NUR•TURE

Unleashing The Genius of Black Voices

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NUR•TURE

Unleashing The Genius of Black Voices

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Editorial –Telling Black Stories from the Black Gaze

The late great critically acclaimed American Novelist Toni Morrison described the "white gaze" as the idea that for Black life to be meaningful, it must be palatable to the white observer. The white gaze is, metaphorically, the various methods in which whiteness, specifically white cisgender heterosexual maleness, controls how minoritized individuals think and behave. It's this notion that everything, from writings to movies, to art, must be created for the white audience. Morrison, a champion of Blackness, spent her life showing the world how to resist the white gaze. Through her writing, she challenges and empowers minoritized individuals, especially Black women, to discover their own understandings, construct their own self-definitions, and tell their own Black stories. This edition of Nurture aims to do just that.

Three articles are featured in this issue of Nurture. Each author calls for educational practices that are more responsive to the unique needs of Black children. The authors utilize the Black gaze to explore issues in education and solutions to these issues. Jackson highlights the importance of embracing diversity in the classroom to affirm minoritized families and encourage literacy development and achievement. Jackson acknowledges the importance of incorporating Critical race theory (CRT) in education and proposes various ways to incorporate culturally responsive teaching in the classroom. Thornton et al. introduce BCDI-Atlanta's Lifted Voices Program, a fellowship program seeking to support the development of educational leaders interested in equity and liberation for the Black community. In this article, fellows used their lived experiences to inform the construction of projects that aim to disrupt racism impacting Black children and their families. Lastly, Young et al. allow the audience to sit at their feet as they explore the role of the Black family in enhancing academic achievement among Black children. Young presents the Collaborative model, developed and informed by his multiple decades of field experience. As these articles indicate, Nurture seeks to promote the culturally informed contributions that Black scholars make to education research and practice.

There is still a need for research centered on the unique experiences of Black individuals, families, and communities, specifically written from the perspective of Black scholars – the Black gaze. Black Child Development Institute-Atlanta continues to aim to meet that need through Nurture, a platform for Black scholars to publish their much needed work. We hope Nurture, our peer-reviewed electronic journal, continues to serve as a platform championing the topics important to Black children ages 0-8 and their families.

Bisa Lewis, Ed.D.
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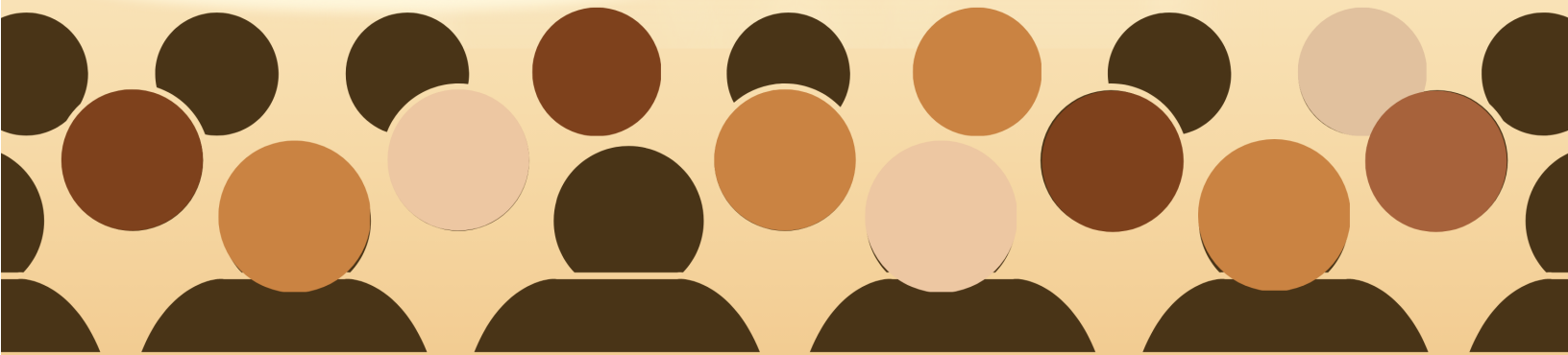
Culturally Responsive Structured Literacy Approaches for Teaching Reading

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Abstract

The International Dyslexia Association has coined the phrase "structural literacy," which refers to programs that teach reading using the research underlying the Science of Reading. As our country continues to grow as a multicultural nation, it is imperative that our classrooms embrace this rich diversity and provide learning experiences that affirm all students, families, and communities in order to promote student literacy development and achievement. There is currently limited information on how to adopt a structured literacy framework in a culturally appropriate manner. In order to assist CLD in becoming proficient readers, teacher education programs must better prepare elementary teachers to use translanguaging and culturally responsive teaching during phonics instruction. In this article, this framework is situated within the larger context of the research on the science of reading. Next, the author moves beyond discussing CRT practices by offering suggestions on how to teach structured literacy in culturally responsive ways in order to positively influence the phonemic and phonics knowledge of culturally and linguistically diverse learners.

Introduction

Culturally Responsive Structured Literacy Approaches for Teaching Reading
The United States has been in a 'reading war' for over 50 years. The debate about the most effective way to teach children to read and write has continued to no end (Adams, 1990). This stems from the fact that the opposing views are on the complete opposite spectrum of instructional approaches—systemic phonics approach versus whole language approach. The instructional method of the systemic phonics approach is characterized as instruction that solely focuses on skills needed to decode words. This method emphasizes phonics skills through explicit systemic instruction. This methodology relies on the notion that explicitly and systemically teaching the rules of decoding words in isolation is the most effective way for teaching children to read and write (Evans, Fox, Cremaso & McKinnon, 2004). This bottom-up process establishes the alphabetic principle of letter sound relationships and word meaning required for children to read and comprehend text (Pearson, 2001).

In contrast, the whole language approach to teaching emphasizes a holistic view of teaching children to read and write. This top-down view supports the idea that children learn to read best when they are exposed to and interact with quality books in authentic ways (Evans et al., 2004). This process categorized reading as something that is learned instead of taught (Smith, 1971). Through this approach, children learn to read through being exposed to the print in the text that they are engaged in. The whole language approach assumes

that children learn to read if they are given high quality books and taught cues and strategies to support their reading, for example by looking at the pictures or using context. This method is popular with many educators since they believe it builds a love of books and reading.

Attempting to End the War with Balanced Literacy

According to decades of studies, reading is not a natural activity (Liberman, 1992). It's not like learning to speak, which is a developmental process. Children require explicit instruction as well as continuing exposure to print and reading lessons. The balanced literacy approach is a comprehensive instructional approach characterized by balancing skills based and whole language components of reading strategies for teaching reading through read-alouds, shared reading, reading mini lessons, independent reading, literacy centers, and guided reading (Frey, Lee, Tollefson, Pass & Massengill, 2005; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Pressley, Roehrig, Bogner, Raphael & Dolezal, 2002; Rasinski & Padak, 2004; Robinson, Lambert, Towner, & Caros, 2016).

Reading skills are explicitly modeled through mini-lessons during the balanced literacy reading workshops. The mini-lesson is divided into four sections: the connection, the teach (demonstration), the active engagement, and the link. Based on assessments administered in the classroom, the teacher decides which skills and strategies the class needs. Connections between earlier knowledge and the skill being taught are made during the connection phase. The teacher announces the lesson's main theme or the skill or reading strategy she will teach. In this method, the teacher uses a book that the students are familiar with to demonstrate how to carry out the skill or strategy. Furthermore, the teacher also engages in "thinking aloud" to demonstrate to the class how she uses the skill or reading strategy before letting the class work through it in their own books or the teacher's book. Students are reminded of the skills and reading strategies they can use when reading during the link phase (Calkins, 2001).

When students read aloud from a common book, it is called "shared reading". This is frequently a large book, a book on a website, or a document camera. Students should have their own copies as well, if possible. Together with the teacher, the students read aloud and discuss the text. The class will make anchor charts during mini-lessons, interactive read-alouds, and shared reading. Students refer to these anchor charts as reminders of when and how to employ certain reading strategies previously learned (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

In a small group setting, guided reading places greater responsibility on the shoulders of the students. Students read passages that are leveled. To improve their understanding and fluency, they make use of the skills that were specifically taught during mini-lessons, interactive read-alouds, and shared reading. The teacher's role is to guide and scaffold students as they read. In the classroom, guided reading offers many opportunities for differentiation. Groups are formed based on guided reading levels. The other students may be participating in partnered or independent reading, reading workstations that promote and reinforce different reading skills, or other activities during guided reading time. Students frequently collaborate in pairs during this time at the reading stations. Libraries, big books, writing, drama, puppets, word studies, poetry, computers, listening exercises, brainteasers, buddy reading, projectors/ Promethean boards, creativity stations,

science, and social studies are just a few examples of stations used by students during this time (Diller, 2003).

As it sounds, independent reading involves students reading texts they have chosen on their own. Books are chosen by students based on their interests and degree of independent reading.
The focus of word studies is determined by the student's needs and grade level. In kindergarten, phonics, sight word practice, and common rimes/onset are added after phonemic awareness instruction.
In first and second grade, phonics work becomes more challenging as children use what they have learned to write, adding suffixes, prefixes, and endings, as well as using familiar sight words to explore new words. Students are expected to be able to read, write, spell, and converse to truly "know" a word.

The different strategies provided through the balanced literacy framework allow for differentiated learning and reveal the teacher's philosophy of reading instruction (Policastro, 2018). As a result, teachers' use of balanced literacy components can reveal both their grasp of those instructional methods and their ideas about literacy education, which inform the routines they create (Bingham & Hall-Kenyon, 2013; Frey et al., 2005; Robinson et al., 2016). Balanced literacy seeks to incorporate some phonics; however, it usually does not align with the more sequential approaches of a phonics-based approach. It is for this reason that struggling readers have slipped through the cracks because they are not explicitly taught to decode words with this process.

Structured Literacy as a Solution
The International Dyslexia Association has coined the phrase "structural literacy," which refers to programs that teach reading using the research underlying the Science of Reading. The teaching of

some elements of literacy is emphasized in structured literacy (SL) techniques in a highly explicit and methodical approach. These elements include both foundational strategies (such as spelling and decoding) and advanced literacy strategies (e.g., reading comprehension, written expression). The development of oral language skills necessary for literacy, such as phonemic awareness, sensitivity to speech sounds in oral language, and the capacity to manipulate those sounds, are also emphasized in SL.

Explicit teaching is when teachers explicitly explain and demonstrate important skills; they do not anticipate that students will learn these skills just from exposure. Systematic means that the order of instruction is well-organized, with key foundational skills being taught before more sophisticated ones. Before learning more difficult short-vowel words with consonant blends or affixes, such as *snap* or *patted*, children must master decoding and writing simpler consonant-vowel-consonant combinations with short vowel sounds (for example, *pat*).

Teacher-led instruction is necessary for explicit, systematic instruction. Another aspect of SL is the ability to respond quickly and specifically to children's errors, which is made possible through teacher-led instruction. For instance, a student may misread *clamp* as *clump* while practicing reading aloud words with short vowel sounds and consonant blends (such as *clamp*). Instead of just correcting the student, the teacher will point at the vowel to get their attention. If that cue is ineffective, the teacher will offer more feedback to the student (for example, "the short sound for *a* is pronounced /ă/").

Decodable books and other teaching tools that are suitable for this style of education are used in structured literacy approaches. Teachers employ a

progression of phonics resources that use simpler to more sophisticated patterns. Children read decodable books that use the word patterns they have learned for phonics. Reading texts and phonics teaching are synchronized so that as students' decoding abilities advance, they can read texts that are more and more difficult. Decoding and spelling are coordinated similarly so that they support one another. This is a method that is characterized as being a strategy that has benefited all students, particularly those who have difficulty decoding words (Spear-Swerling, 2019).

However, concentrating solely on phonics is insufficient. Only receiving explicit phonics, orthography, and morphology training is insufficient. Syntax, semantics, and discourse instruction are also necessary and aid in comprehension development. Furthermore, students accomplish significantly more when they are able to tie their learning to their cultural origins and interests, according to research (Lubin, Vaz, & Scott, 2020). There is currently limited information on how to adopt a structured literacy framework in a culturally appropriate manner. Because of the data that supports culturally responsive pedagogy, this is extremely troubling.

Theoretical Framework

Culturally relevant pedagogy, according to Ladson-Billings (1995), is "a pedagogy of oppression comparable to critical pedagogy, but oriented expressly to the collective, not just individual empowerment." Three criteria or propositions underpin culturally relevant pedagogy: (a) the need for students to achieve academic success; (b) the need for students to develop and maintain cultural competence; and (c) the need for students to develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the current

social order's status quo (Page 160). Students are empowered by culturally appropriate pedagogy, which offers them a curriculum that builds on their past knowledge and cultural experiences. This differs from traditional teaching, which demands that students conform to the dominant schooling culture, and instead requests that the current schooling culture consider varied student experiences. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) is a competitive tool to have a solid awareness of diversity, as Liu (2020) explained, considering the globalization of many elements of society today. CRP helps students develop these skills by building on their assets.

Assets are capabilities and resources that can be applied to improve educational outcomes for students as well as for others in their classrooms, schools, and communities. According to Paris and Alim (2017), the skills that students from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds bring to the classroom are extremely valuable and pertinent to learning. Part of their identity is made up of these "funds of knowledge," which are culturally grounded understandings and behaviors that accumulate through time in family and community contexts (Moll, Amanti, Gonzalez,1992). In addition to serving as a foundation for learning, they are useful informational resources that may be strategically employed to verify knowledge held in the household and local community (Lubin et al. 2020). Peer groups, families, households, and communities are typically thought of as being associated with funds of knowledge. This is so because adhering to a specific set of cultural values, customs, and beliefs is made possible by belonging to a specific community. Delpit (2006) offers the following guidelines for drawing on students' funds of knowledge during instruction: identifying and building on students' strengths; using relatable

metaphors, analogies, and experiences from students' everyday lives to connect what students already know to school knowledge; assessing and meeting students' needs with a variety of effective strategies; honoring and respecting students' home cultures; and encouraging students' sense of community connection.

Literature Review

Culturally Responsive Teaching Culturally linguistically diverse (CLD) students' cultural practices, norms, beliefs, and values are frequently not valued, reinforced, or supported in the classroom (Ladson-Billings 1994, 1995, 2014). According to research, when students' backgrounds are ignored in teachers' curriculum and instructional methods, negative consequences such as low student accomplishment might occur. Researchers have explored alternate techniques that are more inclusive of students' different backgrounds in order to address the link between student achievement and instructors' instructional practices.

