

We Were There Too

Learning From Black Male Teachers in Mississippi About Successful Teaching of Black Students

Cleveland Hayes, Brenda Juarez, and Veronica Escoffery-Runnels

Abstract

Applying culturally relevant and social justice-oriented notions of teaching and learning and a critical race theory (CRT) analysis of teacher preparation in the United States, this study examines the oral life histories of two Black male teachers recognized for their successful teaching of Black students. These histories provide us with a venue for identifying thematic patterns across the two teachers' educational philosophies and pedagogical practices and for analyzing how these teachers' respective personal and professional experiences have influenced their individual and collective approaches to teaching and learning.

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DISTINGUISHING THEMSELVES PROFESSIONALLY (Foster, 1995; Hayes, Juarez, & Cross, 2012; Johnson, 2000), Black teachers have made significant contributions to the field of education in general and to the education of Black children in particular. Black teachers as a group and over time have consistently succeeded where others continue to fail at effectively teaching Black and other students often deemed hard to teach, if not unteachable (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Lynn & Jennings, 2009).

Taken together, the successful approaches of Black teachers demonstrate that the persistent racial gaps in school discipline, educational opportunities, and attainment levels that continue to characterize U.S. public schooling are in no way natural or inevitable (Blanchett, 2006; Johnson, Boyden, & Pittz, 2001); they persist because we as a nation allow it to be so. Black teachers' shared approaches to effective teaching for students historically underserved in classrooms provide a rich, albeit still largely untapped, resource for teacher-educators and others vested in pushing against these persistent race-based educational disparities (Hayes & Juarez, 2012).

The purpose of this study is to explore the philosophies of two Black male teachers regarding successful teaching of Black children, in hopes of providing a valuable source of knowledge on the effective schooling of Black and other students of color. Our hope is

to glean from the teaching perspectives and experiences narrated by these two exemplary educators more about the task of successfully educating Black children within a societal context constantly changing yet consistently hostile to all things coded Black (King, 1993; Lynn & Jennings, 2009; Ware, 2002).

The Participants

Similar to Ladson-Billings (1994) and Foster (1997), Cleveland Hayes began thinking about teachers that he had in the community, which is the setting for the article. He thought about the ways they prepared him to navigate through spaces that were hostile toward Blacks in general and Black males in particular. The two participants for this study are a part of a larger qualitative research project looking at the exemplary teaching of Black teachers, both male and female, in the South. As part of the selection process, we removed

CLEVELAND HAYES is an associate professor in the teacher education program at the University of La Verne in California.

BRENDA JUÁREZ is an assistant professor in the social justice department at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

VERONICA ESCOFFERY-RUNNELS is an assistant professor in the school psychology program at the University of La Verne in California.

all of the female teachers from our population and then decided to use the teachers who had attended Jim Crow schools as well as had taught pre- and post-Jim Crow. Selecting participants for the study was the next step in the selection process.

Following Foster (1997) and Ladson-Billings (1994), we used community nomination to select educators as potential participants for this study and the larger line of research we have been working together on related to successful teaching for Black students and exemplary Black educators. Specifically, recommendations of parents, students, educator colleagues, community members, school faculty, and staff helped us identify individual educators for participation in this study.

We selected the participants for this study based on this small sampling of comments from the community. Hayes is a member of the community in which these two educators lived and worked. This insider perspective helped in answering the “why these people?” for this research. We also went to the literature on exemplary Black teachers to help us determine qualities we wanted to present in this research (Delpit, 1995; Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lynn, 2006a; Siddle Walker, 1996).

The community comments were as follows. One community member stated:

“Mr. Hayes and Mr. Crenshaw had high expectations for all their students whether they were White or Black. Mr. Hayes and Mr. Crenshaw were there to give us the push or the swift kick or whatever we needed to propel us and give us the extra drive we needed.” (Hayes, 2006, p.186).

Another community member explained, “Mr. Crenshaw and Mr. Hayes laid the historical foundation that made us successful” (Hayes, 2006, p. 213). And yet another community member, who is also a friend of Researcher 1, said:

Mr. Hayes did not play; his expectations of us were high and he didn't want to hear the excuses about why we didn't have our homework. He knew we had to get it done and he would tell us, the doors that would open for use with an education were endless. He would ask us, how does failing my class going to change your situation. (Hayes, 2006, p. 215)

There are many exemplary teachers, but we chose two. Jonas Crenshaw, Sr., is from Tallulah, Louisiana, a small, rural town at the mouth of the Mississippi River, about twenty miles west of Vicksburg, Mississippi. Crenshaw began his first teaching job in November of 1967 in Meridian, Mississippi, at Harris High School and Junior College, where he taught for his entire forty-year career, retiring from there in 2004. Harris High School served all Black students until 1970, when the previously racially segregated institution underwent a forced integration of classrooms.

Cleveland Hayes, Sr., is from Mount Olive, Mississippi. His mother was also a public school teacher for over seventy years. Hayes commenced his first teaching job in Kemper County, Mississippi, at Washington High School, an all-Black, racially segregated public high school. When the Kemper County Public

Schools desegregated, Hayes was reassigned to teach in a racially integrated classroom at West Kemper High School. He retired in 2006, also with over 40 years of teaching.

