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in Their Own Words

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Abstract

The Men of Color Hope Achievers (MOCHA) Program aims to recruit, develop, prepare, place, and retain males of color in P-12 public schools as a shared goal of legislators, the state department of education, university leaders and professors, and P-12 districts within one northeastern state in the United States. This paper outlines the MOCHA Program and data collected on MOCHA Fellows' experiences during the first year of this pilot program, including challenges faced, supports provided, successes achieved, and implications for moving forward with similar programs.

Keywords: diversifying the teacher workforce, male teachers of color, curriculum innovation

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Real Talk About Real Work: Experiences of MOCHA Fellows

in Their Own Words

Across the country, teacher shortages (Schmitt & DeCourcy, 2022) are compounded by the lack of racial and ethnically diverse teachers (Carver-Thomas, 2012) in P-12 schools. There is a critical need to diversify the teaching workforce, so students are exposed to teachers from all underrepresented groups and reflect the student demographic shift in U.S. schools today (Maxwell, 2014; Turner, 2015; Woodson & Bristol, 2020). Diverse teachers matter, as do male teachers of color. Research related to the impact of male teachers of color on students of color suggests that increasing the number of male teachers of color may help to mediate problematic social trends and opportunity gaps in the schooling experiences of male students of color (Brown, 2012; Brown & Butty, 1999; Newton, 2013).

Based on a state pilot program to recruit men of color as P-12 teachers, special flexibility was granted to schools facing teacher shortages by establishing a five-year pilot program for issuance of a limited certificate for newly trained teachers through both the alternate and traditional routes of preparation. Our College of Education (CED) collaborated with our state's Department of Education to create the Men of Color Hope Achievers (MOCHA) Program. Working within the parameters of the legislation, which permits school districts to hire up to 10% of staff with flexibility in an area of certification (e.g. GPA, Praxis test requirements, or subject matter credit requirements), College leadership and faculty developed the MOCHA Program to address the dual challenge of teacher shortage and diversifying the workforce.

Conceptual Framework

The MOCHA Program and its related research are grounded in Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) theories (Gay, 2021; Ladson-Billings,

2021) wherein students are valued, emancipated, and empowered by their cultural diversity via specific instructional practices and inclusive curriculum while negating any practices based in biased, oppressive stances.

The Men of Color Hope Achievers (MOCHA) Program is an innovative initiative involving the following supportive structures: 1.) full academic scholarships, including all program entry and tuition fees for the College's alternative route certification program; 2.) ongoing academic and professional support through a cohort model of up to 25 men of color; 3.) consistent hands-on exposure to the pedagogy and practice of teaching, engaging in daily work in MOCHA partner schools and districts; and 4.) supplemental financial support to proactively address known barriers, including costs for instructional materials, laptops, and initial teacher preparation program fees. The MOCHA Program has four primary goals: 1) recruitment, 2) development/preparation, 3) placement, and 4) retention of males of color as teachers in P-12 public schools, through an innovative alternative route certification program.

Research Methodology

This three-year, qualitative study aims to understand features of the MOCHA Program which are most successful in addressing its goals. Qualitative data reveal the successes and challenges these Fellows face through their own voices and powerful stories. Research questions targeted in Year One were: 1.) In what ways do MOCHA Program features impact Fellows? and 2.) How are MOCHA Program features perceived as "in need of change" by Fellows?

The exploratory qualitative approach-based study followed a single case embedded design (Yin, 2009). Demographic details for the ten participating Fellows include: racial/ethnic diversity, ages 23 to 55, earned bachelor's degrees in various fields, and the majority possess previous experience in another profession.

Main instruments of data collection include a Likert scale survey, focus group interviews, and semi-structured interviews. Data triangulation (Carter et al., 2014) centered around responses to the two research questions, utilizing varied data sources, investigators, and member checking.

Findings & Results

A structured survey with questions focused on content knowledge, pedagogical preparation, and teaching/instructional experiences was administered at the MOCHA Summer Institute, following the Fellows first year of full-time employment as P-12 teachers. Findings indicate four emerging themes as reported by Cohort 1 Fellows: clarity and coherency of state and district policies regarding Fellows, communication and accessibility of resources, mentoring network early access, and continuous support. A synopsis of findings from each theme is provided below:

- *Clarity and coherency of state and district policies - "I need to know so I can plan accordingly":* As full-time, public school district employees, for whom many it was also their first teaching employment, seven out of nine Fellows' indicated they strongly agree or agree with the frequency and specificity of information regarding certification process and MOCHA support structures to help them navigate the Provisional Teacher Process (PTP).

- *Communication and accessibility of resources – "We get into behavior management and different teaching strategies":* With monthly professional development seminars during the weekdays and Professional Learning Community (PLCs) sessions on one Saturday each month, all Fellows strongly agreed that communication and provision of instructional resources was a major factor in developing effective teaching strategies.

o *Mentoring network early access – "[Great to have] ideas to brush up on specific content and effective teaching strategies"*: MOCHA's Community Mentor Network (CMN) was developed early in the program delivery and provided 1:1 support to each Fellow by matching them with an educational leader who is also a man of color. Mentors interacted with mentees at least once monthly, and often with more frequency, via in-person meet- ups, text/email conversations, or phone/video chats. Interactional logs documented the varied subjects and types of interactions that occurred.

o *Continuous program supports – "Practice really helped me pass!"*: With overwhelming frequency, Fellows reported their need and appreciation for the Praxis Exam preparation workshops, tutoring sessions, and peer study reviews as they prepared to take both Praxis Core and Praxis II Exams to earn their Certificate of Eligibility (CE) or Limited CE in their employed content area.

Key positive features noted by the majority of Fellows included, but were not limited to, professional development sessions and financial supports. Survey data further documented the majority of Fellows perceived their assigned school mentors and MOCHA professional development sessions as positive influences in the development of their professional teaching practice and pedagogy.

Scholarly Significance

This work specifically demonstrates the following commitments to the teaching profession: 1) innovating curriculum for marginalized populations, 2) preparing diverse and anti-racist educators, and 3) access to high quality learning environments for all individuals. The educator preparation curriculum utilized for all MOCHA Fellows is the ASPIRE to Teach

program at Rowan University. This accelerated program provides fully online coursework and video coaching, 1:1 instructional mentoring via an ASPIRE Lead Instructor (ALI) who works continuously with their assigned teacher candidates throughout all four program semesters, and 100% funding for all tuition and program materials. These elements are necessary and important in mitigating barriers commonly faced by teachers from marginalized backgrounds and ensuring Fellows' success in becoming a certified teacher.

One of MOCHA's aims is to place and retain men of color as effective classroom teachers across the content areas and grade levels in P-12 public schools. These men are trained in anti-racist pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching, including facilitating courageous conversations on potentially polarizing topics. Anti-racist educators are critical to challenging the entrenched racism that exists in the American educational system (Capper, Theoharis & Sebastian, 2006; Leonardo, 2009; Pollock, 2008). The presence of these Fellows as classroom teachers can have a positive impact on all students – not just the students of color – as well as their teaching colleagues.

Lastly, the MOCHA Program models a commitment to creating and sustaining high-quality learning environments. Whether in adult learning situations or developing P-12 curricular experiences, the faculty and program staff associated with every aspect of the MOCHA Program work consistently to identify areas of improvement and creatively address these issues. Modeling the work of educators who seek excellence is both professionally demanding and personally rewarding.

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Student Perceptions of Police Officers and School Safety in Public High Schools

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Abstract

Removal of police officers from schools, post 2020 social unrest, initiated this qualitative case study to explore the perceptions of recent high school graduates, from one of the largest public- school districts in the Midwest region of the United States, on school safety. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory will be used to learn how environmental and societal changes influence students' academic experience, mindset, and safety. Purposive and snowball sampling will support recruitment. Data will be gathered from an online questionnaire to explore a complex interaction of factors that affect students' view of safety. Insights contribute to a continuous dialogue of effective safety and wellness strategies for all school stakeholders.

Student Perceptions of Police Officers and School Safety in Public High Schools

Purpose

School safety is an ongoing concern, however, concerns over police presence in schools were heightened post pandemic. Exploring students' perception of school police as a security and safety measure is a critical component of student mental health and wellness. School police have reported that their role in schools can be situational. Police stated that they have had to serve as confidants, sometimes as counselors, and as law enforcers (Ghavami et al., 2021). Witnessing police brutality during the pandemic has lessened the feeling of being safe with police in schools for some students (Perumean-Chaney & Sutton, 2013).

Three guiding research questions were developed to support the focus and objective of the research on students' perspectives of police presence and removal as school resources:

1. What is the impact of school safety without the presence of police officers, as perceived by recent high school graduates?

2. What are the high school graduates' perception of the role of police officers in terms of contributing to or detracting from their sense of safety in school?

3. What alternative safety measures do recent high school graduates believe could effectively replace or supplement police presence in schools?

