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The Souls of [Black] Teachers: A Participatory Action Research Approach Engaging Teachers with Communities Against Anti-Black Policies and Practices

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This dissertation, THE SOULS OF [BLACK] TEACHERS: A PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH APPROACH ENGAGING TEACHERS WITH COMMUNITIES AGAINST ANTI-BLACK POLICIES AND PRACTICES, by THAIS M. COUNCIL, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education & Human Development, Georgia State University.

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THE SOULS OF [BLACK] TEACHERS: A PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

APPROACH ENGAGING TEACHERS WITH COMMUNITIES

AGAINST ANTI-BLACK POLICIES AND PRACTICES

by

THAIS M. COUNCIL

Under the Direction of Joyce Elaine King, PhD

ABSTRACT

Teachers in urban school districts are both gatekeepers and the frontline of defense against a myriad of injustices Black students and Black communities experience. The goal of this participatory action research (PAR) study was three-fold: 1) to provide teachers a safe but challenging space to identify their biases, assumptions, and fears about working in Black communities, 2) to provide teachers with social, cultural, historical, and political information not otherwise included in teachers' traditional in-service professional development, and 3) to provide teachers an opportunity to co-construct solution-building projects *with* and *within* the communities they serve. The three-fold research goal provided a roadmap to examine if participatory action research demonstrated the skills, knowledge, mindsets, consciousness, worldview, beliefs, attitudes, dispositions, that is to say, the souls of teachers. This collaborative study was framed within the Black Intellectual Tradition (BIT) and employed a PAR approach,

using focus groups, participant observation, and community listening sessions as data collection methods. The BIT refers to the intellectualism, scholarship, and activism of Black scholars in their quest for 1) liberation from enslavement and colonialism and 2) the interrogation of what it means to be human in a world that relegates Blackness to the margins of society. The BIT frames for education scholars whose knowledge counts and implores scholars to use this knowledge for social transformation.

During the PAR dissertation study, teachers engaged as co-researchers in a smaller study-within-the-dissertation study. The findings from both the dissertation study, and the collective study, suggest that Black teachers, engaged in PAR, demonstrate the capacity for, and commitment to soul-building study and struggle required for teaching and advocacy for educational equity and justice. Collaborative, soul-building study and struggle, on behalf of the communities they serve, led teachers to uncover the "New School Pushout" through a rigorous analysis of gentrification and urban education reform. Findings suggest that through the BIT and PAR, Black teachers persistently demonstrate their souls in urban communities.

INDEX WORDS: Black Intellectual Tradition, Black teachers, Participatory Action Research, Dehumanization of Black students, Community-Centered Engagement

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my departed grandparents, Edna Council, James Council, and Merdesta Wilson-Clark, all of whom sacrificed so much so that all I have to do is wear the crown. This dissertation is equally dedicated to my ancestors, some of whose names I will never know.

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PREFACE

While this dissertation bares my name as an academic researcher, it was the experiences,

thoughts, and insights of those who trusted and challenged me during the research process whose

voices fill the pages of this dissertation. Dissertations are written through the lens of the

researcher. This dissertation does not waver from the typical institutional goals of a dissertation,

however the co-researchers who carried this process helped to shape the end result. This

dissertation is a novelty and an innovation, and the following pages are the representation of the

process.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAVE	African American Vernacular English
ABEN	A Black Education Network
AJC	Atlanta Journal Constitution
APS	Atlanta Public Schools
AR	Action Research
BIT	Black Intellectual Tradition
CBC	Congressional Black Caucus
CCRPI	College and Career Readiness Performance Index
CITI	Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative
CRDC	Civil Rights Data Collection
CMO	Charter Management Organization
CRCT	Criterion Referenced Competency Test
GOSA	Georgia Office of Student Achievement
IRB	Institutional Review Board
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics
OSD	Opportunity School District
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PBIS	Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
SNCC	Student Non-violence Coordinating Committee
STPP	School-to-Prison Pipeline
TPAR	Teacher Participatory Action Research

CHAPTER ONE

Background

I am a reading specialist, and I am masterful at my job. I often wear three hats simultaneously. First, I diagnose and remediate reading difficulties displayed by children and adults. Secondly, I support parents and community members with resources and tools to reinforce good reading habits outside of schools. Lastly, I am a teacher educator who trains and coaches teachers using sound, scientifically based reading research and practices to enhance their instruction. The third function of my role is, by far, the hardest. Not all reading specialists function in this capacity. Some perform one of the three roles or remain classroom teachers. Given my first experiences as a family reading specialist in the third grade and a firm understanding of the urgency of illiteracy in my Black community, I knew that I did not have a choice. My job was all or nothing.

Serving as a teacher educator is more than merely sharing teaching and learning processes. There is a degree of mindset and consciousness shaping required to shift teacher knowledge, skills, and dispositions. The goal is not only to facilitate a process of knowing, understanding, and implementing reading instructional best practices but also to change the way teachers view students, especially Black students. My role includes chipping away at years of misinformation and dissonance about Black children and reshaping the hearts and minds of men and women who do not see Black children as capable, intellectual, or human.

I have had the pleasure and honor of traveling across the U.S. and working side-by-side with teachers in their classrooms. I have experienced dehumanizing and demeaning words, actions, and practices projected onto Black children with my own eyes and ears. I have watched

Black boys get pulled out of classrooms in South Carolina for nothing more than dropping their heads into folded arms on desktops because of nonengaging lessons. White women in Oregon have asked me: If prisoners would "just read the Bible," wouldn't that change the criminal habits of inmates? Principals in Florida have guided me through their school buildings, introducing a classroom full of Black students as the "low, Title I group." Once in the Bronx, New York, I worked in a 100% Black and Latino K-8 school for three consecutive weeks. My job was to model formative assessment as an equitable approach to literacy instruction. The goal was for every teacher in the building—no matter their discipline—to teach reading. I conferenced with a Physical Education Teacher of Italian descent, and I began my spiel about the lifelong value of reading and how little time students have to read independently for pleasure during school. She interrupted me and lamented, "Read! How am I going to get these kids to read? I can't even get them to sit down and shut up for 5 minutes! And is it even worth it? All of the stereotypes we hear about them are true! Their parents don't work and don't want to work! They are going to go to prison or be pregnant by 16!"

I sat with my mouth agape, knowing that my response had to be both professional and poignant. I also knew that there were probably hundreds, if not thousands, of teachers like the Italian American P.E. teacher who harbored the same thoughts but chose not to express them so freely in front of professional Black women. My mind raced with questions, and I struggled with a response because no matter what I offered in the short but intense response time, I knew it probably would not change her mind. This teacher required a detox of sorts – a mindset shift and an in-depth, engaged, comprehensive lesson on the beauty of Black life despite the many challenges we've encountered—and beat—during our long-troubled history in America. My response to her was, "How would you feel if someone spoke about your 3-year-old the way you

speak of these kids? Would you want someone to tell your child to sit down and shut up every day they enter the classroom? Or would you expect them to see your child as a child with a developing mind and soul?" She pondered, but I knew this was not enough. During my flight back home and for days afterwards, I wondered about her soul. How could a teacher who works with human minds and human lives have such blatant disregard for her students' lives and above all, such blatant disregard for their human souls?

It is an important and necessary addition to say that this narrative is not an indication of the co-researchers in this study, but an indication of the mindset that some teachers in urban education possess. The insertion of the narrative is to illuminate how close these harmful ways of thinking, being and doing are to Black children and how such harmful thinking affects the academic, social, emotional, and economic trajectories of Black children. The experience with the Italian-American P.E. teacher, which is the impetus for my dissertation study, uncovered the need to examine the knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, mindsets, worldview, consciousness, dispositions or, the "souls" of teachers (see Figure 1.1).

The title of my dissertation, The Souls of [Black] Teachers, follows and draws on the Black intellectual tradition of W.E.B. Du Bois' seminal and classic work, "The Souls of Black Folk." Du Bois promulgated a sociological analysis of Black people and Black life in the segregated, Jim Crow South. The dissertation follows the same vein and extends "The Souls of Black Folk" as an analysis of urban education and Black teachers in the South where segregation persists through other monikers. Gooding-Williams (2020) argues that Du Bois' use of the term "folk" to describe Black people is his "characterization of African Americans as a group united by a collectively shared ethos, or spirit." Additionally, in *Souls*, Du Bois argued that Black people needed both liberal arts education (or education in Black culture) and an expression of

spirit to attain human freedom and advancement. Essentially, Black folks' minds and souls (or cognition and emotions) could not be separated. I argue the same throughout the dissertation.

My dissertation aligns with Du Bois' description and analysis of Black people and I argue that present-day teachers need safe but challenging spaces to critically reflect on their souls. In this dissertation, I argue that a multitude of characteristics comprise a teacher's soul: knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, mindset, worldview, consciousness, dispositions. These characteristics are not mere traits but ways of being. In explicating an equity framework for teacher engagement, Ríos (2018) argues that "Authentic Presence," or "the act of investing in one's inner work in order to change behavior in the world, always keeping the value of life at the center" (p. 22), is required to actualize educational equity. To this end, soul means the embodiment and enactment of cognitive and emotional teacher characteristics as a way of being and doing in urban classrooms and communities.
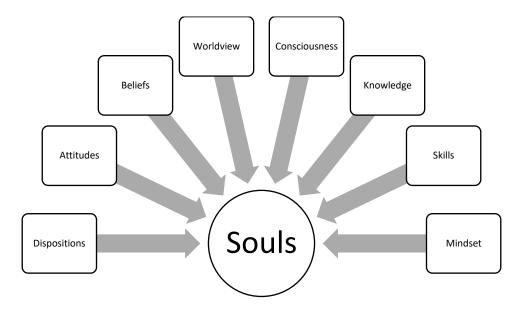
Figure 1.1: Components of a Teacher's Soul

When developing my dissertation study, I sought to bring teachers who thought like the Italian American P.E. teacher to a space to build their knowledge of culture, history, policy, and society to uncover the source of their deficit stereotypes. I envisioned that the experience of gaining such knowledge in this space would be an uncomfortable but necessary step in the process for teachers to work through their miseducation while building their skills, knowledge, dispositions – their souls. The goal is to create a process that would enable teachers to become allies to students and communities in which teachers are not only contracted and paid, but also morally obligated to educate. The co-researchers in this study were nothing like the Italian-American P.E. teacher, but they exemplify the types of teachers who are willing to engage in the soul-searching required to teach Black children in disenfranchised spaces.

Problem

Each school employee I mentioned previously referenced Black children as innately criminal—a head down on a desktop results in being removed from class, being an inmate in prison means Black students lack Bible study, and a teacher refuses to engage Black students because they are going to end up in prison anyway. These statements are manifestations of tightly held beliefs, attitudes, and feelings towards Black children that translate into harmful classroom practices and policies. These practices and policies directly impact students as teachers are the gatekeepers of education and help to chart the trajectory of a student's academic life in school and beyond school (Hilliard, 1991). This omnipresent prison-bound narrative highlights the thoughts and feelings, that is, the "souls" of many teachers who work with Black students in K-12 schools daily.

This manifestation of the souls of education professionals is no more apparent than in the disparities of discipline data. The Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), which is a wide-ranging

database of access and equity data collected from America's public schools, offers a bevy of reports exposing the types of disparities Black children face. According to the 2013-2014 CRDC data, a large predominately Black public school district in the Southeastern United States—the school district in which this study was conducted—enrolls approximately 51,600 students, of which 74.9% of those enrolled are Black students. The graphs in Figure 1.2 show the number of Black students placed in out-of-school suspension (94.4%), in-school suspension (84.4%), and expelled (94.8%). Thus, Black students are disproportionately pushed out of school compared to White students in this district and nationally. Figure 1.3 shows the percentage of non-disabled students who have received out-of-school suspensions by race, ethnicity, and gender. Figure 1.4 illustrates the number of Black students enrolled in Gifted and Talented Education programming (39.4%) and the number of Black students enrolled in Algebra I courses in eighth grade (36.1%). Black students are underrepresented in these critical, 21st-century gate-keeping courses (Moses, Kamii, Swap, & Howard, 1989; Moses & Cobb, 2001; Ford, 2010).

District Enrollment
n=51,600

- Am Ind/AK Nat 0.2%
- Black 74.9%
- Nat HI/Pac Isl 0.1%
- White 14.9%
- Asian 1.1%
- Hispanic 6.8%
- Two or More 2.0%

Out-of-School Suspensions
n=6,063

- Am Ind/AK Nat 0.0%
- Black 94.4%
- Nat HI/Pac Isl 0.0%
- White 0.9%
- Asian 0.1%
- Hispanic 3.6%
- Two or More 1.0%

In-School Suspensions
n=1,872

- Am Ind/AK Nat 0.5%
- Black 84.4%
- Nat HI/Pac Isl 0.2%
- White 4.6%
- Asian 0.2%
- Hispanic 8.5%
- Two or More 1.5%

Expulsions
n=270

- Am Ind/AK Nat 0.0%
- Black 94.8%
- Nat HI/Pac Isl 0.0%
- White 0.0%
- Asian 0.0%
- Hispanic 5.2%
- Two or More 0.0%

Figure 1.2: Exclusionary Discipline Rates by Race/Ethnicity
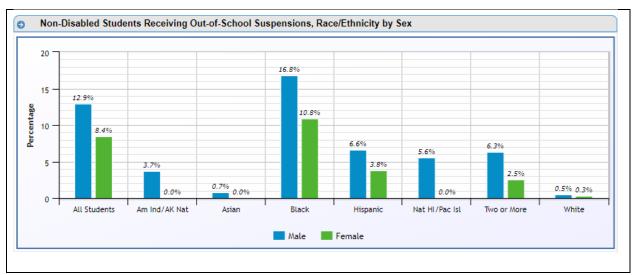
Figure 1.3: Non-Disabled Students Receiving Out-of-School Suspension by Race/Ethnicity & Gender
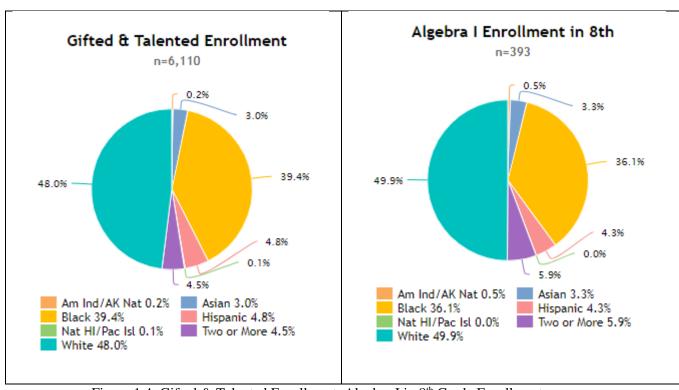
Figure 1.4: Gifted & Talented Enrollment, Algebra I in 8th Grade Enrollment

CRDC data also suggests there is latent maintenance of an educational caste system (Ogbu, 1979) inherent in educational disparities. This data shows that Black students receive exclusionary discipline at disparate rates while they are under-enrolled in rigorous academic opportunities such as gifted and talented education programs and Algebra I in the 8th grade. Teachers, especially those who teach in areas designated as high needs—areas with historically disenfranchised students, parents, and communities and lack of access to quality resources and local control of their systems—do not possess the tools to disrupt their deficit ideologies that also contribute to these disparities (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Matias & Liou, 2015). The disparities beg researchers to examine the skills, knowledge, dispositions, consciousness, attitudes, worldview, and mindset, that is to say, the souls of teachers who are on the frontlines of teaching and learning in school buildings. Researchers must not only critique policies that create such disparities but also examine those who enact said policies. Hence, this study focuses on the souls of teachers educating Black students in urban school districts.

Purpose of the Study

From the vantage point of the Black intellectual perspective on education articulated by Du Bois, many teachers need some corrective soul-searching. The purpose of this qualitative dissertation study is to examine how teacher engagement through a participatory action research (PAR) approach expands and bares the souls of teachers. I started the study using three points of departure: 1) to engage teachers through a safe but challenging space to identify their biases, assumptions, and fears about working in Black communities; 2) to provide teachers with social, cultural, historical, and political information not otherwise included in traditional in-service professional development; and 3) to offer teachers an opportunity to co-construct solution-building projects with and in communities they serve. The three-fold springboard offers a

roadmap to examine how this participatory form of teacher engagement expands and bares teachers' souls.

The following questions guided this dissertation research:

1. In what ways does participatory action research engage teachers to: a) bridge knowledge gaps, b) critically self-reflect on ideological thinking, and c) collaborate with communities they directly serve?

2. How do teachers demonstrate their knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, mindset, worldview, consciousness, and dispositions, or souls, through a participatory action research process?

Theoretical Framework: The Black Intellectual Tradition

Given the purpose of this dissertation study – to examine how teacher engagement through PAR expands and bares the souls of teachers – the theoretical framework to guide this examination requires a bold, unapologetic, and corrective lens. For this reason, I framed this study within the Black Intellectual Tradition, herein referred to as BIT, to examine ways in which a participatory action research approach could provide intellectually, spiritually, and socially grounded experiences for Black teachers' soul-searching.

The Black Intellectual Tradition refers to the intellectualism, scholarship, and activism of Black scholars in their quest for 1) liberation from enslavement and colonialism and 2) the interrogation of what it means to be human in a world that relegates Blackness to the margins of society. Marable (2000) aptly defines the BIT as the "critical thought and perspectives of intellectuals of African descent and scholars of [B]lack America and Africa and the [B]lack diaspora" (p.17). That means this dissertation is grounded in the intellectualism, thought, and perspectives of Black

scholars first. Through the BIT, I assert and contextualize who counts as Black

intellectuals (teachers) and what counts as Black intellectualism (teacher advocacy).

There is no singular Black Intellectual Tradition, rather, there are Black

Intellectual Traditions. Blain, Cameron, and Farmer (2018) detail four central themes

within which black intellectual traditions can be situated: 1) black internationalism, 2)

religion and spirituality, 3) racial politics and struggles for social justice, and 4) black

radical thought.

Gordon (2000) offers an annotated bibliography describing the Black Intellectual

Traditions through historical and contemporary eras as well as subgenres within the eras.

The Black Intellectual Traditions emerged out of intellectual movements of African

peoples seeking both liberation from slavery and colonialism and a full expression of

their humanity. Although Black people's history in the United States did not start at the

slave ships, the framing of Black people by enslavers and settlers divorced Blacks from

intellectualism. In lay terms, the words Black and intellectual were not aligned.

Identifying the Black Intellectual Traditions then is a deliberate reframing to gain human,

political, economic, social, and political freedom.

The Black Intellectual Tradition centers the lives and experiences of Black people

while acknowledging, and privileging Black peoples' intellectual movements, which

include, for example, the abolitionist movement (Douglass, 1882; Jacobs, 1987; Truth,

1887), the Civil Rights Movement (King, 1958; Lewis, 2017), the Black Power

movement (Cleaver & Katsiaficas, 2014; Shakur, 2001), and the present-day Black Lives

Matter movement (Garza, 2016, Khan-Cullors & Bandele, 2020). Men and women within

these movements did not act in haphazard ways but carefully crafted strategies and

tactics, offered critiques, and unified to combat structural racism and dehumanizing policies and practices (Blain, Cameron, & Farmer, 2018). This research study follows this same intellectual tradition.

Each of the aforementioned Black intellectual movements embodied Black peoples' quest for political, social, and spiritual freedom and expression (see Figure 1.5). At the core of each of these movements is Black people reading, writing, rallying, and strategizing to separate themselves from the belly of hegemonic racism and advance their true power. These movements are *political* because of the systemic policies and practices of a carceral state that keep Black people in perpetual and figurative, and sometimes literal chains. Our *social* struggles are quests for human freedom to be recognized, respected, and treated as humans with minds, souls, hearts, and relationships and manifest in many forms. It is in our films, music, fashion, and general Black aesthetic. Our intellectualism is also present in our autobiographical and poetic writing; the ways in which we weave our existence with the perpetual quest for freedom and justice. Lastly, our *spiritual* expression is at the core of our intellectualism in that we are highly spiritual people who often perform acts from the heart. This means we understand the legacy of those on whose shoulders we stand, and we work from the mindset of making life better for those who come after us. With our political, social, and spiritual Black intellectual expressions, it makes sense then that these elements cannot be compartmentalized. One cannot be spiritual or political or seek social liberation but not political liberation. The three are intricately woven. Together they comprise not only our collective struggle but our Black way of being, that is to say, our

Black Intellectual Tradition.
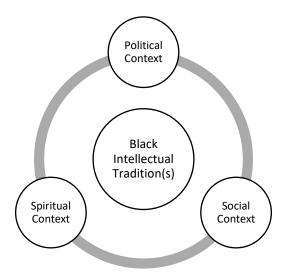
Figure 1.5 Contexts of the Black Intellectual Tradition(s)

A tradition is a practice, habit, ritual, or contemporarily speaking, a way of being. This

understanding of the Black Intellectual Tradition as a way of being, grounded and guided the

research process. In this dissertation, when I refer to the Black Intellectual Tradition, I am

referring to the Black thought, Black spirituality, and Black struggles for social, political, and

reparatory justice, as shown in Figure 1.5, "Contexts of Black Intellectual Tradition." Thus,

throughout our studies, my co-researchers and I relied on Black thought and Black ideals to

problem-pose and engage with our communities. We also relied on the struggles and thought of

historical Black intellectual figures as a lens through which to examine contemporary urban

issues in schools and communities. We started with Black people first to understand their history,

their needs, their struggles, their intellect, triumphs, and advancements.

It is equally important to note that Blain, Cameron, and Farmer (2018) describe

the BIT not as what Black people did but emphasizing the philosophies and guiding

principles of Black intellectual work. Blain, Cameron, and Farmer (2018) also outline the

critiques of the BIT and the focus on ways educated and credentialed Black middle-class elites were divorced from the authentic struggles of the Black community. These are primarily critiques of Black scholars not the Black Intellectual Tradition per se. In this dissertation, the BIT represents a commitment to a set of shared ideas about Black students, Black communities, Black professionals, Black life, Black intellectualism, Black freedom, and Black well-being.

W.E.B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, Ella Baker, and Septima Clark are just a few Black intellectuals who devotedly contributed to the BIT. The profound commitment to and love of Black children, Black people, and Black history displayed by Du Bois, Woodson, Clark, and Baker is lacking in the current educational context, but it is needed in developing the "souls" of teachers working with Black students, families, and communities. This lack of attention to the souls of Black teachers (and our allies) is connected to and undergirds the lack of connectedness to Black communities. The BIT provides a scholarly and theoretical lens through which to analyze this lack while providing an inquiry framework within which to offer solutions to advance human freedom.