We caution against reading these narratives as a recipe cookbook, how-to guide, or other kind of magic bullet formulas on how to successfully teach Black and other racial minority students and thus “fix” our schools. There are no recipes provided herein. As we define it, the teaching-and-learning cycle is cultural work, a way of thinking about and thus approaching life and its many domains, not a technocratic, rational, objective, and mechanistic process or procedure. We already have a plethora of narrow curricula, scripted pedagogies, and standardized assessments that are proven failures despite the good intentions that may have produced them (Hayes, Juarez, & Cross, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Quijada Cerecer, Alvarez Gutiérrez & Rios, 2010).

Black Men and Teaching

Like their female counterparts, Black male teachers have made significant contributions to successful teaching of Black and other children of color. As Lynn (2006b) noted:

The scholarship on Black teachers has expanded notions about what constitutes a sound healthy pedagogical practice. Moreover, these studies remind us that one's ethnic and racial identity can be a driving force for developing the commitment to improve the lives of African American youth in urban schools. (p. 2499)

Focusing primarily on Black women teachers, however, existing research on exemplary Black educators has just begun to establish the ways race and racism influence Black men teachers' work and the ways they view their role in the classroom (Lynn, 2002, 2006a, 2006b). With Lynn (2006b), therefore, we too must ask, “To what extent do Black male teachers, who express a commitment to serving African American youth, embody the characteristics of culturally relevant teachers” (p. 2499)?

Exploring reasons why some Black male teachers enter the teaching profession despite the many social and economic barriers, recent studies suggest that Black men, like Black women, tend to recognize and want to change inequities around them and enter teaching to apply education toward that democratically transformative end (Brown, 2009; Lynn, 2002, 2006a, 2006b; Lynn, Johnson, & Hassan, 1999). Also similar to their Black female counterparts, Black male teachers often do bring to their understandings of teaching for social change a strong commitment to the Black community. Pointedly, the views of Black men on teaching as social change and commitment to the Black community are indicative of public discussion (re)emerging within Black political discourse on “the role African American men would play in altering the educational and social conditions of African American male youth” (Brown, 2009, p. 417).

What is it, then, about Black male teachers that they may know and do to foster successful learning for Black students with regard to how they view their work and role as educators? If there is no causal relationship among being Black and male and successful at teaching Black students, and we posit that there is not, then what

is it that teachers who are Black and male bring to the education of Black children? Following Brown (2009), in this study, we build on existing studies of Black male educators (Lynn, 2000, 2006a, 2006b; Lynn, Johnson, & Hassan, 1999) to broaden research about Black male teachers by drawing on the participants' narratives to examine their views on teaching, their students, and the influence of race and racism in structuring their work in the classroom. After all, from the perspective of Black male teachers—we were there too.

The Positions of the Researchers

Positionality is a concept that acknowledges the complex and relational roles of race, class, gender, and other socially constructed identities. Positionalities may include aspects of identity—race, class, and sexuality—as well as personal experience of research and research training. For example, our experience telling nonmajoritarian stories is one of the premises of this research. The idea that individuals construct an understanding of the world and perceive themselves to occupy a particular location within the reality they construe is one of the key premises of positionality. Positionality for our argument is a significant aspect of the ways in which we, the researchers, read and interpret our research participants (Alcalde, 2007; Hopkins, 2007; Milner, 2007; Parsons, 2008; Zarate & Conchas, 2010).

Similar to Ladson-Billings (1994), we write this article in multiple voices and from multiple positions. We write this article as educators and researchers within the Black community. One of us writes this article as a Black male educator who grew up in the community that is the setting for this research. This researcher, who became a teacher in a diverse community, is the direct product of the transformative pedagogy debunking myths of Black inferiority and the engaged critical pedagogy described in the narratives below.

Cleveland Hayes, the son, is a Black male from the South who teaches the secondary methods course at a small private school in Southern California. Hayes is the member of the team who conducted the interviews and, as stated above, he grew up in the community that is described in the narratives. This is important for the context and understanding of the narratives because, similar to the memories Ladson-Billings (1994) and Foster (1997) called upon, it is Hayes' memories that helped us understand current classroom practices.

Brenda Juarez is a White female. Before becoming a faculty member at the university at which she is now a professor, she taught at a state-sponsored school in the South. As a White female, she brings an outside perspective to this research as a way to address the subjectivity that may arise because of the close ties that Researcher 1 has to this study. Juarez's research also includes a historical and contemporary examination of Black education.

Veronica Escoffery-Runnels is a Black female with paternal origins in Panama and a cultural orientation that spans both an Afro Caribbean and a Latin experience. Escoffery-Runnels's position to this research is equally as valuable because she works with special educators, and her perspectives and research help us begin to provide possible solutions to the overrepresentation of Black males in special education. Our lived experiences and experiential knowledge of Black education became very useful in

the developing of the narratives from a critical race theory (CRT) perspective with crossed epistemological boundaries and became interdisciplinary in our approaches to the research, the construction of narratives and, lastly, the analysis of the narratives (Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Tate, 1997).

