like "Woa". So he came to me the next week. "Um, Mr. Rich, you know I didn't know you were like that. I saw you in a shirt and tie and everything." But he didn't know, if push came to shove, that yeah,

I could take it there also. Maybe not as much as somebody else but you know, I'll let you know okay, you've messed up and here's how you've messed up. Certain lines you just don't cross. The kids they found out that side of me every once in a blue moon that happened.

I've had to speak to them about situations outside of the classroom as well as inside. I would tell them that the world doesn't revolve around them and they have to fit in with society. Whether it's ten degrees outside or whether its ninety degrees outside, I always come to work in a shirt and tie and shoes and pants. So, why do I do that? Number one, just because teachers don't have a dress code I still like to pride myself on coming to work. When I come to work, I come to work. That's my way of focusing, and I tell myself, "I'm here to do a job, I have to get this job done." So appearances aren't everything, but in the real world, if you have an interview, you show up. You never miss a day. I never missed a day at all. I'm here early. If you come to work, half an hour late, that right there could be the reason you don't get a job. Right or wrong, there's a general perception particularly about Blacks that we're late to everything, all the time. CPT: colored people's time. I told them that basically means okay, well, you have to go somewhere at eight thirty, you could wait, because Black people don't get there till nine o'clock, nine thirty. It's funny when you see it in movies but in the real world, this is how people really think. This is what they really think about our kids. If my students come into an interview sagging their pants like Lil' Wayne, they're not getting that job. I tell them to be presentable. I tell them to show the world that they're not just like everyone else. I tell them to separate themselves because you only get one chance to make a first impression and if that's the person they see and then automatically in their minds, they already say, "Okay, next person. You didn't come. You weren't prepared. You came late. You weren't dressed properly."

And, I don't speak in slang, in Ebonics. I don't have to pretend to be somebody I'm not, I'm myself. There are certain things you can say and there's a way to say it. I've created handouts for them to think about the context and what is appropriate or inappropriate to say. I want them to think about being a little more careful of what they say if they're with their friends or around older people. I bring in newspaper articles about things like wrongful termination for racial discrimination. And then they see that you can fired for being Black. Discussions like that really hit home for them, you know.

For Black males, they really need education

I am on the students' backs all the time, pushing them to do better. Anything less than an eighty, they have to get it up. If we are in class and they don't understand something I say, "Listen, if I'm going too fast or you didn't understand something I said, or you want me to go over something again, doesn't matter if its ten minutes just to the period, half an hour, an hour into the period, stop me. Someone might have the same exact question as you and they're just scared to ask. We're all in this together. We're all one family when we come to the classroom." They knew I was really honest and straight-forward with them each and every single day.

Because this was a self -contained classroom, I tried certain things that I probably wouldn't be able to do in a general ed classroom. Students like Eric were struggling in the beginning of the term on the assessments -- the quizzes, the projects and the tests because they weren't doing the homework. I came up with a points-based system which took into account both positive and negative actions. The intent was to reinforce the positive. Anytime a student answered or even asked a question, I would give them one point in a particular section on the board. If a student helped somebody out, if they gave them a

pencil, I mean if they did any little thing, I acknowledge it just to bring them close together as a community and also to motivate them.

Eric was one student I had a hard time motivating. He was a little bit older than the other students in the seventh grade. I know he was a little embarrassed about that. He wasn't as motivated as his peers. In the first month or so in class he didn't really try. He wasn't working up to his potential. He should have been trying harder, really pushing himself but he wasn't. I found out from Eric's dad that he wanted to be a mechanic. Anything dealing with hands, anything physical or if anything was ever broken Eric became the person you called because he was like a quick fix around the classroom. He knew everything in terms of where that was concerned but he had a lot of trouble with math and reading. These things didn't just happen overnight. It was more of a process and years had to have gone by and he never got the skills he should have gotten. He was a big talker during class him and these two other kids Trevor and Ricardo, they always talked all the time, making jokes and everything like that. I know that was one way for him to mask his insecurity but also, he was a kid, just like the other ones. Nonetheless, it was my job to educate him and get him to where he needed to go.

During lunch period, one time, Eric came to my room and I just pulled him aside by my desk and you know, just had a real heart-to-heart conversation with him cause he was getting grades like fifties and sixties. I don't know if he was accustomed to this but I have really high standards for the kids. I was just curious. So I asked him, "You know Eric, how come sometimes when you have a question, you don't raise your hand?" I got pretty much the answer that I expected to get: he felt a little embarrassed sometimes because he's a little bit older than some of the kids and didn't want to appear to be stupid or behind

some of his other friends or not knowing what he's doing. I let him know that you know, it's not about that. It's about just getting better every single day. I let him know, you know, some of the stuff that I'm teaching, I haven't done in a while so I have to go home and I have to refresh my memory sometimes. Sometimes I forget too. So I'm human just like them and I don't have the answer to every single question they guys ask me all the time. Sometimes, I must say "I don't know" because I don't have the answer to the question.

But Eric, I really felt that if he applied himself, if he put his mind to it, he could really be one of the better students in my class where math was concerned. So I basically paired him up with a couple of strong readers that really helped him out. He was more of an oral speaker than a reader. If you asked him what he thought about something or his opinion, he'd be able to give you a rundown on everything with explanations, details and facts to back it up. He started doing much better because I paired him with one of two of students who were among the stronger readers in the class. This really helped in history class. But with math, I tried different ways to sort of motivate him. Sometimes it was using real world examples. He liked basketball so like a real problem with Kobe Bryant like, "If Kobe made ten out of twenty four shots approximately what percentage of the shots did he make?" You know something like that he would always be one of the first to raise his hands and answer the question. So I knew little things like that would grab more of his attention for a little while but I wanted to do something that would keep his attention on a more permanent basis. So I hoped that the point system would work for him too.

The point system was good for the kids because it gave the kids a chance to see their actions acknowledged and to adjust their behavior if necessary. For example, if they did anything like cursing at somebody or insulting, name-calling or throwing pencil at

somebody or even shooting a crumpled up piece of paper like a jump shot into the garbage, I would take two points off of them. You could get points off and at the same time, you could earn them back.

As far as academics, "test" was the dreaded word around the school especially with the current focus on standardized tests. Anytime I mentioned the test, the students would complain and say they know the material already. They'd ask why they had to be tested. I explained to them that is wasn't to make their grades go down and that I just needed to know how much they understood of the lesson. But I thought about how to make the tests less painful. I'm creative in my approach sometimes and unconventional in some of the things I do. I told the students that my job was to teach them what they need to learn and tell them how this relates to real life. I let them know that they could be getting something for getting good grades because its really important to get good grades to move on and to build your confidence. For Black males, they really need the education especially with everything going on in the world. I said to them that I knew that sometimes some of their parents may not ask you how they're doing in class But, if you show them a good grade, then they'll put it on the refrigerator or something and that makes you guys proud and feel good about yourself, I told them. I explained that I wanted to give them something else to motivate them and to make them feel good about themselves. So what I did was tell them "If you guys get an eighty, that's two dollars. If you guys get a ninety, I'll give you three dollars. If you get one hundred, I'll give you guys five dollars." I did that for the first test. I gave back the papers and everything and a couple kids got nineties. "I said, okay, today's payday. It's Friday. Here you go one-two, Here you go one-two. Somebody

got a hundred. Here you go, five. There you go." And they were like "Aaah, man, I gotta do good on the next test."

On the next test, for any student who got an eighty, I bought him a Chinese meal for lunch. About six or seven kids ended up getting it, and even Eric moved up to a sixty-four. He failed by one point but it was still much better from where he was coming from in the thirties, forties and fifties. He was making his way up and he was like "Man, I know I can do this, I know I can do this." That system really straightened him out and he said, "Okay, you know what, I'm gonna stop talking. I'm not gonna talk as much as I was before. I'm gonna start doing more of my homework and I know I'm gonna pass the next test." So I said, "Okay, Eric. Remember, it's up to you. As my dad used to say 'I can teach you what to do but its up to you to make it work.' So I can't sit down and take that test for you. You have to go home, and get the study guide, study it over if you have any questions, ask me. But you have to know your materials and what to do with them."

The next unit was something kind of difficult for them at the time: equations, multi-step equations and solving and graphing and inequalities. These were calculations that really gave them trouble. Eric got the highest score! He got a ninety-six on the exam. I was blown away. From that point on, Eric was my second best student. He rose from pretty much the bottom to the best.

It was really good to see because he started handing in more assignments which gave him more reinforcement and practice to prepare for a test and his grades went up. But also in class he would answer and ask more questions. He was becoming more inquisitive in terms of his mathematical process. And when it came to group work -- which was pretty much everyday -- he actually took on a leadership role and taught the other

students. His explanations were really good as well and when he helped his classmates, my job became easier as well. And by becoming an expert, he built more confidence in his abilities. His peers noticed the change too and they were like, "Oh, Eric, you got an A in math? You got a B in history?" They'd always known Eric to sort of get low grades and then all of a sudden he was up there. That really inspired and motivated the other kids. It showed them if Eric can do it, then they could do it. So it was really, really great to see.

That was really tremendous. It was my first year of teaching and just really motivating somebody and having them know that even though you're demanding and have high expectations and push them a little further than they think they may go, ultimately if you have a really good relationship with them and they trust you enough to work with you on a daily basis and they apply themselves more then things can happen.

<u>If I can work with them, I can teach general ed</u>

My principal shared the data for our school. My kids, on the whole had a much higher passing rate than the rest of the school. Out of the 11 students who took the state math test last year, 75% made gains. This meant that they're doing something right. The approach that I use is something that had a positive effect on my students. As a result, the principal moved me from a self-contained class to general ed. If I can broaden that to the rest of my eighth graders who I have this year -- the other sixty kids -- then maybe something could go well there too. My passing rate in terms of actual classes is higher than most every other teacher and its not because I have low standards. I have very high standards and the kids know that and they know I challenge them and push them every single day. But just, I guess being on top of them all the time and showing them I care and love and at the same time, that yeah, when you get out of line, I'll tell you. When you need

encouragement, I'll be there. I just go the extra mile and do things that other teachers wouldn't like such as staying after or writing a late pass. I mean just all types of things that they come to me and they thank me for later, like "Damn, Mr. Rich, teacher so-and-so doesn't do this or teacher so-and-so doesn't do that. But you took the time out with us to even understand or care," which is what a couple of them really said. But just having that connection and also a philosophy and of course the work ethic and the education behind it and pushing them and having them work with me all of those things, go together. I'm taking my formula for ten kids to sixty in hopes of producing the same positive results. Would my methods and approaches work in a different context? Yeah, I think they can. Whatever I said goes back to my dad. He's been there for everything from teaching college guys all the way down to five and six year olds and that's the hardest thing. To teach first, second, third, fourth graders and have them remember plays? He showed them to know every spot and everybody knows everything, so just if little kids could do it you could always generalize, you could always work it up and anybody can do it. So that's my mentality. There's nothing too hard. I'm working with a really low population. I had special ed, self-contained. I know it works with them. If I can work with them, I can teach general ed. For me, that's easier. Yeah, there's more people, but they're on a higher level so I don't have to scaffold as much, not spend as much individual time. But again, you know there's a different challenge where that's concerned. So do I think it can work? I'm really sure it can work.

Justin began his narrative discussing his parents' involvement in his upbringing. He stated, "My mom and my dad always made time," to suggest that whenever he needed their support, they were there to provide it. This level of support was exemplified early in

Justin's schooling experience. In discussing his first grade teacher perspective about hit literacy skills he stated: "She thought I should be referred for special education services." His parents—particularly his father—intervened in this situation and proved to the school that not only did Justin not need special education services, he was reading at a much higher level than his age mates.

When Justin recalled his high school experience, he states, "There was more pressure on me than other kids." Although he did not specifically discuss the role that race plays in this expectation, he implies that as a Black male student in an all-White school, he felt that he was being held to a higher standard than his peers. In social situations when these peers would make comments that he may have perceived as offensive or that he lacked the cultural knowledge to understand he stated he recalls feeling as if, "I didn't know if I should laugh of react." However, when Justin returned to Assumption, the predominately Black high school, he felt more at ease stating, "Everybody new everybody, nobody got lost and you're around your own people." Justin was able to perform better in school and play basketball as a star athlete once he transferred to Assumption. This led to his admission into college in Florida and he describes that experience as largely positive. During college, Justin spent much of his free-time writing rhymes and stated, "My ritual was writing." Although he studied criminal justice, he also took courses in women's studies and his rhymes often reflected new understandings about gender politics that were gleaned from this coursework.

Upon graduating college and returning to New York, Justin experienced some difficulty getting a career started. He initially worked for a catering company but then had a conversation with a family friend who encouraged him to consider becoming a teacher.

He stated, “I’d never thought about teaching in my entire life but I’ll try it out,” to describe how he felt about this recommendation and his process of applying to the New York City Teaching Fellows. Justin reflected on his interview and how he got the job on the spot explaining, “Teaching really fell into my lap.”

Once in the classroom, Justin worked with a co-teacher in a collaborative team teaching special education setting. He revealed his appreciation for having a co-teacher with slightly more experience than him when he says, “It can get overwhelming if you don’t have somebody there to coach you.” However, he distinguished his pedagogical style from his peers in explaining how he relates to his students and uses humor as an alternative strategy to address classroom management issues. “ I’d have fun with it,” Justin explained about his more laid back approach in the classroom. An additional aspect of his teaching is using the lessons his dad taught him with the students in his classroom. He shared, “Some things my dad taught me are the same things I do now,” to describe his use of proverbs and analogies to get his students to think about their actions and their work ethic.

Justin saw himself as dedicated to education. Justin firmly stated, “When I come to work, I come to WORK.” He reported that he wore a suit and tie everyday of the week to show students that he takes his role as an educator seriously. Further, he thought this lesson was particularly important for Black male youth as he explains, “For Black males, they really need education.” At the time of the interview, Justin had learned that he would be moving to a general education setting and that his principal expected that he could replicate his success with students in the special education setting there. Justin seemed optimistic about his upcoming role as a general education teacher in stating, “If I can work with them, I can teach general ed.”

KAMARI: Up and Down the Ivy

Kamari is a New York City Teaching Fellow (NYCTF) who was influenced to become a teacher by his adopted mother; also a teacher. After a mostly successful elementary and secondary schooling experience, Kamari entered an Ivy League university for his undergraduate program and experience both social isolation and academic difficulties. He applied and was accepted to the NYTCF upon graduation and now teaches in a special education classroom in a New York City Public School in the Bronx. Kamari has noticed the expectation for Black males in his school to hold an authoritative, discipline-oriented role with students but rejects this stereotype. Although he currently feels like he is making strides as a teacher in his third year in the classroom, Kamari does not think he will remain in teaching as a lifelong career.

I wasn't as interested in the same things other guys were interested in

I can think back as far as elementary school. I was placed in the more advanced class when I was in second grade. I think that drove me to be a better student. My mom told me, "You may be in the two class and it's higher performing." That in and of itself made me feel like a better student.

Then when I got to middle school, I tested into one of the top middle schools in the city. I was actually put on the wait list because my scores were near the top but it wasn't quite where I wanted to be. During the waiting period, I was in another school. Even then I was in a top class, but again, just by being given the opportunity to be in a high performing school made me feel better. It made me feel like I was smart. I knew I was smart because my mother told me and I saw my grades. I saw certain signs.

I was advanced and I think initially what was positive about that was I wasn't working with the more troubled students. I noticed when I was with the more troubled

class, the lower performing class, I wasn't performing as well. I was still performing better than the average but I was getting into fights. I had problems because I was being picked on. But then once I came into the more mature class, I actually became a better student. So for me, I think the positive experience was being recognized for my ability. It was a primer into why I think I became a better student. I was reaching my full potential.

I know for a fact that my successes were celebrated more. There was a greater culture of success. I was given a plaque and numerous awards by fifth grade.

Even though I don't have the same perception of myself as a child, my mother says I was bad. I got into fights. But she doesn't realize that I was picked on. I was called names about being gay like "fag." They used those words. My name at the time was Paul. So they called me Paula. I changed my name to Kamari when I was twelve. But that moreso happened in the classroom where kids weren't doing as well. When I got into the class where students were more driven I didn't have as much problems. It happened, but I think it happened to at a slightly less level. I never really talked a lot about it to my mom. She understood because I told her at times. I apologized but she used to tell me "Just be more masculine." That was pretty much her response. I think she sympathized, but I don't think she really like, she would just listen more or less and she just felt like I should be more masculine. That was pretty much her response. That's pretty much how she felt like, you know, "Don't talk like this." And it took me long before I had a more masculine voice. I guess I sounded a certain way when I was younger.

I was always reading. In the eighth grade, I started reading Mein Kampf*. That was one of the most fascinating books to me. I realize that the book isn't the most well-written book but what was fascinating to me was that it was written by an individual who had such*

a powerful impact on the world. Who, you know, really took something that was really evil in terms of racial superiority and racial views and made it a nationalist policy. So in eighth grade, I was extremely interested in things that other students weren't.

In the higher performing class, there were more females. I know for a fact they weren't all Black. I went to low numbers of majority Black schools. I know there were a few Indian, some white, some mixed. In terms of their personality, they were more driven. They were more respectful and at the end of the day, they knew they were smart and they felt better about themselves. I think the whole class system was so obvious. Like, who in the world thinks of these things like 4E, 4-1, 4-2, 4-3, 4-4? That's like, everyone knows that the 4-E class is the highest performing. So, long story short, that was pretty much my experience throughout middle school and elementary school.

As far as the positive experience, I mean, to be honest, it was in high school. It was with teachers who had more interest in my development and would literally sit with me and talk to me. I was always more mature so I think for me, being around adults who took any interest in me, I valued that more than my friends. Until this day, I don't really hang out with people my age. I was always older. In terms of growing up, I wasn't as interested in the same things that other guys were interested in.

I knew my own work and I knew what I was capable of

I went to W.E.B. DuBois High School. September 2001 was my first year as a ninth grader. It was more of a very Afro-centric environment in terms of how the teachers did programs and cultural events. As far as the academic goes, they didn't do a lot of tracking. If they did it wasn't very well known and it wasn't easy to figure out. There was no

hierarchy in terms of that. There was, however, advanced classes that you could take. They would have a.p. chemistry and things like that. They offered those type of things.

My high school teacher, Ms. Jones, she was just very charismatic. She was fun. One of the first interactions with her was positive and negative. The first negative interaction I had with her is when she thought I was plagiarizing. And I'll never forget, she said, "I wanna speak to you about this." And then when we spoke, she said that she was gonna give me a failing grade for it because she felt I was plagiarizing. When she asked me that, I didn't understand. She said "I don't think you wrote this. I don't see you writing this way." Of course, this was early in the school year so she didn't really know my writing. I think it was funny because it kind of drew us closer in terms of relationship building and making me a better student. Once she realized that I could write like that, that I was able to express myself in that way, that made me feel like, you know, that actually became a compliment. I was expressing myself at a higher level than many of my peers. So, you know, since then we, when I would go to her for advice, how to fix certain things in my work, I would be confident in my writing and I was good at it so I didn't need a lot of help. But I was always around her. I was always there after school, always trying to learn more about whatever we were studying that day.

In high school, I had two Black male teachers. One was a science teacher. And one was a history teacher. And they were literally two out of three or four in the total school, out of twenty-four. The science teacher, Mr. Oman, was like the male component of why I wanted to be a teacher. I wanted to be like him. I wanted to be relatable to the kids and fun, but serious about my studies. And he was really smart. I changed my name when I was twelve years old to Kamari. I like the fact, that he, him having an African name was

another thing that was similar to me. It meant that there was that consciousness. I think that's also what made me interested in teaching, just him being a positive influence. I just didn't feel like there was any male major positive influence in my education before he became my teacher in the ninth grade. He was like one of the first.

I had a mentor in high school and she was like the chair of the English department. Basically we took a liking to each. I could go to her and ask her questions when I wasn't getting good answers from my other English teachers. She ended up proof-reading my entrance essays to Carnegie. I mean she didn't really edit it very much. She just was like "Yeah, you did a pretty good job." She told me things I needed to do like indent and maybe clarify. She really like ultimately gave me that extra push which is something that I think a lot of kids don't necessarily get. A lot of higher achieving or higher performing students, they're told that they're smart but they're not given that extra push to achieve great things.

One thing that I like about my experience when I was applying to college was that I knew my own work and knew what I was capable of. I was applying a year early and my guidance counselor was the only person who was pretty much against it. She didn't want me to graduate early. She didn't think I would get into Carnegie. Her and the math teacher. She knew I was smart and she knew I was driven but she just kept saying, "You should wait, you should wait." And I was like "I don't think I should wait. I don't see keeping me here for another year."

They didn't think that I would be able to handle the rigors and they didn't want me to get rejected and then feel like I wasn't good enough. So I know, in some sense, they had my best interest but I don't think they genuinely understood where I was coming from and, what my options really were. My options would have been to stay there for another year,

pretty much be done with everything and take a couple of extra classes and then go to Longwood University just for a couple of classes just to get experiences. I was like "It doesn't make sense for me to spend another year here when I have the grades, I have the SAT scores. I'm doing well. Why wouldn't I just be ready?"

Seeing my mother and then seeing her in the class, I knew I could do it

I was living with my adoptive mom since I was 2 but I wasn't officially adopted until I was 12. I don't have any bitter feelings towards my biological mom. I think because I was the youngest. I have three other siblings. We all were taken from her when we were young. My other siblings were three, four and five at the time. And you know, like looking back now, my only wish now is to connect with her. I can't say reconnect because I've never really known her. I think at this time, that's my only goal is to eventually find her and see what I can do for her. I want to see how she can help me be a better person. That connection is something I think is really missing in my life. I'm not a very family oriented person. Me and my adopted mom, we're close but not closer.

Two of my brothers aren't where I'm at in my life. They're both in jail. They won't be out until 2017, if that. And they've been in for about four years now. It's crucial time that's lost. You can't get that back. My brothers didn't grow up in a stable home. Even though every family is dysfunctional on some level, I had a stable household in terms of having an adoptive mother who provided everything I basically needed. They didn't always have that. My mother tried to adopt them but it didn't work out. And they just ended up in the foster care system which has its own history. In college, I did a paper on the history of the foster care system because I was actually curious to know a lot about it. And, boy did it really open up my mind to the injustices that are going on everyday. I learned about how

inefficient some agencies are and how ineffective their practices and policies are in terms of insuring people are paired with the right mothers. I learned about the agency that I was adopted from. It has a history of substandard parental matching that differs from the standards there are for white and private agencies. When I learned that mostly black single women were adopting children, I realized it's reinforcing those very inadequacies as a result of not really having a strong, solid foundation. Certain kids really need a two-parent household. Not to say that having a single-parent household is bad, it's just unfortunate that this is happening in cycles. My siblings ended up just being a part of that cycle. They were adopted but they were put in a less functional household than possibly what they were living in initially. They were both abused. One was sexually molested by an older sibling. One had an iron pressed against his back by his mother because of something he didn't do right. He literally had an iron scar. I'll never forget when I was a kid and seeing it for the first time. We'd visit each other and I just felt like this could never happen in my household, my mother would never do that. When I was that age, I didn't really know how to make sense of anything. Now that I'm an adult, a part of it is without a doubt goes back to education. And not just only in schools. By the time my mother got me she was in her 40s so she was an older woman compared to the other mothers. She had a different mindset especially being an educator. That worked in her favor and it worked in my favor too.