According to Gay (2010), culturally responsive teachers employ ethnically diverse students' "cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles to make their learning encounters more meaningful to and effective for them" (p. 29). They legitimize students' sociocultural origins by connecting academic courses to students' life experiences through a variety of ways of knowing and learning. They form learning communities and form personal bonds with the kids in their classes. Academic achievement, social conscience, cultural competency, and cultural affirmation are all developed concurrently in themselves and their students. They encourage teamwork and collaboration, allowing students to take charge of their own education. This

cultivation also aids the establishment of a reciprocal caring relationship among students as well as between students and their professors. "Patience, persistence, facilitation, validation, and empowerment for the participants" are characteristics of caring (p. 47). Caring interactions also promote a feeling of security. Gay continues, "Teachers who actually care about their pupils generate a higher level of student accomplishment."

Similarly, culturally relevant teachers, according to Ladson-Billings (2009, 2014), empower pupils intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically. They convey knowledge, skills, and attitudes through the use of cultural referents. They have a high level of self-efficacy, establish learning communities, support collaborative learning, and cultivate relationships outside of the classroom. Furthermore, they think that all children come to school with a body of knowledge, that must be investigated and exploited in order for children to achieve higher levels of accomplishment. Milner (2017) argues that "teachers from any racial and ethnic background could be successful with any racial group of students when they possessed or developed the knowledge, attitudes, dispositions, beliefs, skills, and practices necessary to meet students' needs," which is a key finding of Ladson-Billings' (2009) research on culturally relevant teaching (p. 2).

Students who Benefit from Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Over the past decade, the student population in the United States has become increasingly diverse (Sugarman & Geary, 2018). They come from a large number of families who are linguistically, racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse. A CLD student refers to English language learners, immigrant students, and students of color, whether they are African American, Latino, Pacific

Islander, or Asian. "It's a loaded term, but it's one folks are using to really talk about the students they are most worried about when they look at their data, because they are disproportionately at the bottom of the achievement curve" (Gonzalez interview of Hammond, 2017). CLD students come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and speak a plethora of languages, including Spanish, Haitian Creole, Vietnamese, Portuguese, and French (GA State Performance Report, U.S. Dept. of Education). The experiences of learners as well as their identities are honored and used as connections for new learning (Muniz, 2019-2020). While Ladson-Billings' (1995) framework for Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT) focused on African American students, researchers have expanded on that framework. CRT also addresses learners with other multiple and intersecting identities- based on social class, English proficiency, disability status, and LGBTQ status excluded from mainstream settings. Therefore, Muniz (2019-2020) notes the importance of learners seeing themselves in learning materials used in school and, "For these and other students, culturally responsive teaching provides critical 'windows' into the cultural heritage and experiences of others" (p. 11).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in Teaching Literacy
CRT was described by Gloria Ladson Billings (1995) as a theoretical model that addresses student achievement and helps them to affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate. Chuang (2016) further explains this model by stating how culturally relevant teaching is based on the notion that student success and engagement are encouraged when "teaching draws on each of their individual cultural experiences and language abilities." Teachers can implement this pedagogical practice to encourage students to connect course content to each student's cultural context. CRT is characterized by using students' cultural knowledge, interests, prior experiences, and learning styles to effectively teach (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2014). The use of culturally relevant literacy instruction can also be accomplished through the use of multicultural and diverse children's literature and discussions about student interests, values, and lived experiences that affirm the home culture and language of the students when planning literacy lessons (Au, 2011; Bennett, Gunn, Gayle-Evans, Barrera & Leung, 2018). Rather than recognizing cultural differences as a hindrance to student learning, culturally relevant teaching views those differences as areas of opportunity for learning (Chuang, 2016).

CRT has been recognized as a logical method for guiding students of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds to higher levels of literacy learning (Au, 2007). It mainly supports tremendous success among CLD students (Ladson-Billings, 2014). When teachers understand their students' cultural patterns and create learning environments that recognize and legitimize these patterns, student involvement increases (Alderman, 2013). Research conducted in Hawaiian charter schools discovered that three categories emerged as other teachers looked to implement culturally relevant pedagogy into literacy teaching. These categories included outward orientation, connections to the community, and curriculum content (Kana'iaupuni, Ledward, Ledward, & Jensen, 2010) in collaborative projects to elevate their community. These collaborations could involve musical performances, art exhibits, or other ways to contribute to the well-being of students' families and communities.

Phonics Instruction

In order to understand what phonics strategies should be implemented in reading instruction, it is important to know what phonics is and how educators use phonics in the classroom. Phonics goes hand in hand with reading and involves breaking apart the letters and sounds of the English language in order to better understand the relationship between the letters and sounds. By better understanding the components, students can be more successful in their reading. Heidi Anne Mesmer defines phonics as the "letters or symbols used to encode a language's spoken components" (Mesmer, 2005, p. 366) and defines phonics instruction during reading as "teaching learners the relationships between letters and sounds and how to use this system to recognize words" (Mesmer, 2005, p. 367). When it comes to using phonics in reading, an important concept for students to understand is their ability to acknowledge the letters and sounds within the words they are reading. Their phonemic awareness shows itself when they are able to understand each individual sound, followed by the collective sound of the word, and then the whole text. Phonics works hand in hand with the ability to decode *for* reading and comprehension *of* reading. Hence, this is the role phonics should play during reading instruction.

Phonics instruction can be given in three ways by: integrating spelling into reading, using differentiated instruction based on the various learning levels, and incorporating varied methods of instruction (Bast, 2013). The reality of phonics instruction is that every student will react to it differently and every student will require different strategies to gain phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness refers to the students' ability to identify the sounds in language in order to read words. In order to differentiate phonics instruction for varying levels of students and use varied methods of instruction, there are many different strategies that can be used. Bast (2013, pp. 10-11) offers the following phonemic awareness strategies:

1. Modeling phonemic awareness tasks and responses orally and following student's production of the task.

2. Making students' cognitive manipulations of sounds overt by using concrete representations.

3. Teaching skills explicitly and systematically.

4. Adding letter-sound correspondence instruction to phonological awareness intervention after students demonstrate early phonemic awareness.

5. Progressing from the easier phonemic awareness activities to the more difficult.

6. Focusing on segmentation or the combination of blending and segmenting.

7. Starting with larger linguistic units and proceeding to smaller linguistic units.

8. Focusing beginning instruction on the phonemic level of phonological units with short words.

9. Focusing on the initial sound, then on the final sounds, and lastly on the medial sound in words.

10. Introducing several continuous sounds first before introducing stop sounds because stop sounds are more difficult to isolate.

11. Providing brief instruction sessions. (Bast 2013,pp. 10-11)

In addition to these strategies, there are many ways to incorporate the three ways of teaching phonics such as songs, poems, and technology (Bast 2013, p. 27).

Importance of Systematic Phonics
There is now an emphasis on using an explicit, systematic approach to teaching phonics. Mesmer (2005) includes the history of explicit, systematic phonics providing evidence on what students learn through an explicit, systematic approach while teaching phonics. The word "explicit" refers to the actual delivery of the lesson in that the teacher is telling the "children directly what she or he is trying to teach" (Mesmer, 2005, p. 370). The word "systematic" focuses on scope and sequence: scope being the content and sequence being the order in which you teach the content. When you combine the words "explicit" and "systematic" together you get an approach to phonics that has a "specific sequential set of phonics elements; instruction that is direct, precise, and unambiguous; and practice using phonics to read words" (Mesmer, 2005, p. 369).

Research supports that focusing on word decoding can be very efficient during phonics instruction (Schaars, 2017). Lastly, the whole-to-part approach is a method of phonics instruction that also builds on students' knowledge through shared reading through whole-to-part phonics instruction (Moustafa, 1999). Overall, there were many different approaches one could take to teach phonics. Given this research, a few of these approaches include an explicit systematic approach, a word decoding approach, and a whole-to-parts approach. Each of these approaches are effective and could be used in various ways depending on the students' needs.

Culturally Responsive Phonics Instruction
Toppel (2012) highlights three strategies for successfully incorporating cultural responsiveness into phonics instruction. A personal alphabet where "each family creates a personal alphabet that includes one word for each letter of the alphabet that is relevant for their child" (Toppel, 2012, p. 100). These allow students to connect phonics study to their daily lives and personal experiences. Students are more engaged because it is more meaningful to them while learning because phonics instruction is connected to them on a personal level.

Also, a combination of the teacher's awareness of relevant technology, subject knowledge of essential ideas in spelling and vocabulary, and comprehension of successful pedagogy should be considered when implementing word study digital applications to reinforce phonics instruction (Scott, 2014). "Students will be more engaged in word study that aligns with their needs and interests while also promoting improvement in their grasp of how words work" (Scott, 2014, p. 4).

The Application of Culturally Responsive Teaching to Reading Instruction

Culturally responsive education, including how it applies to reading instruction, cannot be reduced to a single procedure, program, or set of instructions. It should be based on the culture, language, and distinctiveness of the people you're educating, "...shaped by the sociocultural characteristics of the setting in which it occurs, and the populations for whom it is designed" (Gay, 2013, p. 63). With that in mind, the guidelines below for incorporating CRT into literacy instruction are a good place to start.

Establish and Communicate High Expectations for Developing and Applying Reading Skills: Establish strong literacy learning objectives and send a consistent message to all students that they are expected to meet high reading standards. To ensure that students gain grade-appropriate reading skills, provide clear teaching in reading strategies and utilize the gradual release of responsibility.

Choose and Use Culturally Responsive Texts for Reading Instruction: Students must be able to recognize themselves in the text they are reading. Read aloud and student reading materials should reflect multicultural experiences that affirm kids' dignity and value at school and in society. Students also require exposure to books that will assist them in comprehending the multicultural nature of the world in which they live.

Linguistic and Dialect Considerations: Dialect awareness, or the understanding of the systematic disparities between a language's standard and vernacular forms, has been linked to improved literacy outcomes in studies. Improving pupils' dialect awareness will help them learn more about various aspects of reading.

P**honology:** When teaching students to produce phonemes, it's critical for teachers to be aware of phoneme differences between dialects, pointing out differences between Mainstream American English (MAE) pronunciation and the pronunciation in a student's primary dialect while remaining respectful of both dialects. Because traditional evaluations frequently measure solely knowledge of MAE, dialect diversity should be taken into consideration when assessing phonological awareness. Some languages have more distinct spoken phonemes than English, which might be confusing for English language learners. When asking students to produce phonemes or when teaching letter-sound correspondences, teachers must be aware of these variances and provide additional guidance and support (Gatlin-Nash, Johnson, Lee-James, 2020).

- Example: A reduction of final consonant blends is a phonological feature of Nonmainstream American English (NMAE) ('test' as 'tes').

- Example: /f/ and /v/ are often used in place of the /th/ sound in words ending in -th ('smooth' as 'smoov', 'teeth' as 'teef') in NMAE. This difference in phonological features may cause students to misspell words that have the -th spelling pattern.

- Example: At the end of words, the /er/, /ur/, and /ar/ are often not pronounced ('door' is pronounced 'doe', 'your' is pronounced 'yo' and 'dollar' is pronounced 'dolla').

Because traditional evaluations frequently measure solely knowledge of phonological awareness, dialect diversity should be taken into consideration when assessing phonological awareness (MAE). Students may have a great grasp of phonology in their primary dialect, but the examinations used to assess that knowledge may be inadequate. Teachers should pay close attention to the phonemes that the evaluation is looking for, as well as any items that show dialect differences.

Phonemes can be categorized according to articulatory characteristics that have to do with mouth positioning, airflow, and voicing. Talk about how lips join together to form the letter "p" to start. When pronouncing the letter "l," your tongue is raised in the top of your mouth, behind your teeth. When saying the letter sound /l/, there is another vibration that is referred to as voicing. Introduce each of the 44 speech sounds by their articulatory

properties throughout the course of two to three weeks. To be culturally responsive, also discuss the dialect differences and additional sounds CLD students hear and use in their dialect or primary language.

- Example: The Spanish language has the following additional sounds- /rr/, /ll/, /n~/. This is not to be confused with all of the sound-spelling variations. This process provides students with an organizing framework to comprehend the roots of MAE language by introducing each phoneme while pointing out pronunciation variations between that and a student's primary dialect and being respectful of both languages. Start asking students to blend and segment words with all the speech sounds even in kindergarten. Segment the word book into /b/, /oo/, and /k/ sounds. Although students frequently utilize the sound in speech, teachers wouldn't teach them to read with it. Only teach the sound and discuss how they are produced in MAE and the student's primary dialect and language, as well as what it feels like and looks like. Attaching the various graphemes for reading and spelling will be much simpler once the sound knowledge is evident.

Phonics & Spelling: Learning the alphabetic principle or orthographic mapping can be difficult since dialect differences in CLD students do not always transfer well onto the standard English writing system's orthography. Teachers should teach children how to distinguish between how words are spelled and how they are pronounced, particularly for graphemes (letters) that represent sounds that aren't always said or heard in a student's dialect (Gatling et al, 2020).

- Example: Vowel substituting ('sink' becomes 'sank') is a Southern American English (SAE) dialect.

- Example: Native English speakers who tend to omit the phoneme /r/ in specific phonological contexts also misspell words with /r/ phonemes (Treiman, Coswami, Tincoff, & Leevers, 1997).

Teach the most typical letter or grapheme that corresponds to the sound after it has been introduced. For instance, after introducing it, the letter p is the most typical spelling for the sound /p/. In kindergarten, this is simple, but in first grade, children must learn about digraphs and vowel teams, which are used to spell a variety of sounds.

Every day, go over and talk about each sound that has been introduced. Teach the letters p, b, t, d, k, and g, which represent the six stop sounds in MAE. Identify the characteristics that voiced and voiceless consonant phonemes have in common in MAE while also validating your students' dialect and language by distinguishing any differences in order for connections to be made; then, after accurate teacher modeling of the voicing distinction, orally generate each consonant phoneme: the following characters: /p//b/; /k//g/; /t/ /d/; /f/ /v/; /sh/ /zh/; /th/ /th/; /ch//j/; /s/ /z/.

Examine the pronunciation of the following connected groups of phonemes: stops (/p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /g/); hissy sounds (/f/, /v/, /th/, /th/, /s/, /z/, /sh/); nasals (/m/, /n/, /ng/); glides (/h/, /w/). Teach the vowel sounds in a culturally responsive way by using pictures of words that are meaningful to your students and will help them connect to easily instead of generic pictures. As you point to either a picture of a mouth making that sound or a word that describes it, have

the students repeat each vowel sound. Another example is reviewing the common spellings for different vowel sounds. For example, the long vowel sound /a/ is commonly spelled ai, ay, a_e, and a. In first grade, these spellings will be most frequently used. Use this experience to guide your students as they use phonemic awareness to segment and blend words, encouraging them to listen for sounds as they spell and read. This connection between speech and print is strengthened and enhances the understanding of how the two interact together as students concentrate on phonemes during their phonological awareness exercises.