Methods

In keeping with the tradition of the work by Ladson-Billings (1994), this article is not written in the dominant scholarly traditions in which the three of us were trained. However, we marry those “scholarly” tools with our own cultural and personal experiences, as Black educators in the case of two of us and because of our work with the Black community in the case of all three of us. Moving away from “traditional” methods allows us to use storytelling and personal narratives to help us advance larger concerns (Ladson-Billings, 2013).

Drawing on in-depth interviews and applying notions of culturally relevant teaching (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995) to guide our understandings of successful teaching and the selection of participants, in this study we examine Crenshaw's and Hayes's narratives. The teaching careers of these two exemplary Black male teachers from Mississippi spanned the transition of Jim Crow segregated schooling to racial desegregation of classrooms in the public schools of the U.S. Deep South. Following the CRT tradition of storytelling, it is our hope that these narratives can be used to inform policy, inform teacher education, and inform education reform as we continue to improve the education for all students in a contemporary society.

This study is qualitative in design and draws on “a methodology based primarily on acquiring, analyzing, and interpreting narrative data” (Lynn & Jennings, 2009, p. 181). During 2006, Hayes conducted three in-depth, semiformal interviews with Crenshaw and Hayes in their individual homes as part of data collection for a larger study.

Over the years since these original interviews were conducted, innumerable follow-up conversations and informal interviews in person and by telephone have occurred as Crenshaw and Hayes have continued to follow, support, and express interest in and ask questions about Hayes's well-being and the research on exemplary Black educators. During the analysis part of the interviews, being able to pick up the phone and call the participants helped us fill in the gaps in the narratives. In short, the informal conversations served as member checks, especially if the other two researchers, who were not members of this community, had questions about something one of the participants said. It cleared any confusion. The informal conversations also allowed us to add any additional thoughts about teaching and learning that may have changed from the initial set of interviews in 2006.

All interviews conducted by Hayes for this study lasted between 60 and 180 minutes and were audiotaped and then transcribed to comprise approximately 15 to 30 pages per interview. Both Crenshaw and Hayes were provided with transcripts of their interviews to review for accuracy; this also provided an opportunity for further informal conversation and feedback.

How to Read the Narratives

Foster (1997) argues that first-person accounts have long been employed by individuals to encode and record the experiences of Blacks, in this case Black teachers, and such accounts have served as a valuable source of information. The life and work experiences that Hayes and Crenshaw encountered reveal the impact their decisions had on their personal lives and in their lives as educators in Mississippi. Counterstories, or testimonies, are powerful means for dismantling and unpacking the “bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared understandings” (Yosso, 2006) provided by hegemonic majoritarian stories that present the false assumption of White superiority and Black inferiority. Counterstories and narratives also seek to document the persistence of racism from the perspectives of those injured and victimized by its legacy, as in the life and work experience of these two teachers.

The research team wrote the narratives presented in this article, first separately and then together, and we analyzed for patterns in their stories that made them exemplary teachers. These are excerpts from interviews pieced together to form a complete narrative.

Italics indicate the participant's words, roman the researcher's analyses. The analysis that follows those data is our understanding of what was said during the interactions with the participants as well as the lived experience of Hayes. We analyzed the narratives using traditional methods of qualitative research and coded the interview transcriptions for resonant themes and metaphors across texts, using the methodology outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). The interviews, similar to Ladson-Billings (1994), were analyzed based upon Hayes's lived experiences with these two men: Mr. Hayes is Cleveland Hayes's father, and Crenshaw taught Cleveland Hayes.

The lived experience of Cleveland Hayes is important for this study because it allowed us to merge his scholarly tools with the knowledge of this community and these two teachers. Within a CRT framework, we could not ignore the experiential knowledge that he had and continues to have with this community. Cleveland Hayes is a key actor for this research, which helped us provide rich, detailed narratives of these two teachers (Fetterman, 1998).

While we used traditional qualitative analysis and what we will term as lived experience analysis of the stories, we still looked across these major orientations to teaching for each educator to consider what we could learn from each teacher about the perspectives of exemplary Black male educators on successful teaching of Black students. We conducted member checks with each of the teachers to provide them with opportunities to give us feedback and to correct our understandings of the stories they shared with us. Our goal was to produce dependable interpretations that were consistent with our data and were recognizable and approved by Crenshaw and Hayes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Theoretical Framework

Like Knaus (2009), we apply Critical Race Theory for the purpose of developing the voices and narratives that challenge racism and the structures of oppression. Tate (1997) asks the question, “Pivotal in understanding CRT as a methodology, what role should

experiential knowledge of race, class and gender play in educational discourse?” (p. 235). Ladson-Billings (1998) states that CRT focuses on the role of “voice in bringing additional power and experiential knowledge that people of color speak regarding the fact that our society is deeply structured by racism” (p. 13).

Solórzano and Yosso (2001) define CRT as “an attempt to understand the oppressive aspects of society in order to generate societal and individual transformation and are important for educators to understand that CRT is different from any other theoretical framework because it centers race” (p. 471–472).