My sister is the only other person I know that I was most blessed. She's been a social worker. She just graduated a couple of years ago from Island University in social work. She did her thing and I did my thing. It feels good to know that I have someone who I can talk to. We're very close and I've always said ultimately, we see eye to eye. Sometimes

there's nothing like having that biological connection. There are certain things you can't explain when you have your biological connection

My mother, she would show me poems that Maya Angelou wrote. I was actually very interested in poetry since I was a kid. I just remember my mother showing me picture books, regular books, all kinds of books just to get me interested in reading at a young age. I didn't talk when I first came to her. I always cried and I wasn't very happy. To kind of get me to think and start expressing myself, she got me to read. I would read Dr. Seuss. Love Dr. Seuss. And <u>*Boxcar Children*</u> *and R.L. Stine. I was infatuated with his books. I always read those. I loved Goosebumps too. I was reading a different book like every couple weeks. My mother would get them. She'd get them from her school or she'd take me to the library too. Sometimes we'd walk in a bookstore and we'd pass by books and I'd say, "I want that book." And she'd say, "How much is it?" Looking back now, she just said that to see how much I'd be interested. But she knew she could afford it.*

I do think there's a certain level of irony that the same person who I'm not as connected with, I'm very similar to. We're very similar in how we treat people. She's very giving. She's more selfless than me but I have selfless tendencies. But just like you know in terms of being a teacher, I think I developed just the appreciation for education. Seeing my mother and then seeing her in the class, I knew I could do it. She wasn't an educator that went to school and taught. She surrounded me with multiple opportunities to be driven. And ultimately, I was driven, you know. But it could have been a different story. It could have been a case where I was capable but wasn't able to reach my full potential like, a lot of kids I know.

Sometimes when I was a kid, my mother would take me to school. I honestly loved seeing her teach. I don't think she knows how much I enjoyed her taking me to class. She taught fourth grade and I've always been fascinated by her teaching. It was funny because at one point, I actually helped the students with a dance. I learned a dance in high school and then I ended up teaching the dance to the grade that she was teaching. I remember telling her then, "I think I wanna be a teacher" and she said, "Yeah, you'd be a good teacher." My mother always saw me as being as influential as she is. I think that's another reason why I could be a teacher. I like working with kids so I have that about me. I think as far as seeing her just struggling to be a single parent, I think that's another reason why being a teacher is for me. The struggle of teaching isn't the teaching. It's the structural limitations of teaching; of being seen as a positive influence when students and parents and administration sometimes limit that.

When my mother teaches she feels like a mother. That doesn't work for everybody's model nor do I try to be a father in the classroom but there's a dynamic that she created with her students. My mother is sixty-four. She's definitely born in an era where education was such a tool for improving outcomes for African Americans when there were no other ones. Now people have options. They don't necessarily have to be formally educated. You can be homeschooled. There's alternative ways of learning. You can do online learning so there's a lot of things I think technologically, institutionally, socially that's changed since my mother was a child. I think just always seeing my mother talking about manners, talking about respect for authority, talking about respect for other students, you know and just talking back to her days as a child, helped students realize the importance of

education. Because she talks about opportunities that didn't exist at one point, she makes education seem like something worthy.

There's a lot of debate I think now in education about what do educators that have been around for a long time offer in a highly technologically advanced standardized testing world? But I think what is indisputable and respected about my mother is the moral responsibility that she owns. It is totally transparent with her students. When she talks about contacting a parent, there's love that comes in that. It's not just "I'm gonna contact your parent cause I don't like you." I think its gotta start young. Students don't have parents or teachers like my mother. They don't have that opportunity and they end up, you know, losing out by the time they come to middle school.

I think seeing my mother and always respecting the institution of teaching makes me feel like that's something we have to restore. Not simply because its a system that tracks students so they can become engineers and lawyers and doctors but so that we can bring back the core functions of education. I was just reading an article the other day that said that, America has lagged far behind other industrialized nations in measurable goals and expectations such as arithmetic and written composition. But the question that they asked was how would America measure in terms of civic responsibility? In terms of educating for the purpose of developing students who are civic minded? I think that's what lacks. Like we don't test students on how moral or how invested or how knowledgeable they are about the social institutions or the structures in their environment. In terms of understanding, compassion and respect. We don't measure students on their ability to be good, involved citizens who participate in what we call democracy. We only measure them on pretty much how they can write and read.

My mind was in circles, spinning

In college, I think there's things that I got out of Carnegie that if I had went to maybe a less rigorous school, I may not have necessarily valued that. For example, competition and competitive spirit. That was something that was highly valued by many students. Not something that I say I valued, but I understood why people were so driven to be competitive. A lot of students really wanted to do well. But sometimes they wanted to do well in spite of anyone else doing well. You try to meet with other people, you try to seriously work with other people and see how you could grow and sometimes you have kids who just were not interested in that. They were interested in doing well and if you were doing well, that's fine, they'll hang. There are some people who I was able to really bond with and grow with, academically and socially but you know, the spirit I think is a very high stress environment and you know it just requires you to be on your toes.

There were a lot of things that I learned about in terms of being on my toes, in terms of respecting deadlines and submitting work, being up till seven in the morning working on term papers. That really did push me. I think it pushed me to be more driven and to take advantage of the things that I was given. There were a lot of opportunities that I got just being there. I think I was so driven and determined to do things myself that by the time I got to college, you know, I felt like I could do it all myself. I forgot that I should rely more on my mother for support. That was one thing that I didn't do a lot of. And I just didn't want my mother to worry. I took so many jobs in college so I didn't really ask my mother for money. And it's not about the money, even little things like advice or you know household items. But you know, like being able to rely on someone is powerful. I didn't take her up on offers of insight that I didn't necessarily get from my peers. That's why I

think you know, a lot of kids who I teach for example, when they don't have that at home, they really, really, really depend on that. They're depending on us to be nice to them, strict with them, friendly with them, casual, laid back, the rule enforcer. They say that they don't want those things, but ultimately when they don't get that or what they're getting is so lackluster or less than what its supposed to be, they cry for that.

You know, in college I wasn't as good of a student because I wasn't really in the right place. I don't think Carnegie was the right school for me. I just didn't have to be in upstate New York. Cold weather. Isolated. Not many other black people. The population of African Americans at Carnegie was 500 when I went out of fourteen thousand. I think the resources and support that was there was helpful to an extent. The African Center had a lot to do with me pursuing an Africana studies major.

In my junior year, I didn't do really well one semester. And I wasn't allowed to be a residential assistant and that tore me because an R.A. is in a leadership role. And it makes sense if you're not doing well that you shouldn't be one. And it did, it struck me because that's when I really got my act together. I was driven to be a better student. I wanted to prove myself that I could do well at Carnegie; that I was capable. Before that, I was just, I was letting every little thing that I didn't like about the school make me become pessimistic and hopeless. I was feeling helpless. I know I wasn't helpless but I was feeling helpless. But I mean ultimately the social structure of the school, where it was located, me being hundreds of miles from home, not really feeling connected and then being the first in my family to go away, it kind of made me feel like I was doing something really important. And even though I wasn't happy, I was gonna graduate. I wasn't gonna let any feeling stop me. I think that was one reason why -- just being driven.

I just started taking school more seriously. I started practicing what I now preach to my kids. I stopped looking at as this daunting experience and I started taking responsibility. I said, "You know, I know what I do with my time, it's not that difficult to realize. I'm not doing well. I need to go to tutoring and office hours more often. If I don't understand the material, I need to ask questions. If I don't like a teacher, I gotta suck it up." I mean these are just realistic expectations that you have to set for yourself. When I got my first A at Carnegie, I'll never forget, calling my mother. I was so excited. She was like "Okay, I knew you could do it though." And I was like, "Mom, you don't understand. Carnegie is just so hard." But, you know, it's all about your mindset too. I knew I was smart enough. I never felt like I was dumb. I just didn't feel happy. I didn't feel driven. I didn't feel like this environment was helping me anywhere. "Why am I here?" That's how I felt.

The main thing was coming into the classroom and the teacher just looking at me like I was anybody. I was coming into the classroom feeling like I was one of 60 students and just being another name on the roster, another number in the record. I think ultimately that disconnect is a pattern for me. Now that I'm an adult it makes sense. In elementary school, I did well. I had a good foundation because of my mother. And, she instilled certain values. She was able to check up on me, make sure I was doing more work, things like that. By the time I became a middle school student, while I had good grades to get me in there, I got lost in there. Why? Because I look back, I was at really big school. It's a good school but it's a really big school too. I didn't have that one-on-one connection. Then when I got back to high school, I coasted through. It was easy. Why? Cause the school was small and I had everything I needed. I could go in there and get help when I needed help. I didn't feel

any trepidation. I went to Carnegie, it was like middle school all over again. It was big, so much going on, you know? A lot of groups, cliques and programs. A lot to offer but no direction. My mind was in circles, spinning.

I started working at Upington University for a summer program. Leaderships Inspires for a Diverse America is a summer institute program for high-achieving students at schools across the country and it pretty much gives them these summer intensive classes. They're not actual classes at Upington, but they're like classes that pretty much get them acclimated to the language, social knowledge and interactions. They get all of this stuff paid for too. I'm like, gosh, I wish I was enrolled in that program. They get all these applications paid for. They get all of this guidance. Once I worked there, I started really looking at how schools at the college level operate. It's almost like a science. If you gel together some major components, what are your interests, what kind of person you are, your flexibility like and where you come from, you can get a good picture of the kind of environment that's for you.

The program was largely for students of color. It's driven based on economic needs and you know, empirically on issues of racial disparities. So I think ultimately, once I started working with the program and I learned a lot about the college process it was as if I instantly realized what I lacked before I got to that point. It was just a solid understanding about what my options are. And I think a lot of the things that I was experiencing, you know, regardless of my own issues that I was going through, had a lot to do with being in an environment that I at least felt wasn't ready for.

One of the things that I was warned about before I got to Carnegie was to be aware of possibly feeling like an outsider. Possibly feeling like you're not as supported. Possibly

feeling like, you really have to stick with your own and just be knowledgeable about that. Being the kind of person that I am, I don't think like that. I don't think I should just be around Black people just cause I'm Black. So, to feel like I had to go Ujoma for example, to feel like I had to go to certain things because there really wasn't anything else going on, that made me feel like the school wasn't really prepared for me. It wasn't prepared for students of color from urban areas where they are the majority.

Sometimes you have to fail in life to succeed

I've spoken to some of my peers. We always felt like we didn't look forward to socially going to school. We knew we had to do well but the social aspect is one of the biggest aspects. The reason why I did well in high school was because I was around teachers who took a keen interest in my development. When I went to college, I didn't feel that. I felt like it was "Okay, come to office hours," or "Just email me." It was like a shock. Just to ask a question? I'm not even asking a very detailed question. Most of my professors were too busy to have a normal social interaction. And, by normal I mean normal "Hello, how are you?" Just casual respectful and professional. I think that I felt that disconnect very, very quickly. And to be honest with you even in the Africana classes, I felt like some of the professors were just snooty. It felt like they came across like "I'm a professor. Yeah, you might be Black but you're studying what I really know and I'm privileged to know." Several of the ones I can think of, I just felt like they made it too obvious that they were too into their selves and not enough about truly getting their students to be invested. I think the strategies that I learned now as an educator to get my students to be interested is no different than what I did in college. I do think the push back that you get from professors in terms of taking responsibility is important because those

things must remain. You're going to college. This is your education. You're taking ownership over a lot of other things in your life. Why would school be any different? I think the strategies of interaction, manipulatives, multiple intelligences, those are things that didn't exist. For example, I'm not a good as an auditory learner, I'm more of a visual. So while I'm good for conversation, if you just talk to me and you expect me to write, I'm not gonna succeed in your class. But in class where there are study notes, visuals, things of that nature, I did better. I just did better. I also did well when I pushed myself. When you go to college, you're not necessarily aware. I didn't have anybody in my family that went to any school like this program. I wasn't really sort of aware of some of the realities. I think in terms of that question, how prepared was the school for me? Sometimes I think that's even more important than being prepared for the school. I think the lack of diversity, the competition and the cultural climate made me take a while to really adapt to that environment. But I think ultimately too, failure helped me to be a better student. Failure helped me to be more successful.

When I was done writing the application, I knew I wanted to be a teacher

My friend was applying to Teaching Fellows and she told me that I should apply with her. At first, I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do. I wanted to go into higher education. Possibly working in residential life. And then another avenue was politics because I started campaigning for the DNC with Barack Obama. The educational component came when I started applying. I realized how much I wanted to teach. The asked "What drives you to improve to impact high achievement in the educational system in inner-city schools." That question stopped me for a second because I was like, I don't wanna write this if I don't mean it. So I stopped. I stopped. I was like I want this

application to be meaningful. And I started writing and not liking it. I thought I was bs'ing so it took me a while. And when I was done writing the application, I knew I wanted to be a teacher. I knew that I wanted to do Teaching Fellows because I got hyped. I got excited. But then my second interview was crushing. I actually had to do a demo lesson. I never will forget how miserable it was. I felt like I don't know if I'm cut out for this. I knew I had the passion but all I needed was the skills.

Whether or not, I got in, I knew I would do teaching. But the question and critical thinking about why be an educator became more real. That driving force is still with me to this day. The incarceration of my brothers, the lack of a strong male presence in my life and you know, this feeling that I could replicate to the best of my ability what my mother has done for me. My mother has taught the last 40 years and she's passionate about what she does just as I am. I'm an intellectual and I know that. I'm very much about finding solutions to problems. I don't doubt that sometimes application and theory really do mean reconciling certain differences. Realizing that I can do a lot of thinking, I may not necessarily be a good teacher. I don't know how I'm gonna do.

I don't think I'm an excellent teacher because to really be able to teach, you have to teach for a while. You have to teach and you have to be successful if you're a teacher. I think I'm a good teacher because I'm always finding ways. I'm always doing what I can in the classroom. And looking back to what it was that got me into teaching, I'm always reflective. I ask myself, "Am I creating the very inequities that I've seen or have seen in the past with respect to how students and teachers are interacting? Am I reducing students to limited expectations because they are low-performing?" If you find a student and he is unsuccessful, he doesn't realize that we don't always get it. We get frustrated.

I was having that discussion with my students recently. I gave them a quote that I made for them. I acted like I read it online because I didn't want them to think that I wrote and seem prejudiced. The quote was "I wanted so bad to fail just so I could be a success." Invariably, all the responses were, "Oh my god that's stupid. That's so dumb, why would you want to fail? Who does that? Who wants to fail?" And after listening to them, I said "You know what, I understand where you're coming from. I used to think the same way. I don't think that anymore." It took me until I got to college when it really was hard, when I started to actually almost fail. I was barely passing. That was when I realized that, this is actually important. I failed certain tests. I failed certain papers. I'd get a grade and I'd feel like, "You know what, what did I do wrong?" I'd stay up all night, I'd shoot it out and they'd rip it to shreds pretty much. Ultimately, I told the students, it was not until I failed at being a student that I realized that, it's not about me, it's not about what I want and its not about what I like. In order to be at some place in my life, it's required that I go through certain experiences. Sometimes you have to fail in life to succeed. I think that's something that students and I struggle with everyday. I deal with special education students. So they're all low. There's one student who has so much potential but he doesn't care, he's not interested in school. He just wants to be there so he could say to his mother he was there. He's not genuinely interested. So you know, you have to do a lot of these talks. Sometimes it takes like literally half the period just because I have to say it.

I teach math. It's hard to make it anywhere relevant. I mean there is a lot of relevance to telling them about why math skills are important but not necessarily sometimes for their own personal issues and concern. I realize sometimes that no learning gets done, especially at this level. It just requires that conversation. I've told them because,

you know, I realize that your limitations are only relative to where you are in your life. I don't know advanced calculus work. I teach what they need to know close to high school but I can't necessarily do certain things. They might not do well but it's okay. Not everybody is good. And I want them to realize that because to be frustrated means to be in constant contention with reality. And you have to be upset with your circumstances. You're performing at a fourth grade level and you aren't gonna touch an eighth grade text if you can't reconcile the reality, you know. But then there is the reality that I have to come to which is having to help them where they're at. And sometimes meeting them where they're at means lowering certain expectations. But always setting high expectations for me is what's gonna make you a great teacher. If I stay long enough in education, I want to be a great teacher. I don't wanna settle at just being a decent teacher.

Kamari begins his narrative about his schooling by discussing his experiences in high-performing classes. He explains that his academic performance was exceptional and that his placement in a classroom that was recognized for being high-performing made him feel smart. However, as Kamari recalls that he started to feel differently about his school experience when other students began harassing him about his sexual orientation. This sentiment was exacerbated by his mother's urging to "act more masculine" rather than support Kamari in this ordeal. Kamari seems to suggest that he focused his energy on academics and turned to other adults like his teachers for allies. Kamari reasons, "I wasn't as interested in the same things that other guys were interested in," to suggest that he was more mature than his peers and it made sense for him to form relationships with his adults who supported him. One outcome from his ability to foster these relationships was his further intellectual development. Kamari's mentoring by an English teacher led him to

develop his writing skills on a college-level. When he states, " I knew my own work and I knew what I was capable of," Kamari evokes confidence about his abilities and further asserts that at that time, he was ready to enter college despite advise from other teachers to wait another year. Ultimately, Kamari applied and was accepted into college a year early. However, early into his college career, he began to struggle academically. He states, "My mind was in circles, spinning" to describe his state of confusion at being in a large school where he felt disconnected from the life of the university.

As he reflects on his career, Kamari discusses when he began to see himself as a teacher as well as his emerging philosophy of teaching. He recalls visiting his mother's classroom in stating, "Seeing my mother and then seeing her in the class, I knew I could do it." Kamari was inspired by the way that his mother interacted with her students and he began to define some of his ideas about pedagogy based on his observations of her teaching. In addition, Kamari realized that during the application process for the New York City Teaching Fellows, he became certain of his dreams. He states, "When I was done writing the application, I knew I wanted to be a teacher," in reference to the essays about teaching that he was required to write that made him really consider his views on teaching. Finally, Kamari drew upon his own experiences in college to develop his philosophy of teaching. His statement, "Sometimes you have to fail to succeed" is a mantra that he shared with his students that developed from his reflection on his own academic struggles in college. Kamari saw failure as being beneficial to helping him learn what it means to be successful and therefore he urges his students to not be discouraged when they are struggling because failing is a part of the learning process.

BYRON: Saving Black Souls

Byron is a former high school and college football athlete whose efforts with activism and leadership at his university led to racially charged backlash from white supremacists. He entered New York City Public Schools with the mantra of saving Black souls and developed a culturally relevant curriculum of African history to teach in a high school for over-aged and under-credited adolescents in Brooklyn. Pressured to revise his curriculum to a traditional format more closely aligned with the core, Byron is preparing to leave the classroom to pursue his professional development career teaching educators how to develop culturally relevant curriculum.

Football kind of saved us all

I was a really good student. I remember starting school cause I just moved from the hood. By the time I got to kindergarten, I was ahead of everybody else. I have two brothers: one three years older and a brother four years older. Everything they learned, I learned it ahead of time. I knew my reading, my math and timetables already when I started school.

When I was in the first grade, you know how the kids race? We raced to see whoever reads the fastest. It was always me and an Asian kid. I was a straight A student from first to third grade. Back in my day, you had early birds and late birds. The early birds were the lower, like the middle and below. The late birds came later and went home later. I was a later bird all the way and I stayed in the smart class.

Once I got to the third grade, my middle brother left for junior high. I started cussing. I was always one of the best students but then they sent me to go to counseling cause I had a lot of energy. I was active. Looking back, I was kind of a problem because I needed a lot attention. I didn't have any oversight and I was always talking, always

popular and always in the middle of stuff. But I think I just got, I just got caught up in other things.

In fourth grade, I started playing organized football. Our team was doing really well. But fifth grade, I quit. This is consistent with the research. Basketball took over. Football took over. I went from the top classes to the average classes. I started signing and rapping in the sixth grade. New Edition became my life. I was popping back then and real heavy into break dancing. I just got kind of caught up in the other stuff and stopped doing my best in school. Still got pretty got grades but in seventh grade when puberty kicked in, I completely quit. Learned I could cheat so I started cheating. I always knew that if I tried, I could do good but in the back of my mind, I just I didn't have to. The expectation was, "You a dumb nigga" and I was like, "Word up. I can do the bare minimum." When I started being looked at as a dumb jock, I rolled with it.

The only assignment I remember in junior high school was a rap about George Washington Carver. That was like right after Theo and Cockroach did the rap on the Cosby Show. My teacher, Ms. Graves gave me the assignment and said you can do anything you want. And I still know the rap. You ask me anything George Carver. I still remember the rap:

George Washington Carver was his name

When it came to the peanut my boy had game

Born in 1860 back in the days

When my people wasn't nothing but some stupid slaves

He was raised in Diamond Grove by his father, Mr. Carver

Carver was cool just as slave and a farmer

George's mother was gone, just a white man joke

She was another sister working for white folks

When George grew up, he couldn't work in the field

But when it came to the garden, my brother was chill

When Carver was 13, there was a new motivation

George left home to go get an education

Doing many odd jobs to work his way through school

He was a fresh black genius and he wasn't a fool

He earned his wages went to college, Iowa state

He got his MS degree in 1898

Dried coffee to plastics, George Carver created

Messing with the peanut it was badly devastated

Shaving cream

The success that George had was a wonderful dream

Then George was a painter

A real dominator

When it came to art he was no perpetrator

He was also a musician cause he really music

He really had talent so he thought that he could use it

But most of all he was a scientist

That was just another talent that he couldn't resist

Like I said before he had many inventions

For the fame George got he had no intentions

1940 he gave his money to the Carver foundation

The success George had will spread to the nation

In 1943, he was put to rest

He was 83 years old and it was time I guess

But we will never forget

The things he has a place in history so we will never forget

He lived in the time of life when it wasn't fair

Its up to me the BIT to show the world I care

Just like Martin Luther and Booker T.

What he did for the peanut made him cool as can be

Word.

What I remember most significantly about it, was my teacher was blown away. When I performed, my teacher brought her husband from outside the school to video. And then, they showed it in the cafeteria during lunchtime and the kids and everybody went crazy. I remember getting praise for it. I always think about that because Ms. Burnett got my best. And that was the only assignment I remember. I don't remember anything else.

I think I lacked discipline. I wasn't one of those kids who had to go home and do homework. When I got home, I went to the basketball court. I didn't have a curfew. I remember my mom wasn't much of a disciplinarian. She was really young and a single parent. My mom got pregnant early and went to junior college for a while but then dropped out. My dad was a dumb jock. He met my mom when they were in college. He played football but he hustled his way through it. He wasn't there very much and we only saw him every few months. But his advice, was like, "You do what you gotta do." Like he

almost thought we was stupid. My dad, even though he didn't raise us, he graduated from West State football so, I knew I was gonna go to college. But education to me was just football. But for us, football was when people came around and made a big deal so we knew we had to be practice. But education wasn't. Football kind of saved us all.