Theoretical Framework

This study addresses the complex dynamics of school safety, considering both direct and indirect influences on educational environments, as narrated by students who have recently completed high school. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory provided a framework for understanding how different layers of environmental contexts, from

immediate surroundings to wider societal and cultural structures, interact to influence student behavior and learning environments (Crawford, 2020). Additionally, concepts of self-management are considered to understand how recent high school graduates perceive and navigate these influences in relation to student wellness and school safety.

This research study aims to explore the perceptions of recent high school graduates regarding school safety. The objective of this study was to capture the perspectives of student beliefs and experiences post the social unrest of 2020 and to contribute to the dialogue of student-centered strategies for school safety. The issue is that many cities have removed police officers from high schools as resource officers, raising concerns about school safety.

In the context of this of this paper, "social unrest" refers to a period marked by widespread public protests and movements advocating for significant societal change, which emerged strongly in 2020. High-profile incidents of police misconduct, drove a national (or global) outcry against systemic racism and the reevaluation of the role of police in various social structures, including schools.

Some of the literature analyzed to support this study reported research on school safety for students in various learning environments. Students have shared that their individual experiences and the witnessing of police brutality contributed to feelings of anxiety when encountering police officers. Valera and Campbell (2020) surveyed college students who stated that their perceptions of police resulted in sadness, anger and fear which are symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress. Although the potential participants for this study are recent high school graduates, data from Valera and Campbell's study may align with the potential participants' current experiences of school safety, as college students.

Homer and Fisher (2020) posited that their research confirms that police presence in schools shows a high arrest rate of male students and particularly Black male students. Those findings of the Home and Fisher study align with the students and stakeholders who experienced or witnessed incidents of police harshness towards Black males and who were proponents of the call for police removal from schools. Students' perceptions of school police could manifest into unfavorable interactions inside and outside of school environments.

Alternative solutions to support school safety after police removal should be a priority for school improvement planning. Consideration of students' mental health and wellness needs to be front and center prior to implementation of any school safety options. Huskey and Connell (2021) reported that students shared that they experienced increased levels of anxiety during school shooter drills.

Methodology

A qualitative methodology will be implemented, combined with a case study research design. Robert Yin (2009) argues that implementing the case study design allows researchers to retain the meaningful individualisms of real-life events. This approach will allow for an in-depth exploration of the ecological systems affecting school safety, with a specific focus on the perspectives of recent high school graduates.

The population for the study will be recent high school graduates. Purposive and snowball sampling methods will be utilized to recruit participants, leveraging initial participants to provide referrals to other recent graduates who could offer valuable insights into the research topic. Snowball sampling as known as network sampling, allows participants to recommend the research to others who meet the criteria to join the study (Parker et al.,

2019). An online open- ended questionnaire was developed to gather student responses. A sample of respondents will be selected on a first come basis and the questionnaire will remain open to allow students to respond while on summer break.

Data Collection, Analysis, and Findings

Potential participants will be recruited through the dissemination of an informational flyer. The recruitment flyer includes a link to a questionnaire created using Google forms. Volunteers are required to first review and accept the informed consent section included in the questionnaire. Open-ended questions were aligned with the guiding research questions and developed to collect accurate data (Regmi, 2016). The questionnaires allow participants to reflect on their recent experiences and perceptions of school safety across different ecological contexts. Questions include gaining students' perspectives of safety during travel to and from school, within the school environment, and the impact of police presence for other school stakeholders.

Responses to each open-ended question will be downloaded into MS Excel and prepared for analysis. A six-step thematic analysis will be employed to systematically identify patterns and themes in the qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The analysis will include identifying similar language and responses for coding and categorizing. Patterns in participant responses will be coded as themes continue to emerge. Collected responses should include student concerns of mental and physical wellness during arrival and departure from school, as well as within the school buildings. Findings should reveal complex interactions between individual, relational, institutional, and broader societal factors that contribute to the perception and reality of school safety as experienced by recent high school graduates. Additionally, participants will be asked to share their experiences as college students

witnessing the protests on certain higher education campuses in early 2024.

Solutions-Based Findings

Data from this study could contribute to highlighting the significance of social justice and community engagement to educational challenges such as school safety. By focusing on recent high school graduates, the research emphasizes the need for educational policies and practices that consider multiple environmental influences and the unique transitions this demographic faces. The literature on school safety and student feelings of not being safe support this study (Turner & Beneke, 2020). Implications from this study will provide insights emphasizing the interconnectedness of educational environments and broader societal systems and offering actionable strategies to enhance student wellness and safety in schools. Recommendations after review of the literature include deputizing students to serve as school safety resources. Additional suggestions include a program to train student volunteers to police the school grounds as such a program could be a bridge for effective communication and understanding for students and all school stakeholders.

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A Place of Belonging: Unearthing How Black Boys Create Place Through Mentoring

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Abstract

The adultification and dehumanization of Black boys in schools have created an environment in which their academic and emotional progress have been hampered. Reflecting on my time as a school administrator of a K-8th grade school in Philadelphia, I analyze how a mentorship program called KingZ on the RiZe created a safe, affirming, and trauma-heling space for middle school Black boys. Utilizing Black Placemaking and Barry Lopez's *The Literature of Place*, this paper deconstructs how KingZ on the RiZe established a sense of belonging for Black boys, leading to academic and emotional growth and development.

A Place of Belonging: Unearthing How Black Boys Create Place Through Mentoring

The Need for Safe Black Male Spaces in K-12

As the Assistant Dean of Climate & Culture of a K-8th grade school, I was burdened with de-escalating any behaviors that violated the school policy. My job felt more reactive than proactive. I was spending too much time and resources defusing student and teacher-student conflicts. At the end of my first semester working at Northwest Academy, I analyzed student data, which included suspensions, detention, attendance, and academic performance, to learn that Black boys between the ages of 10 and 12 accounted for 48% of all behavior infractions. The numbers didn't surprise me. I was constantly plagued with the notion by staff and society that Black boys are hard to "control."

Since the first enslaved Africans arrived in 1614, Black boys and men have endured over-policing and mass incarceration (Givens, 2021; Leary, 2017). As a native Black Queer West Philadelphian, I am committed to creating healing and safe spaces for Black male adolescents and young adults. I approach this paper through a reflexivity qualitative method to clearly describe the contextual intersecting relationships between the sense of belonging of Black boys and place through the creation of a group of Black boys called KingZ on the RiZe. This method not only increases the credibility of the findings (Berger, 2015) but also deepens our understanding of the work. Furthermore, the process of continual and deep self-examination takes effort and practice and is best learned through mentoring (Mitchell et al., 2018). Utilizing Critical Race Theory, the Theory of Intersectionality, The Literature of Place, and Black Placemaking to understand how the creation of a boy's group led to them constructing spaces and places that developed a sense of belonging.

Northwest Academy is located in the East Mt. Airy neighborhood on a former

brownfield site with a Save-A-Lot and Luke Oil at opposite ends of the corner. Northwest Academy is a lottery-entry Title 1 school where most students come from Uptown, Mt. Airy, Olney, West Oak Lane, and the Lower Northeast neighborhoods of Philadelphia. About 90% of the students who attend Northwest Academy are African American, 21% have an IEP, and 58% are economically disadvantaged.

Creating a Safe Space

During one of the Kingz on the RiZe sessions, students had the opportunity to reflect on their interests and educational goals and learn about Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Kingz on the RiZe created a space where my students and I can be vulnerable. I wanted them to have the opportunity to share their feelings, hopes, dreams, and nightmares in a safe space. Black boys are too often not afforded this privilege. In academic spaces, Black boys are frequently seen as troublesome, bad, angry, or uncontrollable. The anger of at-risk African American males is witnessed through behaviors, demeanor, music choices, and rebellious style. Seldom do they look like happy adolescents (Porter, 2012). Many of the Black boys in Kingz on the RiZe endured hardships that are all too common within marginalized communities. It was rare to see Raheem smile. Raheem lived with his aunt and did not have a healthy relationship with his mom or dad. This conflict caused him to lash out in anger. Hassan's family was struggling financially. Marcus's family was currently living in a shelter. Marcus is probably one of the brightest students I have ever taught. Michael was also living with his aunt. Michael suffered from Sickle Cell Anemia, a disease that is predominantly found in people of the African diaspora. Due to his illness, there were times when Michael would miss months of school. He would come to school feeling like an outsider. Amir lived with his mom and was musically talented. He would come to school with anger and frustration. With all

this being said, it is a reminder of why I must center this paper on Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality.

Critical Race Theory forces me to center the lived experiences of Black people and acknowledge that race is a vital factor in their educational experience. CRT begins with the notion that racism is "normal, not aberrant, in American society" (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Because racism is meshed into the fabric of the U.S. social order, it appears normal and natural to people in this society. Utilizing CRT creates an opportunity to use counter-narrative to deconstruct my research in a manner that does not uphold white supremacy and Eurocentric standards and ideas. By uplifting the narratives of my students, I hope to provide a counter-narrative to the racist stereotypes of Black boys.