CRT scholars have developed the following tenets to guide CRT research; all of these tenets are utilized within the design and analysis of this study (Kohli, 2009):

Centrality of race and racism. All CRT research within education must centralize race and racism, as well as acknowledge the intersection of race with other forms of subordination (Kohli, 2009; Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2002).

Valuing experiential knowledge. Solórzano & Yosso (2001) argue that CRT in educational research recognizes that the experiential knowledge of students of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education. Life stories tend to be accurate according to the perceived realities of subjects' lives. They are used to elicit structured stories and detailed lives of the individuals involved (Delgado, 1989; McCray, Sindelar, Kilgore, & Neal, 2002).

At the heart of CRT is an appreciation for storytelling. Following hooks (1992), the stories of these two men are important because they counter the institutionalized ignorance of Black history, culture, and Blacks' very existence. As hooks (1992) put it, “We don't even know ourselves.” The field of education needs successful counterstories and testimonies of the past Black educational experiences to help us understand how we in the present might successfully prepare Black students in today's racially charged society. It is the stories of oppression and resistance of the past that we can use as a framework for the present (Lynn, 2004).

The application of CRT allows us to focus on the expression of the voices and narratives of teachers like Mr. Hayes and Mr. Crenshaw to learn more about how to think about and use teaching as a form of cultural work to successfully teach Black students. The use of CRT makes it possible for us to tap into the knowledge and understandings that these two men used to effectively teach Black students and understand how we can use these stories to learn how to successfully teach the next generation of Black students.

Challenging dominant perspective. CRT research works to challenge dominant narratives, often referred to as majoritarian stories. CRT scholar Harris (1995) describes the “valorization of Whiteness as treasured property in a society structured on racial caste” (p. 277). Harris also argues that Whiteness confers tangible and economically valuable benefits, and it is jealously guarded as a valued possession. This thematic strand of Whiteness as property in the United States is not confined to the nation's early history (Frankenberg, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Commitment to social justice. Social justice must always be a motivation behind CRT research. Part of this social justice commitment must include a critique of liberalism, claims of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy as a camouflage for the self-interest of powerful entities of society (Tate, 1997). Only aggressive, color-conscious efforts to change the way things are done will do much to ameliorate misery (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Tate, 1997).

Being interdisciplinary. According to Tate (1997), CRT crosses epistemological boundaries. It borrows from several traditions, including liberalism, feminism, and Marxism to include a more complete analysis of “raced” people.

Ladson-Billings (1998) has already put forth the argument that CRT has a place within education. In this paper, we apply a CRT lens to help us present the narratives of Hayes and Crenshaw. The richness, utility, and power of this framework is that the knowledge and experiences of the participants in this study are deemed valid and both worth listening to and learning from.

We use CRT to recognize the experiential knowledge of these two Black men educators and apply this knowledge as a means to unpack racial oppression in the de jure and now the de facto segregated South (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006).

The Teaching Perspectives of Two Exemplary Black Educators from Mississippi

In this section, we present excerpted narratives of Crenshaw and Hayes articulating their respective perspectives on successful teaching for Black students. We have titled these teachers’ narratives of their teaching philosophies based on the main themes that emerged from their respective descriptions of their approaches. We begin with Crenshaw’s narrative, followed by that of Hayes. Importantly, each teacher first explains how he understood the role and significance of education in his students’ lives and then, second, how he went about implementing his teaching practices, his views on education, and the task of teaching Black children. Before presenting these teachers’ narratives, however, we want to alert readers to a brief cautionary note—as we present the narrated perspectives of Crenshaw and Hayes, we ask that those reading the two narratives take each viewpoint as being that of the particular individual articulating it and not in any way representative of the narratives of all Black educators past and present or anytime.

CRENSHAW: DEVELOPING STUDENTS’ ABILITIES TO THINK CRITICALLY

My philosophy for education is probably taken from a quote from Horace Mann: “Beyond anything else, education can be a great equalizer.” Education forces a person to recognize talents or to discriminate against them. Then the whole world would know why one is being discriminated against. So, I think education, despite the discrimination that exists, helps us to establish within us a sense of right and wrong. And intelligent people eventually, I think, in the long term, if by just holding the road, will win out.

I see education pretty much the same way. I grew up with this

knowledge that the size of the brain determines if a person is smart or not. I grew up with the White philosophy that we are basically Negroes and not capable of doing anything but singing, dancing, and having babies. At that time, people could get away with that argument because we [Blacks] were not educated. But, on the other side of that is the fact that we were not educated because we were denied that right to be educated.

So, I think philosophy-wise, I would tell all the kids that education can be and has been, despite the shortcomings, the great equalizer, and the means by which man will end the hostility against other men. It is going to be education that is going to help to eradicate this problem.

In my classroom, I do that mentor piece with students. But I also really work on developing students’ abilities to think critically and to be able to look at a situation and make the best informed decision.