Marable (2000) identifies three characteristics of the Black Intellectual Tradition: it is descriptive, corrective, and prescriptive (see Figure 1.6).
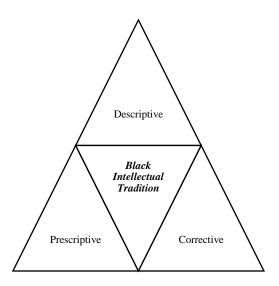
Figure 1.6 Three Characteristics of Black Intellectual Tradition

According to Marable (2000), the BIT has been descriptive by approaching scholarship through the lens and perspectives of Black people themselves. The BIT has been corrective in that it offers a strong critique regarding what it means to be human. And the BIT has been prescriptive because Black people have always proposed scholarship as an intellectual and practical connection to social transformation.

Utilizing this conception of the Black Intellectual Tradition as a theoretical framework for this dissertation then describes the ways in which a participatory action research approach guided us in correcting and restoring the narratives of Black life while transforming our conditions as teachers and the entirety of those connected to us in our schools and neighborhoods. Participatory action research, or research *with* communities not *on* communities, is the logical research approach to examine how teachers search, expand, and bare their souls.

Participatory Action Research Approach

This dissertation study explored the research questions cited about through a participatory action research (PAR) approach that engaged four co-researchers (including myself). Engaging teachers in a PAR process designed to examine how they expand and bare their souls required a research approach that not only deeply engaged participants but also permitted me, in my role as a participating co-researcher, to capture the processes leading towards this understanding. Cammarota, Berta-Avila, Ayala, Rivera, and Rodriguez (2016) describe PAR as a "systematic and collective approach to inquiry that leads to the production of knowledge applied for the purpose of facilitating greater equity and justice" (p. 71). PAR is a research approach that allows researchers to engage with communities in ways that are equitable, empowering, and enlightening and requires all who are involved to be vulnerable. One aim then is to enable participants to shed veils of misinformation and miseducation that may have long obscured deficit views and hegemonic thinking and turned oppression inward.

In many schools, especially schools that serve racialized and classed populations, some regard teachers as mere robots in the schooling process. Stapleton (2019) argues that teachers experience "marginalization by association" because the students teachers serve have also been disregarded, dismissed, and disenfranchised. The marginalization by association functions as a double silencing of teacher roles and expertise. Teachers lack a platform or space to voice frustrations and concerns or have their professional opinions counted as valid. This is stifling, oppressive, and spirit-breaking. Participatory action research (PAR) is an applied, qualitative research approach that allows the researcher and participants to plan, design, and analyze data collaboratively to solve a specific or practical problem of the group (Cahill, 2007; Fine, 2018). PAR is also a research approach for those committed to social justice and transformation as the

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process helps to leverage the lived experiences, expertise, and voices of those traditionally excluded from power. Cahill (2007) describes PAR as a "collective praxis approach" in which "a set of rituals and practices for sharing power within the research process…. that challenges social exclusion…and build[s] the capacity of people to analyze and transform their own lives and communities" (pp. 297-298). In this way, as an approach that breaks the silence of the oppressed, PAR also offers a model for teachers to engage with those whom they serve.

PAR then functions as a research approach intended to help shift and build teachers' souls because it offers a double aim in the process. Fals Borda (2001) and McTaggart (1997) describe the double aim as engaging two goals of research: 1) introducing teacher participants to a social and political realm from which they are largely excluded and absent and 2) providing participants an opportunity to critique their miseducation, biases, and assumptions regarding issues that plague our Black students and communities. In this way PAR is the logical approach to examine how teachers expand and bare their souls from the perspective of the BIT. Additionally, the double aim is why this study is both an examination of the PAR process in enabling teachers to challenge our thinking and unlearn ideas that have not served our students and communities and a process to use new knowledge to advocate for liberating practices, policies, and discourse.

In this study, PAR functions as a form of teacher engagement that centers the community by allowing the participants to use teacher expertise and experiences to co-construct knowledge. Torre (2009) argues that all people "carry important histories, connections, and responsibilities to various communities…within institutions that have been historically defined by power and privilege." In this way, we use our association with racialized and classed students and

communities to break cycles of oppression and hegemony and always ask of our research: Whose voice will be privileged, and who does our research reach, educate, and provoke?

Participatory Action Research Grounded in the Black Intellectual Tradition

In sum, this study situates PAR within each of the dimension of the BIT (see Figure 1.6) identified by Marable. The study is designed to be *descriptive* in that of the other three participants two are Black women, and one is a Jewish-American woman who stands in solidarity with the Black experience. That is to say, she feels connected to Black struggles and triumphs through her own ancestry, and she feels morally obligated to be an ally to social justice and racial equity work. When we tell our stories and speak of our professional experience from and through the Black experience, we privilege our experience, including our feelings, and our knowledge first. We recognize that we are enactors of education policy while not contributing to education policymaking decisions. We proclaim our very participation in this study is an act of resistance and by privileging our descriptions of our experiences we intended to disrupt our historic marginalization as Black teachers, and as teachers standing in solidarity with Black teachers and the Black community.

Second, this study is designed to be *corrective* through the ways in which it aims to enable our teacher voices and learning experiences to correct the misinformation and miseducation that stands in the lines of quantitative data and education policy. Through this study, I hoped to enable teachers to gain new understandings, use our voices and experiences to illuminate qualitative understandings that quantitative data alone cannot narrate. Lastly, this dissertation is designed to be *prescriptive* to determine if the PAR process and the collective research this approach generates, as a form of teacher engagement, can chart a new path for

understanding the soul-searching that is required to serve Black students and Black communities and affirm our humanity.

Finally, this study rests in what King (2006) asserts as "Critical Studyin' for Human Freedom." Critical Studyin' means engaging as teachers in ways that are "cognitively and emotionally free of ideological constraints on knowledge, thought, and morally engaged action and pedagogy" (p. 338). This view of teaching and learning through 'Critical Studyin' offers scholars an entrée into and validation for the use of the Black Intellectual Tradition. The Black Intellectual Tradition is a commitment by Black scholars and allies to promulgate scholarship that promotes the human freedom of Black people and to critically study and approach our liberation and humanity. BIT is an unapologetic, rigorous, and meaningful theoretical frame that offers us a window into the brilliance of Black students and communities while critiquing the oppressive, hegemonic, and anti-Black barriers that barricade them. The BIT provides a critique of what is lacking in our quest for human freedom—a critique that dispels ideologically inaccurate research that harms Black lives and gives us permission to tell our own stories and alter our own lives.

Significance of the Study

This dissertation study is significant for a multitude of reasons. First, using the Black Intellectual Tradition as the theoretical framework to frame this educational research study is a novel approach. The Black Intellectual Tradition is vulnerable to criticism as the university has historically represented itself through objective science detached from people, communities, and feelings. Harding (1974), posits that "we do not exist in splendid isolation from the situation of the larger black community" (p. 5). Marable (2000) continued, Black scholars "should endeavor to cultivate and maintain an

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intimate relationship with the African-American community" (p. 24)…and "Black intellectuals therefore have a special obligation to utilize their skills and resources to contribute to the liberation of their people" (p. 31). Criticism of the BIT denies Black scholars our right to exist in social science research on our own terms (Morris, 2019). Situating this research within the BIT will add a Black perspective to education research literature and blaze a trail for future education researchers who opt to privilege their Black cognitive and emotional experiences and intellectualism.

Additionally, participatory action research (PAR) with teachers is largely absent in the research literature. McIntyre (1997) and Stapleton (2018) are two scholars who have employed a participatory action research approach with teachers. My dissertation study is the first PAR study with Black teachers in the South. PAR with teachers is largely absent from the research literature for several reasons; namely, the lengthy time commitment required to conduct a study with integrity and the political nature of the work.

Of further significance is that the foundations and goals of this research study are multiple and overlapping: 1) to engage teachers through a safe but challenging space to identify their biases, assumptions, and fears about working in Black communities; 2) to provide teachers with social, cultural, historical, and political information not otherwise included in traditional in-service professional development; 3) to offer teachers an opportunity to co-construct solution-building projects with and in communities they serve; and 4) to examine teacher engagement versus teacher preparation or teacher professional development. The broad scope of the research aims to offer several points of analysis that will likely have implications beyond the study. For instance, to the extent

that implications impact how we position future research and define and consider the importance of teachers' souls in their professional engagement, these implications will implore school districts, education policymakers, and educational stakeholders to address racial hegemony and oppression directly.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into six chapters and serves as my contribution to education research literature. Chapter One paints the problem under study through publicly available data and research literature. I also use Chapter One to present the study's research questions, and a research approach to examine the issue of teacher engagement through PAR. Chapter Two, is a review of literature in which I discuss existing scholarship that illuminates this dissertation's original contribution to the field. In Chapter Three, I share details of the methodological approach used for the dissertation study and the study-within-the-study which the PAR process generated. In our study-within-the-study, we engaged in a participatory action research approach that constituted a "double aim" inquiry process in which we were both students and co-researchers. To streamline the discussion and analysis of this broader and the specific study-within-the-study, I offer four phases to operationalize the methodology as the research process is notoriously messy and organic. I also operationalize this process as an acceptance of institutional research requirements and an adherence to a predetermined, formulaic dissertation format. Two chapters are dedicated to the results of the dissertation study and the study-within-the study: Chapter Four and Chapter Five. In Chapter Four, I outline the results and analysis of the teacher participatory action research process being meticulous and intentional in my representation of my co-researchers, the process, and the study. Chapter Five, presents the results, research literature, and analysis of the collective study-within-the-study conducted with the teachers in

which our teacher participatory action research collective examined the intersection of urban

education reform and gentrification in Southwest Atlanta. Lastly, in Chapter Six, I offer a

discussion of my interpretations and analysis of both studies as well as implications and

recommendations.

<div align="center">**CHAPTER TWO**</div>

Review of Literature

A Problem with the Souls of Teachers

The purpose of this dissertation study is to examine how teacher engagement through a participatory action research approach expands and bares the souls of teachers. The study started with three points of departure: 1) to provide teachers a safe but challenging space to identify their biases, assumptions, and fears about working in Black communities; 2) to provide teachers with social, cultural, historical, and political information not otherwise included in traditional in-service professional development; and 3) to provide teachers an opportunity to co-construct solution-building projects with and in communities they serve. From here, I was able to examine how participatory action research can expand the dispositions, attitudes, beliefs, worldview, consciousness, knowledge, skills, mindsets, or the souls for work with Black students in Black communities.

The problem that ignited this study lies in the lack of engagement tools and processes to help teachers accomplish the level of soul searching required to disrupt their hegemonic and oppressive views of Black students and Black communities. This chapter presents a review of the literature to outline the problem under study, provides a view of Black intellectual pedagogues, and offers a more robust explanation of participatory action research. The goal of this chapter – the literature review – is to set the context that defines this study as an original contribution to the existing research literature teachers' souls. I discuss the culture of poverty inherent in urban education, the school-to-prison pipeline through the criminalization of Black students, and participatory action research with teachers.

Currently, teacher professional development discourse peppers teachers with descriptors of Black children through phrases such as 'high-needs,' 'high poverty,' 'low-income,' 'at-risk,' 'under-resourced' and a host of other terms that do little to disrupt or critically uncover the root causes of educational inequity (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2006) and covertly perpetuate the educational caste system Black students and communities are mired by. Ogbu (1979) defines the educational caste system as a system where people are "assigned at birth – by skin color – and have few ways to escape the designation" (p. 17).

Matias and Liou (2015) suggest that a lack of political, social, and historical critique of our education systems perpetuates urban schools as "colonizing projects that subject students of color to an onslaught of deficit practices that reifies structural racism, hegemonic Whiteness, and recycling of dominant rhetoric about the presumed cultural deficits of urban youth…" (p. 602).

This literature review presents academic literature to contextualize the problem, suggests why the problem exists and identifies a potential approach to disrupt it. My interpretation of this literature leads me to conclude that teachers' souls require examination, which involves focused, engaged developments to begin to address the educational caste system. Hence, teacher dispositions (Diez & Rath, 2007; Dottin, 2009; Katz & Raths, 1985) are at the crux of this dissertation. Dottin (2009) argues that dispositions are "not a possession, but a state of performance" (p. 85) in which teachers actively practice and apply judicious action to practices, issues, and ideas reflective of their personal virtues, education values, and social transformation beliefs (Misco & Shiveley, 2007). Fonseca-Chacana (2019) acknowledges that teacher dispositions are a theoretical goal and lack "explicit operational stages" that are "actionable, concrete, or operationalized" (p. 268). Ladson-Billings (2000) offers practical approaches to mobilize explicit operational stages for achieving teacher disposition such as autobiography,

restructured field experiences, and situated pedagogies. The academic literature lacks applied

research that provides corrective action in facilitating knowledge and skill-building to shape the

souls of teachers (Garcia & Guerra, 2004)—the kind of training needed to do the liberation work

in Black schools and communities. Given this lack, my study offers an applied understanding of

developing teacher dispositions to enable them to search their souls in order to view students

through an informed, cultural, conscious, additive lens that Ladson-Billings (2000) suggests.

The Culture of Poverty and Broken Windows Theories

Many states, including the state of Georgia, where this research was conducted, bend to

their misinformed biases about disenfranchised students and communities of color. According to

Dingerson, Dunn, and Council (2015), in 2015, Georgia Governor Nathan Deal proposed an

Opportunity School District (OSD), to "lift students out of poverty." Deal's campaign proposed

to close no more than 100 failing schools according to College and Career Ready Performance

Index (CCRPI) scores. CCRPI scores include high stakes test scores and other standardized

academic measures. All 100 of the schools slated for closure were in high poverty,

disenfranchised communities of color. The OSD would have turned these schools over to charter

management organizations and allowed the governor to appoint—without the oversight of a local

school board—an OSD superintendent. While the OSD was voted down 2-to-1 by Georgia voters

during the 2016 election cycle, the ideals that fueled an OSD persisted.

Governor Deal's plan perpetuated a "culture of poverty" mindset that was widely

disseminated by self-proclaimed expert Ruby Payne (2005). Payne is the CEO of aha! Process,

Inc. and the author of several, self-published books, including, *A Framework for Understanding*

Poverty in which she argues that children from impoverished backgrounds require explicit

instruction in middle-class values, culture, language, world views, and behavior norms to be

productive and successful or they risk a life mired by crime and poverty (Payne, 2005). Payne

(2005) argues, "Upper and middle classes usually have the resources to avoid jail. The poor

simply see jail as part of life and not necessarily always bad" (p. 22). Regardless of her culture of

poverty rhetoric, Payne has sold millions of copies of her books and has garnered contracts from

school districts seeking her counsel.

Gorski, a staunch critic of Payne, asserts that her work has not undergone the rigor of

academic peer-review and is "mired with inaccuracies and [is] inconsistent with entire bodies of

research and knowledge" (Gorski, 2008, p. 144). Further, Gorski (2008) laments:

> [Payne] legitimizes the stereotypes [teachers] carry into the
> classroom with them. She does not challenge their privilege or ask
> them to reflect on their classism….They relate to the hidden rules
> because the rules paint them as moralistically and intellectually
> superior to people in poverty….infinitely more troubling that this
> simple reflection of capitalistic socialization is the extent to which
> supposed champions of educational equity and social justice have
> bought into her work. (p. 144)

The hidden rules of class and privilege are also inherent in community policing policies

that pervade most schools today. Payne (2005) is not the only pundit promulgating a culture of

poverty theory onto Black communities. Broken Windows Theory accomplishes this as well.

Political scientists George Kellig and James Wilson posited this theory in the now-seminal

article, "Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety," published by *The Atlantic*

Magazine in 1982. For the record, James Wilson was trained and mentored by a conservative

and, some would argue, racist theorist Edward Banfield. Banfield (1974) believed that people in

poverty were culpable for their own conditions. He believed that their poverty was pathological

and their blighted living conditions were a deliberate act on their part to maintain low rents.

In the article, Kellig and Wilson (1982) use the metaphor of a broken window to explain how a single ignored, or unaddressed broken window will produce thousands of broken windows in a neighborhood or community. Concerning human subjects, Kellig and Wilson asserted that one beggar, prostitute, or peddler left "unchecked" leads to thousands of beggars, prostitutes, and peddlers and hence creating a climate that is unsuitable for "regular and decent folks" to live, work, and play peacefully. According to Kellig and Wilson, "serious street crime flourishes in areas in which disorderly behavior goes unchecked" (p. 9). Despite any structural or political implications that have contributed to said conditions for "non-decent" people to beg, peddle, or prostitute their bodies, and despite any economic implications of a landlord's or property owner's failure to repair a physical broken window – which property owners are legally obligated to repair – Kellig and Wilson's core argument is that broken window behavior must be "checked" to maintain public order.

Kellig and Wilson (1982) used the field experiment research of Philip Zimbardo (1973) to support this argument. Zimbardo abandoned a nonfunctioning automobile and left the hood open in an affluent Palo Alto, California neighborhood, and another in the Bronx, New York. According to Zimbardo, the abandoned car in the Bronx, New York was vandalized within ten minutes and completely stripped of all valuable parts within 24 hours, while the abandoned car in Palo Alto, California sat untouched for a full week until the researcher himself vandalized the car with a sledgehammer after which others vandalized the car and ultimately turned it on its roof. According to Zimbardo, the experiment suggested, "vandalism and more serious crimes can occur anywhere once the sense of mutual regard and the obligations of civility are lowered by actions that seem to signal that 'no one cares'" (Zimbardo, 1973, p. 32).

These two theories, Culture of Poverty and Broken Windows, suggest to school districts and teachers that Black students and Black communities must be surveilled at all times. As the CRDC data in Georgia Public Schools presented in Chapter One shows, Black students received exclusionary discipline at three times the rate of White students (see Figures 1.2, 1.3, & 1.4). Mickelson (2003) argues that racial discrimination in education arises from the actions of institutions and individual state actors, their attitudes and ideologies, or processes that systematically treat students from different racial and ethnic groups disparately or inequitably. This disparate and inequitable treatment is evident in the Civil Rights Data Collection district discipline data. Skiba et al. (2002) found that most disciplinary action initiated in the classroom where a differential treatment pattern exists in schools refer African American students for subjective reasons. Such subjective views of African American students suggests that Black students are subjected to a rather criminal gaze (Raible & Irizarry, 2010) to assert power and dominance over Black children through institutional and social control.

The School-to-Prison Pipeline

School-to-Prison Realism

Several researchers (Fasching-Varner, Mitchell, Martin, & Bennett-Haron, 2014; Garcia & De Lissovoy, 2013) argue that schools mirror prisons and schools function just as they are designed: as a genuine school-to-prison pipeline created to line the pockets of capitalists. Garcia et al. (2013) call educational, penal, and racial realism "school time to prison time." They argue that high stakes assessments and watered-down school curricula only normalize the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) as it is just "school time" dummying and preparing the minds of our students to serve the hard "prison time" that awaits them in post-secondary life. Furthermore,

Fasching-Varner et al. (2014) call for educators, parents, and school decision-makers to

acknowledge that educational, penal, and racial realism requires school stakeholders to accept

that the education system is functioning just as designed; that is, it is preparing economically,

and socially deprived American students to live in a docile, subservient position as future

prisoners. There has been a boom in prison construction and a pool of ready and cheap labor is

required to keep them filled and stocked with human assets (Porter, 2015). Accordingly, we

should refer to the pipeline as a prison-to-school pipeline as schools are fashioned after prisons,

and it is indeed what we are preparing our students for. Fasching-Varner argues that if we accept

this reality, we can begin to create and play by our own rules to combat the STPP.

Boggs (1974) and King (2017) argue that we must not accept this current educational,

racial, and penal realism but work to disrupt this disparity through privileging Black life, Black

experiences, and Black struggles. King (2011) argues that teachers must work to combat

ideologically-biased knowledge and disparaging discourses of Blackness. King (1991) describes

this ideologically biased knowledge as *dysconscious racism* or "a form of racism that tacitly

accepts dominant White norms and privileges. It is not the absence of consciousness (that is, not

unconsciousness) but an impaired consciousness or distorted way of thinking about race as

compared to, for example, critical consciousness" (p. 135). Baldwin (1963) argues that if

teachers have believed what they have been fed about Black people, then "that means you are not

what you thought you were either!" (p. 86). Instead, you are a brainwashed puppet misguiding

the future of all humanity.

School-to-Prison Pipeline

According to school-to-prison pipeline scholars Wald and Losen (2003), Losen and Skiba

(2010), and Mallet (2016), the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) is a complex, entangled web of

discipline policies and practices that systematically remove students from classroom instruction using exclusionary practices such as out-of-school suspensions, school expulsion, alternative schools. Students begin the process of accumulating criminal records for typical child development behaviors (Mallet, 2016) that would otherwise warrant parent intervention or, at worst, detention. The STPP disproportionately impacts low-income, students of color (Civil Rights Data Collection, 2016) who reside in historically disinvested neighborhoods and attend schools that are systematically under-resourced. Students' school and classroom teachers are unsuspecting actors—often because of their lack of cultural competency, low expectations, and deficit-based views of parents and students (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Raible & Irizarry, 2010; Yull, Blitz, Thompson, & Murray, 2014). Students are pushed out of schools onto streets where they have a higher susceptibility to interact with the police, graduating to criminal records that relegate them to life as virtual non-citizens entangled in a dehumanizing, social caste system (Alexander, 2010). There are even police precincts in schools that arrest children for common misbehaviors on campus. These are just two of several complexities that comprise the STPP. I present scholarship in the next section that supports the argument that the history of slavery, convict leasing, hypersegregation, and the War on Drugs shaped the public's view of Black bodies as criminal, and that these ideologies especially infect the minds and souls of teachers working with Black students in Black communities.

The Criminalization of Black Bodies: Historical and Political Context of the School-to-Prison Pipeline

What follows is a brief explanation regarding the use of the term, Black bodies, throughout this dissertation. In 2019, I attended the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) in Washington, DC. The annual CBC is highly anticipated and arguably flooded and attended by

Who's Who of Black America. There I encountered a gentleman who engaged in a spirted debate with me about H.R. 40 - Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act. House Bill 40 (2019) proposes to identify the following: 1) the role of federal and state governments in supporting the institution of slavery, 2) forms of discrimination in the public and private sectors against freed slaves and their descendants, and 3) lingering negative effects of slavery on living African-Americans and society. In parting, the gentleman argued that Black people could not accomplish anything without the inclusion and permission of Whites. He further argued that Black people are too emotional when bargaining with White people, those who will ultimately decide their fate. His staunch beliefs and narrative provide a narration of why I've chosen to insert the phrase "Black bodies" in this dissertation. In his Black mind, and the minds of Whites he spoke of, Black people were mere empty vessels who had no minds of their own, no fight, no spirit, no resolve, and no souls. Black people are mere Black bodies.