It wasn't that my mom wasn't a good mom. Now that I'm older, I see that my mom had some developmental issues. At the time, it was probably people thought she was a bad parent but she should have gotten therapy. She was a little kid raising three kids. So when I would get suspended, I would tell my mom, don't tell Larry and Mark. I was more afraid of my brothers then I was of my mom. She'd even lie with me and we'd fake like I was going to school. When they left, I'd come home.

My middle brother was a straight A student up until eighth grade. He was the one who was sensitive. He was a good student but when he got older, he realized that that ain't cool so he went extreme O-dog. He was in the streets and in and out of jail.

My grandma is like my mom, my brothers' mom, my mom's mom -- all of our moms. She lived about 20 minutes away so we were there every Sunday. Looking back, we would have fallen off if it wouldn't have been for her. Her people had money and exposed us to middle class stock.

In the white school as a Black boy, I was like guilty until proven innocent

My freshman year in high school, I think was one of the most significant events in my educational career. At the high school I went to we used to have these culture days in history class. So one day would be Greek culture day and the white kids who were Greek would bring their families' dishes. And then it would be Italian day and they'd bring their Italian dishes. One day, the only other Black kid in the class, Chris made a comment and asked, "When are we gonna have an African culture day? A black culture day?" And the

teacher said, Mr. Klonopus said, "It's too hard to kill a wino." And the whole class fell out. I remember I didn't have the words. But after that, I failed. I stopped going to class. I was ineligible for basketball because I didn't pass his class. It just started a real negative experience of me being labeled as a bad kid. Mr. Klonopus spread a rumor that I was a drug dealer. That was when we all wore Starter jackets and, you know, because we were black, he assumed.

I was looked as a dumb black athlete so I cheated the whole time. Rolled with it. Got 2.0's. But I was always good writer. I wrote a paper about racism in my English class and I won an award so I always knew I could write. One of the things that saved me is that when I was young, I always knew I was smart.

I went to a prep school and my brothers were football players. So then we went to the school outside of the neighborhood, like the even more preppy school. When I was in the fourth grade, my brother who was in eighth grade broke the California rushing record in Pop Warner football. There were three high schools fighting for him to come play like he going to the league. All these white people used to come to my little ass, broke down apartment. My mom would be making people kool-aid and they'd be making a big deal over my brother. So I was little and watching my brother the phenom who was going to the NFL.

By the time I got to high school, I'd already played five seasons of Pop Warner football. I was little but I was just older and sharper. I went to rich white school outside my neighborhood. I was going through a wanna-be gangsta phase even though I was a sweet kid who never did anything really bad. But my freshman year, I could walk up to a senior if I wanted to and smack him in his face. If you hung with me, you had OG status

because my brothers had been legends at that school. I was the only black kid and I was there just to play ball. I was arrogant because I was used to being around my brothers' friends who were well known in the city. My brother went to Nevada right out of school and when he would come back from college, everybody would just swarm around him. That status made me feel like a king. I was never motivated or interested in high school because it wasn't interesting. But I was in a singing group and I was in the church choir. Looking back, I was very self-motivated for football, for music and all these different things. But not school.

I was always ashamed of my home life. The joke between my friends and I was that my apartment was called the vicinities. That was our inside joke and all my boys knew. They'd say "We gotta help make sure nobody knows that Brian lives in the vicinities." They were like, kinda like projects. One season, the cheerleaders were gonna tp all the captains' houses for homecoming. I couldn't let anybody see our apartment. I could not! I made up a lie, went to the office and changed the address on the emergency card so they wouldn't know where I lived. To make sure, I made up another lie that my mom was out of town so I could stay with my friend Jay and they would tp his house instead.

Then there was a dance where the girls take the guys and her family was gonna have to pick me up and I could not let them see my apartments. My grandma lived in more of a black neighborhood called North Highland. So I moved in with my grandma.

Even though I was always popular and I always had good, attractive white girls there was always a problem as soon as the dance came. When it was time to pick the girl up from home, it was always some shit. I would talk to my girlfriend's parents like "hi" (in a light voice) trying so hard to be this soft, almost feminized black man so to not be

perceived as aggressive. So I went from being a wannabe Blood to having contacts in my eyes, wearing polo shirts and dating a white girl named Christy. I wouldn't date black girls. I had two identities: extreme gangster and wanting to be white. Both identities were hurtful but they were the usual identities that Black people go to when they assimilate into dominant culture and have to come back to the hood.

I never had the opportunity to be Theo. To be Black and smart and wealthy. Through my grandmother, I got a piece of the middle class. But where I'm from in Sacramento, you either O-Dog or you're Carlton. There's no in between. It's schizophrenic. I wouldn't trade it because I think it shaped me into who I am but I didn't get what other kids got. Growing up, I always felt like I was hustling. I always had to think more. I always had to deal more. I always had to prove my humanity. I look back and it makes me really sad that I was so ashamed of who I was. You know, I didn't get the experience that white kids got. I'm everybody's first black friend. When I go home with my teammates, it was always a problem until my friends would explain "Oh, he's okay. He's good" to their parents. But in the black community, everybody wants their kid to play with me cause I go to school with the white kids, and I'm soft and I kinda talk like a white person. When you're white, the world is yours. None of my friends knew what I was going through. But in the white school as a Black boy, I was like guilty until proven innocent. But then I'll always have respect because of football.

When you go to white schools, you're always seeking black people. You always feel like you're missing out on something. Cause it kind of makes sense now that I'm older, like I remember these experiences I had and I'm like no wonder I turned out like this.

I can be a nigga on the field

I ended up having to go to junior college because I didn't get a scholarship out of high school. I really thought I was gonna go to Golden State. It didn't work out. I ended up with a situation where I could go to North Golden State but I had to pass some classes at Riverbank Junior College. All the black athletes -- really all the football players -- we had priority registration. You knew the classes you were gonna take and so we took the classes that had the Scantron test and a teacher who the coach had a relationship with. I remember a teacher, Ms. Richie. You go into her class on a Monday after the test and when she passed around the gradebook, you just write in your grade. We would just walk in and write our grades cause she had the hookup.

My junior year, I cheated. But in math you can't cheat cause you gotta show your work. I had to pass this math class to go to North Golden State. Me and my boys we were in the parking lot smoking weed. And this guy, Jared Marshall who was a counselor, a black man, saw me. I was always a good kid and you could tell I was a good kid but that was my weed- hanging-with-thugs phase. He saw me and he didn't say anything at the time but he came and approached me later. Mr. Marshall told me he thought I was throwing away a big opportunity. I told him about the math class; how I didn't understand it. So Marshall went to my math teacher and he learned it and met with me to go over it. And then, I was gonna try to hustle my way out and not take the test because I had a girl situation. Mr. Marshall was like, "Brother, I spent an hour learning this, you gon' sit here." And I was like damn, he took the time to learn this, I have to. I ended up passing the class and it was really interesting. When I got my master's from the Mid Atlantic University, I went back to my old junior college and I saw him and I was like, "Mr. Marshall" and he didn't remember me. He had had such an influence on me and I come

back six years later with a master's and a purpose and he didn't remember. That showed me that he does that for everybody. He didn't really know me. He just knew I was a Black football player falling off and gave me that time. Had I not passed that class, I would have been like some of my boys who today have regrets because they didn't take that scholarship.

Eventually, I ended up going to Golden State. I was a special admit, like most football players. I felt like I'd hustled my way there so now I'm busting my ass. My first semester there, I took my first notes ever. First time ever in my life I took notes! I told my coach maybe I can major in psychology. He tells me "No, you're gonna be a sociology major." I rolled with some guys who didn't play football, some smart brothers.

I remember being in class and I got all the books before the first day of class. I was scared because I figured I'd hustled my way, I gotta do this. So I'm learning my shit and I'm answering every question. I never did this much work. I had a little place in the library where I could go three or four hours a day. I wasn't smoking. I wasn't drinking. Busted my ass and I had a chance to get B's. I took all my finals and I got straight C's. I go into my coach's office and I'm upset because I thought this is the first time, I tried and I was like damn, I got all C's. I'm pissed off because I think I'm smart but also, I'm kind of in my assimilation phased and I think I'm better than other blacks cause I went to prep school and I know the white world and the black world. When I walk in, all the coaches are sitting there before practice and they stand up and give me an ovation. An ovation for straight C's. I'm like, "They think I'm stupid." I remember thinking, "They think I'm a stupid ass if they're gonna give me a standing ovation for straight C's."

Later in college, I got involved with this organization for Black athletes. There was a West Coast University track runner who had run a good track meet and he was on the front page of our university's newspaper. The quote of the week with his picture was "I wonder if he got in for his ten meter time or his SAT's?" It was kind of clowning him. So the Black athletes, all of us kind of got together and started an organization. This was the first time ever that I was in a group of Black people talking about our community. I remember having the epiphany that like "Wow, we generate money for this university. You know, Black athletes before the game, yelling, getting pumped, working out twenty hours a week. But this was the first time in my life that I'd ever had real discussion about how we could use our platform. We planned some protests of the front page and talked to the media. And it was like my kind of right of passage.

There was a lot of friction on the team between the pro-black brothers and the brothers who mess with white girls. A lot of the relationships were kind of mended through that. I remember we talked to a group of kids and all of them listened. And that was kind of my epiphany about the platform we could have. While I was apart of that, I was also the student assistant to the athletic director. I ended up being on the honor role. So for the university, I was like their OJ and they were using me as their poster child for the kid who came in as a special admit but now on the honor role. I'm well spoken and I wear polo shirts and I can drink beer with the white boys but I'm quick. I can be a nigga on the field.

I've always been an extreme nigga on the football field. I walked ten yards behind the rest of my team when we came out. On the football field, people always want you to be a nigga. That's the one place where you're allowed to be a nigga. You could just turn and

they love it. In the real world, they don't want you to do that. But it was always interesting how that was the place where I could be a nigga and it was acceptable.

So I'm playing that role and our organization, Athletes for Achievement, starts making moves. I have access to all the student leaders. I found out that the university is trying to shut my organization down and they're planning on using me to do it. So that was like my first "Black man, do you want to keep the hook up or do you want to love your people?" moment. I remember being at a crossroads. I ended up never having to do anything but it was a defining moment.

The night that changed my life

We partnered with the Q's to bring Dr. Nayim Akbar to talk. We used to hang out at this corner on campus called the Black Hole. This guy Mark West used to let us listen to Dr. Nayim Akbar tapes and he helped set it up for him to visit. The night comes and me and my boys blaze and then go to see Akbar. I remember it like was yesterday. I was wearing a burgundy polo shirt. I get there and I'm paranoid because I'm high.
He starts talking and it was as though I was hearing about every double consciousness, every dualism that I went through -- cause I'd gotten very good at being the only black guy in a situation from being at a prep school. But I was in a black world too. I knew how to assimilate. I knew how to do the balance. But I was also at a crisis with it. I remember Akbar talking about Columbus and saying, "How do you discover a land that's fully occupied?" He was talking about mental slavery and it was like everything that I've prayed about, everything that I've been learning, just connected. Everything! A light went on.

That night, me and my boys left and we were all silent. We didn't talk about that kind of stuff. But he just put a mirror up to us in one conversation. And that's when I say now, every black person is one experience, conversation, network away from seeing the

whole world differently. I just remember thinking he was the most amazing man in the world and there was this whole other world of that I knew in my soul but now I could tangibly feel it. I ended up buying his tape. We ended up going to eat and at Denny's and then he walked in. We're all stunned. We met him and I just remember thinking, "Wow." I'd listen to the tape all the time. I'd come back from the club and it would be three in the morning and there was something in me that knew that's what I'm supposed to be doing.

I just remember all the barriers coming down. For this brief moment, we were all on the same page and it was beautiful. After seeing Dr. Nyim Akbar, I began negotiating these worlds and questioning how I could be about Black power and at the same time have my hook up with dominant culture. I reached out to my dad and he had nothing to tell me because he didn't take anything serious. I prayed. I was having an identity crisis and it was hard. The things that are valued in the white community will get you fucked up in the black community. It was really hard for me to negotiate a personality that worked in both places. I'd been so whitewashed that I didn't even know how to come at sistahs. I'd treat a white girl like "Hey, how are you?" and I'd be like this nice, well-spoken guy. But I had my own insecurity and I'd try to be too hood with a sistah. Even though I messed with black girls cause I never wanted people to tell me I was a sell out, in my mind, I was doing sistahs charity. I mean it's a sickness. But when you don't love yourself, you don't love your reflection. It was hard. It was really, really, really hard.

I never had someone I could tell about my problems. I never had a black male teacher till college. I always learned about race just cause I was dealing with it. I didn't do it in a way that was empowering. But I've always been an introspective thinker. I've always believed in God. I carried my bible on the sideline. I read

The Autobiography of Malcolm X. I read Makes me Wanna Holla. The closest thing to that that I had to a mentor was this white dude Mark Edwards. He was cool but there was only limits to what he could help me with in terms of processing my consciousness. I never had somebody I could call and talk to about these things my whole life. I have a lot of pain.
I was two people. I remember like trying to be two people and in high school I could do it cause I'd stay in my school cause if I was with all Black people, I'd just be with all Black people. In college, I was having these situations where it would overlap and I just didn't not know how to deal with it.

I'm the spook who sat next to the door

I ended up working on this big multi-million dollar auction for the university and I'm one of the people who's supposed to talk about my transformation. I'm nervous and I get drunk. I write a rap about what the athletic department did for me. This white lady starts crying and then all of sudden, the next week she calls me and says, "Do you want to go to Mid Atlantic University?" I became one of five people who got a scholarship from the NCAA to go where I want for a graduate degree. I wanted to go for education. It wasn't until I was literally on the plane reading the material that I realized that it's higher ed.

When I get to Mid Atlantic University to study higher education, I also get an opportunity to work with the athletic department. I bring positive public relations, teach a class called "Life after Sports," and start an organization. I had this master plan to create an organization for black athletes. I'm immersed in the ideas of Ali and John Carlos in terms of athletics as a vehicle for transformation for black people.

When I got there, I just had to get it done. I had grown up. I was 23 and I knew I wanted to be successful. I'd had enough success in Davis to know that I could do great

things. I remember being in class and it was like legal issues in higher education. Malcolm X came up and the teacher was like, talking about Malcolm X and how King was better and I remember this white girl who was working on a PhD in curriculum development, raised her hand and said is "Malcolm X dead or alive?" And they all started laughing. She got him mixed up with Farrakhan. And I remember being pissed. I went home thinking if I had said is "Thomas Jefferson dead or alive, they would have thought I was an affirmative action reject." I would have been on the phone with my grandma, like trying to get a motivational speech. But this white girl didn't know anything about Malcolm X and it was funny but we just moved on and she ain't even thinking about it. That's how irrelevant our history and culture is to them. That's when I got my edge in graduate school. These muthafuckas don't know shit about us. They know so little about us, I can be an expert. I became the spokesperson for black people in every class. And I got all A's an B's for the most part. I was a real student. I had purpose. My thesis was like 50 pages more than it had to be. By that point, my dream was to create mechanisms to empower black athletes to change the world. I believed I was gonna change the world.

My research, my first Master's is on African American student athlete's academic, social and professional underdevelopment. I create a model of mentoring and partner with a brother from Ohio State who has a similar program and a brother from Purdue. We decide to turn out the Big 10 and create a Black conscious group of leaders who can give us an economic base. BOOM! I finished my masters.

I graduated and I took a job in student affairs. I'm doing the diversity training and running my organization with the Black athletes. I'm working in the leadership center, I got student affairs professional of the year, I'm the advisor for the Black caucus – it's like

the dream job. I get paid to take all my little brothers and be a big brother while creating a model for black leadership. I'm like the spook that sat next to the door. I have a budget. After my first year, my job description changes because I used to have to facilitate service-learning projects. They gave me a graduate assistant to do all that and they let me create my job description. Now I get paid to bring all the Black student organization's representatives together every week through this model.

We create Sankofa: self, collective and group responsibility. We create a model. The first year we start Sankofa, all of these historical beefs -- this brother broke this brothers cane four years ago, this beef between the fraternity brothers and the football players --- are squashed. We put Black people in campus offices. The following year we use the whole summer to take kids on retreats. And so now we got a whole plan. They hire a new director of the cultural center who's a young brother so we got like this dream team of young black professionals. The Black elders love it! The Black caucus didn't mismanage the budget that year. And the following year, Sankofa meetings go from twenty-five people in a session to now you gotta squeeze in. Black faculty are coming. We create a Saturday school. We realize all the bougie black kids are the ones getting in trouble on campus because they're having an identity crisis and it transcends class so we start doing programming with them. We became a proactive community.

Then, my homegirl Kendra Smith who was the club president of the Black Caucus wrote an article in the paper about how we'd been misrepresented in the campus press. It was just something basic. She gets a death threat. We thought it was somebody playing a joke so we don't really pay that much attention to it. We take it to the top Black administrator and he's nonchalant so we keep working.

A few weeks later, we leave Sankofa and Kendra goes to her mailbox -- there's another death threat. It says, "We warned you nigga...shut you mouth." The first one we used that to talk about racism on campus. Now she's crying. The vice-president comes and he says if you get another one, just make a copy and then leaves. Kendra's nose starts bleeding.

All of us in Sankofa go to this woman named Mama Price who's like the elder in the community. She tells me, "You go to the President tomorrow and you stand with her. You stand with her." They're talking about going to the president but I'm thinking, the students can handle it. The next morning, we go to the president's office and they say, "You can't meet with the president." We won't leave so then a cop comes and the secretary is trying to explain that the president's busy. But the cop spills the beans about other death threats! He tells us about a football player and a board of trustee who got death threats. The students become hysterical because they realize its not isolated. The president ends up coming, he's running game on them and the top head negro is with him. I'm holding my seat, I'm praying. You know, I'm not trying to fuck up my job but if you're running game on these kids. You know damn well other people got death threats. I don't say anything, we leave. As soon as we leave we see a freshman football player, we yell over for him. I say brother, are the football players getting death threats? He's like coach said, you gotta talk to the captains.

We find out all these people been getting death threats. Like prominent people in the Black community. And it's not the hick on the hill. We find out the history of organized hate groups in central Pennsylvania where we are. We find out that Black football players -- quarterbacks been getting death threats. He got death threats, he got death threats, oh

his mom got one. They knew the star player Mark Brown was messing with white girls and they sent him all of the letters saying, "You fuck our white whores, now you can't even win a goddamn football game."

Sankofa started having meetings with the university about the racial climate. We had where we had a forum on it and everybody who'd encountered racism or witnessed it, testified. We had a notary write up what they said. We're pouring libations at this point. We were watching leadership in the making and then we felt like when Blacks become proactive, then we're a racial issue.

It was like an alley-oop from God

So anywhere you go where you start to affirm yourself, this is gonna happen. This is the reaction of white supremacy. So we're kind of realizing that there's always been a history of people standing up about stuff at Mid Atlantic University. We're having these forums and its beautiful. We start having meetings with the university to talk about the kind of changes we can make. One of the professors, an African American studies professor, Dr. Dosier, gives us this document called Diversity Initiatives. It breaks down to us how Mid Atlantic University is under a desegregation mandate for doing like racial shit in terms of faculty recruitment. He says "Use this document to create what you want." So we read through the document and we find out that if we had an allocation. We ran with that.

That was the most powerful Sankofa because we talked about why our education doesn't prepare us to go back to Philly, to go back to Pittsburg, to go back to New York and change our communities. We were prepared to work for white people but we couldn't solve our own shit. This Diversity Document was like an alley-oop from God because it lays out everything for us to map out what we wanted for Black folks like Black people doing research and solving Black people problems. We started meetings with the university

and working with the faculty. Sankofa. We got the community and we got the ancestors with us. And now we're not just reacting. Usually when things happen, we'd react and as soon as the energy goes, it dies down. But now we already have the structure of our organization to bring the community together every week to address a different issue in our community. In our process, we learned about each other and saw our connections. Bougie, dark-skinned, light-skinned, everybody realized we have a collective. It was life-changing.

I'm a teacher and I'm seeing this. We have power that all these senior faculty don't have. And now everybody's coming cause they're seeing all this energy. So, we decide we're gonna use this framework to foster diversity to create a plan. We had brought all these Black people together from the students who were on the executive internship and who knew where the blue money was and the red money was to the to the community to the assimilated black dudes who only messed with white people. So we sat down with the president. And they want to do a poster campaign that's on some "Say no to racism" type shit. That was what they proposed.

He comes in, we're in the cultural center, the Dr. King cultural center and we've been praying. He comes in and all these elders just shrink. I mean its people from my church all of them shrink in the presence of this white man. And I'm watching them. So he takes, he gives us a speech about his family from South Africa. Because of apartheid they left, he just goes through this schpeel but it's so fake. And I just watched everybody get paralyzed man. So we start the meeting. Um, they present, they got his head negro with him. They present the poster campaign. We listen. We shoot it down. My students start talking about our plans. And we pull out the framework to foster diversity and then he

starts running game on them how he can't do this because the faculty senate. And he's running game and they're shrinking and I lose it. We're so tight and so organized, and then we hold hands with them and pray. And they're pissed but they gotta pray. They end up signing this document, next day, front page, students teach us about race. Local news. Now my kids are heroes. Now I'm not fired. I can't be, my kids are heroes. So, the white kids are involved and they're all like "dude, thank you." So it turns into this beautiful thing.

Christmas vacation comes, I go home to California. And I make a decision that I'm gonna go to the end of the year to get the, the changes that we want. At the time, my wife was living in DC, interning with the Department of Justice. A group of us had decided we were gonna start our non-profit and do like this DC teachers program. So I was just gonna go hard this term and fuck it, leave.

I come back next semester and we started meeting with the faculty senate every week to talk about the implementation of these changes. We also invite the younger students to sit around the outer table. We wanted the young students to see. Everything is going well and we're working on this plan. We end up with a meeting with the president. It's getting closer to the end. Then the president comes out his face and reneges on the whole shit. We decide we're gonna go to the legislative black caucus in Harrisburg. Before we leave, the Black faculty come to us and say that we're making them look bad, that they're gonna take what they already have

We end up going and before we get ready to go, some of the Black faculty came in and tried to talk us out. They said, "You making us look bad, they gon take what we got." On some slave shit. Sankofa turns into a fight and half of us leave. We didn't even do our communal affirmation together. We get there and first we had a meeting with Senator Lena

Smith through Mama Price. She thinking we just gon be some angry black people but we had created these packets with all our benchmarking, all our pictures, all our articles and our plan. She watched the kids present for about forty seconds and then she leaves to get all the Black legislatures. Senator Howard walked and he bugged out because we had done all this work. When he gets to the death threats, he ends up ripping a whole in the president's Graham ass. He told him he will hold up all funding. The whole incident ended up being in the paper.

When I get back to school, they threatened to write me up because I'd brought students to the meeting. Senator Howard told me to keep doing what I'm doing and if I want a raise, I've got it. So then, I basically don't have a boss because my supervisor was a white woman who respected it. They knew it was coming, they knew it. It was just real weird.