See, when they desegregated schools, we lost some of this ability to “educate” our kids [Black youth]. I mean really educate our kids in a way that they can make an informed decision and to learn that what White says is not always right. I can no longer tell my Black students they have to be better than their White peers. I can do it with you, Cleveland, and some of the kids from around the way. Your sister was at my house with my son when they were in high school working on projects sometimes. I then had the opportunity to provide them with that racial socialization piece about having to be better. I think being a member of the community living in the neighborhood helps provide the needed informal coaching and mentoring that many students needed. You didn’t need it because you have your mom and dad and your grandmother pushing you in the directions you need to go, but many of your classmates don’t have that and it’s hard to do in schools sometime so when I see the kids in the community I can provide them with the necessary mentoring. It can be as simple as telling the students what classes to take that will get them into college or at least gives them choices and advocate for those who can’t advocate from themselves.

I also push the Black kids at school harder, but what ended up happening is that I ended up with the White kids, thus not being able to teach the Black kids that really needed my help. But I still have informal ways of doing it, in the hallway, at ball games, etcetera. See, when they desegregated schools, the White people didn’t think of the Black kids at the school as a threat because they figured they would do it to themselves in failing and dropping out. This is a case of White superiority and Black inferiority.

So my goal, of which I have lost some of it because of integration, was to prevent Black kids from doing it to themselves and failing at school. You have kids like you and your sister and my kids, who listen to what we had to say and didn’t fall into this trap that making a C was okay. You all had to be better.”

Renowned educator Woodson (1933/1998) once noted, “Real education means to inspire people to live more abundantly, to learn to begin with life as they find it and make it better” (p. 29).

In the tradition of Woodson, Crenshaw likewise views education as an important and necessary tool that should help children and youth learn to read the world around them—understand issues of property taxes, for example—and then act on that world in ways that make it more democratic. For Crenshaw, education is pragmatic; it is a means to a more democratic end. Crenshaw sees and uses education as a tool for improving the surrounding social conditions by explicitly acknowledging and taking on the inequities that characterize students' daily lives. In short, education is an antiracism tool to be applied by students toward ending racial discrimination and other inequities and thus improving not only their own life conditions but also the life conditions of those around them.

Significantly, Crenshaw describes his work as teacher as one of helping his Black students become active agents in charge of their own lives by helping them develop the requisite abilities and knowledge that will allow *them*, his students themselves, not him as their teacher, to act on and improve the social conditions of their own worlds rather than wait for others to do this acting in the surrounding world. Crenshaw himself, very importantly, sees himself as the facilitator and coach, not only leading the way as his students' lives are changed but expecting them to change their own lives in more democratic ways by first critically assessing their surrounding world and then acting to challenge the dominant negative views of Black people and improve social conditions toward more equitable ends. Crenshaw seeks to equip his students with skills and understandings based on a critical education. He sees his Black students as actors who are capable and active, not as passive victims—a direct contrast to dominant representations of Black people “as passive, undeserving individuals who wait for the next handout to be given to them by [Whites] others” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003) that have historically circulated within U.S. mainstream society.

It is also notable that Crenshaw's recognition of the discrimination faced by his Black students is situated historically. Specifically, Crenshaw draws on his own knowledge of and experiences with the history of White supremacy and its attendant assumptions of Black inferiority in this nation: “the White philosophy that we are basically Negroes and not capable of doing anything but singing, dancing, and having babies.” He does this to make sense of the discrimination to which his Black students are subjected. He recognizes that Blacks have historically had to fight for access to education: “We were not educated because we were denied that right to be educated.”

When I was a student in high school, we were at school one day and we must have only been there a half a day and then all of a sudden the school busses, the yellow dogs, as you all call them, came and picked us up, I believe it was around lunchtime. My friends and I were thinking, why are they letting school out so early? We have not been here all day. Well, it was found out later that the White superintendent of schools had determined that the Black students had enough school for the day and that we were needed in the fields to clear the fields and pick the cotton or soy beans, I don't remember. That is why I was so hard on you all when you were in my class. I

knew you, Cleveland, were going to get it because of your daddy but there are so many that were not going to get it, so I had to make sure that you all were going to.

What is seen in the above interchange between Crenshaw and Cleveland Hayes is his historically based discernment regarding public schooling and the discrimination his Black students face; then, Crenshaw uses his teaching to help his students learn to identify and assess the factors in the world around them that are influencing their daily lives. He links his classroom to the surrounding context in very literal ways by teaching his students about the real-life issues, and thus making the curriculum relevant to his students, as a way to empower them and help them be better prepared to act on situations rather than to be acted upon. Importantly, for Crenshaw to successfully link his classroom to the surrounding context of his students' worlds, he had to be very familiar with the worlds of his students.

This link that Crenshaw makes through his teaching between the curriculum and real-life issues, for him, has a very specific and very significant purpose that must not be overlooked. Mr. Crenshaw wants his students to learn to read the world around them specifically so—in other words, he wants his students to understand that they must not take for granted or simply ingest and mindlessly consume what is presented to them as natural, good, true, and beautiful by dominant White society. He wants them instead to have the skills to think critically about what is being presented to them because, as he is aware, given the discrimination faced by Blacks, that which is presented to them oftentimes is not in their best interests to accept and, indeed, it typically works against their best interests to support existing racial hierarchy in U.S. society.