English Language Learners' Linguistic Considerations (ELLs): Some languages have phonemes that are not the same as those used in English. Teachers must be aware of the differences between the phonemes in both languages and support ELLs by providing additional instruction, making them also aware of the differences. It is also important to provide explicit teaching and practice to help students learn the new correspondences if they have already mastered phonics for a first language with different letter-sound correspondences.

- Example: The Spanish language has the following additional sounds- /rr/, /ll/, /n~/.

- Example: The letters j and g are pronounced with an /h/ sound in Spanish.

- Example: In Spanish, and French, letters que and qui are pronounced /ke/ and /ki/.

- Example: In French, ch is pronounced /sh/ such as in the word chez pronounced /chez/. Also, the letter x at the end of a word is silent unless the next word begins with a vowel such as in the word deux.

Vocabulary: Differences in sound and morpheme pronunciation can impair one's capacity to learn new words' meanings. When teaching vocabulary, teachers should teach words in context and ensure that students understand all of a word's characteristics, including its spelling, phoneme pronunciation, word pieces (morphemes), various meanings, and related words

.
- Example: The NMAE common features of 'g' Dropping the 'g' in the suffix -ing and vowel substitution are common features of NMAE and can contribute to students' confusion of word meanings. Therefore, if a student pronounces the word 'string' as 'strain' the student may come to believe that the word 'strain' means a slender cord (incorrect) rather than to exert or pull to the fullest (correct) (Gatling et al, 2020).

Increasing Academic Vocabulary Knowledge: Teachers should be mindful that some students, particularly CLD students, may have limited awareness of academic vocabulary used only in the classroom.

"...We cannot assume that all students have equitable or sufficient opportunities to acquire English academic words or that the sociocultural relevance of academic words is comparable across students from diverse cultural and 13 linguistic backgrounds" (Wood, Schatschneider & VelDink, 2021, p.283).

They suggest that robust vocabulary instruction includes approaches that emphasize the morphology of words, provide multiple opportunities for word use and exposure, and incorporate new word meanings within meaningful contexts.

Syntactic Awareness (sentence grammar): Teachers must remember that dialects of English, like MAE, are complicated, rule-governed systems of English. Grammatical errors should not be confused with dialect peculiarities related to syntax. Explicit education for establishing syntactic awareness that respects students' native languages while highlighting the differences between informal dialect and MAE benefits students**.** Common features of NMAE are variance in the following:

- **subject-verb agreement:** MAE- 'They were hungry.' versus NMAE- 'They was hungry.'

- **deletion of the possessive 's':** MAE- 'We went to Pam's house.' versus NMAE- 'We went to Pam house.'

- **the deletion of helping verbs such as 'has' and 'have':** MAE- 'He has been outside.' versus NMAE - 'He been outside.'

- Teachers should also remember that other languages have syntactic rules that may differ from English.

- Example: 'The blue car is outside.' (MAE) versus 'The car blue is outside'. (Spanish, Haitian Creole, & French)

- Students benefit from explicit education that focuses on developing syntactic awareness through exercises like sentence combining (Graham & Perin, 2007), as well as assisting them in becoming bilingual (Graham & Perin, 2007).

Explicit Instruction for Reading Comprehension Strategies: Students benefit from instruction that promotes the development of higher-order and critical thinking abilities, which are required to attain high learning standards. Students must develop metacognitive reading comprehension methods and

close reading skills in order to become independent thinkers and learners. Students can assess their knowledge while reading, identifying when they are not understanding, and respond by using *fix-it* comprehension procedures with explicit training in these abilities and tactics. Explicit instruction can be done through read-aloud lessons where the teacher reads along with the students aloud from a common book. This is frequently a large multicultural book, a book on a website, or a document camera. Students should have their own copies as well, if possible. Together with the teacher, the students read aloud and discuss the text making personal connections to foster comprehension. The class will make anchor charts during mini-lessons, interactive read-alouds, and shared reading. Students refer to these anchor charts as reminders of when and how to employ certain reading strategies previously learned (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

- Example: Choose a book that mirrors the personal, cultural, and/or commutity assets to teach comprehension from during read-aloud, mini-lessons, or interactive reading.

Classroom Discussion and Participation About Text: Students benefit from opportunities to respond to what they are reading and learning in a culturally relevant way. Teachers should set high expectations for students' participation in classroom conversations and discussions with teachers and classmates, as well as provide specific discourse skills instruction. Teachers should also learn about their students' communication styles, particularly those that are most widespread in the cultures represented by the students. Culturally responsive teachers, according to the IRIS Center (2021), know and realize that some

groups of students are accustomed to communicating through engaging presentation styles, conversational and active participatory discourse, hand gestures, body movement, and imagery.

Teachers must consider the different language competence levels of their students and modify social norms accordingly. Teachers should employ lengthier wait times and clearly pronounce their words, for instance. The same principles should be taught to students several times. Teachers may employ synonyms or paraphrases of challenging language, reiterate and rephrase key concepts, or provide more information in response to student comments (Gibbons, 2006; Kamil, Borman, Dole, Sainger & Togesen, 2008; & Michaels, 1993). By accepting a student's response and drawing conclusions from it, this helps increase classroom involvement. Students are given the opportunity to assess the veracity of their teacher's interpretation through this informal dialogue interaction.

It is crucial to identify which students can and cannot understand explanations given to the entire class if teachers have second language learners in their classes (defined as any student whose primary or native language is not English). Support should then be given to those students who require them. It is crucial for teachers to convey meanings via a variety of forms of representation, including gestural, oral, pictorial, graphic, and textual. Students should be free to demonstrate their grasp of concepts in a variety of ways rather than having to reduce them (Walqui & van Lier, 2010).

The use of questions encourages student conversation engagement. The purpose of a teacher's question is to provoke an idea's elaboration or clarification. Students are given the opportunity to speak and to explain a concept when asked to restate an idea that has just been conveyed by another in their own words. Teachers are given chances to assess students' comprehension as well. The notion and the language used to convey it are reinforced by this repetition and the coversation that follows.

Conclusion

In order to assist phonics learning, teachers should take advantage of the students' native tongue. English language learners learn and make stronger connections when they are able to use their native tongue to reinforce their meaning. The home language can be utilized to reinforce and teach phonics and phonemic awareness skills if teachers and students both speak it. As described by Garcia (2009), students may also be permitted to use mixes of their native tongue and English to communicate.

Teachers can assist students in learning phonics in a variety of ways, even if they do not speak the students' native tongue. Phonemic and phonics concepts can be introduced in both the home language and English at the start of a lesson. The use of the student's native language or bilingual education, according to research, makes the most of conceptual knowledge and promotes learning and vocabulary growth (Mendez et al., 2015; Simon-Cerejido and Gutierrez-Clellen, 2014).

This article provides CRT strategies to support CLD learners during phonemic awareness and phonics lessons. We must emphasize that there is not a set script or specific equation that leads to culturally responsive classrooms because culture is multifaceted and continually changing and evolving, as Ladson-Billings (2014) suggests. In culturally responsive classrooms, certain basic tenets are present, such as "academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness" (p. 75).

Elementary education classrooms are full of opportunities to foster culturally responsive practices that include structured literacy development of CLD students. Teachers can begin by thinking about their students' personal, cultural, and community assets and choose high-quality multicultural children's literature, authentic interactions and supports that incorporate the use of phonics and phonemic skills during literacy instruction. I conclude by recommending that future and current educational leaders create, design, choose, and modify programs based on their ability to support culturally and linguistically diverse students with structured literacy in order to impact literacy learning and close the achievement gap.

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Lifted Voices: Advocating for Black Children and Their Families

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Abstract

In recent years, due to the state-sanctioned violence against Black men, women, and children, organizations, and corporations have attempted to address racism in our society by releasing diversity and inclusion statements, developing equity workshops, and implementing anti-racist policies. Within this context, BCDI-Atlanta's Lifted Voices Fellowship Program was developed to impact change for Black children and families through policy and advocacy . Early Childcare Educators and Leaders interested in equity and liberation for the Black community were selected as Fellows and engaged in programming to enhance their knowledge and skill development and develop advocacy projects. Tenets of Critical Race Theory, informed the design of the Fellowship therefore, supporting Fellows with naming, analyzing, and disrupting the racism that impacts Black children and their families was integral to the program. In this paper, we highlight the stories of the Lifted Voices Fellows scholars and offer a reflection of the Lifted Voices program and an analysis of how lifting one's lived experiences and voice is critical for the emerging leaders and advocates.

Introduction

Lift Every Voice and Sing, also known as the Black National Anthem, is not only a song, but it is a history lesson on the strength and foresight of Black activism. It is a reminder and call for Black Americans, individually and collectively, to lift their voices in the fight for liberation. In the lyrics James Weldon Johnson penned, it is clear that he believed that it was Black Americans who had to play a critical role in creating a more equitable and just nation for us all (Redmond, 2015). Black people have lifted their voices for centuries in the fight for liberation and justice. Many laws that have been passed for equal rights for Black people were the outcome of Black-led movements and resistance. For example, the Civil Rights Act of 1957 and The Voting Rights Act of 1965 were the results of demonstrations, protests, marches, and speeches, led by Black leaders and grassroot activists. History has taught us that Black leaders are key to creating systemic change for Black children and their families, and it is this truth that was foundational for the conceptualization of BCDI-Atlanta's Lifted Voices Fellowship Program. In this article, we lift the voices of the Lifted Voices Fellows and highlight their experiences, knowledge, leadership, and projects aimed at improving conditions for Black children and their families. We offer a reflection of the Lifted Voices program and an analysis of how lifting one's lived experiences and voice is critical for the emerging leaders and advocates.

Context
In recent years, due to the state-sanctioned violence against Black men (i.e, George Floyd), women (i.e., Breonna

Taylor, and children (i.e., Trayvon Martin) at the hands of the police; schools, organizations, and corporations have attempted to address racism in society by releasing diversity and inclusion statements, developing equity workshops, and implementing anti-racist policies. Studies have shown that these gestures are in some ways performative and provide surface-level remedies, at best (CITE). True change comes from shifting of organizational culture, developing knowledge around racial inequities, and opportunities for racially justice-minded Black people to lead. If one analyzes the landscape of services and support of Black children from birth through age 8 in our country, it is evident that there are few Black leaders available to make racially and culturally informed decisions that are truly rooted in justice for Black children. Therefore, the Lifted Voices Fellowship Program was designed to make space for and amplify the voices of Early Childcare Educators and Leaders who place the lived experiences of those in the communities they serve at the center of their work.

As a BCDI-Atlanta program, Lifted Voices focuses on developing inclusive leadership practices that foster equity and liberation for Black children in educational and organizational spaces. The Lifted Voices Fellowship aims to highlight the importance of honoring the perspectives and experiences of Black children and their families, a.) as integral to increasing diverse and liberatory ideas to solve the complex problems of evolving and increasingly diverse communities, and b.) to guide the development of organizational policies and practices that best meet the needs of the Black community. Since BCDI-Atlanta has a dynamic trajectory of work that centers on improving and uplifting the lives of Black children and families, the development of the Lifted Voices fellowship was a natural continuation of the programming

already in place that focused on early childhood education and policy. However, the focus of this program was on leaders who could tap into their experiences in various sectors related to supporting the Black community to create a more comprehensive impact on programming and policy.

Conceptual Framework
Black children continue to experience anti-Black racism that has been ingrained in our society since the inception of this country. It is without a doubt that for significant impact to be made on issues that impact Black Americans, the experiences and knowledge of Black people must be paramount in this work Therefore, the Lifted Voices fellowship conceptualization and design was informed by tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT is a scholarly framework that provides a lens for analysis and methodological approaches, and it also guides activist movements that center race, racism, and raciality. In this article, we lift it up as a framework that seeks racial justice. Additionally, as we developed the fellowship components and engaged in discussions with the Fellows, we utilized CRT as a conceptual framework in order to contextualize the issues the fellows focused on for their projects. CRT comes from a long tradition of resistance to unequal and unjust distribution of power and resources and seeks to transform the power relationships between race and racism (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). Scholars of CRT posit five basic tenets that can be used to analyze inequity, including within societal and educational institutions: 1) racism is permanent, systemic, and endemic (Bell, 1992; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004); 2) rights and privileges are only provided to marginalized groups in those instances when doing so will not disrupt the privileges and rights of the dominant group (interest convergence;

Bell 1980/1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001); 3) Whiteness is a property interest that is used to obtain privileges and power (Harris, 1993); 4) (neo)liberalism only allows for incremental change, color blindness, and meritocracy without real commitments to social justice (Bell, 1980/1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001); 5) racism can be named by centering experiential lived experiences through storytelling and counternarratives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). The 2 tenets of CRT that primarily frame the design and analysis of the fellowship are racism is normal and storytelling.

The first applied tenet, *racism is normal,* illuminates oppressive structures in society and educational practices. For instance, current narratives and practices presume that children of color are deficient (Ladson-Billings, 2009), instead of critiquing the social order and systemic oppression that marginalized communities of color in our society. In this way, it is easier to perpetuate the notion of inherent deficiency in the Black community rather than the structural racism in our society. Second, *storytelling* is an important form for exploring race and racism. Historically, people of color have employed storytelling to describe racial discrimination and heal wounds (Tate, 1997). The utilization of storytelling counteracts the master narrative of dominant White middle-class members and highlights the experiences of those who are marginalized due to race, class, sexual orientation, national origin, language and religion. As Ladson-Billings (2009) points out, "The voice of people of color is required for a deep understanding of the educational system" (p. 24), therefore, the stories and truth telling of the Lifted Voices Fellows is imperative for naming, analyzing, and disrupting the racism that impacts Black children and their families.

Lifted Voices Fellows and Advocacy Projects
The goal of the Lifted Voices Fellowship Program was to enhance the knowledge and skill development of the Fellows as policy advocates by engaging in coursework and conceptualizing an advocacy project that were to produce 4 competencies. These competencies were designed to ensure the Fellows' identities and experiences were central to their learning and as a lever for their advocacy. Each fellow's personal story, aligned with an issue they wanted to address that impacted Black children and their families. Some fellows had an opportunity to implement their project while others did not, yet, we saw that we can learn from each of their stories and the work that they set out to do and will continue to do by participating in the fellowship.

Table 1: Lifted Voices Fellowship Competencies	
Competency 1	Fellows understand the historical context of Black people's fight for equality in America and drawing on those principles to guide their work in advocacy and policy work.
Competency 2	Fellows develop more awareness of their multiple social identities, the influence of their personal narrative, and understand the significance of continual self-reflection.
Competency 3	Fellows understand the diverse set of perspectives across economic, educational, health and political spheres that contribute to inequity and embody key leadership characteristics that promote equity.
Competency 4	Fellows leverage the knowledge of community members, local and state policy landscapes, and legislative process to impact change for Black children and families.