What I learned in that experience that I think is most related to who I am now is that I watched all these Black professors, all these black established people in the face of some real shit, that were just slaves. I was learning about slavery and I just got this realization, that we are still slaves. What does it matter to gain all of this just to see all these Black people cower? It just fucked me up.

At the end of the year, everything is on board. The administration was going to sign off on the seven million dollars. Everything is good. I'm bout to leave the school and on my way to DC to go to my interview for the DC teaching fellows when I get a call from Charles. Kendra got another death threat and somebody got killed.

We turned around, came back to the school and everybody's crying. It's crazy. The note said, "Check the mountains. The nigger put up one hell of a fight and nobody even

misses him. The nigger buck, we told you, we warned you. Do you think those niggers from Harrisburg can help you. Parish the thought." Mark Parish was one of the senators. These muthafuckas knew everything. The note also said, "We know where the cameras are. We watch you three, four times a day with your monkey bodyguards." The police begin an investigation and go search the mountain for about an hour but they didn't find anything so they called off the investigation.

At this point, Kendra started wearing a bullet proof vest to school and she's got security. The student leaders decide to shut down the scrimmage football game the following day in protest. We get there and we're all wearing black. There are like 50,000 people in the stands. We sat behind the goal post and a whole line of cops was in front of us because they know we're gonna do something. As soon as the national anthem starts playing, the officers stood up, turned and looked at the flag. That was our moment and we jumped down onto the field. The police follow us down and they began to handcuffing us. As we're getting arrested, I'm yelling, "Be real, Larry, tell the truth!" because he knows he's received death threats and he's the star player. After the game, he was interviewed and he said he stands with us. All twenty six of us ended up getting arrested. The game was shut down.

Because of the football game being shut down, the administration realizes that it is going to be a big public deal and they announce a march against hate. We have a rally and there are like thousands and thousands of people. We bring our own bullhorns. We get there first, pour libation and pray. We decide we're not gonna leave until the administrations signs our document for the millions of dollars, and then we'll march. The nation of Islam comes and Minister Nelson, he ends up being the dude to broker us to go

back to the Robeson center and have a meeting. Even though they signed the document, they now say they can't give us the money. The students yelled "We will stay!" and they went to go get their sleeping backs. It ends up being a 7-day village. Every hour on the hour, we do a communal affirmation. The white kids get a hold of corporate sponsorships to bring us any food we want. It became a cultural exchange with African dancers and white kids doo-wopping in the lobby.

The last night I was ever a house negro, I still worked for them. And I always thought I was special because I had the master recipe because I could go in both worlds and it was working. I was like, they gave me full autonomy. They trusted me. Gave me full autonomy. I pretty much made my job description. Haroon was the radical. But I thought we could wheel and deal and just that night when we took over that building and my boss told me I was fired, I just remember just praying. And just being like, I was with the amazing students. Nate and all these young like that, I felt like that was where I was supposed to be. I felt like God. This is God. Like that was bigger than this. That's why I came anyway. I didn't know I was gonna lose my job but I came for some revolutionary purpose. And I just remember seeing the kids at the table. There's a picture of me. They had all at the table. I had a tie on and I ain't never worn a tie since. This is 2006. And I this tie on and I'm watching them. Coach is. We've practiced. I'm waiting on everybody to say the right thing. And, the whole black community is behind me and I just remember the freedom. I remember after that night looking at the paper and students teach us about racism! I just remember. I took the day off. And I remember it was the first time I felt free. Because even being in a college town, I still felt like with Nate and them I couldn't hang out. I felt like I had to be like a hermit. Like this church, black community. I remember

after that night, I realized there was this whole other world. I just realized I could start rapping again. I used to be very conservative, shirt and tie. Um, and I think that night it just showed me that the freedom I could have with god and my people was more valuable than these white people. And even my professional career. And I always kind of negotiated. But that night was the last night I was a house negro. I haven't worked for anybody ever since. And I remember it like it was yesterday.

But inside the Dr. King center, it was a little more serious. We were trying to negotiate terms with the administration and it was the 7th day of protest. All of sudden they get a call, they say they have to leave and watch the news. We all went to go watch the big screen -- they find the body of a Black man. It went from student activism to people throwing up and crying. Kendra gets another letter threatening Black youth with bombs at graduation.

The whole changed. But the next day they sign the document and give us the seven million dollars for our grant. It was time to go home. But because we'd been arrested, they had put our names and addresses in the paper. Now we can't go home. Even our roommates have to move out.

The Black Panther party came back but before they meet us, they bring bullets and have a press conference. In the press conference, they say they're gonna shoot up any crackers if they mess with our kids. They'd gone to Walmart and bought all the ammunition. We ended up leaving town with armed Black Panthers stopping traffic as we drove out of town. We had to hide out and stay in white churches right outside the city. Then I moved to DC.

I couldn’t medicate those fucking black kids

In Pittsburgh and started Sankofa -- a nonprofit organization. We took that model. I grew my locks and got a guitar. We started working in universities and doing the workshops. We took jobs at group homes that we worked at from Thursday through Saturday so that we could work for free during the week. During the week we did the Sankofa's at University of Pitt, Chatham and Carnegie-Mellon. I remember we were working like 30-40 hours a week. We was grinding. We had a high school we took over: Westinghouse high school.

And I spent two years in Pittsburgh, really dark years, to be very honest with you. Really depressed. I got heavily immersed and studying the Christian church and Constantine and the root of it. I wondered how could a community of so many strong black people be so enslaved? I started studying Egyptian histories. I just went through life, became a vegetarian and really immersed myself in introspection. I ended up losing my job with the group home cause I could not medicate those fucking black kids. All the white kids were like really autistic and needed shit but the black kids just had post-traumatic slave syndrome. I'd be there on our shift and we’re making music and healing and building family. When I’d leave, I’d find out that Xiomara got in a fight with the white girl and is now in the psychiatric ward doped up. So we were seeing that. I was seeing that and learning from it and I realized, we don't need to medicate these kids. If we use music and talk to her, we find out that she misses her mom and her grandma. We don't have to medicate. I went to the doctor and he looked at me like I was crazy. But that's when I learned about the pharmaceutical game and that dude had a serious contract. I watched these kids come in with low self-esteem and leave 100 pounds heavier and esteem ten times

lower and about ten other problems. One of my students committed suicide. Takara. She hung herself. That was a really powerful experience.

At the high school we were working in, the students started getting pissed off cause they realized they weren't really learning shit in school. We were running Sankofa with like fifty kids and really building. The teachers got mad and told us we couldn't come back. So the students started a fire in the building.

When I lost both those jobs, I became homeless for a little while. I was living out of my Jeep. One of my little brothers I met from Sankofa let me stay with him. I left my job on some principle shit. And then I'd go to interviews and not but want the job. My whole life, I could always impress some white people and get a job but now I got locks and now you can tell I don't wanna work for you. It was dark and melancholy. A liberating but really dark period. Our energy was so aggressive and so clear but there was a lot of resentment for the positivity we were getting back from the young kids. And I'm finding myself beefing with the elders who are trying to like check me. Finally after two years in Pittsburgh, my wife came back. Sankofa had been established so we decided we were gonna start a chapter in New York.

I applied for the New York Teaching Fellows to really just escape Pittsburgh and to try and get a job until I could get Sankofa set up. My wife had already started Sankofa at NYU. I didn't want to be a teacher. I knew I couldn't be a teacher. I figured I'm gonna get another Master's. I went with that attitude to my interview. My resume is African-centered everything but the Fellows recruited me. So I'm like, what the fuck? I walk into this school building and my attitude is "I'm a be. If I can't be free here, I'm not gonna be here. I'm gonna just let it be known who I am take it or leave it. I don't wanna work with you if you

don't wanna work with me." I go in there and I see Egyptian pictures when I walk in. I saw white teachers with t-shirts that said "Down with Capitalism."

I sit down in the interview and they say, "If you could have the ideal school, what would it look like?" And I'm like, seriously. About halfway through my explanation, their body language says I hired myself. It was a fit. They'd seen Sankofa.

I was brought in as a special ed teacher. They let me come in and right off the bat and incorporate Sankofa. I created my curriculum: Slavery in America. It really just became my test ground. Right from the jump, it was a perfect fit. It was the first place I could work that I could love my kids and get paid. I was doing that for free before and now they gave me a class to teach. They used their electives strategically instead of rushing history. I never planned to be a teacher. I was just gonna be there two years because this school allowed me to be me.

I don't remember anybody's name from my teacher education. I just remember going into this program already still in my trauma and taking a class on diversity and one on issues in special education. We were reading about Ming culture in special ed. I was like, "What about my Black kids?" I know my community. We got issues being labeled as special ed. Every time I would bring it up, she would shut it down. She always wanted to talk about Ming dynasty.

At this point, I had already created a research institute so I'm going into the program in my mind thinking, "Professor, I'm way ahead of you." Looking back, I was a little arrogant. I was already at my school and it's this beautiful place then I was taking these classes about how Ming culture didn't trust medicines. I had just gone through this stuff in Pittsburgh dealing with family members who didn't want their kids medicated and

being blocked out. I'm bringing up all this shit in class because these teachers were working with Black kids and they need to know their issues, not the fucking the .2% Ming culture. I was always bringing up that Black folks don't trust medicine either. I talked about the Tuskegee experiment and I brought in article about AIDS testing on kids in Harlem. Everyday I'd have class after class. In my mind, I know more than teacher. I had just gotten twelve professors jobs at Mid Atlantic University. I know my shit. So one day I get to class and the professor says that the students were uncomfortable with me and she had to ask me not to be there. She said she knew I knew the material and that I was gonna get a good grade but that the students felt like I was judging them. I went H.A.M. I checked her and said the only reason she had to do that was because she was culturally incompetent. If she had been doing her job and addressing the issues in special education, I wouldn't have had to bring shit up. But I have to cause I love my people and I live with my people and these people haven't even been introduced in the class. I had to do it to save my people. The students respected me cause they knew I knew my shit. I had to stop going to class. She just did not want me there because she couldn't teach her class but really she didn't know what she was talking about.

<u>Let's give them two to three hours of touching their souls</u>

My story is very consistent with the research in regards to little black kids and school until about fourth or fifth grade. They don't see themselves in the curriculum. Its not culturally relevant, it's not practical. Football, if it wouldn't have been for that I could have been a brother that just, you know ... fell off. My students know my story because I always feel like I missed out on high school because I didn't see myself in it. Some of my friends are dead. Sometimes we try to be extra hard. I just watched a whole generation in California, kill each other over, you know Blood and Crip shit.

When I left higher ed, I kind of went on a death wish. I thought, "I'ma go get my people. I refuse to be scared of my people." What I found out was, our young boys are so hungry for manhood. I thought there was gonna be resistance. But my biggest problem is not having enough time to. I almost like feel like I'm playing favorites. Black boys are so receptive to Black men who aren't scared of them. Whether it's a crack dealer, a teacher or coach. Black boys are hungry to be black men and to learn about how to be black men. I worked with kids straight from Rikers. All we gotta do is create right mechanism. Our kids are very gettable. But I don't know that we'll ever be able to do it with their money. Even with the shift to the Common Core stuff, teaching to the test, we're not getting the best of their energy. At best, they're getting through it. And those of us who get 4.0's, end up being ambassadors for self-hatred. I mean, I swear we have more PhD's, a Black president, more than we've ever had and there's more incarceration. Ninety-nine percent of the people that we know, don't get paid by serving Blacks. You know, we work for white people. Even when the education system works, it doesn't.

To me, there's a distinct difference between training and education. Training is teaching you how to do something. A well-trained dog can stand on one foot, and go fetch, be on the Jay Leno show and get a standing ovation. An educated dog is not gonna let you sell their puppies. An educated dog can get food for herself. Take an educated dog, bring 'em to your house and he's gonna bite you up to go get their food. Education is interaction. But part of the reason why we have all these black professors and people who have all these degrees but no progress is because we have well-trained people who can work for people but don't know how to create solutions to our problems. I traveled the country with college students. Ninety-nine percent of the college students we talked to are of no use to

our community and they're not even preparing to be. They're gonna go work for white people. They have no idea that they are the leaders they're so desperately looking for. They're in business and don't know anything about how to raise property values in Black communities or how to reinvest. They can work for Charles Schwabb but if you ask them how much money did Black communities spend last year, they've never thought of it. They've never studied how Marcus Garvey got millions of dollars in the '20s. Some Black educators, they've never read Carter G. Woodson, John Henry Clark. We don't know anything. We know how to work for white people and how to solve their problems. But we offer no solutions to ours. And that's the difference between training and education. So a lot of people are trainers and you need trainers. I always said the ideal school would have three hours of training, three hours of educere. That was what I was hoping to create at my school and in staff development.

Okay, we live in America, we gotta pass the Regents. I want kids to graduate. That's important too. But you can regurgitate that shit. My kids do that with the music. All that is memorization. That's not even critical thought. Let's give them three hours and teach them how to pass the test but then let's give them two to three hours of touching their soul. Change the way you see your sister. Change the ways you see yourself.

I had a student this year, earlier in the semester, we were doing post-traumatic slave syndrome; dealing with the importance of knowing the roots. They were understanding how past relates to present and we were going through it. The next day she came to school and she wrote a reflection. She said that she finally understood that her dad was a part of this generational cycle of post-traumatic slave syndrome. That's why he's so angry. Her dad was angry and he was a slave. And she was able to see like,

generational slave anger that's being passed down. Any psychiatrist will tell you that any healing starts with a candid confrontation with our past. If there is to be reconciliation, there must first be truth. I'm able to see that particularly with our black kids. At my school, it's so many different dynamics and sometimes I feel like I'm more of a preacher in that regard.

I remember during my first year teaching, we were dealing with this young brother, Maurice. We were watching something about slaves getting abused and he asked if he could talk to me after class. He took me to my office and he told me he'd been tortured in some street shit. I remember this stuff we were talking about was hitting all these Black kids. And my Black girls would just want to stay after. They wouldn't have anything to say, they just felt pretty because I was teaching them that we've been taught that Black was ugly but really, that's because of white standards of beauty. And they just wanted to stay. They didn't want to go to the next classes.

Then another one of my students identified the question on the Regents that asked students to state two ways imperialism benefitted Africans. She was like "Fuck this shit! They would never ask a Jew state two ways the Holocaust benefitted him." She protested and the kids got together and the press came. It turned into this big thing and the city had to apologize to the kids. It was like a big deal and they changed the law so that teachers could go see the exam before they released it.

All my highlights from teaching have been more about activism. One day, my kids were on their way to a funeral. There was a kid in the neighborhood Flex, who got murdered, a Blood. He wasn't one of our students but all our students grew up with him. A lot of our kids were devastated. We knew it was some gang shit. But you know that's kind of

iffy because on the outside it's a gang but to the kids they're like, "Flex, no, he's dancing." Everybody's kind of affiliated through a cousin. One of our students, Asher, led this whole procession. He was a guy we were grooming in Sankofa. He was one of our student leaders. They had organized all these kids in the neighborhood to go the funeral. There was parents and they had a note from the school for permission. On the way to the funeral, helicopters swooped down and the cops arrest them all. They let the women, the parents and the people under 18 go. But then they took Asher and 32 of my boys to jail. They kept em in for two days. One of my kids had an asthma attack. It was crazy. The kids end up calling us the second day at the school like "Yo! We never made it to the funeral. We got locked up." We rushed down there. We called Charles Barron and all our people. The cops find out that the kids have support so they start making up bogus charges. To make a long story short, we spent the whole summer, me and my wife and my boy Trevan, who was working for the New York Times got this whole campaign started. It was called the Brooklyn 32. We helped with the investigation. We found out from all the people in the community that the kids weren't doing anything. They had prayed and they had "Rest in Peace" shirts. We get all this evidence and we had eight witnesses in the New York Times.

It was a high profile case. My kids were on the Sharpton show, running press conferences, having town hall meetings. They were doing presentations on "Stop and Frisk." It turns into this beautiful thing and the kids were getting this Citywide platform. They started this organization: Student Coalition Against Racial Profiling. They had a website. It was beautiful. It was like a practical application of what we've been learning. Like word. It was like an alley-oop. They had court-appointed attorneys but there were eight witnesses in the New York Times and five front-page stories. The times called it the

worst racial profiling case in decades. The kids lead a protest with 100 Blacks Law Enforcement, Charles Barron, Black New Yorkers for Educational Excellence to the 83rd precinct. They kicked the barricades down and accused the police. It was like, on some biblical shit.

Six months later the trial, the trial starts. It just so happens that one day I'm watching Roots with my kids. During the scene where Kunta Kinte gets broken, I get a call that I gotta go to the court. I get there and I'm like the only adult there cause we're having a press conference at noon. I don't really wanna be there and I'd had to leave school early and I'm tired already. The judge comes out and it's a black judge.

The judge calls for witnesses and the defense attorney says "No witnesses." I'm like, "What the fuck is this, a strategy?" And all my kids' parents are there and they're kind of bamboozled. They don't know how to talk to them. They don't know what's going on. Just kind of trusting the attorneys. So, the recess happens and I go in the hall and I'm like asking the attorney "How come you're like there's no witnesses? There are eight in the New York Times. You didn't talk to any of the witnesses?" I'm thinking, "We did all this muthafuckin' work?" And he's like, "Oh, you got witnesses?" And starts writing and Googling shit. I'm pissed and I'm talking shit. I'm like, "Yo, we pay your salary with our tax dollars." And I'm doing it cause my kids parents are there. I want them to know, like they gotta get to work. We pay their salaries. Why am I getting them to Google?

I get ready to leave and there's a young white woman talking to one of my kid and his aunt and uncle. I was kind of pissed off but I'm listening like, "What the fuck are they doing?" And she's like, "Can I help you?" I'm like, "No I'm just listening. These are my students. I'm helping them." She says, "Well step back." I said, "If they don't want me

here, I'll certainly honor that. But this is my space. I pay for this." She jumps in my face. Now I'm dressed kind of like this, I'm not like in slacks. I'm in jeans. We going back and forth and then I'm like "White lady, get your hand out of my face." So I'm saying it so everybody knows her hands is in my face. It gets broken up, whatever. I go inside the courtroom for the court to start again. I'm sitting when this big old white dude walks in. He's the court officer. He sees another man with dreadlocks in the back, and says "You, out of the courtroom." They're going back and forth cause he don't know what the hell is going on. He was asking, "How you kicking me out the courtroom?" But it hits me that the court officer think he's me. So I get up. They get him to go outside and I meet him outside the door. I'm like "Yo, you got the wrong black man with dreadlocks." It was like damn, racial profiling in a racial profiling case. We're in the front of the doorway in front of the whole court and the parents and the lady that was arguing. I tell the dude again, "You got the wrong black man with dreadlocks. Talk to me." He realizes he fucked up. Now the other dude with locks is like, "I know my rights" and pulls out his backpack. He writes down the officer's badge number and the officer gets mad. The partner shows up and we're still in the doorway but they slam the door shut. Now, they're backs are against the door and we're arguing for him to get in. All of a sudden I feel somebody push me from behind. African instinct kicks in. Like, somebody touches you and when you feel you're in the right, you're going to like prosecute his ass. Before you know it, I turned around and the officer falls. My student Mario and my ex-student Jesus who just ran for state assembly come out. Now there's eight officers and its chaos going down. They got the guns out. It's like a movie. Mario yells, "My teacher!"

We all got locked up. Mario has SAT's in the morning. I'm fucked up thinking, "How am I gonna tell his mom?" He's done everything right. Now we're in the courthouse. Fucked up. We're in their house. Its like a fucking rugby team in there. Bunch of frat boys. I'm thinking of Abner Louima. Luckily, my wife and Charles Barron were there for the press conference. They found out we were locked up. I had to go the hospital and they cuffed me up to the chair right next to the police officer and all the police. I ended up going to jail and spending the night. The next day, my wife hooked it up and like all of fucking Bed-Stuy comes to the court. Michael Warren, Tupac's old attorney, took my case. He comes in the morning and gets us out of jail. I ended up beating the case but for a year and a half while the case was on, I was in the rubber room.

They tried to get me with six felonies. I was out of my school but it was a blessing. The week after I get kicked out of my school, I find out one of my former students from Mid Atlantic University is trying to contact me. He's doing lectures around the country and he wants me to help him consult. So now I'm in the rubber room but he takes me traveling the country with him and I have time to do it. I'm on panels talking about culturally relevant teaching and I have everyday to work on my campaign and work on his speeches. I started my consulting company. It just was a blessing and my student saved me. I used to tell him, he was one of the two most powerful people I met. A long time ago, I was like his superhero. Now he's giving back to me. So I was gone for a year and a half from teaching and it was a blessing.

If you love your kids and are unapologetically black, I don't think you fit in these schools

We were doing a P.D. last year for alternative schools and talking about culturally relevant teaching and this old black man said, "If I taught like that in my school, my

principal would have my neck." It hit me, like, usually I do pd with principals who really genuinely want to see their black boys and their black kids get reached. But I don't believe in the school system. I think we need independent institutions. We built this beautiful legacy at our school and the DOE can walk through and take it away. The joke's on us. I'd rather have my Saturday program and have control of it cause I can do one day of real shit than five days of being an overseer. And I feel like, until we get community control of our schools, I don't think real black men can exist in the school system. I don't know any real black men that brings it real. Cause the reality is that if you bring it real, black boys will respond. I gotta compete with 50 cent. The DOE turned out data and they bringing that shit. So when I talk about my people, I gotta bring that shit.

I know I'm doing good but the DOE doesn't value that. So right now, I went from feeling like, I'm this master teacher to being asked, "How have you improved? Where's your rubric for writing?" I think I've gotten so high on everything else, I've kind of neglected to be I guess as rigorous in other areas. I always kind of felt like a million people can do that shit. There are so few people who could do what I'm doing. So I don't feel like I fit. Maybe I'd be better if I was a counselor who could run groups and then just teach my slavery class. That's what I'm going through now. So I'm phasing out of the schools now.

My colleague, Serafin is one of the few Black men on the Earth, when he talks, I shut the fuck up. Me and him got into a physical fight over him throwing out some of the little brothers last year. They had to break it up. So we been through a lot. It hurts to see him being evaluated. He's the spiritual father of the school for myself included. If he wasn't there, I wouldn't have been able to stay. I think they told him he didn't wait long enough

after he asked a question. Just little technical shit. I see kids coming to the school, thugged out and I see them leave with a father in him and feeling like its cool to be different. All those boys are looking because they see, wow, he can survive in my hood and he can have these white people following him and he can speak well and he still got a little swag. They're analyzing every move. You don't necessarily have to preach. You can put the dirty water next to the clear water. People will drink the clean.

We had these small groups and one of the kids was bragging about selling dope over the summer in the Marcy projects. when they was talking about what they did over the summer. He was bragging and what night. Serafin came heard about it he said, "Some of you have lost your souls." He broke down crack cocaine. He was basically like "How the fuck can you brag about selling crack? I will be here to help you take your soul back." After he gave this speech man the brother George, he came to me. He just said, "Yo brother, I'm sorry for the shit I said." And I remember saying "That brother just spoke the devil out of this kid." Like showed him who he really was. And made him embarrassed to be this thug nigga that he learned to be. If it wasn't for Serafin, I wouldn't have lasted one year in the public schools. He was my protection. When I was angry with the white teacher doing fucked up shit to the kids, you know Serafin was the one who could mediate.