I use the term "Black bodies" in this dissertation not as a mythical, ontological, futile term of fatalism against Black people, but to depict how teachers—who are contractually obligated to care for and instruct Black children—participate in the dehumanization of Black students, Black families, and Black communities. Note, I do not use the phrase, "Black bodies," as a metaphor. The Italian American P.E. teacher I referenced in Chapter One moved beyond the metaphor of Black students as Black bodies when she lamented, "all the stereotypes we hear about them are true!" Just as the educators in Florida, Oregon, and South Carolina who criminalized Black students based on their existence alone, each of these experiences showcase how some teachers across America approach Black students – as Black bodies.

Wacquant (2002) provides a theoretical roadmap from slavery to mass incarceration, which describes the historical criminalization of Black bodies (see Table 2.1). Wacquant (2002)

references "Black bodies" to explicate the historization of Black criminalization, which he

argues "extracted black labour while keeping black bodies at a safe distance, to the material and

symbolic benefit of society" (p. 48). My use of the phrase, Black bodies, furthers Wacquant's

assertion by depicting how teachers with malignant views see Black students and Black

communities—as Black bodies. Additionally, one could argue that the school-to-prison pipeline

is a continuation of the criminalization of Black bodies, especially children.

Table 2.1: Historic Criminalization of Black Bodies

Institution	Dominant Social Type
Slavery (1619 – 1865)	Enslaved person
Jim Crow (South, 1865 – 1965)	Sharecropper
Convict Leasing (South, 1884 – 1945)	Leased property of the state
Ghetto (North, 1915 – 1968)	Menial worker, criminal
Hyperghetto & Prison (1985 – present)	Welfare recipient, criminal, thug, inmate

Adapted from L. Wacquant (2002). From slavery to mass incarceration. *New Left Review*, 13, 41-60.

The STPP commenced arguably when the first Africans were captured, kidnapped from

their home, and shipped as cargo to unfamiliar shores. According to Bennett (1961), slavery was

institutionalized through colonial-settler legalese, while African men, women, and children

existed as the method to build whole economies through the forced labor of stolen humans.

Rape, murder, beatings, lashings, maiming, drownings, lynchings, prohibiting African languages,

religion, customs, and cultural expressions were all violent and inhumane tactics that entrenched

slavery in the minds and hearts of White, ethnic settlers. These tactics marked Black bodies as

inferior and unworthy of humanity and freedom. Enslaved Africans were not allowed, by law, to

gather too closely for long periods as a gathering of Black bodies outside of Sunday services

implied, they were busy plotting their freedom. White enslavers also criminalized reading and

writing because they feared that such an expression of freedom would inspire insurrections.

These criminal views of Black bodies prompted physical and psychological violence, which also

stripped enslaved Africans of native practices and their native tongue while holding their bodies

in bondage. While the conscience of abolitionist religious and liberal groups and the resistance of

enslaved Africans helped to usher in legislation that would lead to ostensible freedom from

servitude, legal statues did not represent freedom from mental bondage and violence for African

descendants (Woodson, 1933) or those who enslaved them. The 13th Amendment to the

constitution abolished slavery except for those convicted of a crime. The 13th Amendment reads:

> Section 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment
> for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist
> within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.
> Section 2. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate
> legislation (U. S. Const. amend. XIII).

The 13th Amendment, however, did not stop the tradition of slavery in America. Convict

leasing ensued as an extension of slavery with the same goals of providing unpaid labor to

farmers and industrialists. Blackmon (2008) details how local "judicial systems" comprised of

justices of peace and town sheriffs captured Black men and women for so-called crimes such as

loitering and vagrancy and made them sign self-binding contracts "admitting" to their supposed

crimes. The captured men and women were then leased to plantation owners and industrial

companies—as a punishment—and forced to work without pay. Leased convicts were subjected

to squalid work conditions, and either died from bacterial plagues or sheer exhaustion. If leased

convicts did not meet death, they accumulated bogus charges for clothing, shelter, and food and

were never able to pay their "debt" but instead lived out their days as leased convicts. Blackmon

(2008) further explains that much of the industrialization the South experienced in the late 1800s

and early 1900s was made possible by the arduous, unpaid labor of Black leased convicts. It was not until 1945 that convict leasing as an institution was reassigned.

However, convict leasing did not upend the notion of slavery or the criminalization of Black bodies; it deepened it. Alexander (2010) contends that the War on Drugs has created the third social caste system and the third installation of slavery in U.S. history. She explains how chattel slavery and Jim Crow laws served as the first two caste systems in the U.S. when Black people were treated as less than human and second-class citizens. She contends that the War on Drugs is the perpetuation of class and racial subjugation.

Alexander (2010) further explains that the War on Drugs declared by Ronald Reagan, the 40th president of the United States, lobbied to extend President Richard Nixon's "tough on crime" rhetoric to expand policing across the country. Poverty was a major issue during the Nixon and Reagan years, not crime. After the Vietnam War and the start of deindustrialization, Congress passed laws to separate Blacks and Whites based on class, in the workplace, and across residential lines. Massey and Denton (1993) detail how housing, employment, and education legislation was passed and enacted to create social and economic safety nets and pathways to wealth for Whites, while leaving Blacks in rapidly divested and deteriorating neighborhoods and schools. Inner-city manufacturing companies that once employed Black men and women closed and moved to newly established suburbs where it was cheaper to build new facilities with the attractive enticement of tax incentives. Black people were not invited along for the move to the suburbs as housing discrimination practices like redlining kept them barricaded in inner-cities. These dynamics fueled the hypersegregated neighborhoods that are now gentrified across many American cities (Rothstein, 2017). Ronald Reagan used this deteriorated image of Blacks in the ghetto to propagandize Black life and to manufacture a crisis.

Alexander (2010) further details how cocaine and crack cocaine—the crystallized form of powder cocaine—flooded the streets of Black and Brown neighborhoods. Congress responded by passing racialized drug laws that mandated harsher sentences for crack cocaine—typically used by Blacks because it is cheaper than powder cocaine—and lesser sentences for powder cocaine users. Powder cocaine was considered an elitist drug for whom affluent Whites had privileged access to. The War on Drugs played out on the nightly news where countless Black bodies were accosted and apprehended while stockpiles of money, guns, and cocaine were panned across television screens inside American homes. These nightly images cemented Black people as criminal in the minds of America and justified the excessive use of force as well as excessive prison sentences for what are mostly issues of racialized health and poverty policies.

The War on Drugs ignited mass incarceration where men and women behind bars for nonviolent, drug-related offenses brings us full circle to the ideals of the constitution authors in using slavery as a punishment of a crime. Alexander (2010) contends, "mass incarceration…emerged as a stunningly comprehensive and well-disguised system of racialized social control that functions in a manner strikingly similar to Jim Crow" (p. 4). In fact, more Black men and women are in prison than were enslaved prior to Reconstruction (Alexander, 2010). This disparity is relevant as some would argue the school-to-prison pipeline serves mass incarceration by putting our most vulnerable youth on a sure path to an inescapable social caste (Sojoyner, 2016). The school-to-prison pipeline begins in communities where the schools are over-policed, disinvested in, and under-resourced, often with teachers who have adopted deficit views of Black students and Black communities. These deficit views help to explain how the disparate discipline rates Black students experience (see Figures 1.2, 1.3, & 1.4) contribute to the

STPP and leaves Black students with few, if any, opportunities for social, political, and economic advancement.

Policies that Shaped the Criminalization of Black Students

The STPP has disproportionately affected low-income students of color (Ayers, Dohrn, & Ayers, 2001; Mallett, 2016; US. DOE, 2016). According to the 2013-2014 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC)—a national survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Education collecting data on key civil rights and education in public schools—Black K-12 students are 3.8 times more likely than White students to be suspended from school. This disparate reality is affecting students as early as Pre-Kindergarten. The same survey data revealed that Black children represent 19% of preschool enrollment, but 47% of preschool children receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions; in comparison, White children represent 41% of preschool enrollment, but 28% of preschool children receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions.

A complex web of federal, state, local, and district-mandated rules and policies has led to the STPP. These policies and subsequent practices, which are primarily justified based on mass shooting episodes in mostly White, suburban schools, instead criminalize Black students. According to Mallett (2016), the STPP has a disproportionate impact on four types of students: 1) poor students of color; 2) victims of abuse; 3) students with special education disabilities; and 4) lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or transgender (LGBTQ) students. To add insult to injury, most of these students experience overlapping impacts. That is, they are low-income, students of color, victims of abuse, *and* they have special needs.

There are a series of laws and federal mandates that point to the structure and persistence of the STPP. During the 1980s, when Ronald Reagan continued Richard Nixon's tough on crime

rhetoric, actual legislation ruled that if you are a felon, and you commit a crime three times before you are locked behind bars for life. This "Three Strikes" legislation disproportionately targeted and sequestered poor Black males who were involved in nonviolent drug crimes. The Drug Free Schools Act of 1986, which mandated school systems to enact the same War of Drugs laws, commenced "zero tolerance" practices in schools (Mallett, 2016). The Gun Free Schools Act of 1994 deepened zero-tolerance practices in schools. The 1999 Columbine school shooting justified and validated the 1994 Gun Free Schools Act and increased police presence in schools as a response. Zero-tolerance—a phrase derived from Reagan's War on Drugs—makes weapons (of any kind), drugs (of any kind), and disturbances (of any kind) a criminal offense in schools.

Teachers and the School-to-Prison Pipeline

Without the full knowledge of what the STPP is and how layered policies and mandates have created such a system, teachers become the unsuspecting first responders in the school-to-prison pipeline. Coupled with a normalized view of Black children and youth as "super predators" (DiLulio, 1996) and inadequate engagement in examining the root causes of their attitudes and beliefs towards Black students, teachers follow misguided and misinformed district mandates – mired in culture of poverty theories – that leave students without allies to disrupt hegemonic and oppressive school practices.

To date, California and Oregon are the only two states to acknowledge the school-to-prison pipeline as a legislative agenda item. In 2014, California legislators passed Assembly Bill 420, which prohibits schools from using subjective measures to suspend and expel students. The bill also compels schools to adopt alternative means for school discipline. The Oregon House Bill 2192 also revised the discipline code but requires school officials to consider students' past

discipline records and age when making disciplinary decisions. While both bills are commendable, they do not mention race or the racial disparity of the school-to-prison pipeline, and neither bills require teacher training or engagement with structural issues as a necessary component of teacher training to upend the deleterious effects of exclusionary discipline.

Educational policies like *Brown versus Board of Education*—written to integrate public schools and public education funding—have regrettably left Black teachers vulnerable and disrupted their souls to help upend the present-day school-to-prison pipeline. Lash and Ratcliffe (2014) argue the desegregation of schools through *Brown versus Board of Education* diminished the influential academic culture and academic press in predominately Black schools as before desegregation educators in Black schools were college graduates who were credentialed in a multitude of academic disciplines. They brought with them a culture of high expectations that translated to their students and the surrounding community. Black teachers also beat insurmountable odds to accomplish their academic goals and placed even higher standards on all whom they taught. Once the desegregation of schools commenced, many of these teachers were "weeded out" through testing and credentialing measures that left Black students in the hands of Whites who did not possess the cultural competence to teach those who did not look like them. Today, intra-group racism inflicts the mindsets and practices of Black teachers (Garcia & Guerra, 2004).

Decades of deterioration and low morale in schools have led teachers (including many Black teachers) to make statements such as, "There is no 'buy-in' from students and parents." Their accounts are hegemonic and oppressive and grounded in a devalued perspective of Black students and Black communities. Dancy (2014) argues that hegemony is perpetuated in popular culture and funnels directly into schools. Popular culture offers troublesome perceptions of Black

bodies throughout society, and these images are promoted by the corporate media and adopted in educational settings by school administrators and teachers who, in turn, use this information to penalize Black and Brown boys (Ferguson, 2000). Wood, Kaplan, and McLoyd's (2007) research depicts how low expectations by parents and teachers of African American males start as early as age six, and boys have internalized this compounding of low expectations or "concurrent accumulation effects" and have fashioned their academic lives accordingly. Furthermore, Black girls also suffer from injurious presentations featured in historical stereotypes such as a "Jezebel," "Mammy," or "Sapphire" (Morris, 2016; Richardson, 2006). These images have harmful effects as they rest in the minds of school personnel, and the result is a "push-out crisis" that scripts students out of their childhood and a quality, relevant education.

Boggs (1974) challenges readers to move back to a more community-focused way of schooling. Cramer, Gonzalez, and Pellegrini-Lafont (2014) layout a framework that seeks to raise critical consciousness of educators as a prerequisite to building critical thinking skills and awareness of students. The framework calls for equity and cooperative learning in the classroom as well as culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Raible et al. (2010) assert that we must prepare teachers to "redirect" their surveillance of low-income, students of color and instead shift their attention to developing as critical educators assisting in changing the futures of specific populations of students. Unfortunately, the approach that predominates in schools and teacher professional learning, however, is Positive Behavior-Interventions.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

Many U.S. school districts and schools proffer a Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework to remedy the STPP. PBIS is an organized framework or approach

for responding to student behaviors. The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) created special funding for PBIS and established the Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (hereafter referred to as the Center) is housed at the University of Oregon. According to the Center, PBIS helps school personnel to organize evidence-based practices, improve their practices, and maximize academic and behavioral supports for all students. PBIS is a behavioral framework derived from the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1997 and has since been applied not only to students with disabilities but also to all students, schoolwide.

According to the *Training and Professional Development Blueprint for Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports* (Lewis et al., 2016), classroom teachers receive PBIS professional development through a hierarchal train-the-trainer model in which a PBIS consultant trains a district-level PBIS coach who then trains school-based PBIS coaches. It is the responsibility of the school-based PBIS coach to train and support teachers with the implementation and fidelity of PBIS. Each school has a school-based PBIS team comprised of an administrator, PBIS coach, data analyst, behavioral specialist, and several teachers. The school-based PBIS team hosts monthly school-based meetings to review discipline data and make necessary changes to alter data schoolwide.

Parents and community members are an afterthought in the PBIS training and implementation process. In the *Training and Professional Development Blueprint for Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports* (Lewis et al., 2016)*, parents and community members are mentioned when considering parent training and ways to reach out to parents for PBIS support. Boneshefski and Runge (2014) have acknowledged that this misstep of including parents only as an afterthought is an issue that leads to the breakdown of parent-teacher relationships. Their

study regarding disproportionate discipline practices within a PBIS school reveals that "disproportionately may be the result of a culture gap between teachers' and students' standards of appropriate behavior, lack of training in culturally responsive behavior management strategies, or even discrimination due to personal biases" (p. 153). In the same study, Boneshefski and Runge (2014) also found that, "Oftentimes, the biases held by educators cause them to believe that the disproportionality is a result of variables external to the school" (p. 153) and not within their own identity. These researchers do recognize, however, that a courageous type of professional development – teacher engagement – that opens "dialogues to address differences. . .and promotes awareness of one's own culture" (p. 155) could help to stymie racial disparities of exclusionary discipline.

Teacher Engagement

Through current practices, altruistic intentions, behavioral reforms like PBIS, schools isolate themselves as barriers to collaboration and success for teachers and students through top-down achievement goals, high stakes testing, and prescriptive curricula. This current insular model has also shifted teachers away from their ethical obligation to serving as potential allies to Black students and Black communities and thereby being true to their souls, to situating themselves in indifference, fatigue, apathy, and thus risk being culpable in educational inequity. To be clear, this dissertation is not intended to portray pit teachers as solely responsible for educational inequities and disparate discipline policies. As Garcia and Guerra (2004) state, "it is important to avoid centering on teachers as the problem, which detracts from the critical examination of systemic factors that perpetuate deficit thinking and reproduce educational inequities for students" (p. 154). It is therefore imperative for districts and schools to expand professional learning opportunities to include teacher engagement in reshaping the skills,

knowledge, mindset, worldview, and dispositions – the souls of those who work closest to Black students and hence begin to unpack the systemic factors that reproduces inequities for students.

Khalil and Brown (2015) describe the current teacher engagement landscape as "technicist": teachers have no autonomy in the classroom, school, or curriculum decisions and are hired solely to advance an educational agenda based exclusively on high stakes assessment and progress monitoring. Further, Khalil and Brown (2015) assert that this technicist educational landscape places an overemphasis on metrics which "inhibit educators from developing other teacher qualities, such as their dispositional traits" (p. 78). As a result, disenfranchised communities remain with fewer opportunities for educational equity.

This study examines teacher engagement versus teacher preparation or teacher professional development. *Engagement* represents a reciprocal process, a two-way exchange that not only privileges the knowledge and experiences of Black students and communities but also uses the knowledge of participants to develop content for later analysis and application (Hollins, 2006). Engagement also refers to a constant, fluid act of examining how we consistently engage practicing teachers in learning and reflection using a sociocultural, sociopolitical, and an additive lens (Torre & Fine, 2006; Valenzuela, 1999) as opposed to the banking model represented in professional development. This type of engagement is especially important when teachers themselves have experienced systemic indoctrination and in need of a transformational way to begin to "redefine their roles and explore ways to serve as change agents" (Garcia & Guerra, 2004, p. 155).

Towards Teacher Soul-Expansion and Soul-Baring

King and Wilson (1990) posit that each person can contribute to the soul-freeing substance of African-Americans. This soul-freeing substance requires a level of consciousness

defined as "critical comprehension of the essential nature of society, its myths, and one's own interests" (King, 1992, p. 319). In several studies, education researchers examined how teachers acknowledged their implicit theories about the causes of discipline problems, specifically discipline issues where Black youth are disproportionately impacted (Allen & White-Smith, 2014; Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Kohli, 2014). Sealey-Ruiz (2011) suggests reflective staff development helps to develop teacher consciousness required for today's urban classrooms. Hollins (2006) offers *structured dialogue* as a powerful instrument to engage and empower teachers, while Fu (2015) posits a cultural responsiveness training in which participants experience a process of examining issues of power and privilege. In a study with a diverse group of teachers of color, Kohli (2014) unpacks internalized racism in a quest to achieve more equitably just classrooms and found that critical dialogue about internalized racism was essential in challenging racial inequality. Coggshall et al. (2013) argue that when "educators have the knowledge, skills, beliefs, values, attitudes, experience and supports to effectively address the diverse academic, social and emotional learning needs of all students and to build positive conditions for learning, they not only can begin to redress the overrepresentation of students of color in the pipeline to prison but also put more students on paths to successful futures." (p. 435).

This dissertation study is situated in the South with Black teachers (and an ally). The South, as a research site, represents a model for Black life in America. Morris and Monroe (2009) demonstrate that the South is an important and essential venue for the study of Black student achievement because the South is where the largest population of Black students matriculate. The South is also the sight of several Black teachers (Anderson, 1988; Siddle-Walker, 1996) The discipline disparities juxtaposed with the number of Black teachers begs one to ask was their "education of the right kind?" (Woodson, 1933). This juxtaposition of the

number of Black teachers with the number of Black students suggests the South has not departed from Du Bois' (1903) scholarship in which Black Americans judged themselves by the standards of Whiteness through a veil and deep color-line. These manifestations of double consciousness, color-lines, and veils are omnipresent in education policy and practice.

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

From the vantage point of Black intellectualism on education, teachers' need opportunities for soul-searching and the purpose of this study is to examine how teacher engagement through a PAR study expands and bares the souls of teachers. I seek to examine beliefs, fears, attitudes, and assumptions teachers hold about Black students and Black communities. More specifically, I am exploring how a participatory action research process expands the dispositions, attitudes, beliefs, worldview, consciousness, knowledge, skills, and mindset or soul that teachers need to engage in to disrupt hegemonic and oppressive practices against Black students and communities. Such a research process requires a sustained, prolonged, engaging way of getting close to participants. Participatory action research (herein referred to as PAR) offers education researchers an approach for accomplishing this goal.

PAR is a qualitative research methodology that defies the notion of an "ivory tower" as research is conducted *with* participants versus *on* participants and privileges the voices and experiences of the historically marginalized, leans on their knowledge, and seeks to build capacities within marginalized populations to induce social and political change (Herr & Anderson, 2015; McIntyre, 2008). The goal is PAR is to create sustainable change through the collective engagement of historically marginalized and silenced communities. Cahill (2007) describes PAR as a 'critical praxis approach' which represents a set of rituals and practices for sharing power within the research practices, guiding the role of the facilitator, and framing the

processes of collective study. PAR is an engaged process that does not offer a prescriptive approach or a preset of techniques but provides a method for participants to analyze and change their own lives while becoming informed, agents of change. In sum, research participants "become democratic partners in the building of more sound, democratic communities" (Cahill, 2007, p. 297).

PAR is facilitated through an educative process wherein research participants' knowledge is privileged while they are learning academic and democratic pathways to learn and grow as change agents in their respective communities. PAR has an emancipatory emphasis with a focus on a broader societal analysis of equity, self-reliance, and problems of oppression (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Macleod (1991) posits that PAR is a way of pushing past what one sees on the streets and looking further to reveal the complexities of a particular sociological issue. Herr and Anderson (2015) argue that a central tenet of PAR is that those "traditionally 'studied' must move beyond the role of being a knowledge holder and be repositioned as architects of the research process" (p. 28). This dissertation employed PAR to position teachers as "architects" in the research process, attend to my academic role as a participant-observer, and to illustrate the ways in which teachers ignite change inside and outside of their respective classrooms and schools.

The research literature on PAR is teeming with tenets to guide the research (Cahill, 2007; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Fine, 2018; Kirshner, 2015; Torre, 2009) which include: intentional collaboration, knowledge co-construction, constant reflexivity, equitable decision-making, problem-posing, and social change and political action as outcomes (see Figure 2.1). These tenets are iterative in practice and offer a framework for teacher

engagement.
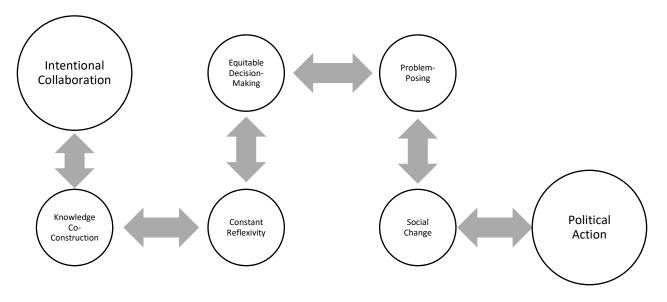
Figure 2.1: Iterative Landscape of Participatory Action Research

PAR practices each of the components mentioned above in iterative ways primarily because the approach values the knowledge of historically marginalized voices and those whose experiences have been politically and socially delegitimized. PAR promotes equal collaboration to bring authenticity to the research process and subsequent actions. Historically, universities have been viewed as knowledge holders, where knowledge is detached from people's lived experiences. Universities have also traditionally been outsiders with a hegemonic gaze of those who do not possess elite or dominant norms. As a result, research has harmed and misrepresented marginalized communities and further distanced itself from the actual needs of communities. A PAR approach seeks to disrupt this and equalize the research process with those closest to issues. This way of approaching research, thus, builds the capacity of participants to take control and assert power over their own lives and communities. A university researcher may then take an outsider/insider approach to the research or serve as a participant, observer, or participant-observer. In this capacity, a university researcher serves as a facilitator of the process and must continuously negotiate, interrogate, and engage power relations within a collective

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research group. A power exploration with a research group promotes exploration of disagreements as opposed to consensus. Power exploration also requires group members to name power actively but strategically work it for the good of the collective. A PAR approach then functions as a commitment of participants to continually reflect and build power towards social change and political action.