In the following section, the Fellows' lived experiences are highlighted as they were key to shaping who they are as advocates and the issue they sought to address in this program. They each have written a vignette that tells their story, background information about the issue and it's impact on the Black community, and the advocacy project they developed during the fellowship to address the issue.

We start with Dr. Latarsha Holden, a motivational speaker and community leader, who was once a homeless, single-mother raising 6 children, is advocating for the mental health of black homeless mothers and their children. Next, Yeme Thomas recalls her experience as a gifted black girl in school, and developed an advocacy project that affirms the racial identities of young black girls. Then, Jennifer Jefferys, a school teacher, shares how her experiences with black men with addictions shaped her understanding of the school to prison pipeline, and the importance of critical self-reflection and building family-teacher relationships. Finally, Yema Thomas, discusses how her work as an artist shaped her work to ensure black children grow in literacy through black art and culture. We hope their truth telling and journeys, inspire readers to tap into and name their lived experiences as a method of resistance and advocacy.

Dr. Latarsha Holden's Project: The Importance of Mental Health Support for Those Experiencing Homelessness

Latarsha's Vignette: Mental Health & Homelessness

As a mother of six black children, the psychological trauma of being homelessness began to wrestle with the sanctity of my mental health. The urgency of wanting a warm home to house my children once felt like an oasis of scattered dreams. The restless nights, the look of fear of the unknown covered the eyes of my six children. I silently made a vow while we were living in a boarded up house as squatters that the streets will not raise my six children, nor the jails will house them. Thus began my journey, to change the narrative for my family and one day for others. I believe it is our past that becomes the guiding light for which path one may travel going forward. Experiencing despair from different lenses of being a single parent, navigating the murky waters of homelessness, escaping the darkness of domestic violence, and rising from the ashes of being an uneducated black woman had awoken my senses that there are other black families silently suffering, but in broad daylight. The hardest thing black parents can do is try to parent healthy kids during their own trauma. The fear from being a homeless black woman with six black children arrested me and almost paralyzed me from moving forward. The journey of navigating through homelessness for four years affected me mentally and physically. In the moments of surviving I had no time to sort through the raging emotions that I felt within. Pouring into my six children emotionally, even though I felt like I was drowning weighed on me heavily as I had no one to pour into me. I was admitted into the hospital for a week for observation, I was at the point of a mental breakdown for having suicidal thoughts, due to feeling like my children would be better without me. For one week I was able to breathe and talk to a counselor. It gave me enough fire, wind beneath my wings so I could finish the task at hand and that was to earn my college degree and to liberate my family. In hindsight, I realized that many people don't have the time nor the resources to give attention to their mental health wellbeing and how black families suffer because of it.

Success means different things to many people, but for me it meant liberating my family from a life of poverty and despair and empowering my children to pave their own path in which I became their guiding light. I've been able to break through my own glass ceilings and inspired my children to do the same for their lives. I went from being homeless in the streets of Atlanta to running for city council in the "2017," election, from a GED to a Doctorate degree in Leadership Studies, became a 17x published author, a comic book creator and now an inspirational speaker, consultant and life coach. I was chosen and named Georgia/ National Mother of the Year "2020," by American Mother's Inc. I was able to change the trajectory of my family, and now I inspire others that they have the Power to Rewrite their Story, because I woke up one day and decided to stop walking in shame.

Analysis of the Issue: Background

and research Children living in poverty generally perform poorly in school, with markedly lower standardized test scores and lower educational attainment. The longer children live in poverty, the greater their academic deficits. Children who are homeless represent one of the highest needs and most challenging groups to serve. They are culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse, and are highly mobile because of their unstable living situations. The influence of poverty on children's learning and achievement is correlated

to structural brain development (Hair, 2015). For the 4.2 million adolescents and young adults who experience some form of homelessness, opportunities to develop and realize their educational aspirations are often disrupted. To avoid long term costs of impaired academic functioning, households below 150% of the federal poverty level should be targeted for additional resources aimed at remediating early childhood environments (Columbia University Center on Policy & Social Policy, 2020).

Systemic and structural racism has been at the helm of black disenfranchisement. The War on Drugs, mass incarceration, and policy aided housing discrimination has resulted in debilitating public housing riddled with crime and has been a dangerous cycle that has kept black children and their families deeply entrenched in a maze of uncertainty with no positive outcome of thriving. The everyday struggle to fight structural racism, to provide decent housing for one's family, the desire to see their children have a good education and earn a living wage can weigh negatively on black and indigenous families emotionally and mentally. Many families living in poverty are likely to fall prey to their environment, they may add to the problems by soothing their pain with drugs, alcohol, or gang involvement, which increases the number of high school dropouts.
According to the Children's Defense Fund, 71% of children living in poverty are children of color. Historically, systemic racism and institutional barriers mean that children of color have been particularly vulnerable to child poverty. The majority (72%) of sheltered homeless mothers reported high current psychological distress or symptoms of a probable lifetime major mental illness or substance abuse. However, few mothers (15%) in need of services received mental health care, and the main point

of contact for those with a mental health problem was the general medical sector. Homeless mothers have a high level of unmet need for mental health services. The relationship between maternal and child problems underscores the need for homeless family interventions that promote access to psychiatric care for both generations (Abramson, 2021). However, there is little support provided in the way of mental health, and less so on the mental health of the children in families that are homeless. In addition, trauma has been passed down through generations of African Americans. Poverty, homelessness, and mental health issues have invaded the black community and robbed them of opportunities for economic growth, development, and generational wealth. Therefore, a deeper look at homelessness across racial lines is necessary to move toward the appropriate support for black mothers and their children who are homeless.
In an evaluation of the Homeless Families Program (Administration for Children and Families. (2014), which provided section 8 vouchers and case management services to 1.298 homeless families across nine sites, found that caregivers' mental health needs exceeded human capital and medical needs. Homeless families are overwhelmingly female headed, minority, and poor with limited financial resources and social support. Evidence has suggested homeless mothers with mental illness require more intensive services than housing assistance alone, yet psychological and parenting interventions are underemphasized in current housing interventions(Samuels, 2015).

Lifted Voices Advocacy Project
Lifted Voices Fellowship was a navigational map which I've traveled through the history of the trauma that black families have endured and continue to endure. It was in this space, where I saw the importance of continuing my work to fight

for black children and black families and developed a Tiny Homes Model to address homelessness with a focus on mental health using a holistic approach. Due to one experiencing continual stress or being in a constant fight or flight pattern leaves one mentally exhausted. This can take a toll on the family unit, thus causing a breakdown in the family structure. With systemic and structural racism black children and their families have insurmountable obstacles to overcome. Extended periods of being in poverty and desolate situations often affects one's mental and physical health; and impedes the educational learning of children. Educators know that student achievement is maximized when students can go home to stable, decent affordable housing. I've created a plan where black families can have a safe space to heal together. There is a growing movement to increase the availability of supportive, service-enriched housing for families with parents with mental illnesses, but evidence on effective models is lacking.

As a Lifted Voices Fellow, I learned about history and the ways in which systemic and structural racism produced trauma that has been passed down generationally as well as individual traumas based on difficult experiences. Therefore, my approach to supporting black children and mothers who are homeless, addresses the root cause of their situations in order to support their mental health. The Lifted Voices Fellow Program has given me the class readings, which has enlightened me on where we come from and what pieces were missing. My mission is to assist families who are homeless by creating a tiny homes community using a holistic approach. Most tiny homes communities are funded by non-profits and provide supportive services. There are supportive services for those who are battling addictions and are afforded the opportunity to go into a rehab center to focus on their healing, but not for black families with mental health illness outside of a mental institution. I propose the Four Seasons Program.

Four Seasons is a 90-day program which will consist of eight tiny homes in a community setting. The Four Seasons program focuses on the client's emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing using a holistic/therapeutic approach. This program is for black families with children under 13. I call this process "The Bridge," due to the fact for 90 days black families who are experiencing homelessness will have the opportunity to focus on their mental and emotional wellbeing, before being processed into a transitional home where they will focus on work and other pursuits. The "Tiny Homes" model was chosen to provide the families with a sense of home without the feel of being in an institution and to keep the families together. The name Four Seasons was chosen because life's circumstances can change in any season of a person's life, but to also encourage the participants that seasons change, and nothing lasts forever. I believe that if we aid the parents in their healing, we can then start the process of healing the family. I'm looking to partner with other organizations that provide job placement, GED services and those that provide transitional housing.

Yeme Thomas' Project: Cultivating the Genius of Black Children

Yeme's Vignette: Gifted Black Girl
My journey into the field of education began as a gifted student who was constantly in trouble for being too talkative and being outspoken. I got very bored easily and I failed to receive academically rigorous instruction. I would finish my work early and then distract my classmates. Eventually, I developed a reputation as a trouble maker. The fact that I was a straight-A student, influenced

the school administration twice when it came to implementing consequences for my behavior. I lost count of how many times I heard, "Well she is so bright, I don't know why she can't get her act together." I admit, I can see how teachers could perceive me as a lot to handle especially in my formative years. I was just an inquisitive kid who analyzed and deconstructed everything that came before me. I questioned everything and would not settle for just any answer. I always wanted to know "why". Teachers say my challenging of views and ideals as a form of disrespect. In my gifted classes, I noticed that I was the only child who got in trouble. The other students in my class seemed to be docile, which was viewed as being obedient. There were hardly any behavior infractions amongst my peers. At a young age I began to identify low intelligence with behavior problems because my teachers always told me I belonged with the other kids due to my behavior. My early education experiences would eventually become pivotal in my desire to want to teach. When I started teaching I made up my mind that I wanted to work with youth that were deemed as "difficult" or hard to reach. Due to the nature of humans, we label students and allow our biases to impact the ways we teach them. It is imperative to get to know a student beyond what lies on the surface. Lifted Voices has exposed me to culturally relevant ECE practices which can be implemented in my classroom. I now have context as to why Black children behave in certain ways or are more receptive to certain pedagogical methods. I am now equipped with the tools to empower and elevate black and brown children.

Analysis of the issue: Background/ Research
In a society where Eurocentricity is the standard, it is difficult for children to embrace and celebrate their blackness. When black children do not own their blackness, their light is diminished and they are not able to live up to their full potential. The efficacy of black children is profoundly impacted by their knowledge of self, sense of self worth, cultural integrity, and racial-ethnic pride (Akbar, 1999). The formation of one's identity is believed to be important since many researchers believe that one's racial–ethnic identity is linked to a positive sense of self, academic performance, and positive conduct. Growing up in predominantly white classrooms, Black children may assign stereotyped characteristics to themselves and their ethnic group, which may hinder their learning and achievement. For some children, a sense of pride and belonging may help them adjust, but an oppositional identity that rejects any embrace of dominant culture and values in favor of exclusive loyalty to one's group may be less adaptable.

Consistently enduring microaggressions and negative stereotypes often have negative effects on Black students' self-identity (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). For example, Brittian (2012) described how individuals' identities are influenced and molded by their environment. Stevenson (1997) explained that because Blacks are continuously exposed to negative comments, subtle reminders of their inferiority, and neighborhood violence, they become increasingly sensitive to microaggressions and racism. Additionally, Brittian noted that "misrepresentation of Black culture and the overrepresentation of European American images on television" (p. 175) may lead Black students to feel inferior and uncertain of their position in society. Continuing to find themselves portrayed in a negative light and misrepresented by the popular culture reinforces negative stereotypes against Black students and evokes their feelings of anger, mistrust, and self-doubt (Stevenson, 1997).

According to Arroyo and Zigler (1995), in order for Black students to become successful, they feel forced to dissociate themselves from their culture of origin and adopt behavior and attitudes of the mainstream culture resulting in their increased feelings of guilt, depression, and identity confusion. In the Black community, as Carson (2009) noted, Black students struggle to divide themselves from their cultural norms as they realize they must learn to speak, look, and behave White in order to be accepted. Further, even more, disparaging is the realization that Black students must strive to become above average in order to receive recognition from faculty (Carson, 2009). Self-esteem and racial affiliation are significant indicators of academic achievement. Studies revealed self-esteem to be less predictive of academic achievement than racial affiliation. Students who exhibited high levels of self-esteem and racial identity performed better academically than students who showed low levels of self-esteem and racial identity. Black students' self-esteem is influenced by general stressors affecting all students, although their self esteem is also negatively affected by additional stressors, including experiences with racism and discrimination, educational hegemony, insensitive comments, and questioning their belonging at school (Goodman, et al., 2012).

Lifted Voices Advocacy Project
I was drawn to the Lifted Voices Fellowship as it served as an opportunity to enhance my abilities to strengthen my cultural awareness and cultivate the genius of black children. I know that like myself, there are Black children who struggle with their self perception and these feelings directly correlate with how they perform academically. My project uses culturally responsive practices to develop programming for African American girls that promotes a strong racial identity through self care, mental health, self awareness, positive body image, and academic performance.

My project will be implemented as a self-esteem booster community project. It will aim to empower young children in the classroom, as well as in their personal lives. The project will hold 2 meetings per month for 6 months. The first session of each month will be a book club meeting and the 2nd meeting of the month will be a mentorship/counseling session. The girls will engage in book readings and discussions of picture books that provide positive narratives of Black life, culture, and history, especially as it pertains to Black girlhood and womanhood. The participants will authentically share identity stories, Black role models in the community and curriculum will be highlighted, and activities will be culturally responsive and mediated. During the mentorship/counseling sessions, Black community leaders, counselors, and therapists will serve as a display of Black representation and help raise the self perception of young black girls.

Jennifer Jeffrey's Project: Teacher Biases Impact of the Teacher-Student-Family Relationship

Jennifer's Vignette: School to Prison Pipeline by Addressing Teacher Bias and Building Strong Home-School Connections
In 1998 I found myself working at a Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Center in Philadelphia instead of being enrolled at the 4-year university that I was attending 2 years before. In my job capacity, I worked on a unit that housed men who were recently released from State Correctional Institutes in Pennsylvania. Many of the residents in my unit were Black men under the age of 30. Most were there for drug convictions, mainly

the sale and distribution of crack cocaine. Some of the men I encountered were considered "menaces to society"; however, I found that most were just victims of circumstances. In talking with many of the men, I discovered that some were in remedial/special education programs, retained, or never completed high school. Of those that I built a "working" relationship with, I found that many of them were highly intelligent, creative, artistic, and financially savvy. In learning about their lives prior to incarceration, many revealed lives that were filled with trauma and abuse. Families torn apart because of drugs, homelessness and parental incarceration; some men found it easier to submit to the calling of the "streets". When looking back at my time with these gentlemen, I found that most of their life choices came as a result of unresolved trauma, especially those experienced at a young age.