The DOE is changing our school into to a traditional school. Everybody at my school has always known that I wasn't no traditional teacher. If you love your kids and are unapologetically black, I don't think you can exist in these schools. With the direction education is going, they're not thinking about understanding the sociological or psychological issues with our children. The shift that I'm watching take place is everybody's adjusting to the injustice. And, I see myself as somewhat of a liaison. I'm cool

with my kids and I still see it from that perspective. And I see it from the professional perspective. We're in big trouble. There's gonna be more high-stakes testing. More standardized, traditional curriculums. More teaching to the test. More of our kids dropping out. And more potential never tapped. Cause these schools don't get the best of our kids. Our kids grow up way too fast to bullshit. There's a quote "The ability to read awoke inside of me some long dormant craving to be mentally alive." That's Malcolm X. Nas used to have this song called Black Zombies. Walking. Talking. Our kids are zombies. And I don't see the education system being culturally competent or concerned enough to wake them up. I don't even think they wanna wake them up. Like what it takes to wake a kid up is what is getting our schools shut down. I don't mean to be pessimistic but I believe the answer lies within us finding ways to educate our own kids. Finding ways to create institutions that we can control, that we can put our kids through. And I know that just from having Saturday school. Its possible to have a place that kids wanna come to, wanna learn, and there's not that disconnect. I think our schools crush our kids. They have you believing you're stupid if you're not interested. And I believe that most people who go through the educational process to become teachers or professionals in general, they become gatekeepers of the bullshit. They adjust to the injustice. Like right now in my school, there's internal beef with the black teachers over who's rigorous. I mean we have all these external battles but then if you go inside the schools, there's a battle amongst black people. Rigor vs. culture. So I'm not feeling very optimistic about public education but very optimistic in that we have a cure, we just have to find a way to administer it. Cause there's a cure for these boys, I'm clear, I'm clear about that. Each black boy we see is one conversation, one network, one Serafin away from seeing the whole world different.

But we just have to find a way for people to do that and get paid to do it 40 or 50 hours a week and create institutions that can be mass replicated. So that's what I wanna give my next 25 years to.

This situation allowed me to do my non-profit. I was getting paid and the kids was being brought to me. I was able to incorporate Sankofa. It was like a win-win-win-win. Man, maybe I'm a little down on myself right now. I've never been married to the DOE cause I know what happens. I've always had one foot out. I've always been ready. I was taught to be ready. I feel really sorry for Serafin because he's put his life into this school and they can come through and decide you don't have a school anymore. So I'm not very optimistic about having Black male teachers. Like you know, this all male model that's supposed to be working. It's getting the kids who are working and making sure they are doing well but it ain't getting my students. That shit ain't gon' get my students. I do know that if we can create the right mechanism, our black boys and girls are very reachable. Very reachable. We can get them. No question in my mind. We can get the roughest of the roughest. No question. But I just don't know if we can get 'em in their schools.

There's not one person in the world that has the job I want. You know in most fields you can say like this is where I want to be. I don't see anybody doing anything like what I wanna do. Like what I wanna do, I have to create. I feel like higher education is more of a fit for me than high school. But I still wanna work in the schools. I still wanna train teachers. But I don't wanna be a teacher. I do not. I never did.

Byron begins his narrative about his schooling by discussing his placement in an advanced kindergarten class called the "early birds". He learned to read, write and count at an early age because of his older brothers and he initially felt smart in school. However, as

he got older he was moved out of the high-performing class due to his behavior and he began to develop an oppositional stance towards schooling. Byron's home life became more challenging at the same time that he began to realize that he was positively recognized for his athletic ability. He states, "Football kind of saved us all" to refer to the fact that his participation in football along with his brothers was the saving grace that enabled them to make it through school.

Still, Byron's grappling with his racial identity as well as the ways that he was stereotypically cast as a Black jock made his high school experience particularly challenging. These challenges persisted even within his relationships with his White friends as he was often one of the few Black friends they knew. He states, "In the white school as a Black boy, I was like guilty until proven innocent," in reference to the feelings of isolation he experienced as a result of ho he was perceived in his school and his own attempts to assimilate in order to fit in.

Although Byron felt that he had to assimilate to the dominant culture on his university campus, he states, "I can be a nigga on the field" to describe the acceptance of his performance of a Black identity when he played football. And yet when Byron attends a talk by Dr. Nayim Akbar, he realizes that his angst about his identity stemmed from a lack of racial consciousness. "The night that changed my life" was his statement in reference to this awakening that occurred in hearing Dr. Akbar – a night that propelled him forward in his personal and academic development. Soon after, Byron earned his Master's degree and got a job as a staff member in academic affairs. In this role, he was able to maintain employment at the university while supporting younger Black college students to become leaders. In reference to his role, Byron states, "I'm the spook who sat next to the

door" as a way to acknowledge the irony of being a racially conscious person employed in a predominantly White institution. The irony of his role becomes even clearer when he leads his students in a protest against the university for failing to implement a federal desegregation mandate to promote diversity. For Byron, the document "was like and alley-oop from God" because it was the historical document that the students needed to validate their claim that the university take action by implementing measures to diversify the faculty. However, Byron's participation in this protest led to significant upheaval at the campus involving students, faculty, administration, community leaders and hate groups. Along with friends who had also been involved in the protests, Byron was forced to leave the university community and take up residence in Pittsburgh.

Byron settled into his new surroundings, committed to continue the consciousness-raising work that he began at his former university by establishing Sankofa as a non-profit agency. He spent two years conducting free workshops at universities and supported himself by working in a group. However, when it came to fulfilling his duties at the group home, Byron felt strongly that he could not administer psychotropic drugs to the children. He exclaims, "I couldn't medicate those fucking black kids," in reference to his refusal to drug the students he worked with, which led to his dismissal from the group home.

Byron's extensive experiences with schooling, developing his own racial consciousness and being a leader and activist at his university led him to develop a philosophy of education around the concept *educere*. He feels strongly that the teaching day should be split between training students to pass standardized exams and "[giving] them two to three hours of touching their souls." However, Byron argues that the current state of public education and the trends that are likely to persist into the future run counter

to this model—counter to what is best for Black kids. He closes his narrative in stating, “If you love your kids and are unapologetically black, I don’t think you fit in these schools.” For Byron, these schools can’t help Black kids and they don’t work for a racially conscious teacher like him.

Summary

The Black male teachers presented in this chapter—Jamel, Justin, Kamari and Byron—share unique stories about their schooling experiences and becoming educators. Jamel was raised by a single mother, academically tracked in low performing classrooms, and felt stigmatized by poverty as well as by his class placement in his adolescence. After graduating from college, he worked as a computer programmer but felt unfulfilled in his career. Jamel began a teacher education program and became a teacher so that he could set his students on the right path and prevent them from making some of the mistakes that he made as an adolescent. He has been teaching special education for three years and sees himself leaving the field for administration once he gains tenure.

Justin grew up in a two-parent household and had a strong relationship with his father, a basketball coach. He was placed in gifted and talented schools and briefly attended a private school in Long Island. After a discriminatory experience on the basketball team, Justin returned to a public high school and then moved to Florida to pursue an undergraduate degree in criminal justice. An avid songwriter and strong student, Justin balanced his time by studying and engaging recording music. Upon returning to New York after graduation, Justin was unable to find work. He applied to the New York City Teaching Fellows and began teaching math four years ago.

Kamari was adopted by his foster mother – a teacher – at two years old and raised separately from his siblings who were sent to other households. He attended gifted and talented schools and, while performing reasonably well academically, faced discrimination because of his perceived sexual orientation. Kamari felt that he performed his best in small schools with significant teacher support however, he graduated high school early and enrolled in a large, Ivy League university in upstate New York. His time at that university was marked by feelings of isolation and loneliness but he suggests that his drive enabled him to complete his degree in Africana studies. Upon graduation, Kamari was encouraged to apply to the New York City Teaching Fellows by a friend and realized as he was writing the application that he wanted to become a teacher. Kamari has been teaching math for four years in the Bronx and is ambivalent about continuing in education.

Byron is a former athlete raised in Northern California by his mother and grandmother. The youngest of three, he played football throughout elementary and high school and feels like the sport was his focus rather than school. Throughout his academic career, Byron suggests that he did the minimum work to get by until he heard a talk by a motivational speaker that changed his life. Byron completed his undergraduate degree in Northern California and then earned a scholarship to attend a higher education program in Pennsylvania. During his time at this university, he earned his degree and became an employee in office for diversity and retention initiatives. Moreover, Byron became an activist in a Black student group and led students to engage in a series of protests around the allocation of land grant funds for diversity at the university. A series of hate crimes took place as the Black student group got closer to getting their demands met and Byron ultimately made the decision to leave the campus once the deal between his organization

and the school administration was finalized. Upon leaving the university, Byron worked as a non-profit educator before applying to the New York City Teaching Fellows as a means to gain the income he needed to expand his initiative. Now in his tenth year teaching special education, Byron is adamant about leaving the classroom and asserts that he never wanted to become a teacher anyway.

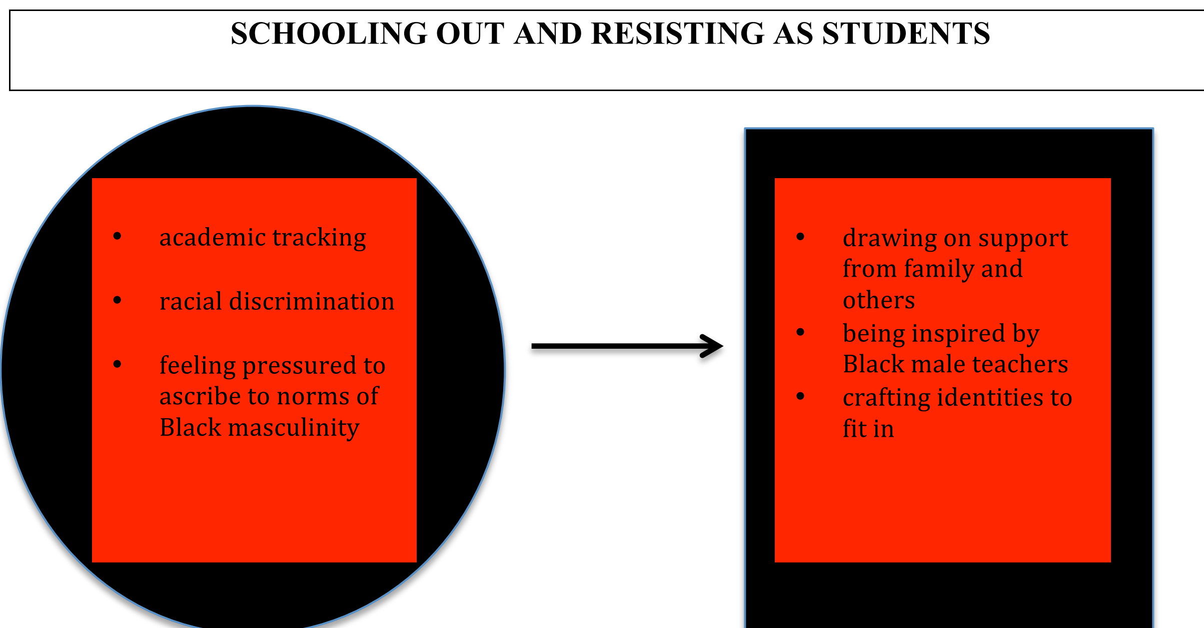
In conclusion, Jamel, Justin, Kamari and Byron, share unique stories about their pathways to becoming teachers and their current lives as teachers. However, several shared themes emerged in their narratives as well as those of the other four participants. The following two chapters examine the continuous themes that emerged in the narratives of the Black male teachers and analyze the ways in which the Black male teachers in this study language, resist and respond to their experiences.

<u>Chapter 5</u>

<u>Schooled Out as students</u>

Whereas the preceding chapter provided the unique narratives of four participants as a means of demonstrating the range of complexity of the negative experiences of the participants, this chapter examines their shared experiences while theorizing what I call "schooling out." Their shared experiences with the four components of *schooling out* as students (see Figure Three) are: 1) academic tracking; 2) racial discrimination; and 3) feeling pressured to ascribe to norms of Black masculinity. The narratives reveal that the challenges they experienced made a personal impact on their lives and they responded with resistance and resiliency. The participants drew strength from the support of their personal networks, including family and peers. They were also inspired by Black male teachers. These personal networks encouraged them to be determined, adapt to various contexts, be disciplined and maintain religious faith. Furthermore, the participants crafted identities in order to resist being *schooled out as students* and successfully navigate the educational system as in Figure Three.

Figure Three: Schooled Out as students



The process of *schooling out* applies to Black male students and is the primary theoretical framework for this chapter. Further, I employ Black languaging as an analytic tool to probe the ways in which the participants construct their counter-narratives. I start by exploring the participants' schooling out as students, focusing on three themes that emerged from their narratives: 1) academic tracking; 2) racial discrimination and 3) feeling pressured to subscribe to stereotypical norms of Black masculinity.

Schooled Out as Students

Academic Tracking

Academic tracking emerged as a continuous theme across narratives. Jamel, Justin, Byron and Kamari all discuss their formal placements in classrooms based on academic performance as well as the informal messages that were communicated about their intelligences. Although they shared similar experiences, the ways in which the participants understood academic tracking diverged. I rely here on their narratives to illustrate how this is so.

For example, when Justin entered the first grade, his teacher attempted to place him in a special setting as a result of his reading ability. Justin shares:

> I had a teacher named Ms. Drake and she thought that I should be referred for special education services because I couldn't sound out words. My dad he got upset and said to her, 'There's no way that Justin should be in special ed! If anything he's probably bored.' So one day, I remember the principal brought me into the lunchroom. He said, 'Justin, your dad says that you read the sports section of the newspaper every single day to him, is that true?' and I said, 'Yeah.' I opened up the

> paper and I read right through. I guess I did pretty well because after that… I went to the second grade classroom for reading. The principal…recommended that I transfer to a school that had gifted programs…I ended up going to that school…and doing extremely well over there.

In this segment of Justin's narrative, we learn that Ms. Drake erroneously called for his placement in a special education setting when in fact, Justin was reading at a more advanced level than most children in the first grade. His father's advocacy on his behalf played a central role in resolving the matter as this initiated the informal reading assessment by the principal using the newspaper. At the end of this segment, Justin's discussion of his transfer to the gifted school seems to suggest his (and his family's) satisfaction with this resolution.

Kamari's story about his experience with academic tracking follows a similar pattern to Justin's. His mother was a teacher herself who advocated for him to be placed in a high performing class. He explains:

> I can think back as far as elementary school…My mom told me, 'You may be in the Two's class and it's higher performing.' That in and of itself made me feel like a better student.

Kamari suggests that knowing he would be in a more advanced class boosted his self esteem. However, like Justin, Kamari's academic ability was called into question by one of his teachers. He shares a conversation between himself and the English teacher:

> She said, 'I wanna speak to you about this…I don't think you wrote this'…She really didn't know my writing…Once she realized that I was able to express myself in that way, that made me feel like, you know, that actually became a compliment.

Similar to Justin's experience, Kamari's teacher seemingly assumed that he was not capable of completing a literacy-based skill and she suggested that he had plagiarized the assignment because of the high quality of his writing. Kamari seems to excuse his teacher's error when he suggests that she wasn't familiar with his writing. Then, like Justin, he concludes this segment of his narrative on a positive note by taking pride in the fact that his writing was mistaken for a plagiarized product.

Taken together, Justin and Kamari similarly recounted their stories with positive outcomes: Justin moved on to a gifted school because of his superior reading ability and Kamari saw his teacher's accusation of plagiarism as a compliment. Further, Justin and Kamari similarly crafted their stories about academic tracking using boastful descriptors and inner dialogue—patterns associated with Black languaging. Both participants employ the terms "top," "extremely well," and "better" to describe their academic performances in school and exude confidence about their intelligences in their speech patterns. They also utilize statements from other people in their lives in inner dialogue to substantiate their claims. For example, Kamari recalls his mother's words, "You may be in the Two's class and it's higher performing," to suggest that early in his academic career he was recognized by others for being smart. Similarly, Justin restates his principal's question, "…You're dad says you read the sports section of the newspaper every single day to him, is that true?" to show that his father's assertion that he could read was taken seriously. What is interesting to note is that the participants' use of Black languaging is limited to boasting and inner dialogue and neither employ significant features of African American Language in this part of their storytelling. This is not to suggest that their counterstories are any less *Black* or authentic without AAL. However, their respective decisions to language without AAL in

this segment of their narratives could reflect an internal association between the Language of Wider Communication (LWC) and being perceived intelligent. Perhaps, though what is more significant about Justin and Kamari's sense-making and narration of their experiences with academic tracking is that their stories counter the dominant narrative about Black male youth, defiance, misbehavior and punishment. These are stories of advocacy, calling out deficit thinking by teachers and gaining access to the appropriate educational resources for advancement.

But what happens to the young Black man who is labeled "slow" or "bad" and tracked into low-performing classes and relegated in this placement for the remainder of his schooling experience? Jamel and Byron's experiences with academic tracking tell that story and are discussed here.

Jamel seems to have been negatively impacted by his placement in low-performing classes and his experience continued to resonate as he retold his story.

He shares:

> I was never a bright student…I remember Ms. Armstrong, one day she was like, 'What's the difference between us and [the top class]?' And I said, 'We're not smart enough!'…I always wanted to be in the top class, but I never made it.

This passage demonstrates how Jamel has internalized feelings of intellectual inadequacy as a result of academic tracking into lower classes. Despite his success as a graduate and career as a teacher, his narrative reveals his negative associations with schooling as result of being cast as unintelligent. In his narrative, the term "never" represents the absolute identification as dumb—as opposed to bright—while "always" refers to the persisting but unattainable goal of gaining recognition for being smart through class placement. And,

similar to the others, this section of narrative is structured around a retelling of a dialogue about perceptions of academic tracking. Ms. Armstrong is presented as asking the question about the distinction between the high and low class as a means to motivate the class—potentially in expectation of the choral response "Nothing!" However, Jamel's reply triggers empathy towards him on the part of the listener for both the pithiness of his answer to his teacher and the depth of sadness that persists into his adult life as a result of the internalization of stigmas of stupidity that are manifested in academic tracking.

Like Justin and Kamari, Byron was initially tracked into high-performing classes in elementary school. However, once he entered puberty, he was moved to the lower classes. He explains:

> I went from the top class to the average class…I always knew if I tried, I could do good…The expectation was, 'You a dumb nigga' and I was like, 'Word up. I can do the bare minimum.'

Similar to Jamel, Byron talks openly about the impact that being tracked into low-performing classes had on his self-perceptions of intelligence. However, rather than sadness, Byron assertively expresses his awareness as an adolescent that he was perceived as unintelligent by his teachers and co-opts this label as a means to both validate his oppositional stance towards schooling and rationalize his lack of effort.

Byron's narrative demonstrates the impact his placement in the lower-performing class and his sense-making of this shift upon his self-esteem. He recalls his internal dialogue as a young Black boy demoted from the high class to the low class for disobedience and in this dialogue, Byron interprets his teachers' negative opinion of him. Byron's crafts his narrative to suggest that his lack of motivation can be attributed to his

teachers' expectations of his intelligence. Because they expected him to be simply "a dumb nigga" because he played sports, Byron suggests he misbehaved in class and lost interest in school. Instead of working as hard as he could, Byron responded to this perceived lowered expectation by doing "the bare minimum" in class—even though he knew he was smart and could do better if he tried. Thus, the impact of academic tracking on Byron is ultimately a lack of motivation to perform to the best of his ability.

Taken together, Jamel and Byron's experiences with academic tracking diverge from those of Justin and Kamari. Foremost, once tracked into low-performing classes, they remained in those placements throughout their schooling. Secondly, neither participant spoke of the process that led to their placement or receiving additional school-based support to move out of these placements. Further, unlike Justin and Kamari who were seemingly satisfied with the resolution to their experiences, the emotional impact of being categorized as unintelligent continued to linger for Jamel and Byron.

Looking across all four narratives, similar counterstories about academic tracking emerge. All four participants were at one time assessed for their intelligence by a teacher and subsequently labeled questioned about his academic ability. Their experiences align with a vast body of literature on Black male youth as targets for placement in low-performing classes based on racially-based assumptions about intelligence and behavior (A. Ferguson, 2001; Lamelle, 2009; Noguera, 2008).

However, the ways in which the participants understood their experiences and crafted their counter-narratives aligned with their placement in either a high-performing class or a low-performing class. At first glance academic tracking as a component of *schooling out* for Black male youth is seemingly a finding that negatively impacted those

participants who were placed in lower-performing classes. However, I suggest the placements by design were arbitrary and exclusionary and thus unfair for all students. While Justin and Kamari did benefit by being tracked into high-performing classes, this placement came at the expense of students such as Jamel and Byron. And while Justin and Kamari gained confidence in their academic abilities, this placement did not shield them from being further probed about their intelligences at later points in their schooling. For For Jamel and Byron, lingering emotional upset about these experiences was evident in their words and emotional expressions.

Ultimately, *schooling out* through academic tracking consists of the formal placements and informal messages about intelligence that the participants were subjected to as Black male youth in urban schools. This aspect of the schooling out process is but one of the subtle ways Jamel, Justin, Kamari and Byron experienced racial prejudice. In the following section, I discuss how incidents of blatant racial discrimination emerged as a theme in the narratives of Justin and Byron.

Racial Discrimination

Both Justin and Byron recounted experiences with explicit racial discrimination as high school students. Justin describes how he was excluded from athletics along with other Black male students while Byron recalls a racially prejudicial classroom teacher. I discuss this in more detail in the following paragraphs. Like with academic tracking, the ways in which these participants language their shared experiences diverge and align with their individual stances. How I interpreted these differences using Black languaging is the second analytical framework in this section and appears after the discussion of the events. First, I turn to Justin's experience with his athletic team.

Justin shares:

> There were three African-American players on the team, myself and two others. In practice, we'd outplay everybody by a significant margin. But in terms of games, we didn't play a lot. There were a couple of times where our team was up by thirty or forty points and…us? We're still on the…bench...it was basically set up for them to get all the minutes and all the shots…I could probably say that affected me in the classroom sometimes as far as not performing to the best of my abilities…I had never experienced racial prejudice up until that point.

In this segment of Justin's explains the circumstances surrounding his lack playing time on his basketball team. Regardless of the playing abilities of the Black athletes or the game score, Justin suggests that the team was designed so that the White players got all of the playing time. In Justin's statement, "I could probably say that affected me in the classroom sometimes as far as not performing to the best of my abilities," *that* refers to the lack of playing time discussed in the prior sentence but the relationship between playing time and academic performance is unclear. Like other parts of Justin's narrative, he avoids expressing negative emotions. Did Justin feel that his *dissatisfaction* with his lack of playing time caused him to *lose focus* in school and perform poorly during this time? Did he feel like stating this outright would be perceived as making excuses? In the moment, as I listened to Justin recall his story, this is how I understood his statements. However, I also recognized his vulnerability and humility and I made the decision not to probe further—a matter I return to in the final chapter of this study. While there is some ambivalence in Justin's statement and my interpretation leaves unanswered questions, what clearly emerges from this section was that Justin was subject to discriminatory practices

along with other African-American males on his basketball team and he understood these practices as having a negative impact on his schoolwork.