Core Principles of Participatory Action Research

In addition to the guiding tenets, there are several experiential, participatory, transformative principles (see Figure 2.2) that explain how PAR helps education researchers engage teachers in soul-searching work. I have categorized the principles into three themes: 1) Experiential Knowledge of the Marginalized, 2) Participatory Collaboration, and 3) Transformative Action.
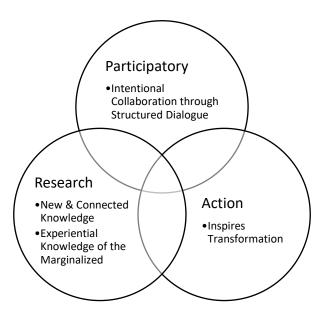
Figure 2.2: Participatory Action Research Themes

Experiential Knowledge of the Marginalized

PAR is derived from critical, social movements that sought to connect the university to the community and reshape the definition of objective social scientific research by privileging and including voices opposite of dominant, privileged classes. PAR is a combination of academic, expert research, local knowledge, and experiences (Kirshner, 2015), and as such, PAR works by convening individuals who share a collective vision and engaging them through a collective discovery process. A collective discovery process involves knowledge and conscious building, and this process ideally transpires through a community-building process using textual, multimodal, and dialogic tools to engage around issues of housing, food quality, education, transportation, environment, and health care inequities.

The discovery process highlights histories of cultural, hegemonic, economic, and educational oppression and subjugation while exposing the sources of such oppression. An outcome of this process is the development of individual and collective counter-narratives (Matsuda, 1995) as participants begin to voice their experiences, which typically are in stark contrast to longstanding narratives constructed by dominant groups. The collaboration is empowering to research participants and models ways of participation to which the marginalized may not have been exposed to or invited.

Participatory Collaboration

The word "participate" embedded in the title of the research methodology is multilayered and covers a range of involvement for all involved in a PAR study. For one, participants are engaged in ways they have yet to experience as they are exposed to histories, epistemologies, and civic engagement strategies that are historically absent from school curriculums. Participants are involved in frequent, critical dialogue with people who offer a wealth and variety of experiences in ways that do not fit homogeneous groupings found in K-12 and higher education

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institutions. Participants are also encouraged to share their knowledge widely and actively seek out ways to enlighten others. These forms of participation create pathways for what Gee (2000) terms "just in time learning" where collaborators are not "banking" (Freire, 1970/1993) information for eventual use but learning and engaging in skills and strategies that will have immediate relevancy to their lives. Hence, participants actively "participate" in building the resources and expertise for more self-efficacious lives.

McIntyre (2008) posits that there is a distinct difference between *involvement* in a PAR project and *participation* in a PAR project. Involvement is just merely being present while participation means authentic collaboration in the process and decision making of the way research is "conceptualized, practiced and brought to bear on the life-world" (McTarggart 1997 as quoted in McIntyre 2008 p. 15). McIntyre continues by highlighting the importance of the quality of participation. Highlighting the quality of participation means that it is essential for researchers and participants to work together "to define the most practical and doable ways for them to participate" (p. 15) as this will offer a meaningful connection to participants' lives and subsequently the quality of their participation will be greater.

Participation in PAR projects also helps to shape participants' academic and democratic skills as they are engaged with processes that build citizenry and democratic tasks to petition decision-makers and inform policy. O'Donoghue, Kirshner, and McLaughlin (2006) posit that participation in PAR provides "access to social-political, and economic spheres, decision making, within organizations that influence one's life and planning and involvement in public action" (p. 3). In the United States, democracy has been limited to voting, rallying, and an occasional social media post as a way of capturing the attention of decision-makers of a particular issue. Through PAR, participants uncover pertinent problems, collect quantitative and

qualitative data, interpret it, and use the data to disseminate to the public through writing, speaking, and audiovisual formats. This form of inclusive "participation" is empowering and leads to a transformation not only of project participants but also academic communities, policymakers, and constituencies alike as all are implicated in creating a democratic society.

Transformative Action

Such an experience is enlightening, inspiring, and transformative as participants are exposed to and learning things that have been absent or hidden from school curriculums throughout their primary and secondary careers. Some participants are very close to the issues, know precisely who the decision-makers are, and the ways to petition for their causes but may have previously lacked mutual support and platforms to voice such concerns. The "cultures of silence" (Goodman & Cocca, 2014) that have plagued marginalized communities are broken through PAR projects and the academic grounding of PAR projects also gives credence to less prominent causes.

PAR projects also help to build the academic skills of participants as there is a significant amount of writing involved in projects—both informational and reflective (Cahill, 2006; Wright, 2015). The dialogic aspect of PAR is a consciousness building process while writing serves as critical thinking and as a vital reflection tool to aid participants in processing information gathered. This process alone is transformative for participants because they have to shed deep-seated ideas to experience the transformation that occurs from working with a collective (O'Donoghue, Kirshner, & McLaughlin, 2006).

Lastly, PAR is transformative as it requires participants to craft counter-narratives, which requires an asset-based approach (Kirshner, 2015; Morrell, 2008) to complex problems.

The layers of the "culture of silence" peel back as many communities have grown to despise the things they cannot change and have in turn grown silent about particular causes. However, participating in dialogue and reflecting on the writings of others who have endured the same circumstances and have been plagued by the same policies requires participants to collectively channel their silence and frustrations into transformative action targeted toward the true culprits.

Teachers in PAR

Teachers' involvement in PAR projects is scarcely documented in the research literature. A literature search of participatory action research with teachers yielded two studies (McIntyre, 2008; Stapleton, 2018). McIntyre (1997, 2003, 2007) is the leading researcher on PAR with teachers. McIntyre engaged White middle-class and upper-class teachers in a PAR study to collectively and critically examine Whiteness, discover ways of making meaning about Whiteness, and recognize how Whiteness is implicated in oppressive educational practices that impede transformation. McIntyre found that "White people's lack of consciousness about their racial identities limit[ed] their ability to critically examine their own positions as racial being who are implicated in the existence and perpetuation of racism" (1997, p. 16).

Stapleton (2018) coined the term TPAR or teacher participatory action research. According to Stapleton, TPAR is an approach to PAR to "further the political reach of teacher research" (p. 2). Stapleton initiated the project's focus on food justice with the school district and recruited teachers through personal contacts and food justice events. Ultimately, Stapleton collaborated with four teachers who worked in a low-income urban school district. They collectively decided to pursue four separate action research studies while Stapleton played the role of participant-observer in the process. Stapleton's study yielded a cluster of challenges in hosting TPAR studies: gauging how to work with an overworked population, the extent at which

to intervene in teacher projects, the importance of working with teachers individually, and teachers opting to disclose their identities in their scholarship.

Dialogics and dialogue is a crucial feature of PAR studies with teachers as evidenced in this PAR study with teachers and the studies of McIntyre (1997) and Stapleton (2018). PAR privileges the voices and experiences of teachers and disrupts the "culture of silence" that pervades much of the teacher professional development models. Through dialogue, teachers take ownership of their own learning and create the infrastructure to promulgate their causes. Hollins (2006) offers structured dialogue as a method to engage teachers in a community of professional practice. Hollins suggests that this form of dialogue and community functions like a culture wherein teachers explicate transformative professional practices. Hollins (2006) adds:

> Structured dialogue is a tool that enabled teachers to share and examine the success and challenges they experienced in their classrooms. This collaborative process enabled teachers to contextualize their pedagogical practices to better support their students' learning. Ultimately, the teachers came to better understand the relationship among instruction, student characteristics and learning outcomes; to believe their students could learn; to accept responsibility for student learning outcomes; and to significantly improve learning outcomes for their students. (p. 198)

According to the literature, this dissertation is a novelty and significant contribution to research literature because it engages Black teachers in urban school districts to examine the many teaching and learning characteristics that comprise a soul. Additionally, this dissertation study is unapologetic in employing a theoretical framework grounded in Black scholarship to examine and explicate structural issues that affect Black students, Black communities, *and* Black teachers. Throughout this dissertation study, I position Black teachers as the oppressed for several reasons. First, through neoliberal educational reform efforts, Black teachers have been

blamed for the failure of Black student achievement, and their jobs are continually at risk by such teaching corps as Teacher for America and The New Teacher Project. Also, Black teachers are rarely invited to decision making and policymaking spaces but instead asked continuously to be unwavering enactors of policies. Lastly, Black teachers are not only the gatekeepers of education for Black students but also the gatekeepers that help steer Black families and communities toward educational resources available, and their status as communal gatekeepers has been largely overlooked.

Theoretical and Epistemological Origins of PAR

The origins of PAR are consistent with the theoretical and epistemological foundations of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Concepts and practices of scholars within the Black Intellectual Tradition are also consistent with PAR tenets and principles. Both Freire and scholars/activist in the Black Intellectual Tradition seek to politicize education for the oppressed.

Freirean Concepts

Freire (1970/1993) argues that the problem of oppression and the oppressed is a 'culture of silence' that permeates the relationships between dominant and marginalized groups. Those in dominant groups have relied on systems of political, economic, and social capital to maintain knowledge, wealth, and power for their own interests. At the heart of their interests is the exploitation of the marginalized for their power would be nil without exploitation Freire posits that liberation is not a gift; instead, liberation is something that requires action through a mutual process or *pedagogy of the oppressed*. Freire describes the pedagogy of the oppressed as "a pedagogy which must be forged with, not for, the oppressed in the incessant struggle to regain

their humanity" (p. 48) or defined another way as, "the pedagogy of people engaged in the fight for their own liberation" (p. 58).

Freire argues that oppressors maintain oppression through a "banking" concept of education or the teaching model that relies on depositing information for potential or eventual use and not education for inquiry, application, or authentic change. "The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world" (p. 73). Through this lens, teacher professional development functions as a form of banking in which teachers are asked to store copious amounts of information for potential and eventual use. Teachers sometimes infelicitously refer to professional development sessions as "sit-and-get" because it is the expectation that teachers show up for lengthy professional learning sessions despite the content irrelevance and nonapplication. Freire submits "problem-posing" as an educational instrument of liberation to disrupt oppression. Problem-posing is authentic liberation as a way of reflecting upon the world in order to transform it while building consciousness. Freire argues that "liberating education consists of acts of cognition, not transferals of information" (p. 79).

According to Freire (1970/1993), acts of cognition are represented in dialogics and dialogue. Dialogics is the essence of education, and dialogue is the practice of "theorizing about the experiences shared" (p. 17) amongst the oppressed. Dialogue is a practice and process which builds consciousness, or conscientização: "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (p. 35).

PAR, as a research approach aligns with Freirean concepts by defying the banking model as educative practice, promoting problem-posing, and inviting dialogue while privileging the

experiences and expertise of the oppressed, using dialogue to co-construct knowledge, and as a

pathway to build consciousness and inspire action.

The Alignment of Participatory Action Research and the Black Intellectual Tradition

Another foundational orientation of PAR is the persistent study and struggle by activists

for social transformation. Black activists have also struggled for liberation and humanity and

engage in a perpetual quest for knowledge through reading, writing, and speaking. This practice

is a hallmark of the Black Intellectual Tradition. I refer to pedagogues Carter G. Woodson, Ella

Baker, and Septima Clark to explicate the theoretical and epistemological tenets and principles

that PAR shares with the Black Intellectual Tradition.

Carter G. Woodson

Dagbovie (2007) offered readers a window into the pioneering work of Carter G.

Woodson. A Black scholar, the founder of Negro History Week, *The Negro History Bulletin*, and

the *Journal of Negro History*, Woodson stressed that "the study of African descendants be

scholarly, sound, creative, restorative, and directly relevant to the [B]lack community" (p. 44).

Woodson embodied what it meant to "return what you learn to the people" (King, 2017) in that

his mission was to "transform [B]lack history into a practical and popular medium for uplifting

[B]lacks and challenging racial prejudice" (Dagbovie, 2007, p. 4). This statement alone

represents Woodson's connection to historically marginalized and voiceless people. He

accomplished this by extending scholarship and knowledge development to the proletariat, lay

historians, ministers, business people, and by engaging teachers in the work of developing

academic content and disseminating transformative ideas and practices.

Dagbovie (2007) continued, Woodson advertised his book, *The Negro in Our History*, as a study for use in Black history clubs, elementary and high schools, and colleges and universities. Every year during Woodson's lifetime, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History held meetings in Black churches, community centers, and universities and high school auditoriums throughout the country. Woodson also invited lay people to attend conferences and present papers alongside credentialed scholars. In this way, Woodson met Black communities where they were and democratized the Black scholarly community. Woodson's actions illustrate the intentional collaboration, collective discovery, knowledge co-construction, and democratic elements also embodied in PAR. It was not enough for Woodson to hold knowledge alone, but for him knowledge and power must be shared for collective advancement.

According to Dagbovie (2007), Woodson made a case for Negro History Week in a pamphlet wherein he argued that Blacks knew practically nothing about their own history and stood in danger of being exterminated if left to the devices, or banking, of others. *The Negro History Bulletin* was a magazine Woodson initiated to reach broader audiences. The first issue of the *Bulletin* debuted in October 1937, and there were nine issues each year. There were several women on the editorial board of the *Bulletin*, and before long, the *Bulletin* served as a discussion board for teachers. Children were also invited to study the achievements of local Blacks, write profiles, and publish them in the journal. In one issue of the Bulletin, Woodson published a call to action for social, education and political change:

> To you then comes the challenges as to what will you do in building upon the foundation which they have laid. These people who civilization was marked by the kerosene lamp, the wash tub, the hoe, and the ox-cart, disappointed the prophets who say they would be exterminated; and on the contrary they enrolled themselves among the great….What will you do in the day of the moving picture, the radio, and the aeroplane? If we do not take hold where they left off and advance further in the service of truth and

justice, we are unworthy to claim descent from such a noble people (*Negro History Bulletin*, 1940, February, p. 79).

Woodson's efforts to advance Black history transformed not only adults and children during his lifetime, but also cemented the need for an entire month dedicated to Black education for generations to come.

Ella Baker

Ella Baker was a heroic, influential, Black woman engaged in the Civil Rights movement (ellabakercenter.org). She worked with several civil rights organizations, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and she was one of the founding organizers of the historic Mississippi Freedom Schools (Payne, 1997). Williamson (2013) explains that Freedom Schools were "designed to change a community by giving residents the tools to develop leaders and exercise their political power" (p. 25). Baker viewed the youth as a resource and an asset to the civil rights movement and dedicated her time to building their capacities and helped to form SNCC. Ransby (2003) detailed the life and work of Ella Baker and described her as a master teacher and resident griot who had a powerful intellectual presence and a moral and ethical compass. Baker promulgated classrooms without walls as she worked with students through didactic leadership as a teacher-activist. According to Ransby (2003), Baker's political philosophy emphasized the importance of tapping oppressed communities for the knowledge, strength, and leadership they carried within to construct models for social change. Arguably, Baker's political philosophy informed much of her praxis as Baker believed that teachers should use words workers understand. Baker also argued that teachers should respect and affirm the "intellectual capacity and political astuteness of

individuals who had no formal academic training or credentials" (Ransby, 2003, p. 363). In this way, Baker sought to interrupt cultures of silence within oppressed communities by using their knowledge for social and political change in the ways a PAR approach suggests.

Ransby (2003) described Baker as an "outsider within" as she was consciously aware of her knowledge and power but did not use, abuse, or exalt herself above those she laboriously worked to serve. Baker's teaching and political philosophies were aligned with Freirean liberatory education concepts, and Ransby (2003) argued Baker "undergirded by a deep and profound sense of connection to and love of humanity" (p. 372). This connection to and love of humanity Baker exuded is at the crux of PAR and fuels the critical studying of human freedom (King, 2011) required to engage teachers and advance Black communities.

Septima Clark

Septima Poinsette Clark displayed what Smith (2009) refers to as the "pedagogical tradition" of Black intellectualism. This means that her personal and professional life embodied service and acts that led to the education and transformation of all under her tutelage. Clark's pedagogical tradition also aligns with the tenets of PAR because her approaches foster intentional collaboration, problem-posing, social change, and political action.

Clark was a native South Carolinian raised by two parents who deeply valued education. Her father, a former enslaved person, never step foot into a schoolhouse. Instead his job was to take his plantation owner's daughter to school, wait all day for her studies, and transport her home. He vowed that his children would be educated. In fact, Clark said the only thing her father would scold them for is if they didn't want to go to school (Hall, Walker, Charron, Cline, & Clark, 2010). Clark's mother was raised in Haiti but boasted how she was never a servant. After

graduating high school, Clark began her 40-year teaching career. She was eventually fired by an all-White Charleston, South Carolina public school board for refusing to denounce her NAACP membership. Clark lamented that she was not going to make much fuss. Instead she wanted the public to see how a school board treated Black teachers (Hall, Walker, Charron, Cline, & Clark, 2010). One could argue that this strategic, well-thought-out approach to social change is how Clark approached her lifelong activism within the pedagogical tradition of the BIT.

Myles Horton, the founder of the Highlander Folk School, hired Clark as the Director of Workshops and she created literacy-based citizenship pedagogy designed to "eliminate illiteracy and get people ready to register and vote" (Hall, Walker, Charron, Cline, & Clark, 2010, p. 42). Clark believed that education should "train people to do their own talking" and that it was the community that dictated literacy course curriculum. Clark advocated for Esau Jenkins, a John's Island community leader, and Bernice Robinson, a Black beautician (Clark's niece) without formal education training, to be the first teachers of the Citizenship Schools adult literacy program. As a result, between 1957 and 1970 the Citizen Education Program's Citizenship Schools trained more than 5,000 people to become Citizenship School teachers and collectively they taught more than 25,000 people. Additionally, these programs resulted in 7,000 newly registered voters across the South.

Clark's strategizing extended to many aspects of her Black liberation and humanity work including how she strategized as a Black woman in, what some would argue, a hypermasculine Civil Rights movement. During her tenure with the NAACP, she petitioned for the equalization of Black teacher pay. She received affidavits from Black and White teachers to show disparate pay between Black and White teachers. Clark brought the case to Thurgood Marshall and in 1946, the NAACP won (Smith, 2019). Clark's approach and dedication to educating and

organizing is central to the Black Intellectual Tradition and a display of how Black teachers often strategize and teach from obscure political spaces. Her strategy for educating and organizing through literacy and citizenship training brought grant funding and high enrollment numbers to the citizenship schools.

This profound commitment to and love of Black children, Black people, and Black history displayed by Woodson, Baker, and Clark is also at the heart of the enlightening, liberating, and politicizing nature of PAR. The conscious raising efforts of these Black intellectuals are connected to and undergird the intentional collaboration, problem-posing, knowledge co-construction, solution advancing quest for social change and political action inherent in PAR.

Action Research or Participatory Action Research?

The participatory and transformative core principles of PAR point to the need for teachers' involvement in a PAR study as well as the benefits PAR engagement could have on the teaching profession and the communities teachers serve. Because this study examines the experiences, perceptions, and knowledge of teachers, it is essential not to ignore the differences between PAR and action research (AR). Action research and PAR operate within the same research tradition; however, there are distinct differences between the two methodologies. First, action research and participatory action research both give credence to the historically silenced and allow teachers to determine what counts as knowledge in the classroom. Action research is limited to the practices of teachers in classrooms and is contingent upon teacher inquiry solely for classroom use (Herr & Anderson, 2015). In this way, AR is singular in focus opposite from the ways PAR offers collective views of teachers. On the contrary, PAR is conducted as a

collaborative research study where decisions are made through the input of all participants and have the end goal of informing policy beyond the classroom (Herr & Anderson, 2015; McIntyre, 1997). The "P" in PAR includes liberating and politicizing knowledge and action that AR does not.

Because of teacher participation in this proposed PAR study, it is important to note the distinctions between action research and participatory action research. Action research and participatory action research both give credence to the historically silenced, and there are stark differences between the two. First, action research is limited to the practices of teachers in classrooms and does not add to the literature by producing new knowledge as PAR does through the inclusion of participants' experiential knowledge. Secondly, action research is contingent upon teacher inquiry and absent of student and community input, which adds to the collectivism of PAR. Action research only benefits classroom teachers and does not improve the experiences of students beyond the classroom or school building. Lastly, action research lacks sustainability as it is closely tied to grant funding and requires a great deal of time from teachers. As such, maintaining teacher engagement without funding is challenging, coupled with the time demands from teachers equates to teacher research with no action. On the other hand, PAR includes what Kirshner (2016) terms "legacy members" who can keep PAR projects in focus and flourishing amid inevitable personnel and staff changes inherent in education.

Challenges in Participatory Action Research

Such an engaged research methodology is not without challenges. Completing a PAR project as dissertation research is one of the challenges of PAR. Additionally, the university Institutional Review Board (IRB) process poses a challenge because it requires an institutional study clearance before the start of the research study. Doctoral students must submit meticulous

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applications complete with research plans, interview protocols, consent forms, data collection

methods, and proposed data analysis prior to beginning the research. Some argue this

institutional requirement detracts from the true essence of PAR because PAR participants are not

devising their own research study. The upside is that IRB applications can be revised throughout

the project. Kirshner (2015) argues that completing an IRB process before an investigation

commences may benefit a PAR study as it helps to "frame" the research and keep it on track.

Kirshner (2015) suggests university researchers "frame" the study as a way to keep the research

focused on the overall goal and tasks of a more extensive dissertation study. Framing does not

take away from the freedoms and participatory nature of PAR, it merely gives participants an

area of focus to better construct a collective research design, data collection methods, and data

analysis, and to establish an action plan for further implementation.