Furthermore, uplifting Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality allows me to recognize that sex and gender also play a role in the challenges they endure. Intersectionality theory began in the context of African American women's experiences and has since been expanded to include many aspects of identity, including race, gender, sexuality, and others. According to Crenshaw's intersectionality theory, an individual's identity is molded by a number of interconnected elements, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and disability (Crenshaw, 1989). It emphasizes that understanding the experiences of marginalized people requires an assessment of how these intersecting identities produce unique social situations. Using intersectionality, I examine how my students' race and gender played a role in their experiences and outcomes at school. As a Black queer man who grew up in a poverty-stricken neighborhood like many of my students, I understand how race, gender, and socioeconomic factors can create additional hardships toward reaching one's educational goals. There were times when I didn't have the necessary supplies for school or when I didn't have transportation to get to school. In a

study examining the effects of poverty on the achievement of urban African-American male students, it was reported that when the level of poverty increases, the achievement level, as indicated by cumulative GPA, decreases (Welch, 2013).

The Power of Place

Barry Lopez (1997) argues that if you're intimate with a place with a history you're familiar with and establish an ethical conversation with it, the implication is that the place knows you are there. It feels you. You will not be forgotten, cut off, or abandoned. My students were intimate with the place of school and the community that surrounded it. Lopez's assertions are evident by my students' closeness to the boys' group we created together. The intimacy I shared with my students led to the using Black Placemaking as a tool of healing. According to Hunter et al. (2016), Black Placemaking refers to how urban Black Americans create sites of endurance, belonging, and resistance through social interaction. Originally, Kingz on the RiZe was designed to correct the behaviors of my Black male students. However, I learned they needed a place to feel loved, connected, and belonging. They taught me that being the big bad dean does not equate to disrupting the challenges they face in and out of the school. The notion of Black Placemaking shifts otherwise oppressive geographies of a city to provide sites of play, pleasure, celebration, and politics (Hunter et al., 2016). Northwest Academy was our geographic space. Through our exchange of dialogue, activities, and programs, we celebrated our achievements while having fun. During our discussion about HBCUs, we had the opportunity to celebrate the higher education goals they hoped to achieve.

Raheem: I like reading. I love playing Apex. I look up to Stephen Curry Michael: You can't even play ball.

Raheem: Shut up. You can't play either. Amir: I'm better than both of you.

Hassan: Marcus is better than both of you.

Marcus: So you see, I like basketball cause I'm the best. But I do prefer football. I also play the guitar. I want to go to CAPA.

CAPA is Philly's top creative and performing arts high school. It is where Boyz II Men, Jazmine Sullivan, Questlove, and countless other Philly-born artists graduated from. Each of my students was talented and skilled in so many unique ways. The joy they …(released)

Findings: Lessons Learned

Lopez (1997) reminds me that "the key to becoming vulnerable to a place is opening yourself up. You can build intimacy. Out of such intimacy may come a sense of belonging, not being isolated in the universe." Trust is a prerequisite for nurturing vulnerability and developing genuine loving relationships. Through KingZ on the RiZe program, the students began taking up space and creating their own spaces of belonging and support. As the program continued, many middle school boys would develop relationships with lower schools, thus creating a mentoring program that I did not plan but an organic mentor program to create a space where they could just enjoy being themselves while helping the younger students. Through their ability to create a place where they took up academic spaces and turned them into places of healing. They would meet in the hallway, behind the stairway, backyard, cafeteria, and various other places.

Too often, I hear from teachers about how the student's behavior and academic performance changed. However, the students in KingZ on the RiZe and I created change together. We created a space where I was not the authority but more of a facilitator and mentor. Research has shown that Black males have an increased likelihood of graduating high school when they are exposed to role models who have secured economic success through academic achievement (Wint et al., 2022). Additionally, a sense of support and belonging from teachers,

mentors, counselors, or coaches contributes positively to school attendance, academic performance, sense of self, and educational aspirations (Brooms, 2013; Brooms, 2019; Osterman, 2000). I was able to create a space for my Black male students that was not available for me when I was in school. I remember searching for the right after-school program in middle school that would allow me to be who I am. Using the lessons and challenges from my middle school experience, I fostered a community that built vulnerability and trust. I dedicate this paper to all the Black boys who have taken space in violent places to create A Place of Belonging.

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Using Culture to Code: An Informal Pilot Programming Session for Grades 4-5

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Abstract

Computational thinking (CT) and programming are not traditionally a part of the elementary curriculum. While these students are digital natives, they are typically focused on being users of technology and not concerned with the science behind it. Computer Science (CS) is not prominent in all K-12 systems nationwide, and access to CS in elementary and middle schools is even less prevalent than in high schools. This work leveraged existing culturally inclusive pedagogical approaches and CS education frameworks to design, pilot and evaluate a one-day interactive and informal CT and programming workshop for African American upper elementary aged children (grades 4-5).

Keywords: Culturally Relevant Computing, Informal Learning, Block Based Programming

Using Culture to Code: An Informal Pilot Programming Session for Grades 4-5

Often, computational thinking (CT) and programming are not an integral part of the elementary curriculum. While these students are digital natives, they are typically focused on being users of technology and not concerned with the science behind it. Computer Science (CS) is only prominent in a few K-12 systems nationwide; as of 2023, only 17 states require all k-12 schools to offer some form of computer science course (Code.org et al., 2023). Support for elementary CS education include piquing STEM interest early and a proven capability of computational thinking skills at a young age (Gibson, 2012).This research sought to reach a niche underserved STEM population of 4th and 5th-grade Black students by hosting a one-day workshop that introduced fundamental CS principles through a culturally relevant approach.

Related Work

One approach that has been utilized to broaden the participation of those historically excluded from STEM has been the use of culturally relevant/sustaining pedagogies. There are several terms associated with these cultural approaches that aim to make mainstream education more relatable to the day-to-day lives of minority students as a means of addressing the cultural discontinuity of home and classroom. One of the more acclaimed sets of practices, culturally relevant pedagogy, was developed and coined by Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally relevant computing (CRC) is the term used for practices that apply these pedagogical frameworks through the use of technology. As defined by Scott et al., CRC aims to enhance educational experiences by integrating culture in a way that learners not only gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of their culture and others, but also as a tool to bring about critical and social consciousness (Scott et al., 2015). The Kapor Center developed the

culturally responsive-sustaining CS framework which is grounded in the aforementioned culturally inclusive pedagogies and geared towards K-12 education specifically (Davis et al., 2021). The framework lists six core components that are suggestions to guide curriculum designer and educators in the design process.

Methods

Curriculum Development

The professor-student research pair (both African American women) worked to develop a curriculum that not only met pedagogical standards, but was also inclusive of cultural frames of reference that would engage the participating students. Central to the curriculum's design was the utilization of students' identities as a catalyst for project development, encouraging creativity while programming elements reflective of their identities. The title of the curriculum was "Who Am I? What Makes Me Me?". The curriculum began by discussing what identity meant and exploring the identities of the researchers as well as the students. It further went on to explore the identities of influential Black History figures such as Hidden Figure, Katherine Johnson, which not only addressed racism in CS/STEM, but racism as a whole and fostered critical discussions about societal norms. Before diving into the hands-on learning experience, the curriculum exposed students to a range of CS and tech careers, showcased diverse professionals and inspiring career aspirations. Students were shown how CS could be intertwined with hobbies such as sports, dance, and fashion. This approach broadens students' horizons and promotes diversity and inclusion in the tech industry, empowering them to envision themselves as future leaders and innovators. Most importantly, the session prioritized student voice and agency by incorporating their input into their individual projects, which also fostered empowerment and advocacy. Students were tasked with creating a digital book

featuring some of their identities. They had to include why they liked each aspect of their identity and utilize the various beginner programming constructs in the process. Programming topics included variables, loops, and if/then constructs. It was decided to use the Scratch platform, which features block based programming which has seen tremendous success with introducing younger students to the CT and programming concepts in the coding world without being tied to cumbersome and nuanced text-based language. Students were introduced to Scratch and were asked to choose different sprites representative of their identities. Then, they were introduced to each of the three programming constructs via an explanation related to concepts they were familiar with (i.e loops and roller coasters). They were asked to utilize one or more of the concepts in each of the settings representing their different identities.

Day of Workshop

The finalized curriculum underwent a pilot session involving three elementary-aged students. This limited sample size was attributed to time constraints related to IRB approval and advertising the workshop at the church. Before participation, all participants provided informed consent (both parental and student). Pre- and post-workshop surveys, including the 11-item Elementary CS Attitudes Survey, were administered to gauge shifts in self-efficacy, outcome expectancy, and perceptions of cultural inclusiveness among the participants (Vandenberg et al., 2021).

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Results and Observations

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Due to the small sample size, there were no significant findings based on the Attitudes Survey however, the researchers were able to draw qualitative conclusions based on observations. The observations revealed a high level of engagement among the children, as evidenced by their active participation and eagerness to ask questions, desire to extend the

workshop duration, and explore further concepts beyond the workshop's scope. Also, all students believed that they could be successful at coding by the end of the workshop.