Similarly, Byron identifies racial discrimination as a factor that negatively impacted his performance in school. He explains:

> At the high school I went to we used to have these culture days in history class. So one day would be Greek culture day and the white kids who were Greek would bring their families dishes. And then it would be Italian day and they'd bring their Italian dishes. One day, the only other Black kid in the class, Chris, made a comment and asked, 'When are we gonna have an African culture day? A Black culture day?' And the teacher said, 'It's too hard to kill a wino.' And the whole class fell out. I remember I didn't have the words. But after than, I failed. I stopped going to class. I was ineligible for basketball because I didn't pass his class.

In this section of his narrative, Byron shares that his high school history teacher mocked African culture when asked if Black students would be represented during the class culture day. Byron again employs inner dialogue to recount the conversation between the teacher and another student whereby the teacher seems to suggest that Black people are substance abusers. Although he recalls that other students found this comment humorous and "fell out," Byron implies that he was so embarrassed that he couldn't speak up. Furthermore, he adds that this incident impacted his academic standing thus stopping him from being able to participate in the basketball team.

Taken together, Justin and Byron share similar experiences with racial discrimination and by coincidence, participation on the basketball team play a central role in both stories. Justin recognized racial bias as a factor in his lack of playing time while

Byron identified his teacher's racial prejudice as a factor that led him to stop coming to class—a decision that would lead to his ineligibility to play basketball. Through these sections of their narratives, their sense-making of these incidents emerged most significantly from emotional expression rather than words. For example, Justin paused several times, breathed deeply and looked directly at me with his hands folded while he spoke. This was markedly different from other moments during his oral storytelling as he typically spoke rather quickly without pause and while exuding confidence, avoided direct eye contact. I gathered that he was disappointed by these circumstances as they seemed to interrupt his sense of equality and meritocracy. I also gleaned a sense of Byron's understanding from his experience through observation of his emotional state. Like during other times during his storytelling, Byron shared passionately: he spoke rapidly and moved his hands vigorously as he spoke.. From this, I got the sense that he was angered by the racially prejudiced comment but he had a wisdom about how these events fit into the larger context of Black male schooling. Thus, racial discrimination as component of *schooling out* impacted both Justin and Byron by preventing full participation in athletics for the former and discouraging attendance altogether in the case of the latter. The third component of schooling out as students—feeling pressured to ascribe to norms of Black masculinity—is the topic to which I now turn in the following section.

Feeling pressured to ascribe to norms of Black masculinity

The Black men in this study shared their experiences with feeling pressured to ascribe to norms of Black masculinity. Kamari was made fun of for his perceived sexual This section is about how this pressure shaped his life.

Beginning in elementary school, Kamari recalls that he was bullied by other kids about his sexual orientation. He explains:

> I was called names about being gay like "fag." They used those words. My name at the time was Paul. So they called me Paula. I changed my name to Kamari when I was twelve.

Kamari's peers teased him for being gay by mimicking his name. He reiterates the transgression of his peers by emphasizing, "They used those words." This suggests that he, understandably, felt very insulted by the name-calling. Further, after Kamari explains that he was called "Paula", he begins to discuss his name change to Kamari. Seemingly, his act of changing his own name was a way to reclaim his agency and assert himself.

Although Kamari was the only participant to specifically name his ostracism as a result of his perceived sexual identity, it is worth noting here that other participants alluded to feeling pressured to live up to a raced and gendered Black male identity. At times, they seem to have internalized these norms and appropriated them into their discourse. For example, Jamel states, "At home, I always had my mother. But we never had role models. We had to teach ourselves how to be men." In this statement, Jamel suggests that a male figure needed to be present in order to help him learn about manhood. In a prior section, as Jamel describes his teacher, he again references a father figure in stating "And, Mr. Gray, he was also a good teacher…especially to me and David because we never had our fathers." The belief in the Black male to acting as role models Black boys maps onto Jamel's statements as he talks about his household and his teacher. Further, as he references the absence of a Black man in his household, Jamel seemingly also questions how he will acquire the skill set in order to learn to be a man. Jamel concludes by stating

that, along with other Black male youth, he learned on his own. However, he then turns to an anecdote about Leroy—an older peer—who stood in for the role of father by providing Jamel with material wealth. This section of Jamel's narrative demonstrates the complex associations to normative concepts of racial and gender identity as they pertain to Black males amongst the participants. The participants grappled with these notions as they navigated the schooling process and resisted being *schooled out*. In the following section, I further discuss the ways in which they resisted *schooling out* and demonstrated resiliency.

Resistance & Resiliency

Resiliency emerged as the most accurate descriptor of the set of actions and behaviors demonstrated by which the participants resisted the challenging circumstances of being *schooled out* as students. Their narratives reveal how family members, friends and teachers in their lives provided incredible support through encouragement, advisement, discipline and religious guidance. The men internalized these lessons and used the strength and wisdom to build resilient spirits. Furthermore, the participants crafted identities in order to help them successfully navigate the educational system. This section focuses on the support systems on which the participants drew to resist their *schooling out* as students and their identity crafting.

Family Support

Kamari and Justin recount how their family support got them through school, although the concept of family support was different for the three of them. Kamari's adoptive mother figures prominently as the central figure involved in his upbringing. Kamari and his siblings were taken away from their biological mother when he was two

years old. When he was adopted, he did not speak. He shares how his mother encouraged him to speak:

> My mother, she would show me poems that Maya Angelou wrote. I was actually very interested in poetry since I was a kid.

Kamari's narrative demonstrates how his mother helped him transition into a new home by reading poetry and providing him with books. He correlates his interest with poetry as a child with these initial experiences as a toddler.

Like Kamari, Justin describes his family as supportive as they had a large impact on his social development. He shares that they held high expectations about his work ethic and provided spiritual guidance. He explains:

> So Dad and Mom, they were very hard on me. They didn't accept excuses at all. Hard work was definitely emphasized… I never had any issue or excuses with, with anything because they said, 'Listen nothing is too hard for you. Put your mind to it and put in work and you'll get results.'…My parents were religious as well. So faith was a principal I was raised on whether it was on the court, in the classroom, or life in general…They let me know not to cast my confidence away.

Justin begins his story by describing how his parents demonstrated high expectations for his worth ethic. As in other segments and similar to other participants, Justin employs dialogue to substantiate his point by restating what he recalls his parents saying to him. In addition, his sharing about his parents' religious faith suggests that they provided religious guidance. Justin consistently refers to *his parents* in terms of expectations and spiritual faith. These themes emerged frequently during his entire narrative provided in the prior chapter. Discipline and religious faith emerge as factors that buffered Justin in the process

of schooling out. During the interview, the avoidance of discussing further details was noted, as was his body language that seemed to exhibit a reluctance towards additional discussion of this topic.

In summary, Kamari and Justin share how their families played an integral part in their lives. The role of mothers, fathers and grandparents emerges as a significant aspect in the development of resiliency as demonstrated in the participants' narratives. An analysis of the narratives of Kamari and Justin reveals how their families provided support through various means to help them feel encouraged, be disciplined and be religiously faithful. This support prepared and sustained the participants as they faced the challenges of schooling out.

The absence of parental figures—particularly fathers—led other participants to find sources of support beyond their family. This savvy, this ability to find alternative figures and activities to meet their needs must be noted as a type of resilience, the subject of the next section.

Alternatives source of support

In the absence of fathers, the Black men in this study turned to other people or activities to draw on for support. Jamel and Byron reveal where they found the means of resisting their being *schooled out* as students. For example, Jamel's narrative reveals how his mother was the backbone of the family. She took care of him and his siblings in his father's absence. However, Jamel turned to other Black male figures to fill the gap left by his father. He shares:

> At home, I always had my mother. But…we had to teach ourselves to be me. And seeing the people in the community, that's what the ideal man was to me…I wanted

> to be just like this guy, Leroy. He always had nice cars…nice jewelry. He used to buy us sneakers, take us to get haircuts and McDonalds….My mother was in between jobs at the time…so [she] can't buy me $180 pair of sneakers. So I figure…I could be able to feel good about myself and pretty much fit in.

In this story, Jamel initially gives deference to his mother for being there for him. He suggests that she was the primary caregiver who took care of him and his siblings. However, the absence of his father left room in his life for other Black male figures to influence him and in this case, that influence was negative. Jamel's narrative shows that by watching Leroy—a local drug dealer—and being coaxed by gifts, he learned about the fast lifestyle acquired through ill-gotten gains. In essence, although Jamel's mother was present to provide the basic support he needed to survive, Leroy filled the gap of an engaged father and helped Jamel cope with this loss. For Jamel, this meant indulging in conspicuous consumption and, although this relationship with Leroy posed risks for Jamel's safety and freedom, he gained personal satisfaction from receiving goods and services his mother could not afford. This contribution to his overall well-being as shared through his own recollection must be acknowledged despite the context of illegal activity. Having material items like new shoes and jewelry helped Jamel feel good about himself and in some ways counter-act the feelings of marginalization he experienced through being schooled out. These outward displays of wealth helped him gain popularity in school and pushed back against the stigma of being tracked in the lower classes and considered unintelligent. Jamel gained self-esteem through his relationship with Leroy and this support was a source that he drew from in the context of being schooled out.

Like Jamel, Byron grew up in a household without a father and turned to other means from which to gain the strength to persevere. He shares about his father and football:

> [My father] played football but he hustled his way through it…We only saw him every few months…His advice was like, 'You do what you gotta do'. Like he almost thought we was stupid… Football was when people came around and made a big deal so we knew we had to be practice. But education wasn't. Football kind of saved us all.

Byron reveals part of his father's narrative in this story. His description of his dad having hustled refers to his using football as a means to get through college. This perspective, juxtaposed with the following sentence about the lack of opportunity he got and the advice he received, led Byron to conclude that his father thought him and his brother's were not smart enough to actually make it through college on their own merits. "Do what you gotta do" refers to the notion of hustling in order to achieve the things that you desire. Therefore, Byron seems to interpret his father's statement as implying that one should pursue any means to get ahead if he is not actually capable of achieving success honestly. Byron is uninspired by this statement but realizes that football is a means to an end.

This narrative sequence moves from an explanation of the context leading up to Byron's decision to be dedicated to football over an education. And, like Jamel, although Byron suggests through his story that his father was not a major part of his life, he found another means to make his way through school in the context of being schooled out. Football became the activity in which he could employ his skills and be recognized—recognition that he'd long stop receiving in school. Thus, the football field, rather than the

classroom became Byron's both a source from which to draw emotional support and an outlet to exhibit his determination.

The narratives of Jamel and Bryon demonstrate that resiliency can be developed through alternatives means. These alternatives include taking on a parental role, developing a benevolent friendship with an older male and participating in athletics. Further, feelings such as pride, high self-esteem and success fostered as a result of these roles, relationships and activities contributed to their ability to successfully navigate the school system. Thus, these alternate sources of resiliency must be considered in discussions of the success of Black male youth in the context of being schooled out.

While a support networks and mechanisms external to school emerged as a significant theme in the participants' narratives, they also shared at length about teachers who were instrumental in their lives. These teachers met the resilient dispositions of the students and, like their family members and friends, helped move them along in the educational process or constructed responsibilities and activities that provided opportunities for them to experience success. The following section is about supportive teachers who helped the participants navigate the school system and move on to college.

Black Male Teachers

Despite the experience of being *schooled out* as students, the participants found teachers who helped them resist the process. Jamel and Kamari talked about their support. For example, Kamari shares on how he was influenced by Mr. Oman in stating:

> The science teacher, Mr. Oman, was like the male component of why I wanted to be a teacher. I wanted to be relatable to the kids and fun, but serious about my

> studies. I liked the fact, that he, him having an African name was another thing that was similar to me. It meant that there was that consciousness.

Kamari found qualities in Mr. Oman that he related to, including his ways of being both fun and serious in terms of academic rigor in his teaching. In addition, Kamari identified with Mr. Oman's African name, given his own name change from Paul to Kamari. He feels that Oman's name change represented a consciousness which was positive. Kamari ends this anecdote with referring to Mr. Oman's gender as being influential to him as an adolescent. He seems to privilege gender over race by the end of his explanation and clarifies that Mr. Oman was one of the only male teachers he had. Seemingly, the teacher's gender is more relevant for Kamari than racial identity. However, as Jamel discusses the Black male teachers who had an impact on his schooling, he specifically talks about both race and gender and juxtaposes them against white female teachers. Jamel shares:

> Mr. Brown, he just kept on pushing us and he was just great.. He wouldn't take no shorts. I remember one day he gave me back my exam and I was happy, I think I got a 75 but he was kind of disappointed. He said something like, 'No you could've applied yourself more, you could've gotten better.' So I studied and the second exam my grades actually went up…So actually seeing a Black man in the class compared to having all white women, was a very big plus for me. It made me think, 'Alright he made something of his life, I think I can make something of my life too.'

Jamel discusses Mr. Brown with great enthusiasm and explains how he was a teacher who by taking "no shorts" did not accept shortcuts. In other words, Jamel suggests that Mr. Brown enforced discipline in his classroom and expected his students to meet high

expectations. This is demonstrated through the anecdote Jamel shares about how Mr. Brown believed that he could do better on the test than a 75 and this belief inspired him to study more and perform better on the following exam. In addition, when Jamel refers to structure, this also supports the notion of "taking no shorts" because he intimates that Mr. Brown established a classroom atmosphere that would teach the students how to navigate a larger context outside of school. In addition, Mr. Gray is discussed as another Black male teacher in Jamel's life who was influential. For Jamel, Mr. Gray became a father figure to replace the absent father in his life. Lastly, he recognized Mr. Gray as being different from the white female teachers he'd previously had, and saw the possibility of "making something of himself" or being successful like Mr. Gray when he grew up. In the next section, I discuss how the participants crafted identities in order to successfully navigate their schools.

Crafting identities to fit in

Crafting identities to fit in emerged in the narratives as an important experience in schooling. Here, I tell the shared stories of Byron and Justin with crafting identities. While they similarly took note of being one of few Black youth in their classrooms and schools, they each crafted unique stories that revealed divergent sense-making about this dynamic. For example, Byron who grew up in a mostly Black neighborhood in northern California and attended a predominately white college preparatory high school, discusses his adoption of conflicting identities to fit in to these different communities. He shares:

> I had two identities: extreme gangster and wanting to be white. Both identities were hurtful but they were the usual identities that Black people go to when they assimilate into dominant culture and have to come back to the hood. I never had the

> opportunity to be Theo. To be Black and smart and wealthy…Where I'm from in Sacramento, you either O-Dog or you're Carlton. There's no in between. It's schizophrenic. I wouldn't trade it because I think it shaped me into who I am but I didn't get what other kids got. Growing up, I always felt like I was hustling. I always had to think more. I always had to deal more. I always had to prove my humanity. I look back and it makes me really sad that I was so ashamed of who I was.

O-Dog, a character from the film "Menace 2 Society" known for his aggressive, highly irritable nature; and Carlton a character from the television series "The Fresh Prince of Bel Air" who, in his speech, mannerisms and clothing portrays an African-American nerd are the identities that Byron suggests he adopts depending on his environment. Byron feels like he had to work harder than his peers to mask his true self through O-Dog and Carlton. This caused him mental stress and he feels bad now about masking his true self.

Comments within Byron's narrative point to the struggles he felt as an adolescent with expectations of behaving in socially acceptable modes of Black maleness at school. His reference to being "Theo" -- the cool, happy, affluent, well-dressed son of the Huxtables on the "Cosby Show" in the 1980's—suggests that, while he struggled with issues of poverty and desired material wealth as an adolescent, he also wanted to be himself and not work so hard to fit in.

Further, in listening to the interview recording, the narrative includes both signifying and tonal semantics that demonstrate the significance Byron attaches to his experiences with identity. He emphasizes two words, "identity" and "Black" as he tells this story. Every syllable is pronounced in "identity" and he briefly pauses between letters.

Byron exaggerates the pronunciation of the word to perhaps demonstrate his disbelief at this moment in his life – both that he had to switch from O-dog to Carlton in order to be socially accepted in his school and neighborhood respectively, and that he conformed with this aesthetic. Further, Byron stresses the ‘ck” in the word “Black” and elevates the pitch of this word. This is a deliberate pronunciation with intonational contouring (Smitherman, 1977) that registers this word in a Black languaging aesthetic. In other words, not only does Byron talk about going to great lengths to fit in as a Black male, his languaging as he recalls this story to me signifies his acceptance of his Black identity—in deliberate opposition to his former stance. His statements within this story affirm this analysis as he recounts that he is both embarrassed that he went to these lengths in order to fit in but, glad that he had the experiences because it shaped him into who he is now – unapologetically Black.

On the other hand, Justin’s narrative demonstrates both his sense of the relevance of being in predominately white spaces and his feeling of being supported in communities of color. He describes his move from African-American public schools to a white, private Catholic school and back to a Black high school. He shares:

> …It was a big change going from mainly beings surrounded by predominately African-Americans…I think it helped me to prepare for later on because in the world, we’re not surrounded by just minorities…But sometimes it was hard being in between. Hard being able to distance yourself from the sub-culture and being able to…be considered…just like everyone else with the dominant culture…I ended up transferring to Assumption High School for my last year. That was almost like going back to how I grew up…Basically, everybody knew everybody, nobody

> got lost as it was more or less you're around your own people. There's a chance you're going to do better and you felt a little bit more comfortable…

Justin's narrative sequence begins with his noticing of the difference between the schools in terms of diversity and his reasoning that this was a positive experience because it acculturated him to what he saw as more representative of the world. However, his repetition of the word "hard" to describe the experience of being a Black person in a predominately white institution and having the desire to be treated like—or even to assimilate into white culture—suggests his ambivalence around his prior statement. Further, the last sentences reveal a significant departure from his initial stance, as Justin posits three reasons why being in a Black school is better for a Black person. At the same time, the use of the term "you" instead of "I" in the final sentence that summarizes the outcome of being in a predominately Black *institution* vs. a White one functions to distance Justin as the narrator of his own experience and suggests that he is examining that of someone else. Justin's sense-making as demonstrated through his narrative does not explicitly demonstrate a stance about the racial implications of his experience at Assumption. Therefore, it is difficult to determine where he stands, although his narrative sequence does indicate a shift from an appreciation of being in a predominately white space to a critique about the difficulty of this positioning to a preference for being in a predominately Black space. Lastly, Justin's speech patterns do not indicate a use of Black languaging. In his whole narrative in the preceding chapter, he shares he does not use AAL in the classroom and teaches his students to use Dominant American English. In the interview, Justin does not appear to be a speaker of AAL and seems to be purposefully careful about his language usage. In summary, while Byron suggests that he made

conscious decisions about his languaging practices depending on the cultural context that he faced, Justin maintains that he employed what he felt were the appropriate languaging practices for divergent context that they adapted to the circumstances through their languaging practices in their schools in order to survive difficult experiences. Survival also relates to the participant's experiences as Black male youths when pressured to conform to a gender norms of Black masculinity.

Conclusion

In summary, the participants drew from family but also from alternative sources such as athletes, older male friends, and supportive Black male teachers. These networks provided the participants with support through encouragement, discipline, and/or religious guidance. This support helped the participants overcome the challenges of *schooling out* that included academic tracking, racial discrimination and pressure to ascribe to norms of Black masculinity. While one participant found meaning in being a caregiver for his siblings, another found a homeboy to fulfill his desires for material goods while still another found recognition in being a football player. By getting their needs met through alternative sources, the participants garnered the strength to resist opposing forces in their schooling experience. Furthermore, the participants crafted multiple identities to adapt to varying contexts while at school. I name this *Black male youth resiliency*. In the following section, I discuss the ways in which the participants were schooled out as teachers and how they responded to this process in their professional lives.

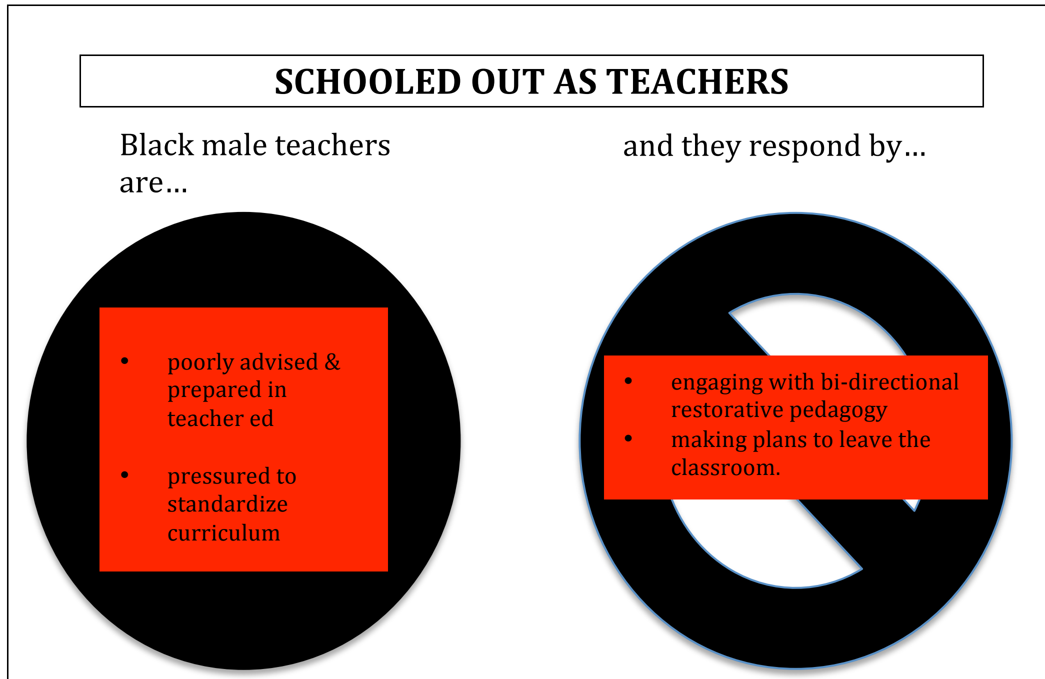
Chapter 6

Schooled Out as Teachers

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Black men in this study experienced being *schooled out* as elementary and secondary school students but they found ways of resisting this process which relied on support from their families and others, including individual teachers. This process of schooling out persisted as the participants became teachers in urban schools.

Schooling out as teachers (Figure Four) describes the parallel experiences of Black male teachers in the urban classroom. The components of *schooling out* as teachers include: 1) under-preparation in teacher education programs; 2) lack of support in the classroom; and 3) pressure to standardize curriculum. The impact of these challenges on the participants' professional lives as demonstrated through their narratives was manifested in complex ways. On one hand, their stories reveal that despite these challenges, they were committed to pedagogies that helped their Black male youth, in particular, successfully navigate the public school system and life in general. They drew from their own experiences as students to construct relevant curriculum. They gained a sense of fulfillment from minding the gaps in knowledge and restoring esteem in their students' souls. On the other hand, the narratives also revealed that the participants were frustrated with the mechanism that I previously named as *schooling out* and did not feel that their work was sustainable. Thus, the positive feelings derived from giving back to Black male youth was not enough to counteract the negative associations with their work as teachers in the New York City Department of Education.