Soon after I became an elementary school teacher, I had many Black male students considered "challenges" in my classroom. And honestly, I didn't have many good thoughts about them. They were disruptive, required much attention, and left me drained at the end of the day. . I felt that reaching out to parents wasn't an option because I had been conditioned to believe that these issues needed to be handled in the classroom. I came to resent those boys and couldn't wait for the end of the year when I didn't have to "deal" with them anymore. They would be the next teacher's "problem". One of the babies I had to "deal" with completely made me rethink how I thought about some of the boys in my class who exhibited disruptive behaviors. His name was Quadir. He was a smart, inquisitive and playful child in my class of high-achieving students. When he was good, he was good. However, when he didn't get his way, Quadir's behavior quickly changed. He would throw chairs, yell and tug at his hair. After dealing with

these behaviors for a period of time and knowing that I could no longer maintain control, I decided to reach out to Quadir's mother. In conversation with Mom, we found out that Quadir had been kicked out of several daycares before starting kindergarten due to his "aggressive" behaviors. Quadir's behavior in school mirrored his behavior at home. Mom and I, along with all the teachers and staff who worked with Qaudir were equally frustrated. We found that the best way to deal with our frustrations was to come together and discuss what we can do to help Quadir deal with the emotional outbursts at home and in school. Before Quadir, I can admit that I was one of those teachers that fell into the "trap" of believing that students like Quadir needed to be "handled" in class and then handed off to the next teacher without trying to figure out how they could be adequately served. Those "victims of circumstances" were now boys who were easily and readily dismissed from my class. Their challenging behavior was seen as a disturbance, and I treated them that way. Upon encountering Quadir, I made the conscious effort to do some self-reflection to see if my attitude and behavior towards students like Quadir included any biases I picked up along the way. What I saw was not pleasant. I began the work of breaking down those biases I incurred on my teaching journey; however, I gained more insight in how my biases could negatively affect my relationship with my Black male students once I embarked upon my journey in the Lifted Voices Fellowship.

Background Issue
Through the Lifted Voices Fellowship, I was able to reacquaint myself with concepts that I learned in undergraduate school. I was also introduced to new ways of thinking in this ever-evolving society. One module focused on identity and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2017).

In this module I learned how we see ourselves can negatively or positively impact how we see others. The work in this module allowed me to acknowledge and become more aware of our multiple and intersecting identities. It also helped me to realize that deeply personal and critical excavation is key for genuine and respectful advocacy work. In this module I discovered my "privilege" in respect to how I chose to deal with my students and their parents. After reflecting on my biases, I started to connect how teacher biases can contribute to the inequities in suspensions and expulsions of Black male students. The effect of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions could have a grave consequence, one that leads students directly to prison. Based on this idea, I decided to focus my advocacy project on teacher bias and the school to prison pipeline.

In a study conducted by The Intercultural Development Research Associates (2021), researchers found disparities in the rates of in/out of school suspensions and expulsions for Black boys in comparison to students of other demographics. The study also found that suspended or expelled students are more likely to commit crimes if they are not in school. Suspensions and expulsions can also increase the likelihood of students dropping out of school altogether. The study notions that suspended or expelled students are more likely to commit crimes if they are not in school.

The rate in which Black boys are suspended and/or expelled from school can indirectly be tied to teacher bias. Biases held by teachers, regardless of their ethnicity, may cause them to look at Black boys in a different way.
Dr. Rosemarie Allen, an Associate Professor at Metropolitan State University of Denver stated,

"We're all biased. All of us. it's not something we ask for, it's not something we want….we have been receiving biased messages from the time we were born… it's why we see that black teachers and white teachers are also looking at little black boys…We're all receiving the same information."

The "information" teachers receive can ultimately cause them to look at specific behavior of Black male students and recommend consequences that may not require suspension or expulsion. Teacher bias combined with disruptive behavior will most likely lead to disruptive patterns that will, unfortunately, lead to more time out of school for Black male students.

Lifted Voices Advocacy Project
My project explores the importance of teachers building relationships with students and their families, while examining how biases can impact how teachers recommend consequences for students' negative behaviors. The goal of my advocacy project is to find ways to build stronger relationships between teachers and parents of "at-risk" elementary school students, specifically targeting Black male students.

I plan to select a cohort of teachers to participate in a six-week Professional Learning Community (PLC) to examine how teacher bias can contribute to excessive consequences/punishment for Black male students. The PLC will also address how students' home life plays an integral role in how they behave in school, study the importance of building culturally responsive classrooms, and understand the importance of creating nurturing relationships with families.
Teachers will meet with select Black male students and their parents regularly. During this time of engagement, teachers will gain a greater insight on their student's home life and how their lives

might adversely affect their behavior in class. Both parents and teachers will come to understand the value of building stronger home and school relationships to support students.

The expected outcomes of the project are an increase in parental involvement "at-risk" students; greater student accountability for negative behaviors; and teachers' abilities to identify their biases and how to address and correct them.

Yema Thomas' Project: Using Art Expression to Encourage Literacy in Black Children

Yema's Vignette: Promoting Literacy Through Arts

My name is Yema Thomas. I am a Black Child Development Institute- Atlanta Lifted Voices inaugural fellow, movement artist, cultural producer, and educator. My interest in the intersections between literacy and the arts led me to pursue a fellowship with BCDI-Atlanta to further my mission to empower the multi-valent identities of black youth through cultural education. I wish to be an agent for healing in my community and have picked up dance, music and education as tools of my trade.

I had always wanted to be a dancer when I grew up. In the 90's as a child, I studied Michael Jackson's moonwalk and 1-2 stepped with Ciara into the new Millennium. My single mom could not afford ballet lessons after my parents' divorce, though, so I kept myself active by practicing choreography in the latest Sean Paul music videos. I began to research the depth of blackness across cultures, and with the coming of the dial-up internet age, I soaked up African diasporic history like a sponge.

I rediscovered my passion for the arts at Georgia State University where I studied

Art History with a focus on African Art, and I have since focused on promoting creative placemaking in my hometown of Atlanta, Georgia. From there, I tapped into dances of the Diaspora and traveled locally and globally to cultivate my skills, reconnecting with my Sierra Leonean roots. I began my career in education working as a substitute teacher for the Atlanta Public School System which furthered my passion for mentoring and empowering youth in underserved communities leading to an appointment as a Georgia Early Education for Ready Students (GEEARS) Ambassador. During a post-grad gap year, I danced in Dakar, partied in Prague, modeled in Milan, and took the stage in Toronto. When I returned home, I began to think about how different Atlanta would be if it were a city rooted in arts and culture? Don't get me wrong, Atlanta is the mecca for Black entertainment, however there is a still strong need for connection to the Motherland.

I wanted to become the change I wished to see, so I began with creating an interdisciplinary youth arts curriculum which led to a full-time position as Recreation Operator with the City of Atlanta's Office of Recreation. In that role, I mentored youth in a bespoke contemporary African dance program of my own creation. Within the year of the program's existence, classes had more than tripled in size and had expanded to include children, adults, and lifelong learners. The program culminated with a performance for government officials at City Hall. Each day, at the MLK Recreation and Aquatic Center, I would see a quote by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King: "If I cannot do great things, I can do small things in a great way." This poignant proclamation gave way to AfroHeat LLC, an arts and culture-based entertainment company, offering dance classes, and music theory workshops geared towards youth in Atlanta. Created to reimagine Atlanta's

cultural landscape through dance, music, visual art and performance, I envision AfroHeat as a beacon of opportunity for young people.

Feeling urged to push the boundaries of arts and cultural programming, I took on a role as Coordinator of Public Programs at the High Museum of Art and developed and managed ongoing programs including Friday Jazz, lectures, workshops, studio programs, musical and theatrical performances. I created a lasting legacy as the thought-leader behind High Frequency Friday, a dynamic monthly program centered around educational entertainment which quickly grew to become the Museum's top public program.

Background

Managing programs furthered my interest in explorations of Identity. I believe no matter how far an individual has traveled from "home," there will always be aspects of physical, spiritual and intellectual ties to reconnect them to their ancestral roots. My current research explores connections in African diasporic music and movement with a focus on a distinctly relevant "circle of influence," beginning with African retentions in the United States and the Caribbean and how those cultural products (i.e. Jazz, R&B, Salsa, and Konpa) have been reintroduced to Africa, contemporarily, in the form of music and dance genres like Amapiano, Kizomba, and Afro-Zouk.

With the increasing popularity of Afrobeats music and dance moves coupled with positive black representation on screen, many Black youth are in search of cultural activities yet do not know where to begin. Another challenge is they lack access to affordable quality programming as there is a shortage of platforms. Through my educational fitness program, AfroHeat, I wish to target youth

and those looking to improve their social conditions through wellness. My goal is to provide students with the tools to boost self-esteem and raise self-awareness while exploring ancestry. Representation matters: if they can see it, they can become it!

Through years of experience working with youth in schools, recreation, and cultural institutions, I have found that Atlanta's at-risk youth need arts/culture-based therapies to combat obesity and mental health disorders. This is significant because compared to their white counterparts African Americans are generally at higher risk for heart diseases, stroke, cancer, asthma, influenza and pneumonia, diabetes, and HIV/AIDS, (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017). The CDC stated that social factors compared to others in the U.S., specifically whites, affect African Americans at younger ages: unemployment, living in poverty, not owning a home, cost-prohibitive effects of trying to see a medical doctor, smoking, inactive lifestyle, or obesity.[2]

A white paper from Cigna went further, acknowledging mental health disparities between African Americans and white patients. They noted blacks are 20% more likely to report psychological distress and 50% less likely to receive counseling or mental health treatment due to the underlying socioeconomic factors.[3]

Grounded in activism, my mission is to provide comprehensive instruction that is both accessible and relatable. The work is rooted in efforts to connect and support Atlanta's Black communities by fostering fitness and education through performance. This desire to contribute to a new future led to the conception of a final project for my BCDI-Atlanta Fellowship, a Literacy Bootcamp.

Project Description

My project was informed heavily by the competencies we explored in the fellowship. One notable area of focus was the importance of affirming black identity and empowerment through representation. I was equally inspired by the methodologies shared in Dr. Debra Ren-Etta Sullivan's book Cultivating the Genius of Black Children: Strategies to Close the Achievement Gap in the Early Year. As part of the Lifted Voices Fellowship, we were invited to attend a 5-Part Series led by Dr. Sullivan where we explored active, engaged strategies for learning and tapping into multiple intelligences (Kinesthetics- I know my body, Rhythmic- I know notes, patterns, harmony, and beats, Visual- I know space and forms, Naturalistic- I know I am connected) to meet early learners where they are.

I tested this bootcamp model at The Wren's Nest, a historic house museum in the West End where we partnered with Writopia Lab to offer literacy workshops to youth in this predominantly black community. The project was unique in that it was geared towards education and empowerment through multiple disciplines aiming to meet students where they are in terms of skill and overall exposure to the arts. Understanding the need for community collaboration, I leaned on the skills of local talent. A great deal of the day was spent in nature (I know I am connected). Fine artist Andre Henderson taught watercolor lessons (I know space and forms) as a means of visual storytelling. Jerry G. White led a drumming warmup (I know my body) and Gwendolyn Napier hosted a song and oral storytelling session (I know notes, patterns, harmony, and beats). The project served as a model for educational entertainment that will have a long-term impact on the participants. Formal data was not collected from this experience but parents and children alike, expressed their enjoyment of the program and remarked that they were grateful to experience arts and learning experiences that connected to Black culture.

The Lifted Voices Fellowship has inspired me to explore non-profit models with a goal of broadening my reach. In the next 2 years, I plan to create an afterschool enrichment center that will expand on AfroHeat's bootcamp model, offering multidisciplinary programming that grounds Black Atlanta's youth in African culture. Our culturally responsive programs will promote identity building through diasporic dance, music, theater, and visual arts classes meeting young learners where they are on their respective creative journeys.

Reflection

The Lifted Voices Fellowship was designed with course modules that focused on leadership, policy, and advocacy, which were important for knowledge and skill development, but it was in the modules and discussions of our histories and stories where our counter-storytelling gave way to the powerful personal stories shared above. These stories seek to disrupt the systems that deny the dignity of Black children. Each of the fellows, in varying ways, has experienced this denial in some form, which is why our stories must be at the center of our advocacy.

These stories were foundational for the conceptualization of their advocacy projects and evoked them to tap into their ingenuity, cultural wisdom, and their collective responsibility to develop spaces for disruption. Although the projects reach varying levels of completion during the program, each fellow has continued this work in varying contexts to grow their projects and advocate for Black children and their families.

Conclusion

The work in the Lifted Voices Fellowship Program grew out of our commitment to lifting the voices, experiences, and expertise of our community to serve and lead for Black children. Our Black National Anthem, Lift Every Voice and Sing, gives us something to hold on to, learn from, and aspire to. Lifted Voices lifts the voices of the community to serve the community. In closing, we lift the voices Black children. Recently, a video has been making its rounds on social media and in the news of a classroom filled with Black children singing and dancing to Lift Every Voice and Sing. Children are pounding on the desks to create the beat for their classmates to sing and dance to. The video is pure joy! We will live in society that from day one, never intended for there to be anything joyous about being Black. So, in our work in this fellowship, we lift our voices, and we lift the voices of our children to disrupt anti-Black beliefs and practices because our children deserve joy!

Dr. Natasha Thornton *is a teacher educator and educational consultant whose work centers on culturally responsive literacy instruction and teacher development. As the founder of Thornton Educational Consulting, she develops professional learning and curricular resources that highlight Black history and excellence. Natasha is also an adjunct professor of literacy education at Kennesaw State University.*

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Early Socialization and Family Engagement Literacy: Standing on Our Own Ground

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Abstract

Why are Black children continuously behind in critical content areas such as reading and mathematics? What are the economic implications for their inability to survive and thrive in the social order? What can be done to stop the bleeding? This article addresses the persistent lack of progress far too many Black children are not making in reading, mathematics, and other essential areas in literacy, according to the nation's report card – NAEP – National Assessment Education Progress (Morrison, 2012, NAEP, 2015). Supportive evidence shows that Black children become potential candidates to drop out of school if a literacy proficiency level has not been attained by the fourth grade (Bowman, 2003). It also presents a view of the Black family in the latter part of the past century and how much the family has regressed. What can the Black community do to rekindle and unite us as people, as well as shoring up literacy as a foundation for the success of Black children? A doable remedy is offered-*The Collaborative Model. As a professor-in-residence, more than 20 years were spent in two communities crafting, implementing, and fine-tuning a collaborative process that changed those school communities. Based on the long-term commitment to teaching, advocating, assessing, researching, and supporting Black children, the collaborative model was implemented to facilitate the development and enhancement of their knowledge and literacy skills relative to the problem situation through family literacy programs and services. The change came about because the model was sustained for a period.