Other challenges that arise when conducting a PAR study include retaining participants

for the long haul, ownership of data and transcripts, and the continuation "action" once

participants phase out or burn out of the project site and, or research focus. Scholars have

recommended a few strategies to preempt these challenges. Van der Meulen (2011) suggests

providing participants with an interview transcript within a week of work sessions so that

participants will not forget points of dialogue. Discussing transcripts provides participants an

opportunity to edit sensitive or misrepresentative text. Van der Meulen (2011) and Kirshner

(2015) also suggest hosting courageous conversations very early in the project as a way of

building rapport and trust with participants as those who have been historically marginalized and

denied access may not have experienced the levels of collaboration in PAR and may be rightfully

skeptical. Regarding collective data analysis, van der Meulen (2011) suggests sending drafts of

written reports to participants with deadlines for feedback if a collaborative meeting is not

timely. These methods all suggest "encouraging participation but not forcing it…as successful tactic" (p. 1298).

Fox (2013) does not regard PAR as a methodology to create change and instead argues that PAR can be tokenistic; there is too much adult gatekeeping involved; dialogue is not formal enough to constitute research; she recommends more writing or worksheets as "formal productions of knowledge." Fox's study examined a study conducted with a small group of young people experiencing exclusion from school to understand their experiences and the impact on their education. Fox's PAR study did not follow the tenets of PAR outlined by many scholars, especially in creating a climate that honors and respects all participants. Fox did not start with community building to set a project purpose and norms for collective research, and, as a result, she misrepresented participants' freedoms as challenges. Fox (2013) argues that participants talking out of turn, negotiating, and challenging rules did not support the behavioral goals of the collective work. Fox's PAR challenges are the total opposite of Freirean concepts, which postulates that those behaviors actually represent the power of critical dialogue for consciousness building.

Participatory Action Research as Viable Research

PAR is administered as quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods studies. Quantitative studies collect and interpret statistical data and lack narratives of the people represented in the studies, while qualitative studies ask questions and confront topics using humanizing methods that give life to peoples' individual and collective experiences. Quantitative data is useful and sometimes necessary in PAR studies as statistical data draws participants to common issues while serving as a springboard to inform further qualitative data collection and action. PAR incorporates the counter-narratives of participants and their surrounding communities. Counter-

narratives are stories and arguments of historically marginalized people that dispute widely held beliefs (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, Matsuda, 1995). Counter-narratives are collected through qualitative research methods such as interviews, surveys, focus groups, participant observation, ethnography, and autoethnography.

PAR is a discursive, cyclical methodology in which data collection, data analysis, critique, and action are points of constant reflection. The constant reflexivity forces PAR facilitators and participants to rightfully grapple with the positionality and subjectivity of the researchers and participants (McIntyre, 2008). These processes create accurate, reliable, and adequately vetted research objectivity, validity, and reliability. Critics argue that PAR lacks objectivity and validity as it relies on the experiential knowledge of participants, and they are too close to the research. On the other hand, Fine (2008) posits that PAR requires a discursive journey or a "cycle of inquiry," which promotes strong objectivity. The discursive journey involves researchers working "diligently and self-consciously through their own positionalities, values, and predispositions, gathering as much evidence as possible from many distinct vantage points, all in an effort to not be guided" (p. 222) by dominant ideologies. She further argues that expert validity is achieved through "plural and subjugated expertise" that pulls from the collective and individual experiences of participants. This collective expertise helps to deepened data triangulation through "intentional and sustained deliberative processes" of dialogue, critique, writing, and reflection. Fine's last assertion pertains to generalizability, which requires data on large populations across varied sites. Generalizability is achieved in PAR as participants engage with larger audiences through data collection and dissemination.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

I am examining how teacher engagement through a participatory action research (PAR) approach expands and bares the souls of teachers. Again, Dottin (2009) and Misco and Shiveley (2007) argue that dispositions are a way of thinking, acting, and being that informs the judicious actions applied to practices, issues, and ideas as a teacher. Examining teacher judicious actions then requires a study of teacher souls. When designing this study, I often asked myself how does one study a teacher's soul? Examining one's disposition, attitude, beliefs, worldview, consciousness, mindset, knowledge, skills, or soul, requires a research methodology with prolonged engagement, a high level of comfort, a safe space to openly share fears, beliefs, and assumptions, and a space to work through discomfort and challenges – not only by the researcher, but peers as well. This research process would also require space and time for unlearning and relearning coupled with the opportunity to experience alliance with Black students and Black communities. The research methodology for accomplishing these goals was participatory action research (PAR). Qualitative or quantitative measures such as surveys or interviews would not have achieved the stated research goals. Gathering rich data, with the researcher as an insider and participant, required an engaged research process.

As mentioned in Chapter One, this study operates within a "double aim" approach (Fals Borda, 2001; McTaggart, 1997) with the dual goals of 1) introducing teacher co-researchers to a social and political realm from which they are largely excluded and absent and 2) providing co-researchers an opportunity for soul-searching to critique their miseducation, biases, and assumptions regarding issues that plague Black students and communities. Research suggests

that teachers' biased, uninformed, perceptions of students contributes to one such issue, the

school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon (Mallett, 2016; Raible & Irizarry, 2010), which was my

initial concern as I began to conceptualize this research study. Listening to the concerns of

parents and teachers, coupled with publicly available data and gaps in the research literature,

suggested the need for a collaborative focus on building teachers' souls. I employed a

participatory action research (PAR) methodology to answer the following research questions:

1. In what ways does participatory action research engage teachers to: a) bridge knowledge gaps, b) critically self-reflect on ideological thinking, and c) collaborate with communities they directly serve?

2. How do teachers demonstrate their knowledge, skills, mindset, consciousness, worldview, beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions, or souls, through a participatory action research process?

As mentioned in Chapter Two, PAR is not a prescriptive methodology with steps to follow,

but a framework that consists of several tenets or principles that govern the research process.

These tenets include intentional collaboration, knowledge co-construction, constant reflexivity,

equitable decision-making, problem-posing and social change and/or political action as outcomes

(see Figure 3.1). While this list is not exhaustive, it represents the tenets present in this research

study. Additionally, PAR is a qualitative research methodology that offers a methodological

framework to study how teachers can self-examine their knowledge and perceptions of Black

students, families and communities.

Intentional
Collaboration

Social Change
and/or
Political
Action

Knowledge
Co-
Construction

Problem
Posing

Constant
Reflexivity

Equitable
Decision-
Making
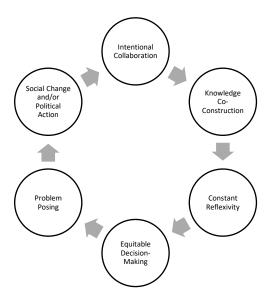
Figure 3.1: Tenets of Participatory Action Research

At the outset, I made clear that this research was a collaborative process and I was actively

learning from co-researchers throughout the process. Cahill (2007) asserts, "'Deep' participatory

research with, rather than on participants requires that we take seriously the processes of

collaboration and building a community of researchers" (p. 301). Using this knowledge, I was a

facilitator of teaching the components and data methods of PAR, and an active participant in the

process working side-by-side with participants.

As noted previously, few education researchers have conducted a PAR study with

teachers (McIntyre, 1997; Stapleton, 2018). Stapleton (2018) denotes the status of urban teachers

as "marginalized by association" because of how teachers are blamed for the low academic

achievement levels of historically marginalized students experience, despite lawmaker's failure

to name the root causes such of education performance disparities. However, as an alternative

PAR engages teachers as active participants in a potentially empowering alternative in a cyclical,

reflexive research process as researchers rather than objects of study. This process also invites

participants as stakeholders in the process and subsequent actions. Yet, there is limited PAR

scholarship with teacher participants at the center of the research process (McIntyre, 1997;

Stapleton, 2018). Thus, this study not only adds to PAR research literature but intends to broaden

the education research literature to include Black and urban teachers in the South as PAR

researchers.

Arguably, as a theoretical underpinning, BIT is consistent with PAR as the BIT

highlights what is right within Black communities and PAR is a prescription for generating more

possibilities. Additionally, PAR offers a process for Black intellectuals/researchers to be

unapologetically *descriptive, corrective*, and *prescriptive* in our quest for freedom and justice.

The BIT frames this study and offers a clear guide for designing the research study, gathering

data, and analyzing the findings. The Black Intellectual Tradition denotes the importance of

starting the intellectual journey with the knowledge of Black scholars and using this knowledge

to correct narratives that offer disparaging stories. The BIT directly aligns with PAR in this

regard as it privileges the voices of those relegated to the sidelines.

Positionality and Role of the Researcher

My knowledge and actions have not always aligned with my role as an urban education

teacher. I now realize that in my position as a classroom literacy teacher, I pushed a student out

of quality instructional time and into an alternative school. I started my teaching career as a

substitute teacher—a recent college graduate with no formal teacher training. I was assigned to

teach reading in a classroom where I was the third teacher for the school year. My students were

disenfranchised, historically marginalized, low-income, students of color infelicitously labeled,

"Title One, Special Education (TIE)" students. I quickly realized how many of my students lived

on the "east side" of the train tracks. The "east side" was a hyper-segregated neighborhood

located opposite million-dollar homes. The entire area was located less than a mile from world famous beaches. Most of my students' parents worked in the travel, hospitality, and service industry as cooks, waitresses, hotel cleaning crew members, and airport security. Many of my students' parents migrated to the oceanside American town in search of economic and social stability. Many had often escaped the turmoil of their respective countries. Teachers in the school were aware of students' family status and, subsequently, treated TIE students differently from the students whose parents drove them to school in luxury vehicles. This disparate treatment reflected an ideology mentioned in Chapter One in which school staff often blame parents and communities for their own oppression without critiquing the social, political, and economic factors that drive families to look for jobs and educational opportunities for their children.

I, too, was indoctrinated into this ideology that justified treating affluent and historically divested kids differently. I confronted my lack of understanding years later when I read several books and articles during my doctoral studies that compelled me to reconcile certain contradictions in my views of poverty, intrinsic motivation, academic achievement, and educational and social policy. The biggest reconciliation is the fact that my ignorance and actions may have led a student into an academic life of labels instead of one with promise. For this reason, I chose to pursue a participatory action research (PAR) project for my dissertation research to engage teachers in problematizing their ideologies as frontline responders in the quest to provide quality education to Black students.

In the interest of transparency, as a classroom teacher, I was gravely unaware of and lacked culturally informed pedagogical practices to grapple with my complicity in the production of educational inequities. During my classroom teaching years, professional development centered on classroom management, academic content, and compliance with federal, state,

district, and school policies and mandates. Our school principal purchased several copies of "A Framework for Understanding Poverty" by Ruby Payne (2005) as a schoolwide book study. She then hosted a series of conversations and lecture screenings about the book for teachers and staff to unpack the text.

However, I am a Black woman who grew up in a low-income family. My grandfather was "pushed out" of an education as the goals of education did not fit the economic requirements for his life, survival, and family circumstances. Several of my cousins were suspended or expelled from school for the same reasons, and a lack of educational and economic options has resulted in their demise or lengthy prison sentences for nonviolent offenses. When I was a classroom teacher, I used personal days to attend juvenile court as a character witness for my students who were mistreated and mischaracterized by law enforcement officials. While teaching, I considered myself a true ally of my students by any means necessary. However, I did not understand how the lack of knowledge about the STPP shaped by own worldview.

One of my former students, Jacquavious Brickhouse (pseudonym), was an American born, Haitian American student who was part of a very large family. Brickhouse was a very intelligent young man who was often disruptive in class and brought unnecessary attention to himself. He not only caught the attention of his classroom teachers but school administrators as well. For this reason, school administrators, school resource officers and suspecting adults on campus heavily surveilled him. Brickhouse had received several disciplinary infractions that ranged from after-school detention to in-school suspension to lengthy out-of-school suspensions. His teachers and administrators lacked the knowledge to effectively provide Brickhouse with productive alternatives and use his intelligence for the benefit of his classmates and his advancement.

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When students misbehaved, we implemented practices such as: "You take my time and I will take yours." Put simply, every minute a student was disruptive was a minute the student owed us at the end of the class period. It was a way of managing behaviors without stopping instruction or causing a classroom disturbance. We explained to Brickhouse that every minute he was disruptive would be an additional minute that he "owed" us when the bell rang for dismissal. We thought this was a fair and equitable practice. Brickhouse was disruptive on a day when several of his teachers were present in one room and had been exhausted by his words and actions. This day, Brickhouse decided to go against our agreement and walk out without paying his time debt. Instead of allowing Brickhouse to exit at his own will, we blocked the doorway and the only classroom exit. He plummeted through our barrier, knocking a teacher to the floor. According to the disciplinary handbook, Brickhouse now created a criminal offense punishable by a lengthy suspension or expulsion. Brickhouse was not only suspended from school and transferred to an alternative education school.

This one incident may have commenced a pathway toward negative school experiences and shaped the remainder of Brickhouse's academic trajectory. Mallett (2016) posits such encounters takes otherwise highly intelligent students out of nurturing environments and move them directly into spaces rife with negative influences. Brickhouse had a contentious relationship with school ever since. The next academic year, his younger brother Jaquan (pseudonym) was a student of mine and I inquired about Jacquavious daily. This experience highlights teacher complicity in systemic processes that damage students' reputations and dampen their attitudes towards schooling. Had we known the long-term consequences of this incident, our classroom policies and the zero tolerance policies of the school district, would we have acted differently?

This question was not only the catalyst of my dissertation but also a question that I sought to answer through this PAR study.

While my previous direct involvement has made me very sensitive to the perils of exclusionary discipline policies, practices, and the lack of rich, academic experiences for Black students, I understand that this experience impacts my subjectivity during the research process. Again, the nature of participatory action research is collaborative and requires equitable decision making. The university researcher is not the only one at the table with knowledge of discipline policies and practices. Teachers, parents, and community members bring a great deal of knowledge, experiences, and resources to the problem-posing, data collection, and analysis phases of the research. It was very important that I not only acknowledged my role as the facilitator but also maintain the integrity of PAR as a research methodology.

I share these reflections not only to chronicle my background prior to this research but also to show that I was an active participant in this PAR process, often learning, reflecting and growing with the co-researchers. I approached this research as an insider with emic understandings as I am a Black woman teacher who has been both complicit in the problem of teachers' perceptions and who has also had successful teaching experiences with marginalized youth and communities. However, parts of my identity as a researcher were very privileged as I was a graduate researcher with access to an abundance of resources and I had the most prized possession during this process: time. Time to read, write, and constantly situate our study within the research literature, while the research participants were underpaid and overworked teachers without time to care adequately for themselves or to spend time developing their own personal desires, priorities, or hobbies. This reality presented me with emic and etic perspectives at times that I had to yield to. For example, as an insider during this process, I was intentional about

honoring our time together. Honoring our time together meant we started on time and ended at the agreed upon time regardless if there were more agenda items. Sometimes, a research participant would arrive late which caused a delay in starting our agenda and this sometimes caused a rift within our sessions. As a result, we agreed to read articles, website, or social media posts at home. When every member did not honor this agreement, I would not get upset or annoyed, but we instead found a way to complete our reading collaboratively during our session times. My insider role allowed me to display compassion and understanding while as an outsider I saw this as a conflict with our schedule.

Recruitment

Three practicing educators were recruited to participate as co-researchers. I used informal networks to recruit co-researchers. One co-researcher is a longtime associate and one of my Facebook friends. She convened and hosted monthly book clubs featuring discussions of critical education texts which I was invited to join. I recruited other co-researchers using a flyer – that I disseminated in person at book club meetings – detailing the goals, time commitments, and compensation for participation in the study (see Appendix B).

Given the goals of the research – to engage teachers in a community-centered PAR process – and the time restraints of doctoral research, a careful strategy was required to recruit co-researchers who could commit for the duration of the study but who also met these following research criteria: 1) three or more years of classroom experience, 2) work in an Atlanta metropolitan schools district, and 3) have attended a PBIS training.

Co-researchers contacted the researcher to express interest and schedule a one-on-one meeting date, time, and location at which point the researcher shared the informed consent,

provided participants time to read the entire consent form, ask questions and agree or disagree to participate in the study without coercion (See Appendix C). Co-researchers were compensated with a $200 gift card during the 2017-2018 academic year, and $100 gift card during the 2018-2019 academic year to offset research transportation and parking costs and to honor their contribution and time to the study.

Study Co-Researchers

There were four co-researchers, including myself, from the beginning until the end of this study. The chart below details the characteristics of each co-researcher, including:

1) Name (pseudonym);
2) Race;
3) Gender;
4) Age;
5) Co-Researcher's teaching subject and certification area;
6) College(s) attended;
7) (Grand)Mother's occupation;
8) Neighborhood or community of residence;
9) Teaching philosophy that drives their way of being and classroom instruction; and
10) Future goals (see Table 3.1).

I am detailing this information for transparency and to show the essential identity characteristics of each co-researcher signals their teaching identities and souls before participating in the study.

Table 3.1: Co-Researcher Characteristics

Name (pseudonym)	Brianna	Janae	Nichole	Thais
Race	White	Black	Black	Black
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female
Age	<30	<30	>40	<40

Subject & certification area(s)	1. Elementary Education 2. Reading Endorsement 3. ESOL Endorsement 4. Curriculum & Instruction	1. Early Childhood Education 2. Reading Endorsement 3. ESOL Endorsement 4. Curriculum & Instruction	1. Elementary Education 2. Gifted Education 3. Science Endorsement 4. Special Education General Education ▪ Special Education ▪ Science ▪ Mathematics ▪ Reading ▪ Language Arts ▪ Social Science	1. English Language Arts 2. Reading 3. Reading Specialist
College(s) attended	▪ University of Georgia ▪ Valdosta State University ▪ University of West Georgia	▪ University of Georgia ▪ Valdosta State University ▪ University of West Georgia	▪ Florida A & M University ▪ Temple University	▪ Florida International University ▪ Barry University ▪ Georgia State University
(Grand)mother's occupation	Elementary Education Teacher	Preschool Teacher	Elementary Education Teacher	Daycare Center Director
Neighborhood/ Community residence	College Park, Atlanta, Georgia	Hammond Park, Atlanta, Georgia	Fayetteville, Georgia	Perkerson Park, Atlanta, Georgia
Teaching philosophy	1. Culturally relevant lesson planning and engagement 2. Relationship building	1. Teaching is a way to give back to the community 2. Empowering students with options	1. All kids can learn 2. Obligation to prepare students for life	1. Every child has a right to know thyself through reading and authentic engagement
Future goals	▪ Turnaround Principal ▪ College Professor	▪ School Superintendent ▪ Policy Expert	▪ Mother of 3 successful, college-educated, thriving children	▪ Tenure-track Assistant Professor

Procedures

PAR is an inquiry-based methodology that does not prescribe a sequence of events which to adhere. I organized the research process into four phases: 1) Community Mapping, 2) Community Building as Knowledge Co-Construction, 3) Teacher Inquiry and 4) Teacher Transformation and Advocacy (see Figure 3.2). While four phases are identified here, PAR operates iteratively through a continuous cycle that involved data dialogue, learning, data collection, reflection, and sociopolitical action. For example, recurring topics and information gathering during Phase One Community Mapping activities informed the topics for Phase Two focus groups, which also served as learning opportunities for the participants that generated data.

During Phases Three and Four, the co-researchers collectively reflected on previous activities and information to design and conduct an inquiry process. The study-within-the study (see Figure 3.4) constituted a form of sociopolitical action that contributed to and informed the overall findings of the research study (see *Appendices D, E, F, G, H and I*). I was a participant observer and researcher throughout each phase of the entire process (see Figure 3.3)
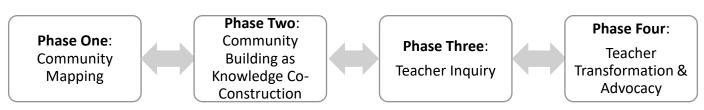
Figure 3.2: PAR Phases
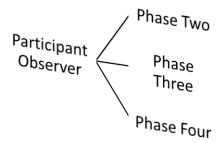
Figure 3.3: Participant Observer
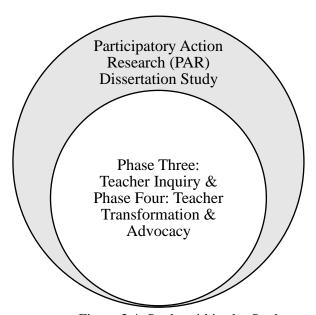
Figure 3.4: Study-within-the-Study

Phase One—Community Mapping. Jackson and Bryson (2018) define community

mapping as "a way to identify local assets, networks, and opportunities in a community" (p.

111). Additionally, community mapping helps to contribute to an understanding of social,

economic, political, and educational conditions that impact students and families of the

community (Jackson & Bryson, 2018). During Phase One of this dissertation research and with

the Black Intellectual Tradition framing my process, I used community mapping as a research

tool to plot sociocultural and sociopolitical gems within our research site. During this phase, I

collected observational and anecdotal data when I attended several advocacy, Neighborhood

Planning Unit (NPU), and informational meetings within the community of the research site. I

also attended events and meetings of a local, grassroots parent advocacy group, Gwinnett Parent

Coalition to Dismantle the School-to-Prison Pipeline or Gwinnett SToPP (see Appendix A),

whose work focuses on equipping students and parents with tools to dismantle the school-to-

prison pipeline. I recorded these observational and anecdotal data through journaling.

Gwinnett SToPP hosted monthly meetings on the first Friday of each month to parse and

discuss the local school district's discipline handbook. The focus of each meeting was aligned to

a specific section of the handbook to build deep knowledge while soliciting opinions,

experiences, and expertise of meeting attendees. Those present at each meeting included: state

department of education officials, school district personnel, parents, public interest attorneys,

college professors and activists. There were never any teachers present, however. The people

who I thought had the most to gain and the most to offer to this process were not present. In my

opinion, their absence was palpable as they are the first responders and the first line of defense

for students and families. While teachers' absence and their missing input were a lack for

Gwinnett SToPP, the organization was still an asset and resource for classroom teachers

throughout the metropolitan region.

Through my constant attendance at these meetings, Gwinnett SToPP became an ally and

community partner to this dissertation research and the organization helped to guide the research

by providing quantitative data, grassroots organizing insight, and entrees into other educational,

political, community and social justice organization. The leadership of Gwinnett SToPP and I

established a partnership. We agreed upon and executed a Memorandum of Understanding

(MOU). Through the partnership, the co-Executive Director of Gwinnett SToPP introduced me to a host of community organizations with deep networks and social justice wins for Black students (see Table 3.2). Gwinnett SToPP hosted the parent-school focus group that I organized during Phase Two, purchased lunch for all participants, and provided gas cards of $10 to each parent participant.