Figure Four. Schooled Out As Teachers



Lack of advisement to become teachers

The participants consistently shared that they were not advised as college students in the process of deciding to become teachers. Further, their teacher education programs did not adequately prepare them for the classroom. Their entry into the field was largely by chance as friends and family members suggested they apply to become teachers. During the application process, they realized that teaching was their calling. For example, Kamari's friend told him about the New York City Teaching Fellows and the essay made him see that he would make a good teacher. He shares:

> At first, I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do…When I started applying, I realized how much I wanted to teach. They asked "What drives you to improve to impact high achievement in the educational system in inner-city schools." That question stopped me for a second because I was like, I don't wanna write this if I

> don't mean it…When I was done writing the application, I knew I wanted to be a teacher. The incarceration of my brothers, the lack of a strong male presence in my life and you know, [drove] this feeling that I could replicate to the best of my ability what my mother has done for me.

Kamari explains that he was considering a few different career choices when he was urged by a friend who was applying to the New York City Teaching Fellows—an alternative certification program—to apply. As he completed the questions and the application, he realized the significance of what he was writing. This is demonstrated through his statement "I don't wanna write this, if I don't mean it." This is further illustrated when he repeats, "So I stopped. I stopped." Kamari shares that he was certain he wanted to become a teacher upon completion of the application; however, he realized during his demonstration lesson that he was not equipped with the skills to teach. Nonetheless, Kamari points to his passion and his drive as reasons why he became a teacher, as well as his brothers' incarceration and the lack of Black male role models. He seems to suggest that his becoming a teacher out of a past experience of dealing with incarcerated siblings and an absentee father was buffered by a strong mother-teacher whose passion sustained him during the process.

Similar to Kamari, Justin heard about the New York City Teaching Fellows through a family friend, applied, and suddenly got a phone call from a local high school principal requesting an interview. He explains the interview proceedings:

> I went into the office with a panel of other people who I later found out we re the special ed teacher, the dean of special ed, the assistant principal and the parent teacher coordinator. I'm sitting there at the circle table and honestly for 95% of the

> interview, we didn't talk about anything academically related at all. What we end up talking about was what I been accustomed to talking about my whole life: basketball. …My father's program really opened up the door and that's how I got the job. The Lord really rang from him calling me, to it being the closest school, to him blessing my father with all the kids that are privileged to come through the program. Before I left he said "Okay you're definitely hired. No questions about it, you're hired. The only question we have is, do you want to do seventh or eighth grade?" I never thought about or dreamed about at all but the Lord worked it out for me and I'm blessed right now to be in this position.

Justin explains that he was called to an interview at a school which students from his father's basketball program had attended. Justin seems to refer to this as an easy process, and uses terms like "nothing to lose." He shares that "95% of the interview was about basketball"; excitedly reports that the administrators query into his grade level preference was "the only thing!" missing and, reiterates twice that "teaching fell into his lap." He seems to credit God with providing him with this position, as well as creating all the circumstances that led up to this career. He is thankful for what he considers to be a blessing.

In contrast, Byron shared that his reason for entering teaching was explicitly due to immediate financial necessity, as a result of significant personal events. For example, Byron says that he applied to the New York City Teaching Fellows on the heels of his departure from Mid-Atlantic University, and a short, difficult stint in Pennsylvania. He states:

> I applied for the New York Teaching Fellows to really just escape Pittsburgh and to try and get a job until I could get Sankofa set up. I didn't want to be a teacher. I knew I couldn't be a teacher. I figured I'm gonna get another Master's. I went with that attitude to my interview. My resume is African-centered everything but the Fellows recruited me. So I'm like, 'what the fuck?' I walk into this school building and my attitude is 'I'ma be. If I can't be free here, I'm not gonna be here. I'm gonna just let it be known who I am take it or leave it. I don't wanna work with you if you don't wanna work with me.' I go in there and I see Egyptian pictures when I walk in. I saw white teachers with t-shirts that said 'Down with Capitalism'. I sit down in the interview and they say, 'If you could have the ideal school, what would it look like?' And I'm like, seriously. About halfway through my explanation, their body language says I hired myself. I was brought in as a special ed teacher. They let me come in and right off the bat and incorporate Sankofa. It was the first place I could work that I could love my kids and get paid. I never planned to be a teacher. I was just gonna be there two years because this school allowed me to be me.

Byron plainly states that he applied to the New York City Teaching Fellows to "escape" and gain financial security, while he set up his non-profit organization. However, his prior experiences at Mid-Atlantic made him more steadfast in his Afro-centric stance, and he states that he made that perspective explicit in both his application and his physical presence and gestures during the interview. As he retells this story to me, Byron passionately uses the term "I'ma be me" to suggest that this potential employer would have to deal with his unapologetic Blackness or he would not be working there. Byron was surprised to learn that the school culture and the administration also reflected a left-leaning

stance as demonstrated through the art on the walls and a teacher's T-shirt. He states 'I hired myself' with confidence, and further expresses that he was the 'perfect fit' for the school as they permitted him to construct and teach a history curriculum of his own design on slavery. Byron reiterates his stance that he'd never planned to be a teacher, but suggests he stayed at the school because they allowed him to be himself. Overall, like the rest of his narrative, Byron uses Black languaging in both his expressions and his mannerisms.

What is troubling about Jamel's story of gaining certification is that, he suggests that he did not receive much career guidance on the area of study to pursue relative to the job market until he had already completed the undergraduate degree. He recounts being told that special education was his "best bet" in terms of getting a job. His tying of a choice of area of study to the job market is practical and he describes this decision as "just going to do that" with general terms. However, his statements seem to reflect a lack of urging by faculty or advisors to consider the age group he wanted to teach or even the desire to want to teach a population of disabled students. As discussed later in this chapter, some of the challenges Jamel faces in his classroom may be related to his lack of foresight and guidance in making decisions about his area of certification during his teacher education experience.

Kamari, Justin and Byron were all New York City Teaching Fellows, and except for Kamari, career changers. Once the participants entered their classrooms, they indicated through their narratives that they were underprepared to teach in the urban school context as a result of inadequate teacher education. Thus, another aspect of being schooled out as teachers during the induction process was the irrelevance of the curriculum relative to the students they were expected to teach, the subject of the next section.

Poor teacher education programs

Jamel and Byron spoke of the challenges of their teaching education program, including difficulty dealing with education professors and the lack of relevance to their actual classroom experiences. For Jamel, his issues with teacher education emerged at the end of his degree, when he realized his major in childhood education was had not sufficiently prepared him for the job market. Jamel explains that he originally entered Urban University to study computer science but ended up changing his major to childhood education. After receiving his undergraduate degree in childhood education, he was not able to get a teaching job. As a result of the hiring freeze at that time, school administrators were not able to hire subject area teachers without special education degrees, according to Jamel. He then went back to school to pursue a graduate degree in special education while working as a paraprofessional. He eventually became a substitute teacher, but he suggests that his undergraduate education was not useful.

> After I graduated, I must have emailed 23 schools for teaching positions and I didn't get anything back because they weren't looking for the common branch…Some of the stuff I remember from my undergrad, I can't really apply it to what I'm doing now…The preparation courses for the basics, it just sounds good on an interview.

Jamel describes the preparation as "basic," and states that it "sounds good on an interview." He eventually got a job as a substitute special education teacher and he suggests that his program did help him to learn applicable material he could use in his classroom, which was one positive outcome in the context of inadequate education.

You may recall that Byron had already been teaching at the college level, working as an administrator at his university and had earned a Masters Degree in higher education. He had broad knowledge in Africana studies and was already teaching in the public school classrooms as a Fellow. Byron found that his coursework in urban education lacked cultural relevancy. During class, when Byron spoke up on these issues, he found that his professors were dismissive and did not want him to interrupt the classroom. He writes:

> Everyday I'd have class *after* class…I know my shit. So one day I get to class and the professor says that the students were uncomfortable with me and she had to ask me not to be there. She said she knew I knew the material and that I was gonna get a good grade but that the students felt like I was judging them. I went H.A.M. I checked her and said the only reason she had to do that was because she was culturally incompetent. If she had been doing her job and addressing the issues in special education, I wouldn't have had to bring shit up. But I have to cause I love my people and I live with my people and these people haven't even been introduced in the class. I had to do it to save my people. The students respected me cause they knew I knew my shit.

Byron enters the course familiar with much of the material that he feels the professor should be teaching in the course, and takes it as his duty to teach his colleagues by holding his own "class after class." However, he suggests that the teacher asks him to leave because she was intimidated by his knowledge and the students' respect for him. Byron emphatically points to his chest when he states, "But I have to, cause I love my people…" This statement and the following, "and I live with my people…I had to do it to save my

people," read like the verse in a hip-hop song or a gospel sermon as Byron speaks his truth. as only an inner-city griot can (Freestyle Fellowship, 1993).

In summary, the participants described their process of becoming teachers beginning with the interview process and their teacher education program experience as one that was complicated by: 1) a lack of advisement about their career path; and 2) a curriculum that did not adequately prepare them to teach in urban classrooms. None of the participants was specifically recruited into teaching or supported by academic advisors to become teachers—even those participants who were New York City Teaching Fellows. Rather, Kamari, Byron and Justin entered teaching by chance and during the application or interview processes, they realized that they wanted to become teachers.

In addition, the participants experienced significant challenges once they entered their teacher education programs. Jamel quickly recognized the irrelevance of his learning in their graduate programs once they entered their own classrooms. Further, Byron attempts to shift the dynamics in his coursework by sharing his insights about Africana studies and is asked to leave the class. Taken as a whole, rather than being encouraged in the initial stages of becoming a teacher, the participants were marginalized and under-prepared to teach in urban schools. Once they entered schools, they were also unsatisfied with having to teach a standardized curriculum that they considered irrelevant.

Pressure to standardize curriculum

The participants were pressured by school administration to abandon their existing instructional material and adopt a standardized curriculum. Jamel and Byron describe their schools as hostile environments where the administration hyper-monitors their adherence to standardized curriculum. Jamel states:

> …I see myself as being scripted. They tell you everything you have to say. We have to do stuff with the kids that I don't see benefitting them in anyway…I feel like I am doing the student-s an injustice. I see this is as pretty much giving the students what was given to me. The teachers just came in and said, 'This is what you have to learn. I am not going to tell you why you have to learn it. It is not going to benefit you in any way. This is what you have to learn. Anybody walks in, this is what we are doing.

In this segment of text, Jamel draws parallels between his own learning as a student in school and what he is being required to do as part of the process of the standardization of his curriculum. He describes his curriculum as scripted and not relevant to his students; however, he has little decision making power over what he can teach. By reflecting on his own life, Jamel sees himself as re-inscribing the educational injustice that was done to him and suggests his discomfort with his role as a teacher.

Like Jamel, Byron feels that the shift to a standardized curriculum conflicts with his own pedagogical philosophy and does harm to his students. He explains:

> The DOE is changing our school into to a traditional school. Everybody at my school has always known that I wasn't no traditional teacher. If you love your kids and are unapologetically black, I don't think you can exist in these schools. With the direction education is going, they're not thinking about understanding the sociological or psychological issues with our children. The shift that I'm watching take place is everybody's adjusting to the injustice. And, I see myself as somewhat of a liaison…There's gonna be more high-stakes testing. More standardized,

> traditional curriculums. More teaching to the test. More of our kids dropping out. And more potential never tapped.

Byron reasons that the pressure for him and other teachers at his school to shift from a culturally relevant curriculum to a standardized curriculum is forcing him to take part in what he sees as an injustice to his students. He takes issue with "adjusting to injustice" and feels uncomfortable with his role in the classroom. Further, Byron foresees that the larger impact of standardized curriculum is a generation of Black youth who are incapable of reaching their full potential.

Among all the participants, Justin is the only teacher whose narrative suggests that he feels comfortable with the curriculum that he is teaching and optimistic about his role as a teacher. He says:

> My principal shared the data for our school. My kids, on the whole had a much higher passing rate than the rest of the school. Out of the 11 students who took the state math test last year, 75% made gains. The approach that I use is something that had a positive effect on my students. As a result, the principal moved me from a self-contained class to general ed. If I can broaden that to the rest of my eighth graders who I have this year—he other sixty kids—then maybe something could go well there too. Yeah, there's more people, but they're on a higher level so I don't have to scaffold as much, not spend as much individual time. But again, you know there's a different challenge where that's concerned. So do I think it can work? I'm really sure it can work.

Justin initially references his students' outcomes on the standardized tests and as indicator of the benefits of his pedagogy and curriculum for the students. He emotes pride that his

students made progress relative to prior years on the math test. Further, Justin shares his principal's decision to move him out of special education and into general education so that he can replicate this model with a greater numbers of students. At this moment, both a troubling sentiment on the part of the listener and Justin's ambivalence about this plan emerge.

Justin was being acknowledged on one hand for his great progress with students, but then simultaneously cast as a Black Superman to save an even larger group of students. Further, he seems to question his principal's rationale that he can replicate this work with more students when he references a "different challenge." Although he does not expound upon the different challenge, it is feasible to argue that Justin's model *entails* scaffolding and individual instructional time in a small class size. He questions how that will be transferable to a larger class but then quickly affirms that it can work. Justin's optimism in the face of this challenge is both beautiful and troubling. He clearly believes in his ability and students' potential to succeed. However, his lack of foresight—evidenced in this segment of narrative—about the ways that he is being positioned points to the complex nature of the work of Black male teachers in the context of *schooling out.* To be like Justin is to believe that one can save Black male youth through pedagogy and curriculum. To be like Jamel and Byron is to know that these schools are organized for the failure of Black male youth and that there is no pedagogy or curriculum in the world that can change that mechanism. The participants' stances about the permanence of their work as teachers, lies on the continuum between Justin and Byron, with more participants aligning with the latter end than with the former.

The following section focuses on how the participants responded to being *schooled out* as teachers in their pedagogies and in their professional decisions. On the other hand, the Black male teachers in my study engaged in a *bi-directional restorative pedagogy* to give their students the support and culturally relevant curriculum they themselves would have benefited from as students. But the resistance from the school system proves to be too much and they respond by finally being *schooled out* and leaving the teaching profession.

Coping with being Schooled Out as Teachers

The participants' in my study entered their classrooms with a strong desire to help their student succeed and that will was unwavering throughout their teaching experiences. They coped with being *schooled out* as teachers by developing philosophies and teaching practices to support the academic and socio-emotional development of their students; particularly Black male students. I name their philosophies and practices *bi-directional restorative pedagogy,* as the participants each discussed how they worked diligently to restore esteem in the lives of the Black male youth in their classrooms and how this work provided them with a sense of fulfillment. In this way, they gave knowledge, skills, wisdom, discipline and support to their students and their students' academic progress, intellectual development, happiness, and sense of being cared for. This provided the participants with positive feelings that they were doing something to right the wrongs in their students' lives that they themselves had experienced as youth. In the following section, I describe this *bi-directional restorative pedagogy* as implied in the narratives of Justin, Byron, Jamel and Kamari.

Justin describes the ways in which his disciplinary model that leads to positive outcomes. He explains:

> I have very high standards and the kids know that and they know I challenge them and push them every single day. But just, I guess being on top of them all the time and showing them I care and love and at the same time, that yeah, when you get out of line, I'll tell you. When you need encouragement, I'll be there. I just go the extra mile and do things that other teachers wouldn't like such as staying after…But just having that connection…a philosophy…the work ethic and the education behind it and pushing them and having them work with me all of those things, go together.

Justin's description of his pedagogical style suggests that he requires order in his class and lets students know if their behavior is inappropriate. He emphasizes his emotional connection to his students through terms such as "care" and "love." He balances a firm stance towards discipline and high expectations for student performance as a means to demonstrate his love for his students. Justin seems to want the best for, and from, his students and engages in a careful dance of firmness and tenderness.

Byron also describes "saving" his students and refers to the bigger motivations and lessons of teaching that emerged from his personal experiences with racial profiling:

> When I left higher ed, I kind of went on a death wish. I thought, 'I'ma go get my people. I refuse to be scared of my people.' What I found out was, our young boys are so hungry for manhood. I thought there was gonna be resistance. But my biggest problem is not having enough time to…Let's give them three hours and teach them how to pass the test but then let's give them two to three hours of touching their soul. Change the way you see your sister. Change the ways you see yourself.

In this statement, Byron puts forth his agenda when he came to teaching, describes what he found when he got to the classroom, and explains what students need. In a deeply passionate expressive mode, Byron describes his work leaving higher education and coming into teaching as a "death wish." This refers both to the manner in which he physically left Mid Atlantic University under the security of the Black Panther Party as his activism at that institution led to acts of white supremacy. Next, he states that the male youth that he met when he came to the classroom were "hungry for manhood." In previous statements, he has explained that being hungry for manhood has meant that these young men wanted to learn how to be adults and were looking for the guidance to become one. In this statement Byron shares that his model of teaching would involve half time with test preparation and half time with "touching their soul." He further explains that the outcome of this work could be changing one's perspective about one's people. Thus, Byron sees his teaching stance as made up of both imparting the knowledge necessary to navigate the standardized examinations and part healing the trauma that his students have experienced. This derives from his own experiences of trauma in school, as well as what he's observed amongst his students in his decade in the classroom.

Similarly, Jamel refers to his personal experiences growing up and his desire to prevent his students from repeating his mistakes. Like Byron, Jamel sees his teaching as saving the students from failure.

> With my experiences in the neighborhood, I guess kind of like put everything together and realized I have to better myself. I also l feel like giving somebody else a chance. I'm still finding out right now how. I'm with students with emotional disturbances. I see that most of the students have obstacles or challenges that they

> face. I see myself being more or less like a role model for these African American youth…From my experiences in the community, I'm able to like identify with them in a way. So it's more or less like my community experiences helped me shape my views and this is where I have to be for the students. No matter how hard they push me I am not going to give up on them because I don't want to see them fail. I want them to succeed and I'm going to try as hard as I can. I have been doing anything in my power to make sure they don't fall into a similar situation that I had. I am trying to be a father figure -- not even a role model. I've been just a reasonable person that they can come to.

Kamari shares that he has been working on getting his students to reflect on their academic situations, just as he had to do at the university level. Unlike the other participants who talk about preventing students from experiencing negative experiences, Kamari shares that he thinks it's okay for students to fail. Failure, for Kamari, is a part of students' experience and it is a place from which to learn:

> I told the students, it was not until I failed at being a student that I realized that, it's not about me, it's not about what I want and it's not about what I like. I want them to realize that because to be frustrated means to be in constant contention with reality. And you have to be upset with your circumstances.

Kamari shares about his own college experiences as he struggled to perform in his classes. He explains that he did not pass tests and failed papers despite what he considered diligent work. Kamari states that what he realized in college and what he shares with his students about failure is that this experience was bigger than completing those assignments. He feels that those experiences taught him what it meant to be frustrated and that improved his

circumstances. Thus, one part of Kamari's teaching stance derived from his failure in college. He communicates to his students that failure is not necessarily a negative thing.

In summary, the participants talked at length about how they engaged in teaching practices that supported the intellectual and academic growth of their students. Drawing from their own experiences being *schooled out* as Black male youth, the participants enacting of a bi-directional restorative pedagogy was characterized by a commitment to helping their Black male students, and restoring their own sense of self as students. Their students benefited by receiving instruction that addressed the critical topic of developing the resilience to navigate the educational complex as a Black male youth. Thus, like the parents, peers and older male friends who were a part of the participants' social networks as youth, the Black male teachers in this study encouraged their students to be disciplined and to adapt to various contexts

Although the participants in this study were deeply passionate about their teaching practices, the satisfaction they gained was not enough to overcome the challenges of being *schooled out*. In other words, *bi-directional restorative pedagogy* restored esteem in their students and fulfilled them. However, having resisted as students their own *schooling out*, as teachers they did not have the supportive context that would have enabled them to resist. The challenges of being *schooled out* were seemingly insurmountable. In the following, I discuss how the participants responded to being *schooled out* as teachers, in the absence of institutional, systemic or personal support by planning their leaving; that is, succumbing to the *schooled out* process to which they have been subjected to in their relationship to school.

Leaving

To varying degrees and for a variety of reasons, the participants in this study discussed leaving New York City Department of Education classrooms. Some were being pushed out, while others were making conscious decisions to leave. This section discusses the positions of Kamari, Jamel and Byron in the process of being *schooled out*.

As a New York City Teaching Fellow, Kamari has the stability of a permanent position. However, he expresses doubt about his role and work as a pedagogue. Kamari shares:

> I may not necessarily be a good teacher. I don't know how I'm gonna do. I'm always reflective. I ask myself, ‘Am I creating the very inequities that I've seen or have seen in the past with respect to how students and teachers are interacting? Am I reducing students to limited expectations because they are low-performing?’ But then there is the reality that I have to come to which is having to help them where they're at. And sometimes meeting them where they're at means lowering certain expectations. But always setting high expectations for me is what's gonna make you a great teacher. If I stay long enough in education, I want to be a great teacher.

Similar to Justin’s narrative, there is both optimism and ambivalence in Kamari’s statements around his ability to teach in the context of being *schooled out*. He questions his positionality as the head of a classroom in which he feels that he has to lower his expectations of students because of their cognitive abilities. However, he also shares the pressure of becoming a better teacher by developing the skills that it takes to reach and teach his students. Kamari’s final statement, nonetheless, suggests uncertainty about

remaining in teaching. He recognizes that it takes time to be the great teacher that he wants to be, but he wonders if he will remain long enough to develop that capacity.

Through his narrative, Jamel candidly expresses his unhappiness about the ways that he is being forced to standardize his curriculum and shares that this is the catalyst for his plans to leave the classroom. He states:

> I feel like I am putting on a show. Its like its hard for me to even apply effective teaching practices. I feel hopeless. It’s hard because it’s like you have all the words to the song but you’re unable to speak… I have this wealth of knowledge – these great resources but it is hard for me to even – even present it because of fear over what will happen. I pretty much feel like selling out. Some days I feel it is like, “Is it 2:50, already? Or, “I will be better at 2:50.” That troubles me a lot. I didn’t go to school for this. I went to school to be there for the students. I feel like I am hoaxing them now. It makes me sad. I don’t want to cry. It just … it really hurts. It makes me feel like I should be doing something else. I think next for me is administration…After my three years I over, that is when I’ll start exploring.

In this excerpt, Jamel attempts to make sense of his stance as he is being pressured to standardize the curriculum while also feeling unable to teach what he knows. His outlook about teaching is grim. This fact is represented through his reference to watching the clock each day at school in hopes that the day is ending. Jamel is deeply troubled by the feeling that he is doing his students a disservice and plans to move on to another job, potentially administration, once he earns tenure in three years.

Similarly, Byron plans to leave the NYCDOE and dedicate himself full-time to his professional development business. He elaborates on his stance and his plans in stating:

> I've never been married to the DOE cause I know what happens. I've always had one foot out. They can come through and decide you don't have a school anymore. So I'm not very optimistic about having Black male teachers. Like you know, this all male model that's supposed to be working. That shit ain't gon' get my students. I do know that if we can create the right mechanism, our black boys and girls are very reachable. But I just don't know if we can get 'em in their schools. I feel like higher education is more of a fit for me than high school. But I still wanna work in the schools. I still wanna train teachers. But I don't wanna be a teacher…I never did.