Keywords: collaborative model; literacy; family engagement; early socialization

Introduction

The article is both a presentation of facts and a discussion of two situations where services were developed to demonstrate what was possible. At the homegoing of the renowned scholar, Dr. Asa G. Hilliard, Dr. Wade Nobles' closing comments said, "Do Asa." Implementation of the Collaborative Model was an example of doing Asa. The Collaborative Model also embraces the essence of MBONGI. MBONGI is a traditional African political institution. Its purpose is to provide deep thought" to education and socialization. These matters must be examined within the context of the history and culture of African people on the continent and throughout the diaspora. The MBONGI Council is a force of elders from the village who bring a wealth of knowledge and energy. Members understand the history and politics of the situation. The two models have similar characteristics that go beyond superficial levels of resolution. Without deep thinking about the matter(s) at hand, surface-level solutions will continue.

The Collaborative Model is a data/information-informed methodology. The gathering and analysis of data/information from the community drive what decisions must be made. In each situation, the lack of literacy or knowledge was the case

that underpinned the problem situation. Literacy brought clarity to knowing and] understanding. Human resources and support were needed to understand and do a comprehensive analysis of the problem. Other resources were also needed but human capital helped move the needle toward change and improvement.

Within the Black community, there are ample resources in the form of human capital. The harnessed energy can be organized and delivered to provide a literacy foundation for young Black children, in both the United States and the diaspora. The question to answer is, do we have the consciousness and the will to rescue and save our children? Thinking creatively was an opportunity to demonstrate that Black children were worthy of the effort to be saved.

As a Research Associate, in the Center for the Study of Adult Literacy -CSAL, Georgia State University, I served as the principal investigator of a research project in an elementary school that had the lowest test scores in reading and mathematics, in the Atlanta Public School district. The school was located in the center of a public housing authority that served 500 children, kindergarten through grade 7. Funding from the U.S. Office of Education supported a family literacy project. FIRST- Funds for Innovation & Reform in Schools and Teaching - was a three-year demonstration research project developed in the CSAL. Its goal was to improve the literacy skills of the families in the school community by extending the classroom into the home (CSAL,1992). The Black Child Advocate, (Fall 1987) featured the scope of the work of the ADEPT Model (NBCDI, 1987), which was implemented in the second community. It was also a collaborative process. ADEPT – Adolescent Development and Early Parent Training – was a creative solution to a

situation that seemed rooted in the school community. It was an intervention/prevention program that was developed, implemented, and assessed in a high school that served students in grades eight through twelve. It too was also located in a public housing community. In each school community, service was rendered to improve the conditions of the families through literacy; these programs were based on the needs of local residents. What undergirded my work was the principle of providing a service that changed or improved the recipient's level of knowledge and skills in literacy. As one of the parents said, "if you know better you do better." "The ruin of a nation begins in the home of its people." (Ghanaian Proverb).

Decades of data and other supportive evidence from research initiatives show that little had been done to narrow the achievement gap in public education in America. The "gap" as identified showed the academic performance levels in areas of literacy between Black, brown, and white students. Over time, attention has shifted from gaps to now focusing on opportunities to narrow the differences in performance. The two examples – MBONGI and The Collaborative Model - described in the article showed what was doable when given opportunities with ample resources and support.

The boundless list of initiatives, as reported by NAEP – National Assessment of Education Progress - had not moved the needle for Black children. NAEP's purpose is to assess and report the results of student performance in reading, mathematics, science, and technology. Assessment of progress is done in grades 4, 8, and 12. The risk of failing in school was increased if reading proficiency was not achieved by fourth grade (Bowman, 2003). The preschool-to-prison pipeline used statistical data from 1st-grade

reading scores to make predictions for prospective prison populations.   Data from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights revealed that Black students were suspended at an excessive rate compared to boys of other ethnic backgrounds. The process and procedure for expulsion begin during the early years of growth and development. Consider the concept of growth and development. Preschool youngsters are still in the process of becoming. The expulsion of the preschool-to-prison pipeline begins to shove young children out of school and into the criminal justice system.   A report from the Equal Justice System tells us that once children are removed from a school setting, the probability of failure increases. Black children, especially young boys, are disproportionately in this group. How do we save our children? The continuing miseducation of Black children only confirms that the ball is being dropped (Lester,2019). How do we get out of this quagmire?   Dr. Hilliard asked, "Do we have the will?"   If we embrace a will of excellence and restructure education, then and only then can we release the full potential of Black children (Hilliard, 1991; Wilson, 1992).

The socialization and education of Black children must become the responsibility of the village. Dr. Robert Franklin, former president of Morehouse College, tells us in his book, Crisis in the Village, that the village is broken and is in need of repair (2007).   He saw a need for the community to rediscover what was being lost.   Following the post-civil rights period, Black communities were inundated with the invasion of crime, drugs, and a wave of HIV-AIDS. Crack-addicted mothers contributed to the neglect of Black children. Dr. Franklin tells us that an action agenda was needed. That agenda called for a ritual of renewal.   It would center its attention on children and families.

The first quarter of the 21st century will end within less than five years. Currently, there is no serious and strategic valid plan or process that will provide for our healing, renewal, and development, by the Black community or by anyone else. When we take charge of the socialization of our own children, they can participate as peers in the ever-changing world order. What would happen to Black children if each school community went above and beyond to reach and teach each Black child? Barbara Bowman, a noted scholar in early childhood and child development described the urgency of Black children's need to read. A robust knowledge base has identified the typical trajectory for persons with limited skills in reading. Because of poor performance in reading, many Black children will suffer economic and social consequences (Bowman, 2003). Functional literacy limits individuals to minimal skills in reading and mathematics. Their ability to be able to do daily functions such as reading medicine labels, balancing a checkbook, or reading informational traffic signs is restricted. Persons struggling to read beyond a basic level can be described as functionally illiterate. Such a label comes at an economic and social cost. Through the improvement of literacy, individuals are able to better understand and transform their lives and communities.

The Black community must restore the idea of the village. The Black community must have a conversation and develop a plan of action that is consistent with the title of this article – Early Socialization and Family Engagement Literacy: Standing on Our Own Ground. A people's future is entirely dependent on how it chooses to socialize with their children (Rashid, 1984). Nearly four decades ago   Dr. Rashid brought to our attention the need to attend to how we politically socialize our children.   Children are very aware of

their environment and respond to it. The behavior and engagement of parents or the lack of engagement give children a clear set of signals. It is the signals they pay attention to (Grier & Cobbs, 1968). Several decades ago, the authors of Black Rage painted a very clear picture of environmental cues children zero in on (Grier and Price, 1968).

One of the stalwarts of NBCDI was Dr. Asa G. Hilliard. His annual presentation at the national conference was always standing room only. As he traveled the globe, he was always looking for those teachers who were exemplary in their delivery of instruction to young Black children. What he gathered from his observations was the creation of classroom environments by teachers where the natural genius of children could be released. Ordinary teachers were not puzzled about how to raise the achievement levels of children from any type of background to levels of excellence. Those teachers did not allow things like poverty, bilingual status, single-parent families, and even threatening neighborhood environments to present obstacles to the attainment of excellence for their students.

There were two conditions Dr. Hilliard identified as necessary to attain excellence. The first thing was to treat Black children like human beings, and the second was to love them. When these conditions were met, there was no limit on Black children's ability to achieve excellence (Jensen, 2013). A teacher must remember these are young Black children (Young, 2017). They are experiencing childhood. These children are in the process of developing and learning with constant barriers being systematically placed to impair them. The article is proactive in terms of what is doable by the Black community. Standard approaches to mitigating disparities are unacceptable.

The unwavering gaps are remarkably the same as they were following the Coleman Report of 1965. Analysis of data from the NAEP report was a call for action. The Black community is at a moral juncture. How will it act? Anything hard is not easy. Consider the fact that no progress in the achievement gap has been made in 50 years, according to a report released by professors from Stanford and Harvard (2019). A comparative analysis of the Coleman Report, 1965, with scores in math and reading from NAEP, showed minuscule progress (Irons, 2019). Think about the number of programs and the billions of dollars spent with no progress for fifty years – schooling with little or no learning in math, reading, and science.

Education and Black Children in America

The schooling of Black children in America has always been of concern. During the period of enslavement, U.S. law prevented us from becoming literate. May 17, 1954, was supposed to be a turning point in terms of equal educational opportunities. The Supreme Court of the United States outlawed segregation. Many southern school districts fought the imposed law and drugged the decision through courts for years. Desegregation eventually won out. Given the above report card data from NAEP, Black children continue on the losing end of the equation. For the majority of Black children attending public schools, education is clearly not working for them. This grievous injustice will serve as an obstruction to their future as they navigate the American landscape. What will America look like in their adult life - 2040 -2050? What trends? What employment opportunities? How will AI (Artificial Intelligence) and technology change things? What will family life be like? What level of readiness will Black children have attained? What is our level of consciousness about future generations? Readiness refers to Black

children's mental preparation to learn. Mental preparation makes learning challenging and fun.

The process of early socialization generally starts within the family.   The emerging structure of the American family will continue to evolve. Changes in family structure or function are generally the result of trends in the social order, the economy, and parental attitudes. The education and socialization of Black children will continue to be a challenge. To change this trend, the work of Dr. Charlyn Harper Browne, Senior Research Associate, with the Center for the Study of Social Policy, described an approach to strengthen Black families (Browne, 2014). The critical and most vulnerable period of development is early childhood.   The "Strengthening Families Approach" aim is to build on the strengths children have as well as to build a family social support network to protect the welfare and well-being of children.   As a research-informed initiative, the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) knew what ingredients would make for healthy development and used a friendly supportive approach to strengthen families. One purpose of the center's work was to reduce abuse and neglect that occurred with many young children. Families would become aware of the importance of early childhood development and socialization.   The model also invites other supportive services as a partner for parents (Olsen and Fuller, 2003).

The Black community needs no government approval to save its children. We must put our children's feet on dry ground. It is imperative that the Black community assume the responsibility of educating and socializing Black children. As an educator, I assumed the responsibility for reflection, goal setting, evaluation, strategic planning, building functional structures, and taking decisive

actions on behalf of Black children. "There is no chance whatsoever that the masses of our people will be saved unless Black people assume primary responsibility for doing so! No one else has our optimal development as their highest priority! They never have. They never will."(Hilliard, 1998).   The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, June 8, 2020, carried the following words on the editorial page. The writer a white woman wrote, "Only if we understand, will we care. Only if we care will we help. Only if we help, shall all be saved." She was describing some of the criminal activity occurring with our Black youth.   Those killed or murdered were once young Black children. They, no doubt, went to schools in urban communities. Their Blackness or lack of literacy statistically placed them in the preschool-to-prison pipeline count. Who really cares? The Black community must stop the bleeding.

After more than fifty years of working closely with Black children and families, this article comes as a clarion call to wake up, to save our children. By engaging families in the process, members learn to support each other.   Remember don't talk Asa, do Asa. The work cited here is a report on doing Asa. What I saw was a deeply embedded splinter that needed to be removed. It had festered and was inflamed. Beyond that stage, it would become ulcerated.   The Black child: who really cares about his or her welfare? Academic success is essential to the well-being of any individual. Most early childhood educators intuitively, make this connection. The emerging generation of scholars is consistent in pointing out and connecting with the scholarly culturally relevant curriculum or instruction that is African-centered (Akua, 2019; Muhammad, 2020).

Racism is an American reality. It is systemic and institutionalized. George Floyd is dead because of it. Names of

other Black Americans like the young Black male jogging in Georgia and was shotgun to death by a father-son team, because he stopped to look at a new construction site, the Black woman who was shot in her bed at the hands of white police in Louisville, Kentucky. Consider the treatment of a white male who stalked and shot nine Black people while they were worshipping in a church in Charleston, South Carolina. The group even invited him to worship with them.   Consider the treatment of this white male being transported to jail after killing nine people. He complained that he was hungry. During the arrest, the police stopped at Burger King to satisfy the killer's hunger. What about young Black children who want to learn – who really cares? News covering these events was nonstop. These events sparked an outcry. Protesters abound and said enough is enough. Protesting of this magnitude had not been seen since the Civil Rights demonstrations and protests of the 1960s. The protesters represented a mosaic of American citizens – Black, white, and brown – who took to the streets. The diversity represented differences in age, background, ethnicity, and religion.   Many a mother protesting said that could have been my child or I want my children to grow up in a different America. Did they really care? Will America change? Will the playing field ever be leveled?

America and the world have simultaneously experienced the Pandemic Virus. As a result, many things have been uncovered about the reality of America's history. That revealing will forever change the landscape of America, and possibly the world. Through all of the calamity, we must protect and keep Black children safe. The coronavirus crisis has overwhelmed the entire continent. What do we do? What does the future hold? What about the children? The scientific community developed an emergency-approved vaccine. Time is the critical factor when a new vaccine is being developed. In haste, the federal government made an immediate response. To get an authentic reliable vaccine, scientists and other experts must follow procedures and regulatory policies over a lengthy period of time before allowing a new medicine to enter the market.   There is a reluctance on the part of many Black people about the government-approved vaccine. The history of their track record speaks for itself in terms of using Blacks as experimental test groups.

Revisiting Childhood
Our goal is to provide readers with a view of young children's development within a cultural context. Ideally, to maximize development, all children need to be healthy.   As a result of what is provided during the formative years, the early stages of intelligence are formed. Heredity and intelligence are influenced by the environment.   It is what families do that is important for children's overall development. Families, for example, provide two very important things for children's development. They protect them and prepare them to be able to function within their social setting. Bronfenbrenner's (1993) ecological model shows the impact of the environment on children's intelligence. Children are endowed with a unique set of qualities. Consistent exposure and embellishment of the qualities will determine the broadening of children's intelligence. Are there risk factors? What if parents are not able to provide the resources? The negative effects of poverty on children's intellectual development are without dispute. What enables so many children living under impoverished conditions to survive?   What distinguishes these resilient children from others living in similar circumstances? Families living under impoverished conditions and still helping their children to become literate have always been focused. They wanted

to know and wanted their children to be different (Strickland, 1987). Researchers found that mothers of these children protected and provided for them in ways that were similar to parents with an abundance of resources (1994). High-quality parenting makes a difference in meeting the challenges of school readiness for preschool-age children. It is important to examine cultural differences and variations in families (Santrock, 2009).