Table 3.2: List of Gwinnett SToPP Introductions

Gwinnett SToPP	Southern Education Foundation
	Public Education Matters Georgia
	Journey for Justice Alliance
	Alliance to Reclaim our Schools
	Ahmadiyya Muslim Community - Georgia Chapter
	Interfaith Children's Movement
	Georgia Legal Services Program
	Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation
	Communities for Just Schools Fund
	Dignity in Schools Campaign
	Teachers Unite

Phase Two—Community Building as Knowledge Co-Construction. During this phase, I organized structured opportunities to "break the ice," so that we could get to know each other and share their personal and professional experiences. The phrase "community building" represents the intentional acts of building trust, support and comradery while learning the strengths and weaknesses of each co-researcher. Community building created a safe space to be vulnerable and ask questions, tease out assumptions, fears and biases and grow as critically conscious educators without fear of retaliation or retribution. Phase Two represents Murrell's (2000) theory that teachers must be prepared through community-dedicated and urban-focused experiences as well as engaging in the "right" context of professional development.

Knowledge Co-Construction is a natural extension of community building in that the more we learned about each other's personal and professional experiences and expertise, the more we were able to grow our individual knowledge bases and connect to our individual understandings. Knowledge co-construction involved listening, speaking, viewing, and sharing. During this phase, study co-researchers engaged in structured activities to spur discussion to build community. This process allowed us to learn more about each other's individual strengths and weaknesses and learn more about what drives our education identities and philosophies. Co-researchers explored several educational issues rooted in community perspectives. Co-researchers received resources—websites, readings, and short videos—to contextualize their understanding of sociopolitical, cultural and structural factors impacting their students and families. Co-researchers had several opportunities to learn from documentaries, readings, roundtable discussions with local community organizations and parents, and field trips to organizing events and documentary screenings (see Table 3.3).

Phase Two consisted of eleven (11) 3-hour sessions from September 2017 until January 2018 that included focus group conversations and field trips. Nine sessions were hosted at Georgia State University, College of Education & Human Development, Department of Educational Policy Studies, one session was a field trip to a community forum hosted by Gwinnett SToPP. One was a screening of the documentary, *For Akheem*, at a local independent theatre in the large urban Southeastern city. All co-researchers were present for each session except for one in October 2017 (one co-researcher had a previously scheduled event). We collectively decided to go forward with the session versus rescheduling despite the absence of one member.

The sessions hosted at Georgia State University were held in a conference room in the Department of Educational Policy Studies. The conference room is equipped with a dry erase board, dry erase markers, dry eraser, a smart television display with computer capabilities. The smart television was connected to a digital server with digital connectivity. There was an 8-person dark mahogany wood conference table with multiple chairs. The conference room was next door to the department's break room equipped with a kitchenette with a sink, microwave, refrigerator, cabinets, and water fountain. Directly adjacent to the conference room was the women's restroom and a hallway to quickly access the elevators and stairwell.

Seven (7) Phase Two focus group sessions centered around specific recurring topics during Phase One community mapping activities: school-to-prison pipeline, Black community schools, African-American Vernacular English (AAVE), Black girl pushout, restorative justice practices, school segregation, and the treatment of parents (see Table 3.3). Research suggests that teachers lack scholarly knowledge about these issues (Delpit, 2006; Morris, 2019) not from their own doing but the inability of professional development and in-service to address these issues and the lack of time school administrative duties create for teachers to engage with such topics.

Co-researchers received $300 total in MasterCard gift cards as compensation each for their participation and contributions to the study. The researcher and Gwinnett SToPP funded the compensation.

Phase Three—Teacher Inquiry—is the process through which our teacher research collective collaboratively decided on and developed a research agenda using our new knowledge and expertise of sociopolitical issues plaguing Black students and Black communities. There were ten sessions during this phase, three of which were data collection sessions for our teacher

research collective. The planning sessions during this phase lasted approximately three hours and were hosted at Georgia State University and online via WebEx platform.

Co-researchers had semi-structured opportunities to intentionally and collectively engage in dialogue that allowed us to co-construct meaning of the previous sessions. This dialogue showcased our collective voice, expertise and leadership. More specifically, co-researchers reviewed select Phase Two session transcripts, reflection logs, and publicly available data to explore what our initial thinking was, what we have learned, and how we could use our new knowledge for the benefit of Black students and communities.

Initially the research study was presented broadly as a study of "school pushout" dynamics and teachers' complicity within the school-to-prison pipeline as a way not to dictate what our collective study agreement would and should be. During Phase Two sessions, co-researchers read research literature, watched films, and participated in community group forums that focused on the web of complex policies and practices that comprise the school-to-prison pipeline. Through our iterative reflection and discussions, we surmised that we in fact embody the characteristics of teachers who are allies of Black students and Black communities. Gradually, we recognized an economic, political, and social phenomenon that made an alliance with Black students and Black communities increasingly harder at our research site: gentrification.

Collectively we decided to research a concept we termed, "The New School Pushout," which is the intersection of gentrification and urban education reform in a historically Black and marginalized area of the research site. After successful completion of CITI training, we collectively designed a research study-within-the-study. Next, we submitted a review request to the human subject Institutional Review Board at Georgia State University that included

recruitment procedures, an interview protocol, and informed consent documentation (see Appendix E). The purpose of our research – as both inquiry and action – was to examine the impact of gentrification and urban education reform in the Southwest quadrant of the research site. Our research questions included, but were not limited to the following: 1) How would you describe any changes happening in your school and neighborhood? 1a) How do you feel about and/or what do you think about those changes? 2) Where do you see yourself and your family in the changes currently happening in your school and neighborhood? The study included three listening exchanges with distinct communities throughout the Southwest quadrant of the research site. A listening exchange afforded the opportunity to listen and learn from community members while exchanging information they may not have been aware of (see Appendix E). A community listening exchange is a reciprocal process of information gathering and sharing among community members present (King, J.E., personal communication, April 22, 2018).

During summer 2018, we hosted three community listening exchanges to examine how gentrification and urban education reform intersect in the Southwest quadrant of the research site. The first exchange took place in an in-town neighborhood of the research site in the living and dining room of a renovated house listed for sale. Participants included homeowners, renters, teachers, students, real estate professionals and investors looking to purchase in a rapidly gentrifying Atlanta neighborhood. The second exchange was hosted in a neighborhood of Westside Atlanta in the living room of a family new to Atlanta. White and biracial nuclear families with school aged children comprised the entire audience. The third and final exchange happened through a longstanding nonprofit organization and was convened in the dining room of a house converted into an after-school space and office. The participants were all Black women with children or grandchildren who attended the local public charter school. The ages of our

participants at each listening session ranged between twelve to eighty years old and were either Black or White.

Phase Four—Teacher Transformation and Advocacy—is the post-inquiry action phase of the study. Teacher Transformation refers to the double aim of this PAR study. There were fourteen (14) sessions during this phase, which included academic presentations, community presentations, and opportunities to share our research in academic journals.

During this phase, by learning from each other as equal, co-researchers through our action research collective, we were able 1) to witness a shift in our own understandings of the social and political realm from which we have been largely excluded and 2) to further critique our miseducation, biases, and assumptions regarding issues that plague Black students and communities. The process included collaboratively analyzing research data and deciding to create two research products: an academic journal article and a community-facing report designed to inform the public regarding gentrification and urban education reform seen through a teacher lens. We also presented our findings at four venues, two of which we were invited to: The 13th Annual Sources of Urban Educational Excellence Conference, and A Black Education Network (ABEN) Regional Conference, as well as the URBAN Colorado Node Conference on Place and Displacement, and Clark Atlanta University Department of Political Science Policy Seminar.

Date	PAR Phase	Session Topic/Focus	Session Description	Session Text(s)/Film(s)
2017				
08/26/2017			One-on-one interview with Janae	
08/26/2017			One-on-one interview with Brianna	
09/02/2017			One-on-one interview with Nichole	
09/09/2017	Phase 2	School-to-Prison Pipeline	Focus Group	Office for Civil Rights. (2014). Civil Rights Data Collection: Data Snapshot (School Discipline Report). Granastein, S., Reed, L. & Rowley, R. (Producers & Directors). (2016). America Divided [*Television Series*]. United States: EPiX.com
09/23/2017	Phase 2	Black Community Schools	Focus Group	The Ciesla Foundation (Producer). Kempner, A. (Director). (2015). *Rosenwald* [Motion picture]. (Available from www.rosenwaldfilm.org)
10/07/2017	Phase 2	African American Vernacular English (AAVE)	Focus Group	Delpit, L. (1997). The real Ebonics debate: What should teachers do? Rethinking Schools, 12(1). Retrieved from: https://www.rethinkingschools.org/articles/the-real-ebonics-debate-power-language-and-the-education-of-african-american-children. Wheeler, R. S. (2008). Becoming adept at code-switching. *Educational Leadership*, 65(7), 54-58. Gayles, J. (Producer & Director). (2014). *The E-Word: Ebonics, Race and Language Politics* [Motion picture]. (Available from www.ewordfilm.com)
10/21/2017	Phase 2	Parent Organizing School-to-Prison Pipeline	Gwinnett SToPP Field Trip	
11/04/2017	Phase 2	Review & Reflection	Focus Group	
11/12/2017	Phase 2	Black Girl Pushout	Documentary screening Field Trip	Annamma, S. A., Anyon, Y., Joseph, N. M., Farrar, J., Greer, E., Downing, B., & Simmons, J. (2019). Black girls and school discipline: The complexities of being overrepresented and understudied. *Urban Education*, 54(2), 211-242. Blake, J. J., Butler, B. R., Lewis, C. W., & Darensbourg, A. (2011). Unmasking the inequitable discipline experiences of urban Black girls:

				Implications for urban educational stakeholders. *The Urban Review*, *43*(1), 90-106. Boyd, I. (Producer), & Levine, J. S. & Van Soest, L. (Directors). (2018). *For Akeem* [Motion picture]. (Available from www.forakheemfilm.com)
11/18/2017	Phase 2	Restorative Justice Practices	Focus Group	Teachers Unite. (2013). Growing Fairness Screening Guide. Retrieved from: https://teachersunite.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/GrowingFairnessScreeningGuide_1.pdf Teachers Unite (Producer & Director). (2016). Growing Fairness [Motion picture]. (Available from www.teachersunite.org/resources/film)
12/02/2017	Phase 2	Parent-School Relationships	Focus Group	Choi, J. A. (2017). Why I'm not involved: Parental involvement from a parent's perspective. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *99*(3), 46-49. Fogelman, D. (Writer), & Ficarra, G., Requa, J., & Olin, K. (Directors). (November 17, 2017). The Most Disappointed Man [*Television series episode*]. In. D. Fogelman (Producer) *This Is Us*. Los Angeles, CA: 20th Century Fox Television.
2018				
01/06/2018	Phase 2		Collective transcript analysis	
01/20/2018			Focus Group	
01/25/2018	Phase 2		Focus group w/ Founder of Committed to Communities	
02/19/2018	Phase 3		Focus Group: WebEx session	
03/25/2018	Phase 3		Collective research planning	Jacobs, S. (2016). The Use of Participatory Action Research within Education--Benefits to Stakeholders. *World Journal of Education*, *6*(3), 48-55. McIntyre, A. (2003). Participatory action research and urban education: Reshaping the teacher preparation process. *Equity &Excellence in Education*, *36*(1), 28-39.

				MacDonald, C. (2012). Understanding participatory action research: A qualitative research methodology option. *The Canadian Journal of Action Research*, *13*(2), 34-50.
				Stapleton, S. R. (2018). Teacher participatory action research (TPAR): A methodological framework for political teacher research. *Action Research*, 0(0), 1-18.
04/21/2018	Phase 3		Collective research discussion	
05/19/2018	Phase 3		Collective research discussion	
06/02/2018	Phase 3		Collective Research Session: Pittsburgh Listening Session	
06/09/2018	Phase 3		Collective research discussion	
06/23/2018	Phase 3		Collective research discussion	
06/28/2018	Phase 3		Collective research discussion	
07/14/2018	Phase 3		Collective Research Session: Washington Park Listening Session	
09/01/2018	Phase 4		Collective research discussion	
09/15/2018	Phase 4		Collective research discussion	
09/27/2018	Phase 3		Collective Research Session: Stewart Center Listening Session	
09/29/2018	Phase 4		Collective research discussion	
10/13/2018	Phase 4		Collective research discussion	
10/20/2018	Phase 4		Collective Action Session: 13th Annual Sources of Urban Educational Excellence Conference	

12/07/2018	Phase 4		Collective research discussion	
12/21/2018	Phase 4		Collective research discussion	
12/22/2018	Phase 4		Collective research discussion	
2019				
01/11/2019	Phase 4		Collective research discussion	
02/07/2019	Phase 4		Collective Action Session: URBAN Colorado	
02/08/2019	Phase 4		Collective Action Session: URBAN Colorado	
02/09/2019	Phase 4		Collective Action Session: URBAN Colorado	
03/23/2019	Phase 4		Collective research discussion	
05/11/2019	Phase 4		Collective research discussion	
10/19/2019	Phase 4		Collective research discussion	
10/27/2019	Phase 4		Collective research discussion	
10/29/2019	Phase 4		Collective Action Session: Clark Atlanta University Political Science Department Seminar	

Table 3.3: Components of PAR Phases

Data Collection

     I used semi-structured interviews, conversational focus groups, participant observation, journal entries and artifacts as data collection methods during this study (see Table 3.4). A semi-structured interview is qualitative research method in which the researcher prepares a list of structured questions but does not adhere to the rigidity that structured interviews sometimes follow (Roulston, 2010). A semi-structured interview allows the research to explore topics or themes that may arise during the conversation.

Table 3.4: Data Collection

Research Questions	PAR Phase	Data Sources	Rationale for Data Source
In what ways does participatory action research engage teachers to a) bridge knowledge gaps, b) critically self-reflect on ideological thinking and c) collaborate with communities they directly serve?	Phase One Phase Two Phase Three Phase Four	- Participant observation data - Focus group transcripts - Journal entries	- Focus group transcripts illustrated how participants made meaning of new knowledge against their current understandings. Focus group data also captured our analysis of community listening exchanges. - Participant observation data allowed the researcher to chart the process and transformation of each participant individually and as a research collective.
How do teachers demonstrate their knowledge, skills, mindset, consciousness, worldview, beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions, or souls, through a participatory action research process?	Phase Three Phase Four	- Participant observation data - Focus group transcripts - Listening exchange transcripts - Journal Entries - Presentations - Academic journal article	- Focus group transcripts illustrated how participants made meaning of new knowledge against their current knowledge and professional and personal experiences. - Journal entries, presentations, and academic journal article demonstrated how co-researchers' mindset, skills, consciousness, worldview, beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions, or souls, shifted throughout the participatory action research process. - Participant observation data allowed the researcher to chart the process and transformation of each participant individually and as a research collective

Focus groups are a qualitative data collection method that allows the researcher to interview a group of individuals simultaneously as it capitalizes on discourse among research participants. Group interaction is the core of focus groups and it is a non-discriminatory method to encourage participation of research participants who are encouraged to exchange narratives, validate experiences, dissent and ask questions. According to Kitzinger (1995), "Focus groups are particularly useful for exploring people's knowledge and experiences and can be used to examine not only what people think but how they think and why they think that way" (p. 1). It is also important to note that "people's knowledge and attitudes are not entirely encapsulated in reasoned responses to direct questions," so focus groups offer the researcher opportunities to explore attitudes, needs, misconceptions, and biases of participants. The coalescing of the group's members was "naturally occurring" and homogeneous as it was comprised of individuals who have an existing professional relationship with the graduate researcher as the only outlier.

Focus group sessions were conducted in an environment outside of participants' daily work location which offered participants a safe place to share our personal and professional philosophies, biases, misconceptions, and assumptions without fear of retaliation. For the teachers as employees in a right-to-work state this was an important consideration. Sessions were conducted while seated at a round table in a small conference room with a 10-person maximum capacity. The conference room was equipped with a whiteboard, a touchscreen, smart television display, networked internet access, comfortable heating and air, and a restroom nearby. During each session, I provided a personally selected lunch. The sessions were scheduled for two and a half hours but averaged three hours each. Each focus group was recorded and transcribed.

I was an active participant in this PAR study and used participant observation to collect data not only about the process but also about myself. Participant observation is a qualitative data collection method "in which a researcher takes part in the activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture" (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, p. 1). It is important to note, that my participant-observation was grounded in the Black Intellectual Tradition (BIT) meaning that I privileged the identities, values, practices, and experiential knowledge of my [Black] co-researchers. This meant that my notes captured the ways in they practiced liberating and humanizing work. In the context of this study, data collection was limited to our focus groups, field trips, online discussions, and journal entries in which I was able to capture my observations, my thinking, and my reflections during the process.

Prior (2003), asserts "documents make things visible and traceable" (p. 87). To show evidence of teacher voice in action, I collected artifacts throughout this process to document evidence of our collective work. The artifacts include, flyers of our presentations, pictures from our presentations and work sessions, as well as PowerPoint slides of our community listening exchanges.

Data Analysis

Ezzy (2002) asserts, "the aim of qualitative research is to allow the voice of the 'other,' of the people being researched, to inform the researcher" (p. 64) and "the voice of the 'other'" is inherent within PAR approaches. To maintain the integrity of PAR, data analysis commenced at the outset of the study and consisted of several steps. First, to organize such a large and complex data set, I utilized Microsoft Word and aptly titled each transcript to correspond with each session. At the end of each session, I read the transcript to maintain an iterative, interpretive

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process to synthesize our sessions. During this step, I also wrote analytic memos to capture and accumulate my initial thoughts of the process and as a first step of coding. At the commencement of the study, I organized the transcripts to correspond with the four phases of the PAR study.

I employed a grounded theory data analysis process throughout wherein I applied open coding, axial coding, and selective coding at certain points during data analysis (see Table 3.5). Charmaz (2006) describes grounded theory as a "systematic, yet flexible [set of] guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves" (p. 2). Grounded theory follows one of two approaches: Glaserian or Straussian. This dissertation followed a Straussian grounded theory approach in that I followed a fragmentation of data using a three-step coding process (Gbrich, 2007). Charmaz (2006), argues:

> Qualitative coding guides our learning. Through it, we begin to make sense of our data. How we make sense of it shapes the ensuing analysis. Careful attention to coding furthers our attempts to understand acts and accounts, scenes and sentiments, stories and silences from our research participants' view. We want to know what is happening in the setting, in people's lives and in lines of our recorded data. Hence, we try to understand our participants' standpoints and situations, as well as their actions within the setting. (p. 46)

Utilizing a three-step coding process allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of our two and a half-year PAR experience and construct meaning of our collective research learning, interaction, and sociopolitical action.

Table 3.5: Grounded Theory Three-Step Coding

1. **Open Coding**	
	▪ Re-reading ▪ Classifying statements ▪ Memo writing ▪ Journaling ▪ Generating emergent codes
2. **Axial Coding**	

	▪ Subcategorizing codes	
3. Selective Coding		
	▪ Identification of central story	
	▪ Member checking	

While rereading the transcripts, I categorized our focus group conversations by type denoting if a statement represented an experience, information, a disagreement, a question, collaboration/agreement, a joke, a bias, fear, or assumption. Then, I used the memos to search for patterns in the data and to decide initial coding categories. I completed multiple reads of the transcripts, reading line-by-line, sorting conversations into codes by PAR phase. As with any qualitative study, I re-coded and re-categorized the data to reduce the number of codes into categories of phenomena. To maintain the integrity and collaborative tenets of PAR, I conducted member checking (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016) in which I consistently invited participants to critique my summations and interpretations. I will detail these findings in Chapter Four.

Ethical Considerations

Ezzy (2002) argues, "ethical conduct of qualitative research is much more than following guidelines provided by ethics committees. It involves a weighed consideration of both how data collection is conducted and how analysed data are presented…" (p. 51). Given this understanding, I conducted this participatory action research—both data collection and data analysis—with the marginalized at the center.

First, I was intentional in considering the location and setting of the research study. The large Southeastern urban school district in which the study took place, is in a right-to-work state which means employees can be fired at will and at the sole discretion of their employers.

Considering this fact, all sessions were held at a neutral, location away from teachers' work environments so that their identity and privacy would not be compromised. Next, the informed consent form included information on the dangers of exposing our collective work sessions via social media. All participants were asked not to take pictures during the exchange and not to post the content of the exchange online. The social media clause was also extended to the community listening sessions. The dangers on social media were also shared with and agreed to by community listening exchange participants.

I was deliberate about maintaining the integrity of PAR as methodology. PAR is notorious for being a lengthy, sometimes messy process. I used this understanding to honor participants' time commitments. We started on time, and when the agreed ending time approached, I announced it. Every one of our session extended beyond the originally agreed upon time and required a verbal consent by participants. I was also careful not to bring harm or expose the identities or likeness of research participants during field trips and roundtable discussions with our community partner. Pseudonyms are used throughout this dissertation to protect the identities of research participants. Each participant had an opportunity and time to read and process the informed consent and I was certain to inform participants that they could withdraw at any time.

In keeping the tenets of PAR central to data collection, participants informed the process at each phase of research. Data analysis was also an intentionally democratic process through participatory methods. Equally important to the process was the interpretation of data. As the principal researcher, I was not at the center of the research process and decisions. We approached our research process through dissent, discussion, and mutual agreement. To maintain the integrity of PAR, throughout this dissertation I decided to share the collective narrative of our

study rather than my sole interpretations. We also shared a collective narrative during our presentations. I also instituted member checking, both during the research process and with each draft of the dissertation. Collaboration is also a hallmark of PAR and also an important ethical consideration. Collaboration also raises the issue of intellectual property, or an "owner" of the research data. As a researcher I was conscious of the co-researchers' multiple roles in this study and we openly discussed ownership of data. At the completion of dissertation writing, I emailed each co-researcher a copy of the dissertation and asked them to read, reflect, and provide critical feedback. Their close read took two weeks and we spent an hour on a WebEx conference call for me to listen to their concerns. I was intentional about listening to their concerns versus defending my interpretations to honor the integrity of PAR and the collaborative understandings of our study. The final draft represents our collective agreement.

Reflexivity was extremely important in this process for several reasons. First, reflexivity was important to maintain the integrity of the PAR process as there is no prescriptive formula to follow. Instead the researcher must always check their position and privilege. I accomplished this by convening an hour-long discussion with the community partner after PAR sessions. I also took meticulous memos while reading session transcriptions as I did not journal consistently. I discuss results of the studies in the next chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR

Teacher Participatory Action Research

In this chapter I share the process of engaging teachers in a participatory action research approach. The focus of this chapter is an illumination of the collaborative, democratic, reflexive, and iterative nature of the research process and offer an analysis of the process through the tenets of participatory action research (PAR). I provide a possibility picture of authentically engaging teachers and provide context for the research question: In what ways does participatory action research engage teachers to (a) bridge knowledge gaps, (b) critically self-reflect on ideological thinking, and (c) collaborate with communities they directly serve? This chapter is also a response to Tuck's (2009) call to "institute a moratorium on damage centered research to reformulate the ways research is framed and conducted and to reimagine how findings might be used by, for, and with communities" (p. 409).