Future Work

As a result of the workshop, the church that hosted the coding session has reached out to the professor to conduct workshops throughout the Fall of 2024 in conjunction with their community center on the church's campus. These future sessions, with a slightly older demographic (middle school), will allow for an opportunity to help supplement the limited CS educational resources of local schools in the area. This will also permit a longitudinal study of the applied culturally situated frameworks with a larger sample size.

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Authors' Biographies

Dr. Desmond L. Kemp is an accomplished writer, activist, and educator. As a proud HBCU alum, he has guided students to secure over $10 million in scholarships as a college readiness and scholarship coach. He graduated from North Carolina A&T State University and DePaul University prior to receiving a doctorate in American Studies from Indiana University-Indianapolis. Dr. Kemp's research interests are in public sector policies, social media, and youth development. He is the founder and CEO of De'Lamar Communications Agency, LLC, focusing on diverse content creation for social impact.

As a writer, scholar, educator and proud HBCU alum of Morgan State University, Dr. Thomas- Woodard has 20 years of experience in educating, coaching, and training teachers. Dr. Thomas's research has been featured in top journals such as the *Journal of Negro Education*, the *Journal of Multicultural Education*, and the *Journal of African American Males in Education*. She has also co-authored several book chapters and books. She is excited to present her latest book entitled *Political, Legislative, and Economic Solutions to Urban Education and the Implications on Teacher Preparation*, released in Fall 2021. Dr. Thomas-Woodard combines her years of classroom experience, with years of research and collaboration with practitioners around ways to support new teachers and teacher educators. She is an Assistant Professor and MAT Coordinator at Lenoir-Rhyne University and is also the Assistant Director of The Urban Education Collaborative.

Developing Culturally Conscious Teachers in an Era of Teacher Censorship

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Abstract

In recent years, teachers have faced criticism and restrictions on how they choose to educate their students. Some states have gone as far as to censor teachers, preventing them from providing authentic and truthful instruction. Although there is an abundance of literature addressing this issue, this article aims to provide additional ways to develop culturally conscious teachers who can navigate hostile censoring environments. The article uses a qualitative case study of social studies teachers from three schools in a southern state to highlight their lived experiences and how they persist in overcoming these challenges. The study shows that each teacher developed a specific cultural consciousness to help them navigate their pedagogical practices. The article concludes by offering recommendations for developing a culturally conscious teacher in the face of censorship.

Keywords: teacher censorships, culturally conscious teaching, social studies teachers

Developing Culturally Conscious Teachers in an Era of Teacher Censorship

Educators globally are facing challenges regarding their methods of teaching. In China, Queer teachers in China are governed by both the repressive political climate and heteronormative culture (Cui, 2023). As such, addressing queer issues in the classroom presents a unique set of concerns. A range of classroom surveillance and censorship techniques operated by the authorities hinder queer educators from addressing LBGTQ issues in class. Thus, China's heteronormative spaces are where the institutions and Party-State suppress queerness (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2018). Lee Smith (2023) found that principals at Canadian-accredited schools abroad deal with different levels of government control over what's taught and discussed, compared to schools in Canada. Principals work with ruling political parties to ensure they stick to approved topics and methods to closely monitor curriculum content. Although there are agreements between host governments from eight countries in Asia, Europe, South America and Canadian education authorities, ongoing negotiations are influenced by political changes, making it tricky to run these school programs smoothly.

In the United States, similar political behavior has resulted in censoring teachers in American schools within the embodiment of heteronormative culture driven by the conservative Republican party (Feingold & Weishart, 2023). As a response to the issue of teacher censorship, debates across public mediums have heightened, especially in a politically charged atmosphere (Dávila & Barnes, 2017). The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) identified that seventeen states, primarily across the South, have implemented classroom censorship laws (IDRA, 2022). In 2022, the state legislatures in Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, South Dakota, and Tennessee passed race education-related bills. Georgia's HB 1084 bills and Kentucky's SB 1 dictate how teachers engage in the context of race and U.S. History. Most recently, in 2024, Alabama Governor Ivey, signed DEI bills into law, banning

diversity, equity, and inclusion offices, programming and training within public colleges, and other state agencies (Griesbach, 2024).

The shift in the political climate places a need for teacher education programs, especially in social studies education, to reframe their pedagogical approach to teaching history. Scholars in education, teachers, and teacher candidates' views on incorporating banned or censored literature in their lessons have become mixed. When exposed to such material during their training, on the job or in formal instruction, educators often appreciate the idea of exploring contentious subjects with their students (Lycke & Lucey, 2018). Various factors influence how sensitive topics are taught, such as official guidelines, community sentiments, emotional backgrounds, and imparted values. While past research emphasized the discussion's role in addressing controversies and fostering civic engagement and empathy, further investigation is required to understand its effects on students' political and civic involvement.

This article addresses concerns regarding teacher censorship and proposes solutions for cultivating culturally aware educators capable of navigating inclusive pedagogical practices. Teacher education programs play a pivotal role in preparing educators for diverse student populations, requiring support in integrating culturally relevant pedagogy and addressing issues of race, power, and privilege (Allen et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2014). Through a qualitative case study in a southern state, Georgia, the article explores the experiences of three social studies teachers facing censorship and emphasizes the development of cultural consciousness to navigate such environments. Recommendations are provided to aid in the development of culturally conscious teachers when faced with censorship challenges.

Literature Review

Conscious Teachers

Conscious teaching is defined in various ways in literature, all of which emphasize the importance of educators critically examining their pedagogical practices to uplift the unique voices of their students (Schiera, 2019). A recent "anti-hate" project led by both educators and

students found that conscious teachers have dedicated their careers to pushing back against the systemic barriers that exclude marginalized populations (Pollock et al., 2022). To prevent censorship from hindering their efforts, conscious teachers must empower themselves and the school community to take action. Being a conscious teacher means adopting a race-radical and political framework and sharing a vision of teaching in solidarity with the school community (Mayorga & Picower, 2018). Moreover, conscious teachers must explicitly acknowledge racial disparities in all aspects of a student's life, including discipline (Carter et al., 2017), access to gifted education (Ford, 1995), and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1990). This involves continuously dismantling implicit biases, microaggressions, and colorblindness (Gilliam et al., n.d.).

The existing literature also indicates that conscious teachers deliberately work against whiteness (Matias & Mackey, 2016). This is frequently achieved through a topical life history, which involves the teachers reflecting on their white identity and being critical of a racialized curriculum that elevates white voices (Jupp, 2017). The conscious teacher must engage in the creative deconstruction of their cherished knowledge of America to recode their mindset for a race-visible pedagogical practice. This includes white teachers redirecting their racialized focus away from the implicit deficits of students of color (Utt & Tochluk, 2020). Similarly, conscious teachers of color unpack internalized racism as they strive for racially just classrooms. This practice involves self-work before becoming a teacher and engaging in critical dialogues about internalized racism (Kohli, 2014). Conscious teachers of color, in particular, recognize the importance of taking a cross-racial approach to understanding the struggles of teachers of color with internalized racism in their own lives. Therefore, conscious teachers from all racial backgrounds undertake an internal examination of their racial identity and how it influences their teaching.

Conscious teachers who are deeply committed to fostering a democratic schooling project are known to employ culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP), which involves perpetuating and nurturing linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism, particularly in light of the changing global

landscape (Paris & Alim, 2014). The pedagogical practices of conscious teachers are grounded primarily on two key tenets. Firstly, they focus on recognizing the plural and evolving nature of youth identity and cultural practices. Secondly, they are committed to embracing the counter-hegemonic potential of youth culture. In employing CSP, these teachers seek to elevate student voices and create a student-centered classroom instead of one that is teacher-driven (Aponte, 2018). Therefore, for many conscious teachers, CSP is the pedagogical practice of choice.

Censorship in Social Studies

The phenomenon of a whitewashed curriculum that neglects the harsh realities of U.S. history is not a new one. However, in recent years, educators have been tasked with critically examining themselves and their curricula to provide a cross-racial approach to teaching. Among the subjects under particular scrutiny is Social Studies, as educators grapple with the challenge of teaching unapologetically or potentially facing professional repercussions (Ho et al., 2017). One study conducted by Lycke and Lucey (2018) explored the thoughts of secondary teacher candidates on issues of censorship and which materials to use. The study found that teacher candidates conceptually appreciated the notion of exploring controversial issues with students when introduced to banned and censored texts related to citizenship. However, when it comes to teaching controversial issues, two main areas are often addressed: the contextual factors affecting the teaching of such topics and the instructional practices involved in doing so (Ho et al., 2017). The decision to teach controversial topics is influenced by a range of contextual factors, such as official curricular policies, community beliefs, emotional histories, and teachers' differing beliefs and sense of purpose.