Childhood is that period sandwiched between birth and the intermediate years. When looking at young preschool-age children, it is necessary to consider their social context of development. Environmental circumstances influence and shape children's development. The environment includes everything not connected to the genetics of children. Children's prosocial and aggressive ways of giving shape to their beliefs and habits are the result of exposure and experience from their immediate surroundings. Children's beliefs and habits are the foundations for their motivation for learning and their preparation for school readiness.

Preparation for school readiness is generally determined by the availability of resources and the education of their parents. As a result of the preparatory process, children are expected to have acquired a level of literacy in language, mathematics, and science proficiency, Children should know a variety of other functional skills to broaden their base. The problems of education and socialization of Black people have been acute, and, in some cases perennial. Low achievement or low academic performance, high dropout rate or low graduation from high school, violence, low motivation, inappropriate curriculum choices, and a host of other issues have been well known to educators and families, with no resolution to the matter.

We owe no one an apology for wanting to educate our children. Dr. Hilliard asked the question, "DO WE HAVE THE WILL?"

A Sankofa Reflection
I am reminded of a story published in the journal *Young Children*, many years ago. A man was walking along the banks of a river and suddenly heard a cry for help. Once he located the voice he jumped in to save the boy. As he brought the boy to a point of resuscitation, he again heard another cry for help. He again located where the voice was coming from and again jumped in to again save another drowning youngster. This particular activity continued, again and again. He continued until he was exhausted. He never stopped though. He pondered on who was pushing them into the water. I share this because, for a period of more than twenty-plus years, I found myself and those who worked closely with me in a never-ending need to jump in. The delivery of services and support was not a quick fix but was doable with ample resources and human capital. Funding from various sources was awarded based on the uniqueness of each initiative as a research demonstration project. Each endeavor was an opportunity to offer a resolution to an ongoing challenge in each respective community. The delivery of services was consistent with the goals and mission of NBCDI, locally and nationally. The families and children served were all Black. Our team was never more than three people that served the entire school – project director, curriculum specialist, and a graduate assistant – all Black. Within the context of the time these services were designed, the scholarly work of Dr. Charlyn Harper-Browne, Thoughts, on Children, Schooling, and Research, Dr. Na'im Akbar – Know Thy Self, Dr. Asa G. Hilliard, and Dr. Wade Nobles scholarship framed each designed. Further, an analysis of the quantitative synthesis of research on programs that applied best

practices in reading was used. Services were aligned and guided by the following principles:

Black families must be studied in context – socio-political, socio-historical, and socio-educational
Assume that we have a unique culture that provided form and style to the way we do things
Assume that regardless of color, we are one people and have a collective history, but many stories within
Do not assume that there is a monolithic Black family
Focus on the strengths and strategies that have been developed by Black scholars
Do not deny that problems exist in the Black community
Frame the solution in a proper context (Harper-Browne, 1987).

The How, Why, and What We Must Do
 In May of 1998, Dr. Asa G. Hilliard, aka, Nana Baffour Amankwatia II, convened a three-day think tank, in Atlanta, Georgia. Under Dr. Hilliard's leadership, more than forty persons gathered to discuss and harness the energy to respond to the moral obligation of the group – the education and socialization of Black children throughout the diaspora. The energy and mood of the body were to assume what was rightfully our duty and responsibility.   Months prior to assembling, each participant was given a four-inch-thick notebook of readings – state-of-the-art-on-education and early socialization. Georgia State University's Department of Educational Policy Studies, and Clark Atlanta University's Department of Curriculum and Instruction, as a collective, collaborated on this historic gathering of scholars. The group operated under the auspices of MBONGI as described above. It is a collective process for problem definition, problem-solving, consensus building, strategic planning,

and community renewal (Fu-Kiau, 1985). This gathering was an example of the function of MBONGI.

Our purpose was to develop an understanding of the "big picture," of the condition of education and socialization for people of African ancestry, worldwide. Traditionally, responses to the problem of education and socialization had been fragmentary and episodic. A view of the landscape from our readings noted a scattering of good teachers, a few good programs, and special recognition of special school achievement, but there was no forceful plan of action to transform the African American community's experience into a positive and substantive way. The collective of scholars saw the need for a broader look at programs that did not get bogged down in the typical dialogue of school reform and standards. No member of the collective could point to a time when any system had collected the requisite information, focused priority attention on the condition of Black people, or performed appropriate analyses of information. MBONGI wanted to be deliberate in its discussions.

Family Engagement and Socialization
The character of parenting comes from what you do. There are no perfect parents, just those who do a good job of rearing their children. Hilliard (1995) tells us that we do not have to go outside of our cultural order to define who we are.   Parents, within the bounds of African parenting styles, had choices of simplicity or being profound. Parental functions included ways to discipline as well as methods to resolve conflicts. At a profound level parenting embraced our long and rich history and cultural awareness.   These attributes were woven into the thinking of each generation.   By doing so intergenerational transmissions were sustained. In his book, Know Thy Self, Dr. Akbar (1998) tells us that each

generation has the responsibility of maintaining the level of consciousness attained by the previous generations, and of advancing communication to an even higher level (Akbar, 1998).   Dr. Diane Baumrind, a developmental psychologist was a source for parenting information for more than two decades. She created what was known as the pillar theory. She concluded three specific styles of parenting – authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive that provided the basis for parenting for a number of parents.   Many Black parents were looking for a style that was more consistent with their culture. They did not want to be trapped into accepting a false dichotomy when it came to parenting. Black parents also knew that what was learned during the early years of life – attitudes, values, behaviors, customs, social skills, traditions, and relationships – will be the stage from which they will unfold as adults.   The key to teaching these life skills was socialization.   As Dr. Rashid points out in the process of socialization, the importance of how you orient your children is critical. Affirming who they are is an ongoing process. At some point, you will know that the affirmation has taken like the "Good House Keeping seal."

Parenting has some universals, regardless of the culture. In all social orders, there are functions related to child-rearing. The terms nature and nurture play a central role in the dynamics of family functions. Children's development is influenced by their heredity and how parents choose to rear them. A child's appetite for knowledge is usually determined by how they are socialized. Socialization and education go hand-in-hand. When parents (home) and teachers (school) work together (partners) on behalf of children (collaboration), there are immediate benefits for all (community). Such a triangulation can work positively for all. What happens

if these elements work cooperatively to deliver quality education and positively interact with each other?   The crisis in the village would begin to be restored (Olsen & Fuller, 2003; Young, 2006; Franklin, 2007; Young, 2018)   The cooperative relations between families, schools, and community support groups serve to enrich children's development.

Socialization is an unavoidable obligation of any group of people. By definition, we know that socialization is the process whereby children learn and are taught those things used to navigate life. The education and socialization of Black people is not merely a simple matter of finding the right teaching methods and techniques. There have been countless school restructuring programs, school reform programs, and virtually all sorts of professional concepts to make schools better. It is important to understand the intensity, duration, and strategic nature of the structure of systems to remain as they are. These institutions have years of strategically miseducating and falsifying what Blacks are taught. The aims of education, and its content and values are not at the center of educational changes, especially when these matters are considered from a Black perspective. As you educate your children pay attention to the traditional Black history and culture that is not part of the school curriculum. There are hundreds if not thousands of years to be told. Our history gives Black people an identity and recognition unique to us. It also frees the mind. A freed mind gives you a clear path to enrich Black children by connecting them, culturally and historically.   In SBA: The Reawakening of the African Mind, Dr. Hilliard (1997) provides readers with a sense of the importance of linking the mind to the goal of what it means to educate and socialize Black children. A perspective on the importance of the Black family is confirmed when viewed in

context. From the latter part of the past century until today, there is consistency in the status of families. The family is the most basic and dynamic unit for the survival of any society. Economic support and availability of resources determine what can be done for children. To ensure the development and well-being of young Black children, the following outline lists thirteen tasks Black families should do during the process of socialization:

1. Study and know who you are

2. Model expected behavior

3. Expose children to the wide world

4. Involve children in the real world of work, play, joy, pain, and truth

5. Participate with children in organized groups that serve the interests of the larger community

6. Give children responsibilities and hold them responsible

7. Listen to your children's thoughts and feelings

8. Provide an environment with unconditional respect

9. Provide an environment where children are well enough known by significant adults to get mature feedback about who they are

10. Provide an environment for appropriate recognition for children's efforts

11. Provide an environment where children experience unconditional love

12. Maintain structures linking elders and youth

13. Tell and retell the story of one's family and people so that children can locate themselves in time, space, and in context, and in destiny (Hilliard, 2001)

That quality of socialization will provide Black children with a solid foundation for self-confidence and self-esteem. Their feet would be on dry ground. Application of the Collaborative Method is done in concert with the list for socialization. It, too, provides parents with the important knowledge and skills children need to know for success in academic schooling and life. Parents need to learn what young Black need to know and how to teach the skills for readiness. Children must understand how stories are structured and the language therein, e.g., stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end; there are people, events, locations, scenery, and the like. Children must also acquire basic concepts, and vocabulary; learn the written word and the telling of stories – i.e., the order, sequence of events, characters, and more. When presented within the context of culture, history, and why, children can soak up knowledge and skills like a sponge.

In the broader sense, the Collaborative Method gives parents a voice in decisions pertaining to the overall school plan. Parents are the primary stakeholders. Marian Wright Edelman, president and founder of the Children's Defense Fund, reported that we have allowed schooling for Black children to reach a deployable level of failure. Nearly every level of statistical analysis acknowledged that overwhelming numbers of Black children are facing despair when considering their future. The dangers facing young Black children have truncated development, limited language skills, lack of school readiness, and other restrictions that will have long-term effects on their lives. Proficiency in reading, mathematics, and the ability to think is critical in the 21st century. She emphatically states that we must act. The think tank described above was an MBONGI institute under the direction of Dr. Hilliard. It was a process of inclusion. MBONGI is an African political

tradition. It is a collective process of problem-solving and consensus building and strategic planning. It derives from a worldview that respects the rights, responsibilities, and obligations of each member of the family to participate in the consensus-building process. This process gains and assures the commitment of the whole community. The participatory process enables all family members to have a significant role. The process ensures a way of bringing about self-improvement. The simplicity gives each member a voice and protects the rights of each. Principles of the Collaborative Method are:

- The rights of children must be protected

- Children must be protected from mental, physical, and environmental harm

- Parents have the first say in establishing goals and priorities for the education of their children

- There is respect for cultural and racial diversity

- Assessing and measuring growth must include parents and must be collaborative (Young, 2018).

The world order is moving at a rapid pace. As my students often remind me that we are at a 5G pace.   How is teacher preparation keeping up? The following narratives are views from two recently certified classroom teachers. They continued their education and completed a MA. One has since been accepted into a doctoral program. The other will follow within a semester. Each is characteristic of the type of teacher Dr. Hilliard looked for when he was globe-trotting.

The 21st Century Teacher and the Family

Curriculum and instruction in the 21st Century classrooms are governed by the four Cs – Communications, Critical thinking, Collaboration, and Creativity. What does that mean to a teacher?   The four Cs should represent cutting-edge practices and the employment of up-to-date technology. High school graduates are expected to be career prepared – college readiness or job market ready. The 21st-century educator must look to the future and be aware of ever-changing trends in practice and technology. Two graduates from the teacher education certification program were asked to respond to a set of questions: Q: As 21st-century teachers what would you do or what do you do to affirm young Black children? What do you think teachers should be doing? Draw from your preparatory experiences and what you have learned from your teaching.

21st Century Viewpoints on Teaching

The Problem/Introduction

21st Century Educators are the future leaders of today that learn and grow tomorrow that also adapt to changes immediately. As a May 2021 graduate of Clark Atlanta University, and a current graduate student majoring in Educational Leadership, I am preparing to become a change agent to make a difference in the lives of all children, but especially Black children. As a recently certified educator, I have been observing and immersing myself in the classroom with three Practicums (each lasting a semester) and a Student Teaching internship for a full school year. Additionally, I have been serving my community by participating in a national summer enrichment program for four years; moving through the ranks of Assistant Classroom Teacher,

Classroom Teacher, Media Specialist, and now Lead Teacher. Currently, I am a Substitute/Collaborative Lead Substitute in a premier school district within the City Schools of Decatur in Georgia. I have learned throughout my teaching experiences (in various multicultural environments) that young Black children are in most cases slighted and are portrayed often in a negative light. I've noticed teachers (in predominantly African American urban public school settings) are afraid of their own students, and often dehumanize them and I find that to be so unfortunate. How can you be a pillar of your school community, when you're afraid of grooming young leaders? What makes children specifically Black/brown children threatening to you [a professional educator]? Do you not remember the educational oath that you swore to uplift and align yourself with as you were moving through Undergraduate and Graduate school? Those questions that were asked are constant reminders that the field of Education must elevate and do more than change, but we must continuously transform the classroom where ALL students benefit and have opportunities. As we lift our students on our gigantic shoulders into the everchanging future, we must understand why there is a disconnect and find the correct outlets to healthily plug back into our scholars.

First Step: We Are Not the Enemy/ "Knowing Your Audience"
My Undergraduate education at Clark Atlanta University taught me about the importance of parental involvement in a child's education. As Dr. James C. Young would like to say, remember "The Structure and Essence of the Black Family". I always made it a point to introduce myself to parents and to immerse myself in events such as Open House, Curriculum Night, etc. I proudly let parents know that their young scholars are in the best of care

and that I look forward to an amazing time together. Consciously, I am aware that parents of course want me as a teacher to earn their respect and trust because their children's lives are in my hands. While they are in the school building, they are my responsibility and are expected to be treated as if they were my own children. Educators have to remember that trust is a very fragile element. The element of trust is a critical factor in the relationship between parent and teacher when teaching for the advancement of their children.

Some parents are hesitant or untrusting of their child's teachers sometimes because of personality clashes or because of their own personal experiences with their teachers growing up. After all, in our African American community, we know all too well about trauma leading and being a cinderblock to our own growth and development. Children are only comfortable with teachers if the parents are, and if they are not then it is up to us as educators to do the best we can without compromising ourselves, but to be open to establishing the best partnership between home and school possible.

In one of my Practicum experiences, I witnessed something profound that shifted my perspective on parental involvement. There was a case where a reluctant student did not feel motivated to do any work and took out his cell phone. He was sent to the principal's office because he was violating a school rule. His parent came to the school because the teacher called her to let her know about the incident. The concern voiced by the parent was to return the cell phone, rather than what can be done to improve his academic performance in class.   she made a priority of retrieving his cell phone back despite the violation of school rules. [That alone shows how times and

parenthood has changed in some of our communities]. The parent then reminded the teacher of her past experience with a teacher. "This situation reminded me of one of my old teachers who set me up for failure. If you take his phone he can't be his best self. Plus, I pay the bill." Academic improvement or ownership of the phone – what is important?