Crenshaw, thus in line with the historical traditions of Black teachers working toward the improvement of the larger Black community through their teaching, uses his teaching very specifically dedicated to advocating for and empowering Black children. At no point does Crenshaw draw on deficiency perspectives of Black students or the Black community to inform his teaching as is typical in dominant understandings of education and teaching and learning (King, 2005). As we shall see in the subsequent narrative, Crenshaw is not alone in his pragmatic views about the purpose of education as a means to help Black students learn to more democratically transform the world around them. Albeit implementing in his own distinctive way, Crenshaw's colleague and close friend Hayes likewise views education as a valuable tool for improving the social conditions not only of Blacks but also of people in general.

MR. HAYES: TAKING STUDENTS WHERE THEY ARE AND MOVING THEM TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Success is an attitude—let that attitude remain by itself, or you can build on it by doing something about it and what you want to do. You can have an attitude, and you've just got an attitude. Well, now, what happens if I take my attitude and I live and I expand? Success is determined one attitude at a time. Now, do you want to be successful? Yes. That's an attitude.

Now, if I want to be successful, what do I add to it? What do I add to it to become successful? Everybody's got an attitude, whether good or bad. Well, now, if I am going to be successful, I have to add certain things to this.

You can have an attitude and be narrow-minded, the most narrow-minded person, but what happens when you take that and you expand? Expand, expand, expand, expand, do you see you've got to expand? You've got to do it. One attitude at a time. I ask my students, "What do you want to know? What's on your mind?" They say, "I want to be a welder." I ask, "What would it take to be a welder? What do you need to deal with?" They say, "Uh, go to school." I say, "What's the problem?" Everybody can't be Kobe Bryant. Everybody can't be Hank Aaron. Somebody's gotta iron your clothes; somebody's got to sew your clothes; somebody's got to wake you up; somebody's got to mop the floor at the hospital.

You know, success is not determined always by the bank account. Success is self-peace. That's what I think, it's about attitude.

Oftentimes, I have to go into the classroom and do damage control. We have these White female teachers who are afraid of the Brothers [Black male students], and they look for an excuse to kick these Brothers out of class. Now don't get me wrong—these Brothers are hard. A lot of them are coming from Detroit and Chicago to live with their grandparents.

I had this one guy who had come down from Detroit, and he was hard and angry. He was in this teacher's room, and the two of them had gotten into it over something. This guy was not even my student—I happened to be in the hallway when she kicked him out of class.

Now, if he got sent to the office, he was going to be suspended and kicked out of school, which would have only made him that much angrier. You know it is that self-fulfilling prophecy. It was expected for this young brother to get kicked out of school.

So, I grabbed him and said, "Let's go for a walk and grab a Coca-Cola and talk." This gave him a chance to cool down and hopefully resolve the situation. I had to give this young brother—I felt it was my obligation to give this young brother—some guidance on how to deal with his anger with years and years of being what he considered disrespected at school.

Yes, teaching students history is important, but something that I learned from my own teachers is that mentorship [is just as important]. Taking students where they are and moving them to the next level. I think many teachers today have lost sight of that. They are too worried about test scores and don't worry enough about the souls of kids.

Like Crenshaw, Mr. Hayes values what students bring to the classroom in terms of their cultural backgrounds and experiences. The teaching philosophy of "expand, expand, expand" presumes that what students begin with is of positive value and has worth in

the classroom—he has to help students expand from something of value, and students bring with them into the classroom that something of value to be expanded. Accordingly, like Crenshaw, Mr. Hayes does not draw on assumptions of Black cultural or moral inferiority in his teaching. Following in a long tradition of Black educators (DuBois, 1924, 1935, 1973; Hilliard, 1997; Horsford, 2009), he instead accepts where students are when they enter his classroom, even if it is the narrowest of attitudes, and helps them to build from that point toward their goals even as he recognizes the realities of the race-based discrimination that he knows his students will and do face—he knows that dominant White society expects Black students to be pushed out of the classroom. Mr. Hayes sees his role as one of helping Black students resist that dominant, business-as-usual expectation in public schools that they be pushed out of classrooms.

Pointedly, Mr. Hayes has to know his students well to help them to expand toward fulfillment of their dreams and goals. He uses his teaching as a way to help students to take the appropriate steps between articulating a life dream and making that life dream a reality. Positive relationships between Mr. Hayes and his students are a priority. Without that, as the stories of alienation shared by other Black male students all agree (Delpit, 1986, 1988, 1995, 2006; Horsford, 2009), there is little likelihood that students would share their life goals and dreams with him, their teacher.

Mr. Hayes's care for students also emerges in his emphasis on doing what he refers to as "damage control,"—that is to say, mentoring and advocating for Black students in particular. As an educator who must do damage control, then, Hayes views his teaching as a means to try to control and contain or at least minimize the injuries systematically inflicted on Black children. Again, we see a Black educator who does not begin with the assumption that Black children and the Black community are deficient. Recognizing the damage done by the historically White school system, Hayes identifies the social structures of White supremacy as the source of his Black students' challenges in the classroom, not their cultural backgrounds or perceived lack of motivation or other types of personal and group-based deficiencies regularly attributed to Black people. Mr. Hayes does not begin, for example, with the assumption that the young brothers in his example are simply thugs and therefore angry and hard without reason. Teachers within the existing schooling system often do begin with this assumption that young Black male students are angry thugs lacking motivation and family training to help them successfully compete in school. Hayes finds himself regularly in situations wherein, as a Black male himself, he must do damage control to contain the injury being inflicted on Black youth.