Over time, the social studies classroom has been a crucial space for preparing students to live together in a multicultural democracy (Sheppard & Levy, 2019). Advocating for the creation of political classrooms that engage students in questions that explore how we live together, Hess and McAvoy (2013) emphasize the critical examination of whose stories we tell, the decision to confront or repress our differences of opinion, and the exploration of inequalities in our

communities. However, social studies teachers across the United States face significant challenges in teaching about and for democratic life in an increasingly polarizing political climate (McAvoy & Hess, 2013). As a result, there is a growing need for teachers to undergo development on how to teach controversial topics. This necessitates teachers' ability to be comfortable with uncomfortable topics (Arneback, 2022) by employing anti-racist pedagogy. A pedagogy of discomfort acknowledges that inquiring into systems of inequity and oppression brings up difficult emotions that require a highly skilled teacher. It also requires teachers to observe and listen to students' emotional reactions and allow for ambiguity in the learning process (Sheppard & Levy, 2019).

Bans on Critical Race Theory (CRT) due to the misuse of the theory in definition and application, have censored teachers from addressing the horrific and controversial history of the United States. The laws governing K-12 teacher's speech protection have been convoluted, ignoring that teachers retain some First Amendment protection as public educators. However, banning CRT prohibits an array of controversial topics across social studies classrooms that have paralyzed teachers from unabashedly educating students on the difficult truths of American History (Driver, 2018). In some cases, educators have resigned because of the way some groups have responded to the debate over banning CRT. Not shockingly, new laws that restrict teachers from teaching content that may make students uncomfortable have been passed (Morgan, 2022). The misconception of this theory has yielded negative outcomes over teaching about the history of Blacks in America. Teachers have First Amendment pedagogical rights, which have been ignored for fear of the truth and how the truth deconstructs white supremacy and makes whiteness less marketable.

Teacher Preparation Toward Conscious Teaching

Teacher preparation programs (TPP) designed to produce conscious teachers must prioritize several critical areas of focus. Foremost among these is the need to explore how race, power, individual, institutional, and cultural racism impact beliefs, structures, and outcomes for

students of color (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015). One effective strategy to promote this understanding is through the use of racial autobiographies, which can serve as a powerful tool for students to examine their own racial identity and develop an awareness of race, privilege, and systemic racial oppression (Ards, 2015). This process of development also involves pre-service teachers of color confronting their own internalized racism, a crucial step in cultivating a socially conscious teacher (Kohli, 2014). Moreover, there is a particular emphasis on teacher identity, which involves analyzing how teachers are shaped by reform contexts and discourse, and how they navigate these factors to create a supportive environment for themselves and their students (R. Buchanan, 2015).

Teacher preparation programs that include ways to prepare teachers with a social justice perspective are more able to cultivate firmly established core beliefs and practices needed to act as a change agent in the classroom (Jones-Fosu, 2021). As such, TPP programs that incorporate Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), examine critical areas of accountability, curriculum, and instruction of teachers and teacher educators. TPP programs rooted in a critical race paradigm that centers on exposing and challenging racial policies that maintain the status quo have yielded critically conscious teachers (Allen et al., 2017). Overall, the policies that govern TPP toward the development of conscious teachers include reforming the curriculum of teacher education to emphasize a deeper study of race, poverty, and the intersectionality of race and poverty (Milner & Laughter, 2015). Unless teachers are prepared to develop a sense of consciousness in schooling as a sociopolitical context and a sense of social responsibility, the academic failure of students and the opportunity gap will continue to grow (Ukpokodu, 2020). As the literature reflects, when TPP programs interrupt centering whiteness and white comfortability, conscious teachers are cultivated for the future classroom.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) observes and studies racism, race, and power with the overall goal of transformation (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Furthermore, "the work of critical race

theory is often disruptive because of its commitment to anti-racism" (Bell, 1995, p. 899) and appeals to understand the permanence of racism. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) identified six fundamental tenets of Critical Race Theory, which include: 1) interest convergence, 2) social construction of race, 3) racism as a common experience, 4) differential radicalization, 5) role of intersectionality, and 6) voice of color. Interest convergence explains the avoidance of focus on racism by White people in an attempt to continue to receive benefits afforded to them as a result of their race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

CRT also encourages the examination of decisions to support "equity" when it benefits White people. Secondly, race is socially constructed, and often society chooses to focus on race above other factors such as intelligence and skill (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT also posits that racism has become a normalized everyday experience in the United States and is difficult for White people to address (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Differential radicalism addresses how minoritized groups are constructed to reinforce White supremacy and the needs of the market (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Intersectionality focuses on resisting the single narrative of people of color and instead embraces their diverse lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1990; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Lastly, voices of color highlight the burden of Black people with educating White people about matters for which they may be ignorant (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

This study is examined through the lens of interest convergence to recommend ways to develop a culturally conscious teacher when censorship threatens what and how they teach. Teacher censorship from the harsh realities and historical experiences of minoritized groups in America reinforces white supremacy in schools. Censoring what has taken place in America, and the treatment of Black, Native, and other people of color, reinforces lies that fuel elevating white culture as the right culture. When teachers are censored, the history that exposes white supremacy is blocked, therefore interest convergence is utilized by Whites in leadership wanting to maintain their privilege and social status.

Research Background

This research was sparked by a notable investigation on teacher censorship in Georgia conducted by Kemp (2023). One year prior, the Georgia Legislature passed the Protect Student First Act, which limits K-12 educators from discussing certain topics known as "divisive concepts" - such as race, gender, and sexuality. This legislation is emblematic of a larger national conversation concerning educational curricula and how to address controversial subjects in the classroom (Sawchuk, 2021; Gibbons & Ray, 2021). Advocates for the legislation argue that these measures guard students from potential ideological indoctrination, while others worry they restrict academic freedom and perpetuate ignorance surrounding significant societal issues (Campbell, 2023; Seiler, 2022).

The implementation of the Protect Student First Act highlights the tension between academic autonomy and political influence in education. By establishing parameters for classroom discourse, policymakers aim to ensure that instruction reflects the values and priorities of the political climate (Williams, 2022). However, this approach may impede educators' ability to foster critical thinking and facilitate nuanced discussions about complex social issues among students.

One of the primary targets of the legislation is Critical Race Theory (CRT), which we have identified as a framework that examines how systemic racism operates within societal structures and institutions. Proponents of CRT argue that it provides valuable insights into understanding historical and contemporary patterns of discrimination, while opponents claim that it promotes divisiveness and undermines traditional American values which typically is driven in social studies education. By limiting teachers' discussion of CRT-related concepts, the Protect Student First Act reflects a broader resistance to perceived challenges to the prevailing narrative of American exceptionalism.

Kemp (2023) uncovered that the scope of the Protect Student First Act extended beyond K-12 education to encompass higher education institutions. However, due to the autonomous

nature of college curriculums, direct restrictions could not be imposed on Georgia's colleges and universities. Nonetheless, one of the interviewees in this research noted that Georgia's higher education landscape witnessed a notable shift as the state began to reduce financial support for diversity-centered programs within these institutions (p.18).

The study further highlights how the law increased stress for teachers statewide, fearing disciplinary action and heightened parental and administrative scrutiny. These restrictions affected the entire academic community, creating an atmosphere of uncertainty. Faculty struggled with navigating discussion boundaries while maintaining academic integrity and promoting critical thinking. Meanwhile, students faced a limited educational environment, with certain perspectives marginalized and discussions on important societal issues restricted in some classrooms.

Over 100 colleges and universities across the United States have been identified to be a leader in critical race training in education (Critical Race Training in Education, 2022). Each school may not have designated CRT courses to mold conscious teachers but their programming or stance in fostering an equitable learning space provides a foundation in which we hope to see is reflected in all learning environments. Prior to 2020, the schools listed by CRT in Education were not impacted by legislation as the schools in Alabama will be enforced under Senate Bill 129. Although the Protect Student First Act presents considerable obstacles to academic freedom and diversity in Georgia's K-12 public schools, higher education institutions retain the freedom to incorporate critical race theory into their curriculum. Institutions like the University of Georgia and Georgia State University offer courses in social studies education and education policy that prioritize critical race theory, particularly for future educators.

Methods

This case study is a follow-up to the teacher censorship study and utilizes the author's research notes of each participant. We chose three of the participating educators who received training from a Georgia-based college or university. The teachers all agreed to the data being

used for research to further advocate for the practice of culturally relevant teaching. The author promised anonymity and will maintain that agreement within the context of this study. The teacher participants are identified as Teachers A, B, and C.

Each teacher was interviewed twice. The first interview was for one hour to discuss their reactions and feelings to the Protect Students First Act and the follow-up interview was a conversation about their experiences as advocates, or how they've been allowed to further educate themselves within their practice as educators

Analysis

Teacher A, a white male, in his mid 30s, received teacher training from a university in Georgia. Teacher A teaches middle-grade social studies in the northeastern region of the state. Teacher A reported his school's demographics are 48% Black, 36% White, and 9% Hispanic. Teacher A first met with the researcher after school on Thursday, January 19, 2023, five months after the passing of the Protect Students First Act.

Issues with the law:

Teacher A expressed strong opposition to the law, labeling it as "stupid and partisan." They emphasized the lack of concern or discussion about the bill among others. Teacher A voiced frustration that partisan politics were prioritized over truth and expressed a desire to accurately portray history, particularly regarding the neglect of Black children's feelings in the 1950s and 1960s. They emphasized the importance of acknowledging this historical reality without exacerbating racial tensions.