As stated throughout the first three chapters of the dissertation, participatory action research is an approach to education research based on reflection, data collection and action that aims to shift the perspective and understanding of those involved in the process and those who will encounter the action of the research. Stapleton (2018) coined teacher participatory action research (TPAR) and defines it as "a project conducted in collaboration with teachers who are experiencing marginalization in their positions as teachers" (p. 5). With this understanding, the TPAR findings differ from those of a typical dissertation in that the results are a collective representation of a shared experience where we face marginalization in our professional roles but found multiple ways to exert power and our agentic voices through PAR. My analysis then is a chronological representation of the theoretical, methodological, and epistemological

underpinnings of the dissertation and collective study, and an explanation of how the research process embodied PAR tenets. Each explication describes the soul-baring nature of the process, or how we as [Black] teachers demonstrated our dispositions, attitudes, beliefs, worldview, consciousness, knowledge, skills, and mindset – or souls – working within the Black Intellectual Tradition.

Guishard (2009) argues studies of political awareness and action must include the researcher's assumptions and vulnerabilities as without this inclusion we stand to make the same voyeuristic mistakes that commodify the marginalized in the name of PAR. Here, I not only detail our process to push back against the traditional, institutional, linear view of explaining findings but also offer a dynamic unit of analysis that includes my own limitations, assumptions, and challenges as a burgeoning PAR scholar.

Personal Limitations as the Facilitator and Active Participant in the Process

A doctoral program of study requires students to decide a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods track for research inquiry. Once decided, a doctoral student completes a predetermined number of credit hours before conducting a research study with fidelity and validity. After taking several qualitative and quantitative research courses, none of the research methodologies or research methods spoke to my mind or spirit. As an eternal educator, my heart, mind, and soul knew that I wanted to engage teachers in a research inquiry that was meaningful, impactful, and enduring. I do not recall the moment or the class where I was introduced to participatory action research. I believe I read about the approach in an article that only vaguely mentioned the topic.

Georgia State University (GSU) is a state institution that began as Georgia State College of Business and at one point, did not admit Black students. It was not until 1994 and after student

demands that GSU established an African American Studies program (Georgia State University African-American Studies Program). I mention this to also highlight that the university and College of Education and Human Development touts itself as an institution preparing educators for urban education but does not offer any participatory action research courses. The university sits at the center of Atlanta, Georgia, a city that is the birthplace and hub of the Civil Rights Movement. When exiting the College of Education and Human Development, no matter which direction you head – north, south, east, or west – the path leads you to any civil rights memorial, or across a building or street named after a civil rights legend. It can be easily argued that the civil rights movement itself was an ongoing participatory action research project where Black people are still learning, raising consciousness, and growing stronger in the quest for political action and social change. I write this to not only call out GSU, but to question the intentions of a university that graduates the most Black students than any other university or college in the country (Chiles, 2016) but does not offer research courses designed to advance issues of equity and justice.

While taking a Sociology of Education course, I read more about the research approach. One day after class, I expressed my PAR interest to the course professor, Dr. Joyce King. I asked if she knew of any courses in PAR in our department, college, or another school at the university. She did not but we both agreed that I could take a directed readings course with her to explore the research approach. She recommended I read "Youth Activism in the Era of Education Inequality" (Kirshner, 2015). My review of PAR literature ballooned from here and I soon discovered many PAR scholars. Next, I created a calendar of readings for myself where I uncovered the origins of PAR, the many strands of PAR, and critiques of PAR. This was an impactful process in which I also discovered a lack of teacher participation in the PAR literature.

I remember having a conversation with Dr. Ben Kirshner, Professor of Learning Sciences and Human Development at the University of Colorado Boulder, regarding my research proposal and he cautioned me concerning the difficulty of and challenges with involving teachers in a PAR process. I appreciated his honesty and feedback.

Embarking on a research project using a methodology that doctoral students rarely employ with a demographic overlooked in the research literature was a daunting task. My imposter syndrome as a Black woman was also triggered. I knew that I had to add to my arsenal if I wanted to engage in this research process with integrity. This meant forging my way into spaces where I was not invited or sometimes even qualified for. This meant using my own money and resources to fund my academic pursuits and explorations. I read Kirshner (2015) from cover-to-cover. I had no clue what he looked like, sounded like, or what type of personality he possessed. During an American Educational Research Association (AERA) annual meeting, Dr. Ben Kirshner was the discussant for a presidential session where I presented a co-authored paper. This presentation was off-site and required a bus to transport all session attendees. Dr. King, who organized the session, asked me to "take roll" of the bus riders using a clipboard, piece of paper, and pen. I thought this a menial task, but I figured it was a part of paying my academic dues. I remember asking a prominent Black scholar – whose work I had also read and annotated but did not know what she looked or sounded like – for her name. She looked me up-and-down and ignored me altogether. When I approached Dr. Ben Kirshner for his name, he replied, "Ben Kirshner." My eyes lit up and I shared that I had just finished reading his book and I learned so much. His eyes also lit up and he said, "Oh yeah? What did you learn?" I rattled off the two concepts that stuck with me and our relationship commenced at the point. He mentioned

that he supported one of my GSU classmates, but he was a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) scholar not a PAR scholar.

Later, I learned Dr. Kirshner directed the CU Engage Graduate Fellowship in Community-Based Research at University of Colorado Boulder. According to the website's program description:

> CU Engage's Graduate Fellowship in Community-Based Research models a strategy for universities to prepare doctoral students for public scholarship. Whereas emerging scholars are often forced to make a choice – "*either* engage in the community or *do* peer-reviewed research" – this fellowship is designed to enable scholars to build strong academic careers while working on public issues in partnership with community groups. The purpose is for emerging scholars to practice and develop expertise in Community-Based Research through their participation in a supportive cohort (https://www.colorado.edu/cuengage/graduate-fellowship-community-based-research-0).

I asked Dr. Kirshner if I could be a participating member of the upcoming fellowship cohort. His response was democratic and what I expected of a conscious, YPAR scholar. "I would have to get an agreement from the current cohort and get back to you." He did and I fully participated remotely.

As an outsider to the University of Colorado Boulder, I was very cognizant of the extra burden my remote participation may have caused. As a result, I was intentional not to talk too much, not to ask too many questions, and to always volunteer for duties. In fact, each Fellow was required to plan session readings and facilitate a course discussion. I was the first. I also attended two sessions in-person to be in community with my fellow cohort mates. I was introduced to a network of scholars engaged in participatory methods and a host of YPAR and PAR academic opportunities.

I also participated in the Community Engaged Research Institute at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Through seminars, roundtables, hands-on workshops, and case studies, participants were introduced to the foundations, ethics, methods, tools, and democratic aspects of collaborative research (http://www.everettprogram.org/ceri/). I appreciated this opportunity and new learning because I witnessed several projects from across the country in one space. I also learned a multitude of ways to represent data from this process.

Through all of my PAR learning, what was striking to me was the lack of Black women leading PAR projects and the lack of Black women deciding PAR as a research approach. While on the surface, it seems as if our exclusion is a choice, it also worth noting that PAR is a contested approach in academe. In an institution where we are entering and attempting to show and prove, publish or peril, and keep our jobs while keeping our families and ourselves together, I can assume that Black women scholars, especially Black women doctoral students, do not conduct PAR work because of the messiness of the process, the time commitment, and the lack of clear paths to academic success.

While I was not spared any of those trials, this dissertation represents a picture of possibilities for Black women considering PAR as an academic research approach. In the end, understanding my limitations – both personal and professional – led me to facilitate this work with confidence while also baring my vulnerabilities and limitations. My soul baring was an act of power to help foster and shape our collective process, consciousness, and action. I learned so much about PAR as a research approach and about myself through this learning process. It was important for me to get this right from the start for several reasons. First, I understood the burden on co-researchers' time as mothers, caregivers, and women pursuing their individual goals while maintaining full-time jobs. Secondly, as a Black woman teacher with a soul, I wanted to conduct

a research process with integrity. Third, there were several instances throughout the research

process where my co-researchers and I collectively asked ourselves, "What are we going to do

about it?" This question was a layered one and one that shows the action-oriented goals of PAR.

I had to navigate our action within an institution that does not offer PAR courses but within the

rigidness of the IRB approval. Considering the questions and the institutional requirements

forced me to "keep my powder dry," to be able to pull out my metaphorical "guns" when needed.

This mindset of overpreparing and study is not only soul-baring but indicative of how I

functioned as a facilitator of a teacher participatory action research collective. My quest for

knowledge demonstrates my commitment to this arduous task and simultaneously highlights my

courage and willingness to bridge knowledge gaps for myself and for the department, college,

and the university.

Transparency from the Outset

"Deep participatory research is collaborative and reciprocal" (Cahill, 2006, p. 302).

Building a safe, neutral, dialogic space requires complete transparency to build rapport and trust

amongst the research facilitators and co-researchers. During our first session, I shared with my

co-researchers the level of involvement most PAR studies entail. I shared how I came to this

work, my background as a teacher, and things to expect. At the onset, I shared a brief

presentation of what PAR entails, and I was careful to expose the principles of PAR to guide our

work understanding that my explanation was also me modeling PAR research skills. As a Black

woman teacher whose voice, experiences, and opinions are silenced and ostracized, there were

things that I was certain to emphasize "we are in a collaborative space where what you add is

welcomed and valued." Understanding my PAR training, I was also certain to give the co-

researchers a complete tour of the facility and to let them know that "You have complete and

open access to anything and everything here." I provided everyone with a schedule and semi-structured agenda of our work and made certain to take pauses to ask: "What are your thoughts?" and "Do you have anything to add?" "Are there items you think I should have included?" I distinctly remember the look on everyone's face, the silence, and the uncertainty about what they have gotten themselves into. I was careful to be my complete, thorough, transparent, unfiltered self as a means to establish comfort, safety, and transparency early on. I ended my opening spiel with a community-building activity then asking, "What are your thoughts? I'd like to hear from each person individually."

Nichole: *I'm excited to learn some new information, things I don't know. Change my thinking. I don't know.*

Janae: *Excited to listen and learn. I like listening and learning to people and new information and observations and forming my own thoughts and opinions.*

Brianna: *Excited to see what I'm going to learn.*

Thais: *Prepared and nervous. And I never get nervous.*

One by one, each person shared in sum how they were interested in learning more. I was struck by their responses as it was a typical first response of teachers who are often expected to be compliant. Immediately following our first session, I jotted this down in my journal as the overwhelming thought of the session. I later realized that in fact, they did not know what to expect, so their response was also partly "wait and see," which is a typical defense mechanism of teachers when presented with new leadership, new curriculum, new programs that promise to fix inequities in school buildings.

Establishing transparency from the outset was a bold but smart move as it helped to foster

intentional collaboration required for both the dissertation study and our collective study. The

transparency created a safe space for us to interrogate our knowledge and misunderstandings

about persistent issues plaguing Black students, families, and communities. In this way, we were

also able to self-reflect and asking deeper, critical questions of ourselves and the sociopolitical

landscape around us.

Critical Literacy for Deeper Learning for Deeper Analysis

Critical literacy is grounded in critical theory and helps readers to exercise their agency,

voice and power through interrogating text through a sociopolitical and sociocultural lens

(Duffy, 2008; Janks, 2000; Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys, 2002; Papola-Ellis & Eberly, 2015).

Papola-Ellis & Eberly (2015) define critical literacy as questioning text, challenging dominant

narratives and using new knowledge to enact social change. To "do" critical literacy, scholars

have denoted three tasks that comprise the act of critical literacy: it is an act of 1. questioning, 2.

critiquing and 3. acting based on new knowledge of the gaps in text (Lewison, Flint, & Van

Sluys, 2002; Papola-Ellis, 2015; Riley, 2015). During Phase Two of our process we read journal

articles, periodicals, reports, and books. We also watched documentaries that spoke to the

political, social, economic, and cultural nature of urban education. Our reading and viewing

spurred discussion and led us to ask deeper questions to pinpoint the sources of educational

inequity. We developed a sort of reading cadence where, as the research facilitator, I

recommended fewer-and-fewer reading materials, while Brianna, Janae, and Nichole shared

recommended reading. In fact, they suggested we collectively read "None of the Above: The

Untold Story of Atlanta Public Schools Cheating Scandal, Corporate Greed, and the

Criminalization of Educators" (Robinson & Simonton, 2019). This text became a springboard for

our critical literacy process and problem-posing, and a pivotal resource during our collective data analysis.

An end goal of critical literacy and PAR is the development of critical consciousness. Freire (1970/1993) argues that building conscientização, or critical consciousness, involves "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (p. 35). Freire's methods to achieve conscientização include dialogue, or a reciprocal flow of information where both co-researchers and academic researchers are learning from each other. We enacted reciprocal learning for critical consciousness through dialogue during Phase Two of the research process.

I created a topic map and calendar for Phase Two depicting an overview of what each session would entail. I used the Black Intellectual Tradition as my guiding framework to devise this topic map which meant I intentionally incorporating liberating and humanizing literature to shape our understandings of the intellectualism of Black students, families, and communities. The topic map provided the co-researchers with a tentative roadmap while also satisfying the requirements of the university Institutional Review Board (IRB). It was, however, designed to be a fluid document. In it were multiple sources of information including readings, films, and field trips. After each session, I used co-researchers' opinions, thoughts, questions, experiences, and recommendations to inform our subsequent sessions. This led to field trips, a roundtable discussion with parents and an area realtor, and an evolving critical analysis of a rapidly changing city.

Each session started with a check-in. Check-ins allowed for dialogue and were a way for everyone to just breathe, be free, and talk about whatever it is they wanted. Check-ins ran the gamut of personal issues to work issues, idea and resource sharing, encouragement, and

sometimes casual conversation. It offered a way for us to build community and even share best

practices of how we handle personal and professional matters. We learned from each other

during our check-ins and supported each other immensely. Check-ins also helped us to gauge

how to show up during the remainder of our session. If something was heavy on someone's

heart, we knew to be delicate. If someone was dating someone new, we were lighthearted and

jovial. If someone was dealing with a crisis, we would often respond with, "what do you need us

to do?" Our check-ins also made us self-aware and consider the ways we show up in certain

spaces. Our self-awareness is especially important as burgeoning PAR scholars who have to be

self-aware within the communities we serve. In turn, our self-awareness taught us how to

approach communities we collaborate with and serve. Check-ins also provided an opportunity to

showcase our consciousness. Our check-ins often went this way:

Brianna: *I told Janae this comment cause I thought it was really crazy. My cousin lives directly in the city of Philly in what they call row homes. We have to drive through the city to get to Elkins Park where they live. We had just gotten off the airplane and I'm hungry. We're driving through and I see a Jamba Juice and Chipotle, and I'm hungry. Let's stop and get something to eat. My cousin says, "Oh, no, we're in the ghetto right now. We are not getting out of the car." "We're in the ghetto?" I was so shocked.*

Thais: *With a Jamba Juice and a Chipotle?*

Brianna: *Yeah, I was just so shocked that she said that and then how she was referring to the neighborhood, like, "We are in the ghetto. We're not getting out of the car. We're riding through this area." I was just like, "Wow."*

Thais: *Philadelphia was one of the first cities to close schools and go through gentrification. It's real up there.*

Brianna: *Yes, it was really weird because I always thought of my family up north as being so liberal. My cousin is gay. They are always saying, "All love matters, love wins," and they have all the decorations even something that says, "There's no room for hate here." So, when I got there and they said, "We're riding through the ghetto," I pulled out my computer. They're like, "Oh, you're a part of that movement?" I'm definitely a part of that movement. What are you talking about? They were kind of shocked by my computer. Then at dinnertime, I was telling them I don't really know where I want my career to go now because I've been like doing some research and learning some things about the school-to-prison pipeline. My cousin was like, "You*

mean the prison to school pipeline?" I said, "No! The school-to-prison," and how they were trying to put school in prison. They're just looking at me like I'm crazy. "Okay, well, good luck with helping, doing that down there." I replied, "Good luck with helping doing what?" No, this is like my life. This is what I'm trying to do. So, it was just really crazy.

Thais: *It's so interesting.*

Brianna: *I thought they were so liberal. I mean, you're gay and you guys are for gay rights, human rights, and women's rights but now you're kind of like looking at my Black Lives Matter sticker like, "Oh". . .it was really weird. It made me think about all liberals.*

As notated by Brianna's experience, check-ins offered a process to critically self-reflect not only on our own ideological thinking but the ideological thinking of those closest to us. This critical self-reflection allowed us to see how the depths of miseducation, misinformation, lack of consciousness, and empathy sit within cultural, political, and socioeconomic structures.

During other check-ins we strategized ways to address charter management leadership:

Nichole: *Can I tell you all something? I just need advice, not advice but. . .we had a meeting at school. Our CEO comes and meets with the teachers every so often. During the meeting, we did this activity where we talked about how the company was trying to build culture because teachers are leaving and no one is happy. It's just a terrible, horrible place to be. We listed some things we thought we were good at as a team and some things we thought we could work on. One question was about passion. Do we [as teachers] find the passion in this work? So, we said, "Well, we don't really know. Do we have passion about the mission?"*

Janae: *Did you all come up with a mission on your own or something?*

Nichole: *No, it's theirs.*

Janae: *You can't be passionate about someone else's stuff!*

Nichole: *That's what it was. But, we asked, "What is 'our' mission?" The CEO interrupted, "I'm gonna stop right there. And I'm gonna restate the mission because we have an issue with everyone reiterating what our mission is." This man said that the mission for Purpose Built is to, one, educate children from underserved families and two, we have an outward mission where we are concerned about the community. We know in order for them to improve and prosper, that the community is gonna have to change and. . .while he was talking, I was having that moment. I want to have a conversation with him, but I don't trust him with the research we're doing. He's available to talk because I'm taking a leadership class and I see him every Monday. I do want to*

have that conversation about what exactly is Purpose Built is doing outwardly because I don't see it.

Janae: *What exactly, to change the community, what does he mean by change the community?*

Nichole: *Improve. He didn't say change. He said improve. They're working on improving the community, but my questions are for who?*

Janae: *Right!*

Brianna: *What does improvement look like?*

Nichole: *Do you all think that's…*

Janae: *Who's gonna benefit from it?*

Nichole: *Do you all think those are valid questions… because now I'm going to see him Monday. And I'm in the space where I don't know how much to ask or I don't want him to know what I'm doing. But I'm really curious.*

Thais: *As you should be. You're a stakeholder.*

Nichole: *And I'm seeing parents pushed out. We have less students this year. Almost 180 students less this year than last year. So, what did you do? Would you all bring that up again or no?*

Nichole detailed how she was taking her new and contextualized learning to task by challenging the charter management organization's CEO about the staff adopting an internal and external mission statement that they did not create. She saw this as an opportunity to collaborate with communities that was different from what the charter management organization (CMO) envisioned.

Check-ins helped us to see how inequality materializes in our own lives:

Janae: *Growing up, I thought poor was you're homeless, living on the street. I didn't think I was homeless, but I didn't understand. Now I know that going from house to house, living with your cousin and your grandma for a while, your great grandma, we were homeless most of my life. I didn't know that was considered homeless. In my mind, I didn't know having food stamps was a problem. I didn't know that Section 8 was a problem. Dang. And then when my mom was filling out FAFSA, I was like, "How you make a living on $11,000 a year?" That sounds crazy. Or that one year, $17,000, that was a high. And now, looking back, it's like dang! It was three of us. How? And now it makes sense why she would say, my grandma would be trying to put bills in everybody else name. Now, it all makes sense. So, I feel like everyone has their own view and it*

just kind of, I don't know. We felt really okay. And now looking back, I'm like, "Ooh, I wouldn't want to live back in those conditions. I don't want to raise anyone in those conditions."

We have experiences similar to those of the students we teach and the families we serve:

Thais: *When I first signed the lease where I live right now, it was the most racist lease I ever signed in my life. They wanted me to agree to having someone come once a month to videotape what was happening at my house. To make sure there were no other activities outside of the lease happening.*

Nichole: *You weren't doing hair, nails?*

Thais: *I wasn't babysitting kids. I wasn't selling barbecue. It made me go and do a little bit more research about housing policy and I realized, that's how I knew that these neighborhoods that we live in are not owned by us. We don't own anything over there. So, when people talk about taking care of stuff, it's like, "No, the land owners are not taking care of it." I don't have the rights to paint my house, to pressure wash my house. To do all these things. And why would I, if it's not my house?*

It was during these moments, that we recognized the personal was political in this process. While our students fight for decency and visibility within a school system and in a city with a housing infrastructure pushing them aside, as teachers, we, too, experienced their pain and struggles. We also realized that there are teachers unlike us who are adding to the issues urban, Black students face. We disapproved of teachers who lacked a critical consciousness and recognized that their lack of consciousness was not completely their own doing.

At certain points, I questioned if the research process was truly a PAR study because, at times, it did not feel that way. It felt as if we were teachers discussing ideas and calling out all that was wrong with our schools and neighborhoods. It was in these moments that I realized and reaffirmed for myself that PAR is not a formal, prescriptive process but fluid and dynamic. I also realized that I was constantly modeling PAR tenets from the onset – active listening, collaboration, knowledge development (by reading certain articles together), agreement not consultation, encouraging the sharing of experiences, and baring my mistakes. I was not the only researcher who felt conflicted about the research process. I should also note that during a post-

project discussion with Brianna, she referred to our sessions as a "chaotic process" when what we talked about was Black people buying houses. On the contrary, during the study Brianna mentioned how she rethinks asking students to step outside her classroom door, and in her new position as an Assistant Principal she touted her participation in a research study about the New School Pushout. Her confessions speak to the messy, dynamic, and fluid nature of PAR. At the same time, the collective and individual criticality developed during the critical literacy process is undeniable.