For Mr. Hayes, teaching is much more than the delivery of academic facts in a content area. Recognizing and affirming the challenges that Black students, particularly Black male students face in classrooms, Hayes attempts to break the cycle of Black youth being funneled out of school and into the streets and into prisons by talking with them and helping them to develop strategies for the disrespect he recognizes as legitimate in the lives of these young students. As Hayes put it, he is interested in not only academic content and test scores but also in "the souls of kids."

Discussion: Successful Teaching for Black Students and Changing Racial Conditions

This study represents an exploration of the narratives of two now retired Black male teachers from Mississippi whose careers spanned decades, including the years of transition from racial segregation to integration in U.S. public schools in the American Deep South. The teaching perspectives of these two Black male teachers provide fruitful venues for mining the potentially antiracist knowledge historically generated and enacted into practice by people of color, done so to address and resist the challenges and pernicious effects of race-based discrimination and other social ills manifested in education and other important venues in U.S. society (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Knight, Norton, Bentley, & Dixon, 2004; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005, 2006; Stovall, 2004). In particular, Crenshaw's and Mr. Hayes's perspectives on successful teaching for Black children are significant because they help develop and extend the existing and limited body of research documenting the beliefs and viewpoints of exemplary Black educators on culturally relevant teaching. Crenshaw's and Mr. Hayes's teaching perspectives also help elaborate existing understandings of how successful teachers of Black students link their views of students and ideas about their work to their teaching practices. They are likewise significant because they provide a not-often-accessible window of opportunity to better understand how the changing dynamics of race within U.S. society have over time and in different ways influenced the educational experiences and outcomes of Black students.

Like the teachers identified by Ware (2006), specifically, Crenshaw and Mr. Hayes "are not considered to be exceptional but qualify as ordinary people responding with care, high expectations, and skilled pedagogy to African American students, thus making them exemplary" (p. 452). Crenshaw's and Mr. Hayes's views on successful teaching for Black children emerge as congruent with the standards and components of culturally relevant teaching with regard to beliefs about students; focus on caring relations, and activist-oriented pedagogy (Kohli, 2009). For Crenshaw and Mr. Hayes, Black students and all students are seen as active subjects with great potential to proactively act on their surroundings to change the world in more democratic ways despite their different specific philosophical emphases as reflected in the titles of their respective narratives.

Moreover, neither Crenshaw nor Mr. Hayes viewed their Black students through dominant, historical assumptions of the moral and cultural inferiority of Blacks (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; O'Connor, 2006). Rather, each teacher acknowledged the negative influences of society's context that served to limit their students' educational and social opportunities and attainment levels. Both teachers, accordingly, viewed their role and work as educators as that of helping their Black students successfully navigate and succeed academically and socially within contexts characterized by race-based discrimination—whether they focused on mentoring, critical thinking skills, or changing attitudes one at a time. Both teachers viewed themselves as responsible for students' educational and social experiences in school. They likewise both perceived education to be about life rather than just about content

knowledge. Education thus became for both teachers an important means to provide their students with to help them to successfully survive racism and succeed within U.S. society's dominant White mainstream.

The centrality of issues of race and racism in Crenshaw's and Hayes's teaching philosophies is thus apparent in the ways each teacher respectively articulated his views of Black students and the purpose of education as a pragmatically race-based, antiracist means to help students of color succeed in dominant White US society. The role of a teacher's strong racial identity and ways exemplary Black teachers draw on their knowledge of the Black community to help students succeed in school have been documented by existing research (Ware, 2006). For us, what is also particularly interesting and notable about the two exemplary Black male teachers presented in this study is the time period that they taught in as classrooms transitioned from racial segregation to integration, which provides us with a view of factors from both official ideological contexts that have influenced the schooling of Black students and how these teachers worked to address them.

Within today's purportedly race-neutral U.S. society and education, emphasis in dominant official discourse within the White mainstream typically centers on individuals outside of historical context, and thus as ahistorical beings, thereby minimizing the significance of an individual's group membership in structuring each person's life and life chances (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Dixon & Rousseau, 2005). The teachers in this study, however, demonstrated their understanding of their Black students as members of a group with a particular group history negatively impacted by the effects of White racism. Their approach to education remains conscious of color and grounded within an understanding of the systemic exclusion of Blacks within U.S. society even after racial integration of classrooms occurred and opportunities for race talk became more limited.

These two exemplary Black teachers likewise both addressed the limitations of notions of universal, apparently colorblind ideals, such as equality, as being rooted in the privileging of Whiteness and used as the measure against which Black children are evaluated and then pushed out of school as part of the normal, daily business of public schooling—no conspiracy against Black children needed (Hayes & Juarez, 2012). Crenshaw's and Hayes's teaching approaches are not colorblind, individualist, or dependent on universal ideals but, instead, grounded in a pragmatic, color-conscious understanding of their Black students' lives and universal ideals of equality, for example, filtered through the system of White supremacy (Quijada Cerecer, Guitierrez Alvarez, & Rios, 2010). Based on a sense of deep care for Black children, Crenshaw's and Mr. Hayes's teaching approaches help extend understandings of culturally relevant teaching by providing further detailed descriptions of the frame of reference that exemplary Black teachers typically enact in their classrooms.