Teacher A also acknowledged that his student body needs to see themselves in the curriculum especially since the school has a large African American population. He made the researcher aware that there was no formal training on how to teach with the Protect Student First Act in place.

Teacher A took the responsibility to be an advocate for teachers, students, and equitable education. Teacher A believes teachers should sue the state and bring students on board to fight the legislature against this law.

Teacher B, a white woman in her early 30s, received teacher training in multiple states. Her graduate-level education was completed at a university in southeast Georgia. She teaches high school social studies in the southeast Georgia region. Teacher B is the second participant in the overall research. She assisted with recruiting other teachers to participate in November 2022, because she knew of teachers who were dealing with firsthand issues with the administration after the passing of the HB1084 Bill.

Issues with the law:

Teacher B voiced deep concerns about the trajectory of public education, seeing recent measures as part of a broader agenda to undermine it. They fear that eroding trust in educators and schools, despite their dedication and expertise, will lead to the removal of experienced teachers. This, in turn, could result in a system reliant on less qualified individuals who adhere strictly to scripted lessons. Ultimately, Teacher B is worried that this erosion of trust will be used to justify privatization, jeopardizing the quality of education and the teaching profession.

Teacher B viewed the Protect Students First Act as oppressive and offensive to teachers. As a teacher of advanced US History and Government teaching within a Title I school, where the majority of students are of color, she recognizes the crucial role she plays in imparting truthful and honest history. Amidst the enactment of the bill, she perceives it as a hindrance, imposing oppressive barriers to students' access to knowledge and potential for advocacy. Despite the inherent risks, she remains steadfast in prioritizing truth in her teaching approach. Utilizing literary texts such as *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, she aims to foster critical thinking among her students. She is determined to empower my students by providing them with a comprehensive education that encourages critical analysis and fosters a deeper understanding of the world around them.

She provided the example that in a class discussion on knowledge and technology, students explored whether Internet access constitutes a human right. Through examining a clip featuring a South African advocate discussing post-colonial theory, they delved into

conversations about its relevance in the United States. The students questioned whether Americans are immune to post-colonialism or contribute to it. While these discussions may seem collegiate, they are crucial as they extend beyond traditional K-12 topics. This exploration is integral as it permeates all subjects, enhancing students' understanding and critical thinking skills. Thus, while the Theory of Knowledge may challenge norms, it enriches students' academic pursuits across disciplines.

Teacher C, a Black male in his mid-30s, is a lateral entry social studies teacher who graduated from a college in south Georgia. Teacher C teaches high school government and U.S. History in the southeast Georgia region. Teacher C met with the researcher in December 2022 before a school basketball game and immediately following a conflict with his school's administrators.

Issues with the law:

Teacher C discussed censorship in their school context, noting a lack of explicit censorship but highlighting cultural influences, particularly in South Georgia. Unlike the other teachers, Teacher C has the experience of a white parent objecting to a lecture, feeling it was too heavy, despite it not deviating from the standard curriculum. He observed that some teachers who pray in class, reflecting cultural norms, have not faced any consequences. In their government class, they prioritize neutrality, avoiding personal biases and opinions. However, they encountered censorship when attempting to display a neutral political cartoon. Its removal stemmed not from student benefit but from a white colleague's objection, highlighting internal pressures rather than official censorship policies.

In his school, he reported the censorship of curriculum was not closely monitored due to workload priorities. Teacher C recalled an incident where a colleague faced censorship for discussing drugs with students, resulting in her departure. The censorship was prompted by concerns about topic relevance to standards and inappropriate language, causing discomfort for students of all backgrounds. Teacher C stresses the importance of adhering to standards to prevent stricter censorship and maintain a conducive learning environment.

He proudly embraces his Black identity and recounts an incident at their new school where assumptions about their political beliefs were made based on classroom decor. However, the assistant principal's recognition of cultural elements in the classroom prompted a reassessment of these assumptions. Teacher C underscores their dedication to transparent teaching, involving students in current events, and promoting cultural inclusivity to deepen understanding and connection to the subject matter, especially for their predominantly Black student demographic. To enhance his practice, he is currently participating in a culturally relevant professional development cohort for history educators until 2025.

Recommendations

In the current climate of legislative scrutiny and governance, the education system is under constant observation. To maintain a culturally conscious school culture amidst these challenges, we propose implementing the following practices:

School Level Recommendations

It is crucial for schools to recognize the value of leveraging students' diverse experiences to enrich teaching pedagogy and create a sense of belonging and relevance. Incorporating students' personal perspectives into lessons, like sharing personal anecdotes when discussing civil rights movements, helps bridge the gap between textbook knowledge and real-world application. This approach empowers students to take an active role in their education, leading to higher engagement and better learning outcomes. As educators move towards culturally sustaining pedagogy (Alim & Paris, 2017), students must be given a voice in the curriculum to shape their own thinking.

School principals and leadership team members must remain mindful of legislation that may have negative impacts on students and staff. Decisions should prioritize the overall needs of the school, ensuring they align with educational goals while navigating legal requirements to foster a conducive learning environment for all stakeholders. Therefore, school leaders should monitor the short and long-term effects of censorship, as it can potentially hinder the academic

achievement of students.

Hosting community-based professional development (PD) can enrich classroom learning. By engaging educators with local culture, leaders, and resources, this approach equips teachers with insights to create culturally responsive experiences. Adapting teaching methods to immigrant students' cultural backgrounds and family dynamics fosters better engagement and support, ultimately enhancing learning outcomes. School community partnerships can provide educators with unfiltered accounts of historical events, offering a wealth of knowledge to enhance classroom instruction.

Teachers and school principals must seriously consider running for political office. Decision-makers frequently lack classroom experience and enact regulations and laws based on misinformation and political agendas. A teacher or school administrator understands firsthand the effects of implementing laws on student outcomes. For instance, in North Carolina, Congresswoman Alma Adams, a former educator, has steadfastly championed legislation and supported teachers to enhance student success.

District Level Recommendations

School district leaders have to advocate to strongly oppose bills that take away teachers' control and limit classroom diversity of thought. These measures weaken teacher effectiveness by restricting their ability to create engaging and inclusive learning environments. By standing against such regulations, district leaders protect teachers' crucial role in helping students succeed and promoting equal educational opportunities.

District-level leaders should involve community leaders in providing resources to schools to boost community engagement citywide. Encourage parents and business leaders to join parent-teacher associations to stay informed about legislation affecting education. This fosters collaboration and ensures a well-informed community involvement in shaping educational policies and practices.

District-level leadership ought to partner with local colleges, including Historically Black Colleges and Universities, to improve culture-based training for educators. They can tap into

course materials, like those implemented in social studies teacher preparation education at Georgia State University and the University of Georgia, related to understanding diverse perspectives. This strengthens educators' ability to create inclusive learning environments sensitive to students' backgrounds.

District-level leadership must provide professional development to social studies teachers that dismantle fear of the past but situate difficult histories as a mechanism of learning and growth. Given student's access to technology, school districts are being counterproductive in censoring historical narratives that show the realities of whiteness and white rule. Districts need

to take a proactive approach, leaning in on the history of their state as a way to dismantle white supremacy and not uplift it.

State Level Recommendations

State-level leaders must undergo a reorientation regarding Critical Race Theory (CRT). Regrettably, it has been unjustly scapegoated for anything related to Black history in America and race in education. State legislators must first grasp what CRT entails and acknowledge that it is not part of school curricula. Teaching historical facts about states formerly part of the Confederacy or discussing the outcomes of European slavery inflicted on Africans in America is not synonymous with CRT.

It is crucial for State-level legislators to truly represent the people they serve by embracing diversity and multiple perspectives. By doing so, important issues like censorship can be addressed and lies be refuted. To achieve this, the State education commissions must actively involve educators in the decision-making process and keep them informed about potential changes. By empowering teachers to contribute to educational policy and practice, we can foster civic engagement and create a brighter future for all.

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Limitations

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A significant challenge in this research is the varying issues surrounding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) legislation across districts and states. This imbalance complicates the ability of researchers to offer universal solutions or approaches. Instead, it emphasizes the need for tailored strategies that consider the unique circumstances and challenges of each jurisdiction. Such targeted approaches are essential for effectively addressing DEI-related issues in education at both the local and statewide levels.

The aftermath of the Protect Student First Act yields diverse experiences among English and social studies teachers across the state and local levels. Each teacher grapples with unique

challenges in managing their classrooms post-implementation. Understanding these individual accounts is crucial for gaining a comprehensive insight into the legislation's impact on teaching practices and classroom dynamics.

Conclusion

It's crucial to advocate for culturally relevant social studies education to ensure students get a complete and inclusive understanding of history and society. We need to encourage discussions at the local level to promote racial understanding and support policies that embrace diverse perspectives. Unfortunately, recent bans on topics that address Black history, race and racism, inaccurately cited as "Critical Race Theory", hinder educators from addressing important aspects of U.S. history. Legislation such as the Protect Student First Act puts restrictions on what can be taught in schools. We need to document the experiences of educators and policymakers to understand the implications of these limitations. While DEI legislation presents challenges, we must come up with tailored strategies to address these issues at both local and statewide levels. It's important to keep pushing for comprehensive education that offers students a complete and accurate understanding of history and society.