It was profound to me because of the irony in what she stated. I heard what she said, but I also heard what she didn't say. I cannot assume that this parent only comes to the school for discipline problems instead of active parent engagement, but what can be understood is that this parent is the product of a racist educational system. The mother probably experienced trauma from her schooling experience. Moreover, the teacher taking the cellphone reminded her of her own negative childhood experience in which she felt like she failed. She feels that the loss of a cell phone is equivalent to her child failing or not having a successful future in the school. This scenario also reinforces generational trauma.

How would I resolve this now? As an educator I have learned that no matter what, do not let yourself or the parent leave the classroom/school angry, but to have a common understanding. After all, my pedagogical training would have allowed me to invite the parent to sit and give a reasonable explanation as to why the phone was taken and at that moment be compassionate. I would let the mother know that I am here for her and I want to support her child to be the best of the best. However, I can only do that if we as a home and school community grasp the seriousness of his behavior and agree on a plan of action as to how we can get there. We as parents and teachers would hold ourselves accountable and be there to support one another. After all, our success will guide and determine the young scholar's success; we are preparing him

for the real world. I also would want the parent to know we are in this together and I would not leave him behind, but he also must put in the energy and time. I would even open my classroom after school to get his work accomplished if that would be great for him and the parent. I would also keep in mind that the parent probably is not involved heavily due to work/personal engagements and that the child probably has his own personal responsibilities to do at home. I'm sure after that conversation, parents would have a different opinion and taste as to how I am as a teacher and I'm sure respect and trust would be earned from them. Sometimes a mature and rational conversation can adjust things to be on track. Even if the overall school culture does not support the student, as individual teachers it is up to us to set the tone and atmosphere in our classrooms with our parents and students.

Second Step: Expose Them To More than Their Environment
Brown vs. Board of Education (1954) still haunts us and is a clear reminder of how far we have come and how far we have to go. Linda Brown against the Topeka, Kansas Board of Education supposedly overturned the infamous Plessy vs. Ferguson case that tried to defend the 'separate but equal doctrine. As we know, the official separate but unequal doctrine was declared unconstitutional however it still lingers and is being practiced in school systems across the United States , especially in the South. I know from my personal high school experience (2014 – 2017) I went to a private Waldorf high school for my freshmen and sophomore year and then went to a public urban high school in DeKalb County for my junior and senior years.

When I attended the private Waldorf high school, it cost my mother tuition of course but allowed me to travel out of state for educational real-world field trip experiences to the Blue Ridge Assembly

Mountains and Nantahala Falls in North Carolina, Washington D.C, and the state of Maryland. I had the opportunity to learn how to zip-line, do a tight rope course, participate in field trips, hike trails, and even s'mores by a bonfire. However, I did not travel anywhere locally when I attended my urban high school except when I participated in the College Club by visiting states: Alabama, Tennessee, Florida, and Georgia. However, we only commuted to see up to three colleges a day and came straight back to our high school campus. We did not have an opportunity to explore or make new discoveries with our thinking. Reflecting as an educator, if students had been granted to see more than our community then the possibilities are endless.

Furthermore, in my private Waldorf high school we had more than enough resources and supplies for the success of their kids in a predominantly white environment. We had access to clean textbooks and were able to sit comfortably in any part of the classroom. However, we made our own textbooks from scratch based on the work we've done in each class and they would be evaluated and graded by the teacher and showcased as if in an art showcase or museum. Unlike my experience in an urban public school in a predominantly black environment, some teachers were careless about grading papers. There were times when work would be appreciated is if it was recognized by another school or school district representative; someone who could have the means of granting scholars life-changing opportunities. Sometimes those students who chose to go above and beyond were looked upon as if they had the mentality of "it's just an assignment" or "do you want a medal". Sometimes it can be extremely discouraging to show your potential and rise above mediocrity as a student especially if your parents at home are pushing you to always think outside

of the box. I know I want all scholars to think big! The context of racism towards Black children in schools takes on a selective colorblindness approach when incorporating social justice. Fitchburg State defines colorblindness as, "the racial ideology that describes the best way to end discrimination is by treat people equally without thinking about aspects of race". The problem with taking on a colorblindness approach is that you are essentially blinding your perspective and are not welcoming inclusivity and differences of people. In a way the expectation is to almost censor that reality and pretend racism and its pitfalls does not exist. However, understanding the system and norms make society better while promoting us to be better as a human race. At my school, the colorblindness approach seemed to be alright until we celebrated federal holidays that were originated to demean people of color. Sometimes it made me feel shy to celebrate Black holidays because it led to awkward moments of silence all because other students did not empathize with our struggle or see it as one of importance because it did not concern them or teach them. I know I am just one example and my story may not be the sole example that speaks on behalf of all Black people, but it does signify the relevance of our ways as people and what we can do to look for positive change in the future.

As a teacher, I would grant ALL my students the platform to share whatever they would love to create for their homework or project. I want my classroom to be a sanctuary and sacred place where students can find their identity and learn how to think outside the box in their own unique way. As a teacher, I would take my experiences from all schools I've attended and apply it to make not only my students better but to elevate the school culture. Teachers should be ready to open the minds of scholars as if opening a door to

a new dimension. The world is constantly changing and so is the field of Education and the minds of scholars.

Education, as we know it, is battling between two directions that could potentially set the tone for education in the next 20 years. One that promotes a more democratic union between the individual social settings that exist in the world and another that will try to save the traditionalist values that have set the range for education in society. As we think about the efforts we are taking to change that narrative, we must first think about the power of democracy in public education and how building institutions that promote individuality, tradition, and inclusionary practice helps students grow to become world-renowned citizens. If we reflect on the different events that have transpired in history that have changed the way we handle political affairs, foreign exchanges, and social activism, why haven't we treated the matters of education the same way? We have learned throughout this global pandemic how crucial it is to think about the individual whom we impact and the way our language, classroom styles, and personal backgrounds affect the trajectory of students' achievement and discourse. In this article, there is a chance for individuals to think about how important it is to take a step back at the miseducation of their educational background and how they can change the laws, policies, and curriculum that will promote inclusionary practice in public education.

In my graduate studies, I thought that it would be impossible for me to make a difference in the world of education based on the differences between me and my white colleagues who have been provided to sit in rooms where I have not always been welcomed. As a recent graduate of Columbia University, I now understand that I deserved to be in those rooms of

world-renowned educators and potential policymakers because of my intelligence and my willingness to serve. I know that this imposter syndrome came from my upbringing in the public education system and the knowledge that they try to feed black children. " If you can't see it, you can't be it" or " Do you know all you have to do to become that? Are you sure I can handle that?" Of course, a response to those questions should have been a yes in all capital letters. But of course, if you read books that promote more white students having more advanced degrees, houses, opportunities, and access, it is hard to imagine that image. I say that to support how this reflection of my adolescent years makes me realize that nothing has changed. Although we have the media to expose white supremacy in education, more black educators and schools. We are still using a curriculum that is not inclusive of students' cultures, educational backgrounds, and personal learning differences. Slowly but surely, I am realizing that in order to make a difference and change the narrative for black children in the future, we must, as a culture, think of revolutionary acts that will help students, teachers, and policymakers make the necessary changes needed in order to form a more "perfect union".

In reflection on my collegiate studies at Columbia University, I realize now more than ever how important it is for me to pay it forward. In my classroom, in the parent-teaching meetings, and in the superintendent's office, I must do my best to educate students on how intelligent they are and use textbooks as references instead of lifestyle guides for learning. In my observation of student and teacher interactions, I know that students are either open vessels or closed cages. It is our job to give them the knowledge to be open vessels to relieve individuals who have fallen into closed cages.

Some of the strategies include students sharing their ideas in conversations and instead of imprisoning their ideas, strengthening their knowledge about their ideas by eliciting questions or participating in research. Include current events in daily practices in school and allow students to have a voice in the classroom in order to promote democracy. Old-school ways of learning still work in this fast-paced world of technology. In fact, they help promote more inclusionary ways to help students achieve and do their best. Education is the gateway to accomplishing dreams in this world, even if they seem they are merely impossible.

The narratives provided by the two graduates were illustrations to show they were job-ready on day one. Dr. Leslie T. Fenwick, dean emerita, Howard University described the importance of teachers being ready day one (Fenwick, 2021). Dr. Edmund W. Gordon (2014), one of the designers of Head Start, said that the narrative for educating Black children must change.   This discussion is a presentation of evidence, though limited, captured what must be done if the education pathway for Black children is going to be different going forward. The findings and data analysis from two distinguished scholars – Eric A. Hanushek, Stanford University, and Paul E. Peterson, Harvard University, clearly stated that at the current rate of progress in mathematics, it would take decades to close the gap. Whether we accept their reporting or not, that is the discussion coming from leading American institutions. Implementation of the demonstration literacy programs was done over several years in each setting. The reader is given a look into two school-community situations where a difference in behavior and academic performance were made when people impacted were included in the process. Data from NAEP, Children's Defense Fund, the Center for the Study of Adult Literacy, and other reports from renowned scholars must wake us up. In real-time, many Black children continue falling behind. What are we prepared to do? We must put Black children's feet on dry ground. Our ancestors would do no less. References represent both the past and present. Dr. Maya Angelou reminds us of the Black Family Pledge, "Because we have forgotten our ancestors our children no longer give us honor (1986). To go forward we must be reminded of our past. The Collaborative Model is a process that is doable. It protects the children with a set of principles, followed by a framework that spells out the steps.
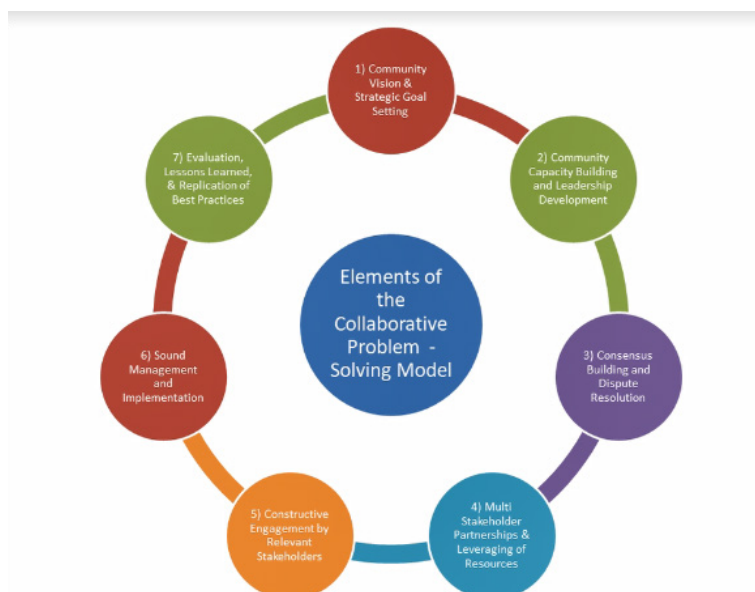
Conclusion

In the final scene of the award-winning Spike Lee movie, School Daze, Laurence Fishburne, the critically acclaimed Emmy Award-winning actor, cried out Wake Up! Wake Up! What will the next generation say about us?

Figure 1: The Collaborative Process

Figure 2: Elements of the Collaborative Problem-Solving Model

James C. Young *is a professor of Early Childhood Education and serves on the faculty in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Clark Atlanta University. Dr. Young is also a motivational speaker, author, workshop leader, and has served as a consultant to schools and school districts. In addition to being a public-school teacher, he served as a regional director of Head Start Leadership Development, covering upstate New York and New England. He was the Executive Director of the Association for Childhood Education International -ACEI. In 1992 Dr. Young was selected by former President Jimmy Carter to serve as the Secretariat of Education for the Atlanta Project that served more than 135 public schools. His scholarship has been cited in the Atlanta Joumal & Constitution, the Marietta Daily Journal, the Morehouse Research Institute Bulletin, The Jegna Collective Newsletter, U.S. News and World, Childhood Education, Young Children, The Journal for Nonwhite Concerns, Dimensions, The Black Child Advocacy Bulletin of NBCDI, and by the CDA Professional Council. He was an elected president of Georgia Association for young children, elected board member of NAEYC, and elected to vice president of SECA. His funded research has included Fanily Literacy, School Improvement, Prevention of Teenage Pregnancy, Parent Involvement, and CulTiculum Development and Assessment. He was a member of the Black Task Force that developed the prototype model to assess CDAs -Child Development Associates. Dr. Young has authored over 40 research articles, co-edited three books, and has written four books.*

Brittney Kilgore *is a student at the University of Georgia receiving her Ph.D in Educational Theory and practice, as well as a full-time 3rd-grade reading teacher. Her research focuses on teacher preparation programs that address the societal issues in public schools. She is particularly interested in understanding shared patterns and potential causal factors in teacher preparation programs. As she continues in her educational endeavors, she seeks to analyze new data to inform educators and stakeholders on how they can address societal issues in curriculum and teaching.*

Diamond Mayo., B.A. *is a first-year teacher in the City Schools of Decatur district and serves as a fifth-grade teacher. Ms. Mayo has been in the field of education for four years and is certified in Elementary Education and Educational Leadership (Tier 1) for grades P - 12. She served City Schools of Decatur and Atlanta Public Schools as a Pre-Service Teacher and Substitute Teacher. After matriculation from Clark Atlanta University in 2021, she worked as Educational Outreach Coordinator for the Georgia Institute of Technology for their K-12 Outreach Center named "CEISMC" and for a summer enrichment program named Horizons Atlanta. Mayo is an Atlanta native that loves traveling, baking, swimming and playing scrabble. Ms. Mayo is scheduled to matriculate from her alma mater in December with her master's in educational leadership.*

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Nurture: Volume 3 Call for Abstracts

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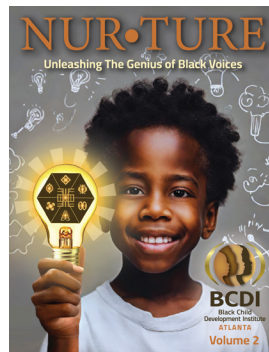
Black Child Development Institute (BCDI) – Atlanta, an affiliate of the National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI), launches its **Call for Abstracts** for the third edition of *Nurture* - our new, peer-reviewed, electronic journal championing the topics important to Black children ages 0-8 and their families. BCDI-Atlanta will publish high-quality original works based on the six NBCDI focus areas - Public Policy, Early Care and Education, Health and Wellness, Family Engagement, Literacy, and Child Welfare. Each focus area is described below. Selected authors will be invited to submit full articles by the posted deadline. See submission requirements below.

BCDI-Atlanta seeks to *improve and advance the quality of life for black children and their families through education and advocacy* in the three NBCDI focus areas, accordingly.

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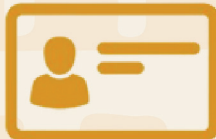
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