Conclusion: Successful Teaching for Students of Color as Critical Race Praxis¹

Critical race scholars (Stovall, 2004; Stovall, Lynn, Danley, & Martin, 2009; Yamamoto, 1997) suggest that a kind of critical race praxis combines critical perspectives and pragmatic approaches to effectively navigating and surviving within U.S. society's dominant White mainstream and links them to practices by and for communities of color. This combination results in a type of critical race praxis that provides us with a useful way of gauging innovative approaches to schooling and education of Blacks and other historically disenfranchised communities. Critical race praxis is aimed at giving kids of color the tools required for them to successfully combat forces pulling them toward the contemporary school-to-prison pipeline and educational failure.

What we see with Crenshaw's and Mr. Hayes's teaching approaches is the day-to-day engagement of students with issues of social justice, race and racism, and educational equity (Leonardo, 2009; Stovall, 2004) threaded through their academic and other forms of learning. Based on the tenet of CRT, which applies the experiential knowledge of communities as a form of engagement, Crenshaw and Mr. Hayes drew from their lived experiences as survivors of the Jim Crow South to put into place the nonconventional knowledge necessary for Black students to "make" it in the United States. For us, the enactment of critical race praxis comes together to produce the kinds of transformative pedagogies Crenshaw and Mr. Hayes described regarding their own teaching approaches. A transformative pedagogy bridges theoretical concepts of oppression, liberation, and schooling success for freedom in everyday practice.

For the purposes of this paper, we draw upon the works of Freire (1973), Ladson Billings (1994), Delpit (1996), Lorde (1984), and others to develop our working definition of transformative pedagogy. Transformative pedagogy refers to an approach or philosophy of teaching accompanied by practices that enable students to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to navigate within, provide sociopolitical critique of, and foster democratic change within conditions of historical White supremacy. We follow Leonardo (2009) in defining White supremacy as "a racialized social system that upholds, reifies, and reinforces the superiority of Whites" (p. 127).

As we define it, transformative pedagogy has three major components. First, there is equity. Equity is equal access to the most challenging and nourishing educational experience. For us, equity is more than equal representation or physical presence within an educational program for example. Educational equity refers to full participation as a recognized member of a community. A closer examination of these two teachers' teaching careers suggests that their students did not always have equal access to educational opportunities. Yet inequities of access did not stop them from providing a rigorous educational experience, one that was not necessarily banking in nature, to their students (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Hayes, 2006; Hayes & Juarez, 2012).

Second, there is activism. Activism is a part of transformative pedagogy because it entails preparing students to actively reinsert themselves into public spaces and dialogues to help them gain access to the valued resources and opportunities they have either been excluded from or denied. This activism demands that students have an understanding of the inequities in society and the how-to in terms of beginning to fix those inequities if necessary.

Third and lastly, transformative pedagogy as we define it is about social literacy. Social literacy is preparing students to acquire the discourse or language necessary to resist the fattening effects of materialism, consumerism, and the power of the abiding evils of White supremacy—nourishing an awareness of one's identity (Ayers, Quinn, & Stovall, 2009; hooks, 1995; Quijada Cerecer, et al., 2010).

If we are to bridge the Black-White performance disparities in education that plague our public schools, we must find a different way, a new path, an alternative journey (Ross, Bondy, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2008). Theorizing their lessons and the experiences from which they draw them allows us to begin imagining and creating a different path and approach to education not grounded in assumptions of Black inferiority and White superiority. Crenshaw's and Mr. Hayes's lessons thus provide the understandings that policymakers need to make sense of why traditionally dominant ways of teaching Black learners continue to fail and teachers continue to enter the classroom unprepared to teach all students (Knaus, 2009; Ware, 2006).

If we are to ameliorate the racial disparities in education that continue to plague students of color in our nation's contemporary public schools, we posit, we must all follow in the paths of Crenshaw and Mr. Hayes to likewise enact a critical race praxis as transformative pedagogy (Ross, et al., 2008). Theorizing about successful teaching for Black students based on that which we can glean from Crenshaw's and Hayes's teaching approaches, we may begin pushing toward realizing and creating different, more democratic paths and approaches to education based on robustly democratic forms of teaching and learning. Crenshaw's and Hayes's perspectives on successful teaching of Black students helpfully illuminate how classrooms in public schools might begin to be transformed into antiracist spaces of an education not based on the contingencies of a society organized around Whiteness and instead in a vision of teaching and learning for freedom dreams (Siddle Walker, 1996, 2001). Crenshaw and Mr. Hayes help us better understand what possibilities for that vision of teaching and learning for freedom dreams might look like as we examine their perspectives on successful teaching for Black students.

Note

1. As stated above, the experiences of these two men are not meant to be used to develop checklists and rubrics for others to follow, as we believe that teaching cannot follow a how-to guide. It is our intent for others to use these experiences as a way to begin to think about their teaching.

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