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Critical Intercultural Competency and Special Education in Urban Education:

Increasing Student Voice, Visibility, and Motivation Through Self-Reflection

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Critical Intercultural Competency and Special Education in Urban Education:

Increasing Student Voice, Visibility, and Motivation Through Self-Reflection

Introduction

Today's student interconnectedness leads to increased vulnerability in their personal and academic lives, such as growing blatant racism and discrimination based on factors such as socio-economic status, race, sexual orientation, learning and behavioral differences, and more. Students in areas of urban education experience the compounding effects due to ongoing experiences and traumas associated with the volatile and fragmented social context of our society. Therefore, teachers must learn to self-reflect by using critical intercultural competency to better understand their own biases and prejudices to abate further negative effects of the systemic power dynamics at play in the U.S. education system. Therefore, this paper session will consider the far-reaching effects and influences of social media, the current political climate, and cultural and racial profiling on K-12 students, and how teachers should seek to establish meaningful relationships with their students; especially those who do not identify as White, male, heterocisnormative, or neurotypical, etc. (i.e., LGBTQIA, Black, Asian, etc.) (Coda, 2018).

Concept

In both general and special education, the need for cultural and racial responsiveness is compounded and represents a critical component for educators. Considering the continued dominance of White-identifying teachers across the United States, all educators must seek to develop pedagogically-sound and culturally responsive lessons if they seek to engage with and educate the increasingly diverse student populations seated in their classrooms (public, private, and charter) (Stein-Smith, 2019). Moreover, as students may need special education services, the processes concerning referrals, testing and the evaluation processes require teachers to be

culturally and racially conscious, especially for those students of color. Without acknowledging and connecting with these students, past traumas, continued discrimination and fear could be reaffirmed and exacerbated leading to student disengagement and the sense of being seen as the Other. Furthermore, when students and families feel marginalized during this referral process due to a lack of cultural considerations, they may not feel comfortable articulating their concerns and questions about what the special education process looks like as it is applied to their child's learning needs. Consequently, parents and students lack the agency to fight for the inclusion of their child in "mainstream" courses such as world language to provide them with a larger array of possibly life-changing opportunities whether they be academic, vocational, cultural or personal.

Innovative Strategy

One method of doing this can be found in critical intercultural competency (CIC) (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Guilherme & Dietz, 2015; Rodrigo-Alsina & Medina-Bravo, 2016; Smolcic & Arends, 2017). Providing teachers with strategies and tools rooted in criticality as it pertains to their pedagogical approaches in the classroom allows for greater student visibility, voice, and inclusion for students who do not identify with the dominant culture, race, and/or language (Smith, 2023). As stated by Mayo (2022), today's students come with a myriad of experiences that have shaped their cultural understandings meaning teachers must engage with them to design curriculum, create equitable learning environments, and empower students to critically think about the world and cultures around them, especially those represented by the students in their classroom.

Data-Driven Support

Classrooms in the United States are diverse and as a result, teachers will benefit from self-reflection opportunities and on-going professional development to build their capacity for critical intercultural competency. Approximately 30% of public-school students in the United States are educated in urban settings (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Science, National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020). Schools in urban settings can have funding and resource challenges that can prevent appropriate attention being given to students as they are evaluated and reevaluated for special education needs and other needs related to their emotional, social, or physical health. Given this knowledge, educators should continue to consider their biases and beliefs about student learning needs and behaviors regarding race, ethnicity, and gender identities. With ever growing intersectional identities for our students in urban settings, teachers must be able to self-reflect on their critical intercultural competency and then be able to further the practice on their reflections by participating in professional development that seeks to improve inclusiveness for all students in the school setting.

According to a case study by Smith (2023), out of 18 teacher-respondents, more than half reported a lack of experience, both academic and professional, related to culturally responsive teaching and learning. Due to this lack of experience, many stated they had had no professional development or practice strategies either for self-reflection regarding culturally responsive training and, therefore, avoided the inclusion and implementation of culturally responsive lessons in their classrooms. In a case study done in a school in an urban intensive district by Woodley (2023), teachers reported wanting more professional development to help them become more culturally responsive as they worked with diverse student populations with academic and

behavioral needs in their classroom (Milner, 2012). The respondents in this study did not feel comfortable asking for professional development about cultural responsiveness due to the nature of the current socio-political climate for fear of losing their jobs.

Outcomes

Educators must become responsive about cultural, linguistic, and racial differences regarding the student's and family's perception and understanding of the 13 disability areas under IDEA to become change agents of disruption of the "status quo" and systemic oppressive devices at play in the U.S. education system. Without considering the diversity of their students' identities and experiences, teachers face othering their students and exacerbating systems of oppression and inequitable power dynamics such as the disproportionality for students of color in special education. Through guided self-reflection, teachers can understand and challenge their own implicit biases and prejudices, develop new content, and create more equitable teaching practices and strategies by engaging in CIC.

Actionable Strategies

Educators can disrupt the consequences of racial and cultural bias by examining their own practices in the school setting. We can consider our own biases toward diverse student populations, including behavioral and learning disorders. Boulorian et al., (2021) writes "using student perspectives indicates that listening can be a powerful way for teachers to build high-quality relationships with students" (p. 3986). Teachers can become more inclusive in their classroom by starting with introspective work as they challenge their idea of "I don't know about my students." They can consider their own beliefs and behaviors that can lead them to prevent student voice from becoming an important part of how their classroom functions. Teachers can build relationships with students and families from the beginning of the year and maintain

consistent communication throughout the year so that when needs arise, the communication line is open. Remember, the parent/guardian is the expert on the child.

By engaging in critical intercultural competency work, teachers will be able to disrupt inequitable practices such as disproportionality in special education referrals and behavioral referrals and their classroom can move from a teacher-centered space to a student-centered space that is more inclusive of the diverse needs of all students. Teachers can engage in this important work in multicultural education because it promotes self-reflection, action, and change to support students.

This one-pager tool can help teachers begin a self-reflection journey on how to engage in critical intercultural competency to increase student voice for all students.

See this one-pager for actionable steps on how to engage in critical intercultural competency to increase student voice for all students: (Link)

Running Head: Systemic Disadvantage

Systemic Disadvantage: Understanding How State-Supported HBCUs are

Systematically Under-resourced to Protect White Privilege

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Abstract

This comparative case study leveraged qualitative content analysis to examine higher education desegregation litigation in four Southern states: Alabama, Maryland, Mississippi, and Tennessee. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of federal and state policies, practices, litigation, and legal remedies on the evolution of public HBCUs. At this stage in the research, public HBCUs are defined as institutions established primarily in Southern states to avoid racial integration in higher education. We placed a particular emphasis on federally designated land-grant HBCUs established under the Second Morrill Act of 1890. Using the legal precedence established in *Brown v. Board* (1954) and *United States v. Fordice* (1992), arguments to remedy patterns of racial discrimination in the allocation of resources HBCUs relied on the 'equal protection clause' of the Fourteenth Amendment. On-going funding patterns and resource allocation continue to privilege public Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) to the detriment of public HBCUs. These practices are rooted in systemic racism and create a monopolistic environment that stifles competition and economic contributions from HBCUs. By framing the issue as an antitrust violation, we expose how *de jure* segregation evolved into *de facto* practices that continue to hinder the progress of public HBCUs, thereby opening new legal avenues to combat these long-standing injustices.

Keywords:

Systemic Disadvantage: Understanding How State-Supported HBCUs are Systematically Under-resourced to Protect White Privilege

Introduction

The higher education system in the United States evolved alongside chattel slavery and racial apartheid, with access to educational opportunities becoming central to the Civil Rights struggle. African Americans accepted education as the reparation for decades of marginalization across all sectors of society. Yet, in establishing higher education institutions in a racially segregated country, federal and state government practices historically advantaged universities with predominantly white student bodies (PWIs), thereby perpetuating inequalities.

This comparative case study leveraged qualitative content analysis to examine the impact of federal and state policies, practices, litigation, and legal remedies on the evolution of public HBCUs in four Southern states: Alabama, Maryland, Mississippi, and Tennessee. The study was guided by the following research questions: 1) What constitutional amendments were leveraged to support the desegregation litigation in each state?; 2) What were the foci of desegregation litigation in each state? (i.e. funding, academic programs, unfair competition, etc.); 3) When you examine the court decisions in each state, in what ways do they violate the three-pronged test established in *United States v. Fordice* (1992)?; and, 4) How can successful NCAA litigation, that relied on violations of the Sherman Antitrust Act (1890), inform litigious efforts to support public HBCUs?

The case study approach allowed us to examine these questions both within and across each state. As advocates of HBCUs, we wanted to systematically examine how *de jure* segregation, prior to *Brown v. Board* (1954), evolved into *de facto* business practices that limit student choice and perpetuate inequities in public higher education. This study is part of a larger

study designed to examine the overall impact of persistent inequities in resource allocation between public HBCUs and PWIs.