In this segment of his narrative, Byron returns to his prior stance about teaching that he shared as he discussed his application process and interview. Although he has been in the classroom for ten years, Byron feels that he has never been fully a part of the NYCDOE. His statement "They can come through and decide you don't have a school anymore" refers to the phasing out process that his school is currently undergoing. That is, although it began as a culturally relevant model for teaching high school students who were over-aged and under-credited, the NYCDOE has decided to end this model and replace it with a standardized curriculum—firing the principal who was the instructional leader in the process. Thus, Byron is exasperated with the process of *schooling out* as it pertains to his life as a pedagogue, although he also feels that there are other ways to teach and reach Black youth.

Byron is steadfast in his plans to leave the classroom. At the time of this interview, he was going on interviews for educational leadership positions and was certain that he would not be returning to the classroom the following year. He is the quintessential

exemplar of what it means to be *schooled out* as a student and as a teacher in urban schools.

Summary

In summary, this chapter and the preceding one demonstrate how the Black male participants experienced the process of *schooling out* as students and adult teachers in urban schools. Their narratives reveal that as students, academic tracking, isolation and discrimination, bullying and negative encounters with authority figures presented significant challenges in their educational experiences. However, by drawing on the support of their personal networks, the participants were able to gain the encouragement, advice and guidance to successfully navigate the U.S. public education system and earn graduate degrees.

Entering the classroom and becoming teachers, however, presented a new set of challenges in the context of *schooling out*. The participants were offered minimal advisement on the process of becoming teachers and had little knowledge to draw upon from their teacher education programs to assist them in their classrooms. Once they became, they were pressured to adopt standardize curricula that had little relevance to their students' lives. Despite the pressures, the participants adopted philosophies of teaching and engaged in practices that restored esteem in their Black male students and enabled them to resist being *schooled out*. *Bi-directional restorative pedagogy* refers to the work of these Black male teachers to encourage their students, providing the academic and socio-emotional support to successfully navigate the educational complex. The participants drew from their own experiences as students to construct relevant curriculum. Further, they

gained a sense of fulfillment from filling the gaps in knowledge and restoring esteem in their students' souls.

On the other hand, the narratives also revealed that without support, participants were frustrated with the mechanism of *schooling out* and did not feel that their work was sustainable. They eventually succumb to being *schooled out*. Thus, the positive feelings derived from giving back to Black male youth were not enough to counteract the forces to miseducate Black male youth. Despite being cast as Black Supermen in the grand narrative of teacher diversity and recruitment, Black male teachers' life history narratives reveal that they hardly felt like educational heroes. In fact, all but one participant, Justin, has made plans to leave teaching.

In the context of the significant public attention that the recruitment of Black male teachers to resolve the Black male educational crisis has received, their marginalization in the pipeline and in the school building demands further exploration. In the concluding chapter, I discuss the implications of *schooling out* for teacher education, especially for recruitment and retention, that emerge from the life history narratives of the seven Black male teachers in this study. I frame this discussion through concepts I name *counter-induction* and *counter-retention* and refer back to the relevant literature about Black male teachers to underscore the significance of this study within the body of scholarship.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

Given the dearth of Black male teachers in the U.S. public school labor force, the Black male educational crisis and the suggestion by educational stakeholders that the recruitment of Black male teachers is the solution to resolving this crisis, my study sought to better understand the experiences of Black male teachers in urban schools. I wondered about what could be learned from the personal narratives of a group of Black male teachers working in urban schools and the implications for schooling, teacher recruitment, teacher education and teacher retention that emerged from their narratives. Therefore, my specific purpose for this study was to shed light on the complex experiences of Black male experience in the urban school context by studying the personal narratives of those who had navigated this institution and became educators themselves.

To answer my question, I developed a conceptual framework of languaging (Garcia, 2006), African oral tradition (Smitherman, 1977), life history theory (McAdams, 2008) and critical race theory (Dixson and Rousseau, 2006). I conducted life-history interviews of four Black male teachers currently working in New York City Public Schools and applied the conceptual framework in my analysis. The four teachers were Byron, Jamel, Justin and Kamari. All the participants are 1) U.S. born men who self-identified as Black or African American; 2) attended urban schools as students; and 3) taught for at least two years in urban schools. I methodically transcribed each interview and then scrutinized the transcripts through close and repeated listenings (Reissman, 1993). After these repeated listenings, I constructed profiles of each participant based on their experiences schooling and teaching. The unique stories of Jamel, Justin, Kamari and Byron in their own words

constitute chapter four.

Chapter four includes four narratives entitled “Jamel: Tracked Into Silence,” “Justin: Jumping through Hoops,” “Kamari: Up and Down the Ivy,” and “Byron: Saving Black Souls.” I present the narratives of these Black male teachers at a critical moment in urban education whereby Black men—repeatedly cast as Black Supermen—have been called upon to save Black boys from the educational crisis. This calling takes place in a vacuum—without regard to the individual life histories of Black men who become teachers and without consideration of the ways in which the U.S. public education system has miseducated all Black and Brown youth through urban schools and Black male youth in particular.

This study both challenges the dominant narrative advanced in the recruitment discourse on Black male teachers and contextualizes the work of Black male teachers in urban schools by presenting the counterstories (Delgado, 1995). Dixson and Rousseau write, “Because members of our society who have traditionally been silenced tell these stories, they serve to counteract the stories or grand narratives, of the dominant group and to challenge the status quo” (2006, p. 63). Un-silenced and de-marginalized, Jamel, Justin, Kamari and Byron tell their own stories in their own words. We learn about how each man experiences moments of feeling smart and moments of feeling inadequate, moments of being supported by teachers and moments of being discouraged. Racial discrimination, straddling two worlds and being uplifted by family members are themes that emerge in each man’s narrative but the specific ways that they navigate the educational complex are unique and situated in their individual sense-making of the world.

The participant’s sense-making revealed the different ways that they grappled with

issues of Black masculinity. Their talk, avoidance of talk or lack of talk about race and gender underscore the range of perspectives within the group despite their shared raced and gendered category of “Black male”. The reader may find strong assertions of racial consciousness, ambivalence about race and even contradictions. Taken as a whole, the narratives demonstrate the range of personal experiences and perspectives among a group of Black men, thus de-legitimizing the concept of a singular Black male identity and making apparent the absurdity of the Black Superman.

In addition to looking at the individual narratives of Jamel, Justin, Kamari and Byron, I looked across their stories to examine shared experiences with schooling and teaching in urban schools. To do this, I engaged in two levels of analysis that interpreted both the content of their life stories and how they told their stories. Here, I synthesize and analyze the data discussed in the prior two chapters and develop the theory of *schooling out* to answer my first research question about the experiences of Black male teachers working in schools. In addition, I respond to my second research question about the implications of the narratives through a discussion of three concepts that emerged from analysis: *counter-induction*, *bidirectional restorative pedagogy* and *counter-retention*.

My findings contribute to the existing literature on Black male teachers by building on frameworks that emerged from prior qualitative studies discussed in the literature review. For example, both Brown (2009) and Lynn (2006) examine the pedagogical styles of Black male teachers and find that they engage in practices that reveal their understandings of oppression and commitment to students of color. Lewis (2007) and Martino and Rezai-Rashtiti problematize the notion of Black male teacher as role model. Finally, Brockenbrough found that stereotypical notions of identity constrained the relationships

Black male teachers had with students, colleagues and school leaders. While focusing on the ways that Black men are figured in the discourse as role models, these studies provide alternatives constructions by highlighting Black male teachers' pedagogies, perspectives, problems and potential. However, these studies do not adequately address how oppression operates in the school system to marginalize Black male teachers. My study contributes to the existing body of literature by naming one mechanism—*schooling out*—and documenting how it emerges throughout the educational experiences of Black men who become teachers. The following section further discusses how *schooling out* functions in the lives of Black male teachers.

Interpretation of findings

Schooling out as students and schooled out as teachers

As a result of my analysis, I found that as students in urban schools and then as teachers in urban schools, Black male teachers experience the process of *schooling out*. *Schooling out* as students has three components: 1) academic tracking; 2) racial discrimination; and 3) feeling pressured to ascribe to norms of Black masculinity.

Despite the challenges of being *schooled out* as students, the participants were able to successfully navigate the institution of public schooling, graduate, complete Bachelor's degrees and earn Master's degrees in teacher education. They relied on social support networks of family members, teachers, peers, and community members who advised and encouraged them to persevere. They also used non-traditional sources such as participating in athletics and religious activities and taking care of younger siblings as means to develop the resiliency to negotiate schooling and resist the process of *schooling out*. This resiliency manifested in several forms including: 1) the determination to succeed; 2) the ability to

adapt to new contexts; and 3) religious faith. Furthermore, the participants' skill at languaging, and adeptness at avoiding ridicule, acting cool and resisting authority figures served as a means to maintain personal identities and integrities. Their resilient spirits and accompanying strategies were effective up until the participants entered the classroom as teachers.

Being *schooled out* as teachers took an emotional and professional toll on the participants in this study. They were not advised appropriately into teaching, were not adequately prepared, and had to deliver a standardized curriculum that they considered irrelevant. The participants coped with being *schooled out* as teachers in two ways: 1) they engaged with pedagogy to support the academic and socio-emotional development of their students and restore their own self-esteem—particularly Black male students—and 2) they made plans to leave the classroom. What I named *bidirectional restorative pedagogy* and described in the preceding chapters, is characterized by the sharing of knowledge, skills, wisdom and discipline to support to students. In return, the participants experienced positive feelings from being engaged with students' academic progress, intellectual development, happiness, and care. This pedagogy was particularly focused on Black male youth as the participants saw themselves in them and taught for the purpose of righting the wrongs that they knew these young men were currently experiencing.

However, while the participants extended emotional reserves to their students, these were not necessarily being replenished. Further, the hostilities of *schooling out* worked against their commitment to teaching by fostering discontent and feelings of inadequacy. The Black male teachers in this study were compelled to reconsider their career choices, and all but one participant is seeking new employment. The paradox of

schooling out for the teachers in this study is that despite their best efforts to obstruct the process of *schooling out* for their Black male youth students, the participants themselves were being *schooled out* of classrooms as teachers. Furthermore, in the context of significant public attention towards Black male teachers in urban schools, their actual lived experiences with *schooling out* contradicts the public narrative about the urgency of their recruitment and retention. I name this contradiction *counter-induction* and *counter-retention*. In the following section, I further discuss these concepts and the implications they have for education.

Counter-induction and counter-retention

As discussed in chapter one, educational stakeholders such as Arne Duncan (2012) have voiced concern about the dearth of Black male teachers in urban public schools. Black male teachers make up less than 2% of the American public school labor force, Black male youth underperform their counterparts at an alarming rate and are also over-represented in the prison industrial complex (Alexander, 2010; Wald & Losen, 2003). Black males as role models in schools have been proposed as a way to resolve the educational crisis. They wait for *Black Supermen* to charge into urban classrooms and save Black male youth from the educational crisis—presuming that a homogenous cohort of soldiers will use their blackness and maleness to lead Black male youth to academic success. They suggest that Black male teachers *can* and *want* to be role models, while assuming that this figure can single-handedly take on the Herculean task of saving Black male youth from the crisis. But never do they recognize the role of the institution of public schooling in creating the conditions that foster the failure of poor students of color in general and Black male youth in particular. That failure is located in the process of

schooling out. The participants in this study were the outliers—the exceptions. They were among the few Black men who—despite being marginalized in the educational complex as students—successfully navigated the system and subsequently committed themselves to teaching in order to give back to their younger counterparts. And yet as teachers, they continue to be *schooled out.* I name the mechanisms of *schooling out* in the context of significant attention around the recruitment and retention of Black male teachers as *counter-induction* and *counter-retention*. In the following section, I discuss these mechanisms further, as well as their implications for teacher education.

The gap between publicly stated goals by educational stakeholders to increase the representation of Black male teachers and the actual experiences of the participants with marginalization in schools has significant implication for education policy. *Counter-induction* and *counter-retention* have import for teacher education. The term *counter* refers to the contradiction between the discourse from educational stakeholders around the recruitment of Black male teachers and their actual experience with being schooled out as teachers. Thus, *counter-induction* refers to the lack of professional support prior to entering teaching and during the first years of teaching, while *counter-retention* refers to the lack of effort to retain Black male teachers in the classroom. Counter-retention is especially heinous as the participants reported a tangible effort on the part of administration to push them out of classrooms. Each term is further discussed in the following sections.

Counter-induction

In the context of significant attention to the recruitment of Black male teachers, the narratives of these participants suggest that they were not actively sought after by federal,

state, local or university-based initiatives. None of the participants spoke about academic advisement in their college experiences that specifically supported them in the induction process. Further, even those participants who were recruited by the New York City Teaching Fellows were not specifically sought after in an effort to diversify the workforce. Rather, Kamari, Byron and Justin shared how they entered teaching by chance and how through the application or interview process, they realized they could become teachers. Thus, one aspect of counter-induction is a lack of academic advisement specifically geared towards the recruitment of Black male teachers.

Secondly, counter-induction is also evidenced by the hurdles that the men faced within their teacher education programs. Jamel quickly recognized the irrelevance of their learning in their graduate programs once they entered their own classrooms. Further, Byron attempts to shift the dynamics in his coursework by sharing his insights about Africana studies and is asked to leave two classes. Taken as a whole, rather than be encouraged in their first stages of the induction process, the participants were overlooked and underprepared.

Counter-retention

The participants talked at length about the pressure to standardize curriculum and the chastisement to which they were subjected. These factors negatively impacted their work conditions and compelled the participants to make plans to leave the classroom. Justin and Kamari are ambivalent about their ability to meet the expectations set forth by their school administration as it pertains to pedagogy and curriculum. Finally, Jamel and Byron express skepticism towards the intense pressure by the school administration to standardize curriculum in light of their belief that they in fact have the knowledge and

skills to effectively teach their students. They see themselves become school administrators or professional development providers because they seemingly recognize that—despite criticisms they faced by administration—they in fact are capable of not only teaching but leading a school. Nonetheless, the fact remains that all but one participant in this study has been *schooled out* as a classroom teacher. There has been no mechanism present within their schools to address their concerns, support them professionally or convince them to stay. *Counter-retention* functions as a force at the school level that pushes Black men out of classrooms in the context of significant discourse at the federal level around the recruitment and retention of Black male teachers.

Summary

Based on this study, further research in teacher education, teacher induction and teacher retention as it pertains to Black men emerge. Teacher education programs are not doing enough to welcome and support the development of Black men who are preparing to become teachers. Curriculum and instructional practices need to be further examined to better determine how schools of education can address the marginalization of Black men such as the participants in this study. In addition, the need for support for teachers in the first years of teaching is well documented in the literature on teacher induction. However, Black men such as the participants in this study are not receiving adequate professional guidance once they enter the classroom.

In the context of a surge of attention around the recruitment of Black male teachers, the lack of retention efforts of Black men currently teaching in urban classrooms is a significant paradox. The paradox emerges in the contradiction between the recruitment narrative and the actual experience in classrooms. At the root of this issue is a resistance to

culturally relevant pedagogy and curriculum so that teaching that values the knowledges that students bring to the classroom and teaching that disrupts hegemonic norms and ideals and empowers Black and Brown children is simply ignored. Rather than focusing on developing culturally relevant philosophies in *all* teachers, educational stakeholders reserve the responsibility of educating Blacks male youth for Black men—as if they alone have the magic solution to teaching Black male youth because of their own Blackness and maleness. This reasoning is problematic in and of itself and the only positive outcome that emerges is the increased attention towards the dearth of Black male teachers which may have some impact on increasing their representation in classrooms.

It should be noted that increasing the number of Black male teachers benefits *all* students—not just Black male youth. However, as demonstrated in this study, once Black male teachers enter the classroom, they are not supported to remain in the classroom. They are *schooled out* and will not return to schools as teachers. The message about recruiting and retaining Black male teachers does not seem to have reached the district or school level.

If educational stakeholders are serious about retaining Black male teachers in the urban schools, sustained efforts need to be operationalized at the district and school level to provided mentoring and professional development for Black male teachers. This effort should recognize the function and significance of *bi-directional restorative pedagogy* as a practice enacted by some Black male teachers to counter-act the effects of *schooling out* on Black male youth. The retention of Black male teachers would also need to be addressed in this effort as their lack of support in the inductive phase, coupled with pressure to standardize curriculum fosters a sense of marginalization that leads to their decision to

leave the classroom. Ironically, the participants in this study discussed moving on to administrative positions or professional development organizations. These career decisions seem to suggest that the Black men in this study remain committed to the field of education in the urban context but are specifically leaving the classroom context.

Significance of the Study

In addition to contributing to our understandings of the schooling and teaching of Black male teachers, this study also fulfills its commitment to giving agency to marginalized voices through the life history narratives. The stories of the participants in this study talk back to master narratives about teachers and teaching by demonstrating alternative motivations and pathways to becoming teachers, as well as racialized and gendered oppression throughout the school-to-teaching continuum. Subsequent research about the life histories of teachers—particularly teachers of color—should not assume that their stories align with majority stories about becoming and being a teacher. The counter-narratives in this study as told by seven Black male teachers dismantle essentialist notions of experience and should thus be included in the discourse on teacher life histories.

Furthermore, in my analysis of the life histories of Jamel, Justin, Kamari, and Byron, Black languaging and AAL emerged as a means to communicate these stories and as an aesthetic discursive form, respectively. The participants also discussed their teachings to their students—often quoting statements that they had made in the classroom—using AAL. Admittedly, as a "native" speaker, it was difficult to articulate how Black languaging and AAL were being employed. However, consistent with Smitherman (1977) and Paris and Ball (2011), both Black languaging and AAL emerged as organic and purposeful forms of communication during most interviews. In many ways,

the shared understandings about Black culture between myself and the participants as evidenced through Black languaging fostered a sense of trust. The participants in this study shared extensively about their life stories and the ways in which their schooling and teaching experiences in the context of *schooling out* have often been challenging and painful, with only brief, positive moments. The discussion of these deeply personal memories brought up a range of emotions within the participants and made me question my role as a researcher. I now consider these questions and discuss the tensions that emerged as I conducted this qualitative life history study.

Researcher's decisions, tensions and reflexivity

Tears. How am I as a researcher, supposed to deal with a participant's tears? This is the question that I asked myself as I walked to the restroom of the Brooklyn Museum to fetch tissue for Jamel. When I entered this study, I did not anticipate the strong emotional impact that asking Jamel, Justin, Kamari and Byron questions about their lives would have. They were questions no one had asked before and these men responded with great vulnerability and honesty. As a result of their forthright sharing, I began to think of the work of conducting life history interviews differently. I thought less of what I was supposed to do and acted upon what I felt was right. Tissue. A pause to turn off the tape recorder and breathe. Affirming words. These actions—the same that I would perform with my brother or a friend—felt appropriate and real and so I, I forgot about the pretense of being a university researcher and remembered that I was Amber Pabon, the mom, othermother and English teacher from Bedford-Stuyvesant.

As the men shared, I took note of non-verbal cues such as eye contact and body language as well as audible speech patterns such as pauses, repetitions, laughs and tears. I

read these indicators to mean that, at times, my participants felt awkward about the words that were coming out of their mouths. Perhaps they questioned their own statements as they were being made. Or they held back and were choosing their words carefully because they were concerned about what I might think. Their motives became unimportant and I took their words as truth.

The interviews began to function more like dialogues that question/answer sessions. Their narratives are indeed their stories but they are also a co-production of our Black languaging with the participants telling it like it is and me affirming, head-nodding, leaning in. They cried. I cried. They laughed and so did I. I committed myself to allowing them to flow and as a result, they shared abundantly. When it came time to schedule the second interviews, Jamel, Justin, Kamari and Byron were generous with their time. And after the interview was completed, the phrase, "Thank you, this was like therapy" was uttered more than twice. Looking back, I wonder if I adequately responded to the emotional vortex that I feel responsible for opening up. I am hopeful that I did.

Because of the intensity of our dialogues, I felt an extraordinary pressure to represent the participant's stories accurately and in such a way that brings forth their humanity. After completing the narratives in chapter four, I returned them to each participant so that he could check for accuracy. Justin pointed out to me that I had forgotten his pseudonym in a few places so I fixed those errors. Other than this, all four participants said they were okay with what I had written. Byron later told me that he was using his narrative to share with his son and to help him with his professional development seminars. I am happy that the men were pleased with the narratives but I continue to feel ambivalent about sharing with a wider audience.

At times, I noticed the re-inscription of raced and gendered stereotypes of Black masculinity in their storytelling. I see my lack of probing around these moments as a tension in this study. During these interviews, I assumed that probing further would cause the participants discomfort. Reflecting back, I see that this lack of probing could relate to my own discomfort with being asked about my Black identity. I have always found this line of questioning—particularly done by outsiders—annoying. I did not want to commit the same transgressions that I have experienced both personally and professionally as I conducted this study. In hindsight, I think I could have struck a balance between tactless probing and healthy questioning. I see those places where I did not follow up with further questioning as missed opportunities.

Nonetheless, when I reflect back on use of life history interview and the re-construction of their stories in this study, I am satisfied with the research methodology and the ways in which it provided a means to shed light on the experiences of Black men in the urban school context as both students and teachers. Further this study speaks to the need for integrity in life history research. We must consider how to listen better, document more accurately and interpret more honestly the stories that emerge from the subjects of our research so as to honor their sense-making as they story their lives. With this as a starting point, we can then engage in analysis that challenges the status quo. In the following section, I discuss the implications for education policy that emerge from this study.

Implications for policy

The recruitment of Black male teachers is a noble cause and their increased representation in urban classrooms is as much a matter of labor equity as it is a question of racial and gender politics. At two percent of the teaching force, the lack of Black male

teachers begs questions about the pathways of Black men to the classroom. This study has shown that their pathways are marred by challenges that begin in the classroom as students and end with their exodus from classrooms as teachers. If we are serious about changing these circumstances, the following areas of policy reform must be enacted with expediency.

1. **Induction of teachers and implementation of culturally relevant curriculum to educate Black male youth in urban schools**. There is a large body of research on education of Black male youth. Unfortunately, the implementation of this research at the school level is unremarkable. A national effort to enact the necessary curricula and place effective pedagogues who espouse a culturally relevant educational pedagogy is necessary.
2. **Increase recruitment and induction programs for Black male teachers**. There are several existing programs to support the training of Black male teachers including "Call Me Mister" at Clemson University and the "Urban Community Teachers Project" at Brooklyn College. These programs have proven successful in fostering the development of Black male teachers enrolled in traditional teacher education programs. These models—that include mentorship, academic advisement and networking—need to be replicated across the United States in urban centers
3. **Develop programs to retain veteran Black male teachers**. In addition to the recruitment and induction of Black male teachers, programs must be developed and implemented to support them in the classroom as they become veterans. These programs could center around the issues that emerged in *schooling out* as teachers to help these men resist the process and remain in classrooms.

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