Literature Review

Ending *de jure* segregation in higher education became a question of dismantling states' racially segregated dual systems (Lee, 2010). In *United States v. Fordice* (1992), the Supreme Court decision held that a "predominantly White or Black institution does not in itself make out a constitutional violation". However, the state violates the constitution when the distinction can be derived from "*de jure* segregative" policies of a dual system and if those identified policies can be removed without dismantling "sound educational policies" (*United States v. Fordice*, 1992). *Fordice* overrode state policies and practices that established dual, racially identifiable systems of higher education arguing that these circumstances violated Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

As public institutions of higher education evolved, state legislative practices positioned universities serving white students with advantages that resonate today. These include institutional classifications that signal superior financial investment; persistent underfunding during periods of *de jure* segregation; current funding formulas that advantage PWIs; and the establishment of higher education governing boards that failed to equitably administer academic programs to avoid direct competition with public HBCUs, per desegregation litigation remedies. The courts found these practices stymy the overall development of public HBCUs and have a deleterious effect on their institutional competitiveness.

Alexander (2020) describes '*de jure* segregative' practices as 'preservation through transformation,' maintaining white supremacy through specific rhetoric, including institutionalized designations. Wilson (2021) argued that monopolizing high-quality resources in

predominantly white school districts indicates *de jure* segregation and violates antitrust laws, specifically the Sherman Act's Essential Facilities Doctrine. Combined, these theories examine how resource hoarding through *de facto* practices shifts from ethical to economic violations. Thus, systemic disparities in funding and resources represent antitrust issues, necessitating an examination of how *de jure* segregation and *de facto* practices translate into economic violations under the Sherman Antitrust Act (1890).

The Supreme Court's decision in *NCAA v. Alston* (2021) reaffirms that non-commercial entities are subject to antitrust scrutiny when its practices affect commercial markets. In context HBCUs and state higher education associations share a similar relationship to the NCAA and student athletes. The SCOTUS ruling examined how the NCAA used 'amateurism' as a designation that kept students from being compensated as revenue-generating athletes, by prohibiting compensation for using their name, image, and likeness (NIL). Federal and state governing bodies perpetuate systems of inequity that hinder the competitiveness of public HBCU by under-investing in these institutions when compared to public PWIs, affecting their competitive output, specifically research. From federal student loan programs that disproportionately burden economically marginalized students with significant debt, to disparities in faculty salaries and workloads, and the historic limitation of public HBCUs' academic missions to undergraduate programs, these structural inequities—rooted in *de jure* segregation—have directly impacted the overall competitiveness of HBCUs in the state's higher education market and limited Black students' choices between attending an HBCU or a PWI.

Theoretical Framework

We leveraged Galtung's (1990) notions of *structural* and *cultural violence*, Wilson's (2021) social closure theory, and the concept of preservation-through-transformation to situate

this study (Alexander, 2020; Siegel's, 1997). King-Jupiter & Phelps (2023) characterized education as a violent structure that destroys black and brown bodies and minds while purportedly providing a pathway to uplift. Alexander (2020) described the U.S. as a caste system that channels black and brown bodies from the classroom to the prison industrial complex. These *de facto* practices are legitimized by a public narrative that blames black students and their families for school failure despite underinvestment in public schools, the proliferation of exclusionary discipline practices that disproportionately target historically marginalized groups, and the presence of school resource officers that increase students' exposure to the criminal justice system.

Research Questions and Research Methodology

This paper is a comparative case study of the higher education desegregation litigation in four Southern states: Alabama, Maryland, Mississippi, and Tennessee. Thomas (2021) described case study methodology as a choice about the unit of analysis and the focus of the case. Consistent with Hammersley & Gomm's definition (2000 as cited by Thomas, 2021), the purpose of this case study is to examine the processes that individual state governments use to administer public institutions of higher education, particularly HBCUs. More specifically, we examine desegregation litigation and resulting legal remedies to understand state government efforts to address racial disparities in public higher education. The selected case studies will be analyzed as individual cases and then a cross-case analysis will be conducted to identify trends. Consequently, Thomas (2021) would characterize this study as an instrumental comparative case study.

We utilize qualitative content analysis (QCA) to understand the impact of litigation, and legal remedies on public HBCUs. QCA systemically describes the meaning of large bodies of

qualitative data (Kuckartz & Radiker, 2023; Mills, 2019; Schreier, 2014). Schreier (2014) identified eight steps for conducting a QCA: deciding on a research question, selecting material, building a coding frame, segmentation, trial coding, evaluating and modifying the coding frame, main analysis, and presenting and interpreting the findings.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What constitutional amendments were leveraged to support the desegregation litigation in each state?

2. What were the foci of desegregation litigation in each state? (i.e. funding, academic programs, unfair competition, etc.)

3. When you examine the court decisions in each state, in what ways do they violate the three-pronged test established in *United States v. Fordice* (1992)?

4. How can successful NCAA litigation, that relied on violations of the Sherman Antitrust Act (1890), inform litigious efforts to support public HBCUs?

Selecting Documents and Description of Data Analysis

The documents selected for this study included a range of publicly available sources, including court documents, scholarly and mainstream articles, consent decrees or legal remedies. These materials focused on desegregation lawsuits in the four identified states with particular attention to the original complaints of plaintiffs, amicus curiae, reply briefs of defendants, lower court rulings, and in Mississippi, the Supreme Court decision and the lower court's application, to inform the development of coding variables for the study.

In addition, scholarly and mainstream articles that provided evidence-based insights into *de jure* segregation, HBCUs, and state and federal policies were included. To build the antitrust

argument, the rulings of two precedent-setting antitrust cases involving college student athletes were examined alongside the Federal Trade Commission and Department of Justice's Antitrust Guidelines for Collaborations Among Competitors (2000). These sources helped draw parallels between *de jure* segregation's legacy and modern *de facto* practices in higher education. All documents were loaded into MaxQDA for analysis. The legal documents (initial legal complaint, Americus briefs, and legal remedies) were grouped by state to facilitate within and across case analysis.

Development of the Coding Framework and Description of Analysis Process

The initial eight codes were created during our review of the desegregation litigation: *premise of initial lawsuit*; *how institutional oppression works; remedy applied as a result of lawsuit; termination of lawsuit; legal precedence applied*; *reference to previous legal decisions*; *persistent racial segregation after Brown*; and *NCAA Litigation.*

The *autocode* function in MaxQDA was used to identify frequency of occurrence for the variables concentric to institutional competitiveness: enrollments; funding; institutional mergers, faculty; resources; and academic programs. The text identified during *autocoding* was either adjusted to capture the context of the selected material or deleted if it was not relevant. Additionally, we manually coded relevant text not identified in the 'autocode' process.

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Findings/Results

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Institutional funding, faculty, and resources were the most frequently occurring codes yet the codes were only co-occuring with one or more other codes 6.07% of the time. It is in selected text where funding, faculty, and resources are simultaneously mentioned that the complexities of the relationship between state governments and public HBCUs was revealed. In Alabama,

> Dr. Richardson testified that because of the lack of state funding, faculty salaries at Alabama's state universities [were] well below regional and national averages, and absent increased state appropriations, tuition must continue to rise to compete to attract high-quality faculty members. (Richardson Dep. at 46–47.)

Like the other states, the remedial decrees addressed the challenges perpetuated by a dual and racially segregated system of higher education:

> Then, in 1995...the court ordered numerous changes in Alabama's higher education policies, including less duplication of programs at geographically close institutions; strengthened curricula at historically black institutions; increased integration of administration and faculty at all institutions; more flexible admissions policies; increased black student recruitment; and increased funding of historically black institutions (Knight v. Alabama, 1995)

Many of the decrees prohibited duplication and included support for new academic programs to increase overall institutional competitiveness at public HBCUS; these decisions have been systematically undermined since the termination of the lawsuit. What is necessary is a willingness to engage in corrective measures when needed. Litigious efforts that relied on the 'equal protection' clause of the Fourteenth Amendment gave birth to consent decrees that allowed for business as usual; state governments' continued the unequal treatment of public HBCUs when compared to PWIs. This on-going pattern of institutional discrimination amounts to a hoarding of state-provided educational resources based solely on race; it represents an underinvestment in the most marginalized students in each state.

Conclusion

Within each state, the remedies developed as a result of higher education litigation have failed to equalize the playing field between public HBCUs and PWIs within each state. In part, inequities persist because of federal and state practices that allocate disproportionate resources to HBCUs while PWIs in these Southern States continue to enroll negligible numbers of students underserved and historically marginalized by public K-12 public schools. The persistence of these discrepancies in allocation of resources amounts to a hoarding of educational resources. This study, in part, makes a legal argument to challenge federal and state practices regarding the funding and administration of public HBCUs. We contend that these institutions and the communities they serve should pursue litigation utilizing the precedent set by the *NCAA v. Alston* (2021) and *O'Bannon v. NCAA* (2015) which makes the arguments set out in the Sherman Antitrust Act (1890.)

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