Democratic Inquiry: Study-within-the-Study

Guishard (2009) describes democratic inquiry as research "collaboratively designed, conducted, analyzed, and disseminated in the context of equal partnerships with university scientists and members of disempowered groups" (p. 87). The arrival of our collective study six months after we had begun was haphazard but diplomatic. Our inquiry process started by listing the issues plaguing Black students and schools. We considered our many discussions, reading and field trips, and reviewed session transcripts. The transcript review revealed the number of times we referred to housing, renting, homelessness, or gentrification. We landed on gentrification as the topic of our collective research study. This process was a back-and-forth dialogue laced with dissent and difference as we debated several questions, such as: Which population should we start with? What is our why? Exactly what would our action be? Here is an example:

Janae: *We could do another group like this but with parents. Because we gotta disrupt the knowledge. A lot of parents have the same Eurocentric beliefs about school and attendance policies because that's what they've been taught. But if we disrupt their knowledge about it, then they could probably start burning a fire. I don't know. That would be the first thing though. . .We would not be able to do anything else successfully until they're informed.*

Nichole: *Right. I like the article that I read. I liked the community part and the vocational part. I think this is kind of going back to us seeing how we can market what our skills and the things that we do in our communities. How to show people how to make money using their gifts and their talents? I think the main problem is that poverty piece. So, my personal thing I think we should focus on is that poverty piece.*

Brianna: *I don't know. I mean, I think the poverty thing, I think that's too, I don't know. I feel like that's, like, "You all in poverty." You bringing people in, "You know you all in poverty, right?" [laughter] That's how I feel like, no, no, no……I think what Janae said, inviting parents and focusing on, I'm trying to think of one video that we saw that was specific, that was enough to be like, "Wow!" thinking but not too much, like in your face. And then get people talking about like what you said about what parents need. So when we did our questionnaire for our parents and we did our home visits, what do you see? So something like that, like asking them questions but not to get them to say like, "Oh, we want our children to go to college," or something like that but something more with the school, just have a conversation about that and then from there, maybe some people, just see what happens*

Thais: *So, you asked a question, "What's the end goal?" So, in my brain, the end goal is what question am I trying to ask and answer? What am I trying to find out by doing this? Yeah, we know we've gotta disrupt knowledge but we're trying to disrupt knowledge to get to what point? What's our aim, and that's something we may have to like continue to think about. Because there are layered issues. But what's the one pressing issue for us collectively? So, what I hear us talking about a lot and just reading the transcripts and I had no clue it was going to be like this, that's why you gotta let research take you. We talked about housing a lot. How much housing is impacting the, the "what" of what's happening in our schools, how we're doing our jobs and even why we show up sometimes.*

While not only discovering the struggles of our students, families, and communities was personal and political for each of us, we could not deny that our neighborhood was changing all around us. There were new school buildings, renovated houses, new houses, new parks, new businesses, more police presence, foregrounded by the fact that students were withdrawing from school and moving each week. Several discussions included statements like:

Janae*: So, I went to Washington and it's extremely gentrified now but the enrollment of our school now is so low because all the White people who live over there, their kids don't go there and they're not planning on sending them there.*

Nichole: *Yeah, that bothers me to no end. Now that I'm there, those are my children that I love. I don't want to lose them, and they're starting to move already. I've lost three students in the past few months because they got "that letter" and at the apartment complex, rent is increasing. That's hearsay. I never saw the letter but that's what the word on the street is and that's why a lot of students are moving.*

Thais: *So, I got a postcard in the mail from a neighborhood resident asking us to call the police on drug dealers. The so-called drug dealers are children.*

We were surrounded with all of the markers of gentrification. We read articles, watched documentaries, and discussed the school-to-prison pipeline and realized that the STPP was nuanced with gentrification contextualizing school pushout. We theorized that the school system, real estate holders, and developers were collaborating to create a neighborhood free of poor, Black people.

Our democratic inquiry was not unlike a typical inquiry project in that we followed a process to conduct our collective study. We started by reviewing literature on the topic. We found that the current literature did not offer a glimpse into the intersections of urban education reform and gentrification through teacher inquiry. There were institutional agreements to which we had to adhere. Each co-researcher completed the human subjects Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) certification to be recognized as formal researchers by the institution. We each contributed to and co-authored a formal research proposal in which we detailed our research design, research questions, data collection methods, data analysis, target participants, recruitment methods, length of study, and a plan for the presentation of findings. What made our inquiry process democratic was our way of thinking and approaching the study and the dissent and consensus displayed throughout the process.

Our inquiry process demonstrates our democratic ways of being and ways of doing. This was evident in the ways we sought to privilege the knowledge and experiences of those we serve instead of relying on dominant narratives. We acknowledged and understood that our review of literature was a critical process where we interrogated and critiqued each text we read through the lens of our own students, families, and communities. We also considered our lived professional and personal experiences when critiquing and interrogating the literature. We

privileged the knowledge and experiences of our target audience constantly reminding ourselves

that we wanted information they provided us versus what literature says about them. We

proposed a listening exchange which is a reciprocal data collection method where participants

provide us with data, and we share information and resources with them. Lastly, we proposed to

offer each participant, in the study we designed, compensation through gift cards of frequented

merchants such as gas stations, grocery stores, and discount stores.

We made mistakes throughout our inquiry process, the most prominent was within our

initial research design: our approach amounted to unintentionally presenting ourselves like social

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IX. Interview Protocols

Interview Protocol A (Parents/Guardians)

1) Do you own/rent/live with someone?
    a) If you rent, would you like to become a homeowner?
        i) If so, do you know the steps to become a homeowner?
    b) How much to you pay per month for housing?
        i) Is this amount affordable or out of reach for you?
    c) If you are not a homeowner or renter, who do you live with?
    d) How long have you lived here?
2) Do you consider yourself low, middle or upper class?
    a) Do you mind sharing how much money you make per month?
3) How do you feel about your child's school?
    a) Why do you send your child to this school?
    b) If you could choose where to send your child for school, where would you send them? Why?
    c) Do you think the school superintendent, district, and principal hear your concerns about the school?
    d) Do you think school leaders and decision makers are accessible?
    e) Do you know how to voice your concerns and get action?
4) What is your main mode of transportation?
    a) How reliable is your transportation?
    b) How accessible is your job?
    c) How accessible is your school?
    d) If you lost your transportation, how would this impact your job/school?
5) Described the climate of the school you/your students attend?
    a) Is it welcoming?
    b) Are you greeted properly?
    c) Do school staff members and teachers ask you for your opinion and input?

Interview Protocol B (Students)

1) Who do you live with?
    a. How long have you lived with this person/these people?
    b. When is the last time you moved?
    c. How many people live in your house?
    d. Do you have your own room?
    e. Who do you share a room with?
2) How do you like your school?
    a. Are you ever late or absent from school?
3) How do you get to school?
    a. Who brings you?

Figure 4.1 Initial Interview Protocols

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workers instead of as thoughtful listeners and intentional researchers. We developed an interview

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protocol with the questions listed in Figure 4.1. Our goal was to interview parents to survey their

living arrangements in a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood. Above all, we wanted to know if

parents felt safe and comfortable in a shifting neighborhood. We created a list of potential

interviewees and anticipated responses. We expected participant responses to provide different

contexts for the effects of urban education reform and gentrification. We often consulted elders

and thought partners for guidance and feedback. A personal conversation with Dr. Joyce King,

my dissertation advisor, revealed the voyeuristic nature of the initial interview protocol. Dr. King

explained that community-centered work must place the lives, experiences, and perspectives of

the community at the center of the work, meaning that we needed to rethink our approach

through the eyes of the participants. We questioned how we would feel if a group of well-

intentioned teachers asked to interview us and asked questions about our education, earnings,

and knowledge of homebuying? Dr. King's critical feedback led us to conduct community

listening exchanges, or focus groups designed for the community to gain resources while

providing data through collective group thinking, reflecting, and dialogue.

This process forced us to be deeply reflective and cognizant of any damage-centered

narrative we were projecting. Our reflexivity was constant throughout as we often brought our

professional lens as teachers to our studies, but we were also mindful of our student and family

experiences. In this way PAR helped us to reflect on ideological thinking and prepared us to

collaborate with communities in humanizing ways.

Multiple Subjectivities with a Collective Goal

Our Study-within-a-Study collective goal was two-fold. First, we aimed to position

teachers as capable, intelligent, and necessary partners in education policy and decision making

especially as it relates to Black children's economic, academic, and social mobility. Secondly,

we intended to define and highlight the "New School Pushout" happening in Southwest Atlanta, Georgia. We defined "The New School Pushout" as the intersection of urban education reform and gentrification where politicians promised local residents "revitalization" of schools and neighborhoods while using their long-endured pain and suffering as bait – with empty promises of remedies – to attract political, social, and economic capital. The empty promises longstanding residents are left with are new schools and new buildings intended not for them but for a different residential demographic. While we all agreed on our collective goal, our ways to achieve this goal differed greatly. This was partly due to our varied and multiple subjectivities as individuals.

Brianna – a White, Jewish American woman aware of her Whiteness, privilege, and how she shows up in Black spaces as an ally. Brianna often credits her mother for modeling allyship, activism, and a moral commitment in the quest for justice. Janae – a Black woman who is often demonized by what Monique Morris (2016) calls "Black girl pushout." Janae is an accomplished teacher and scholar who defies Black women's stereotypical views and expresses herself through writing, speaking, and calling out inequities and those that seek to address such inequities through disconnected methods. As a Teach for America (TFA) alum, who "contributed more to TFA that they contributed to her," she is a fellow of Leadership for Educational Equity (LEE). During a LEE meeting, she strategically waited to speak last to share with a group of burgeoning education policymakers how important it is to listen to communities instead of making assumptions about what they need. Nichole – a Black woman, mother of three children, and views her students exactly the way she wants teachers to consider her own children. Nichole is intent on serving Black children. She often attends community meetings regarding economic, policy, housing, and justice issues – all issues that affect Black children. Her presence is a

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revolutionary act and a show of solidarity with Black communities. Nichole's meeting

attendance is also an outward display of her understanding of intersectionality in educating

children in urban schools. Nichole is a Pan-Africanist and firmly believes children should have

communal experiences to mold, protect, and advance them. Lastly, I – Thais – often introduce

myself as a "literacy specialist since the third grade." Reading has been a lifelong passion that I

have also made my career. When I started this career path, the goal was to work myself out of a

job because, as a reading specialist, I would have done so well that the "reading gap" would be

no more. The collective teacher research process coupled with my professional experience, has

taught me that schools are teaching reading as it is designed, and policymakers and enactors have

not changed or trained their mindsets to approach reading scientifically or equitably.

Cahill (2007) argues that "a collective subjectivity [is] not about a shared social

identification, but also about the process of working together, of collaborating in producing [our]

understanding of [our] situated position" (p. 285). To achieve our collective goal, we knew and

understood the importance of writing and presenting. At the culmination our collective Study-

within-the-Study and after data analysis, we each contributed to a journal manuscript using a

round-robin writing approach. This is a writing engagement activity I created using my

background knowledge and experience as a reading specialist. In reading research, round-robin

reading is an antiquated way of engaging classroom students in oral reading (Ash, Kuhn, &

Walpole, 2008). The teacher typically assigns textbook reading and each student reads a

paragraph aloud. To keep the teacher from interrupting the flow of oral reading to keep teachers

from calling on individual students, students take turns reading passages going down or across a

row of student desks. This is effective for classroom time-management, but ineffective for

equitably teaching reading and engaging students. Most students are embarrassed by this process while others get to showcase their oratory prowess.

Round Robin Writing follows the same idea of an unending flow but for a positive gain. The process helps writers, and reluctant writers get "unstuck." The gist of Round Robin Writing was to start writing collectively and not get stuck by the thought of, or anxiety about, writing for academic journals. It would also provide us an opportunity to engage and include everyone's writing voice while supporting each other when a mental block or question emerged. First, we outlined our journal manuscript, then we each took a section to write within – without distraction – for 25-30 timed minutes. We took five-minute breaks between each timed writing block. We completed this cycle four times. At the end of the entire cycle we each had a clearer idea of how to communicate our goal as well as which writing holes we needed to fill.

Brianna: *You've added so much to my writing. I'm like, "Whoo!"*
Janae: *I feel like I'm blurring [my writing] between two sections.*
Nichole: *I'm learning about my process….I have quotes because I know I don't want to use that word. You know, whoever gets mine, those quotes mean I want to say that. So, if you could restate it, that's fine.*

We knew that collaborative writing would prove hard, but this approach allowed us to showcase our multiple subjectivities while working towards a collective goal. Our writing also represented a self-reflection point not only to reflect on all the knowledge we've gained but to also to synthesize it for public consumption. Using the Round Robin Writing method, we were able to see the additional information required to present our analysis and we were able to recognize the intellectual strength and voice of each co-researcher. As teachers who are often marginalized and silenced, our writing became a show of power of our expertise and our commitment to our community.

Power and Ownership

Collaboration is the foundation of participatory action research studies. As such, power dynamics and the question of ownership of data require upfront transparency when collaborating with co-researchers and the community. Our teacher participatory action research (TPAR) team discussed every opportunity we were presented with to make public presentations of our research. We often detailed the pro et contra of offers before making a decision. We were invited to speak at high schools, businesses, and organizations in metropolitan Atlanta. Before anyone ever committed, the response was usually, "let me take this to the team and get back with you." One such instance occurred when we were invited to share our research findings during a speaker's series at the Federal Reserve Bank in Atlanta. After careful and thoughtful deliberation, we declined because the person who extended the invitation wanted us to pitch our work before securing a spot on the speaker's series calendar. We felt as if we were being used to buttress someone's career interests and, as teachers who are often cajoled to serve political agendas, we collectively decided it would not be worthwhile or smart but more of the same. This was an exertion of our power and ownership of our research, data collection, and democratic inquiry process.

On the other hand, we also contended with internal disagreements about ownership of research data and how we use it. Nichole and I had an altercation when her employer, a charter management organization (CMO) presented a funding opportunity to teachers. Nichole wanted to write a proposal for a teacher film festival as an opportunity to raise critical consciousness amongst her school colleagues. Her idea was to replicate our experience of the many films we collectively watched and studied. I, on the other hand, did not think it was a strategic move to give away our work and ideas to a charter management organization when research constantly

informs us of the ways charter management organizations take over everything – our schools, our housing, and entire neighborhoods, (Ahlquist, Gorski, & Montano, 2011; Buras, 2015; Ewing, 2018). Nichole thought we should not limit ourselves and just go for it. In the end, we decided as a collective to seek external funding using the same idea.

MacDonald (2012) observes: "The ultimate aim of PAR is the empowerment of oppressed individuals to partner in social change, which encourages capacity development and capacity building of all who participate" (p. 40). In hindsight, Nichole was exercising her power and ability to effectuate change. She was baring her knowledge, skills, mindset, consciousness, worldview, beliefs, attitude, disposition, or soul, in her attempt to spread the word of our work. Our ability to talk through this demonstrates how collaboration is also messy but necessary for achieving the aims of the research process and collective social action.

Pushing Boundaries through Writing and Action

Our TPAR team had an opportunity to join a cohort of PAR scholars conducting research around issues of displacement at the 2019 URBAN Action Research Denver, Colorado Node convening. The focus of the conference was "to connect, share stories, and develop practices and strategies for supporting communities in rapidly-changing cities and outlying areas across the US" (www.urbanactionresearch.org). There was a pre-convening call to discuss final writing products. A woman stated that teachers should not write an article or a book because she did not think teachers could write an article or a book. I quickly and publicly interjected correcting her falsehoods about what teachers were capable of doing. Her expressed thoughts are often the silent and coded agreements amongst policy and decision makers about what teachers are capable of doing. Our work is a direct clap back at these notions and a blueprint for rethinking such falsehoods.

We submitted a proposal to the 13th Annual Sources of Urban Educational Excellence conference hosted by the Alonzo A. Crim Center at Georgia State University. Our paper entitled, "Is Gentrification the New School Pushout?: A Conversation with Community about the Intersection of Urban Education Reform and Gentrification," was accepted and we presented to a an overflowing room of scholars, teachers, and education stakeholders on October 13, 2018. We were true to our identities as PAR scholars and formatted our presentation as a conversation amongst us and the audience. Initially, I think we were all a bit nervous as this was our first collective research presentation and as teachers who are often excluded, we did not know how receptive the audience would be. During our individual introductions, Nichole remarked, "Hi, my name is Nichole and I'm just a teacher." The entire panel and audience groaned, exchanged side eyes, and mouthed, "Just a teacher?" In hindsight, the audience's response to Nichole gave us the fuel we needed to know we were amongst allies. We spent weeks preparing the PowerPoint, writing scripts, and rehearsing our respective lines. Our efforts were well-received and praised. There were audience members who had no clue of the visceral nature of urban education reform and gentrification. The energy was palpable.

When we asked attendees to define gentrification, they responded:

Sources Conference Attendee: *I see gentrification as someone who is wealthy coming into a neighborhood that's an unfortunately a poor neighborhood or seen as a poor neighborhood, coming in, they're changing the houses, changing the neighborhood and the look of a neighborhood.*

Sources Conference Attendee: *I think there are kind of two different definitions. First, on the newcomer side, their definition would be the raising of their standard of living and by extension, the whole community's standard of living, just by their presence and for the legacy residents, it's basically respectability politics.*

Sources Conference Attendee: *One more word, colonization.*

When we asked, "How do you feel about the changes in Atlanta, specifically your neighborhood and/or school?" participants responded:

Sources Conference Attendee: *I'm not from Atlanta but I went to college here at Spelman. I just moved back about a year ago and one thing I noticed, like I love the West End area. It's just great culture and I went there recently and there was like, White people jogging, and walking dogs. I started talking to people because I get my hair done over there, I eat over there and they're starting to slowly see those changes and although I don't live in that community, it's interesting to hear their perspectives and how they're processing, seeing their community change so quickly. And I feel terrible about that. That's how I feel about gentrification. It's really sad.*

Sources Conference Attendee: *Yeah, actually, she said what I was thinking. My family lives in Edgewood but we live in a Habitat home. We watched the property value go up for all of the new Edgewood. Target, all that stuff and how there's way more White people in that neighborhood. All the Section 8 housing that used to be across the street from us is now gone, so it's just the homes on our side of the street. I do find myself kind of toeing that line of I know what this neighborhood used to be like. But now our property value went up so I'm like well, longer down the line, if we decide we want to keep this house ourselves, that is in our family's benefit. But at the same time, all these people that used to live here no longer live here either. It's really interesting to watch that dynamic of like my family is going to be okay but like what happened to all these other people who weren't okay?*

Toward the end of our hour-long presentation, we shared a few listening exchanges quotes we collected during our collective Study-within-the-Study. We shared a quote from one of the second listening exchange participants who responded to the question, "Do you consider yourself a gentrifier?" A Sources conference audience member was so struck by this quote, she blurted out, "They were asleep, they were asleep during the recession. They slept through the recession! Like they slept through the entire thing to say… the house was empty. I mean they didn't wake up until last week!"

Our experience presenting our research at the Sources conference validated our work and that we were charting a path for the kind of soul-expanding and soul-baring scholarship teachers should pursue. At the end of the presentation, an audience member asked a question and Nichole responded that this process showed her how to "frame her activism…and I feel like this work

kind of gives it focus and a voice." Our presentation demonstrated our skill set, our expertise, and our souls while charting a prescriptive path for what [Black] teacher engagement for [Black] students should look and feel like.

Our Sources presentation was so well-received that we were invited to make a keynote presentation at the Black Education Network (ABEN) regional conference at the Auburn Avenue Research Library in Atlanta, Georgia on January 20, 2019. The conference organizers thought it a great idea to frame this keynote presentation in the same way as our Sources conference presentation, as a conversation. The venue was much larger with auditorium seating and a raised stage. The set-up was not as personable as our first conference presentation. There were at minimum 250 people in attendance representing a mix of students, parents, scholars, teachers, community activists, and lay conference goers. Our presentation nervousness was a little different this time. Our nervousness was not first-time jitters but a "right fit" nervousness. The presenters before us offered theories to frame the ever-present problems in urban education with books and resources to educate children through Black education models while we were sharing our research data that highlights what many of the audience members were living day-in and day-out. We kicked our presentation off by introducing ourselves and inviting dialogue as a community conversation. This was the biggest mistake. We were interrupted three times at just the introductory presentation slides.

ABEN Conference Participant: (Interruption #1): *Is it true that gentrification in Atlanta will change the schools?*

ABEN Conference Participant: (Interruption #2): *Could you give a definition for gentrification?*

ABEN Conference Participant (Interruption #3): *Can I ask a question before you go further? The prior slide that you had up said Atlanta was the worst in terms of income inequality. Now what's that based on? Inequality as to workers or what's the inequality that you're mentioning there, between whom?*

We quickly noticed a shift in the room as people were voicing their frustrations over listening to us. We lost control of the crowd, and we knew it. While descending off the stage, we sent each other text messages in our group chat, each one of us expressed a different sentiment regarding what had unfolded:

Thais: *What the fuck just happened?!*

Brianna: *I know right?! I feel attacked!*

Nichole: *That was great!*

While we immediately felt attacked by the audience, in hindsight, we realized the impact of our research, writing, and presenting because, although the room erupted, it was as if the crowd took a collective sigh and thanked us for "seeing them." We were seeing and acknowledging their struggles and highlighting something that they can see, feel, and touch but cannot stop or change. While it had seemed as if we were attacked by conference goers and attendees, instead the audience's active engagement – while not on our terms – nevertheless showed just how invested people were in the topic and how they had been personally and collectively affected by it. We later realized that this was actually a moment to appreciate the work we had done and boundaries we pushed through research and writing. We also recognized this as an affirmation of our stature as [Black] teachers and our salient contributions to public discourse.

Our presentations created a domino effect. As a result of our ABEN conference presentation at the Auburn Avenue Research Library, we were invited to present our research at Clark Atlanta University. Nichole remarked, "Let's take this show on the road!" We garnered a crowd of willing listeners and participants and while we were a little bruised by the ABEN

presentation, we were not broken. A parent at Brianna's and Janae's is an assistant professor of political science at Clark Atlanta University and her department hosts regular seminars for students to learn from outside scholars. We learned a lot from our previous presentations, but this presentation affected Brianna differently. As I mentioned previously, Brianna is very cognizant of how she might be perceived as a White woman in Black spaces highlighting issues that disproportionately impact Black students, families, and communities. She especially felt this way about our presentation at a prominent Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in Atlanta, Georgia. Twenty minutes before our presentation, Brianna and I took a stroll along "the set" of CAU to unpack the source of her nervousness. I could not understand where it was coming from because I see Brianna as a brilliant, unabashed, and unafraid leader. She shared that she was apprehensive about being the only "White girl" on the panel and presenting about gentrification at an HBCU. My reply was, "How is this presentation any different than the work we've done and the work you do at school? You are just advocating on a Black college campus now." I do not think my words consoled Brianna or alleviated Brianna's concerns, but I do know that the spirit hit her during the presentation. While discussing how charter schools operate under urban education reform, she divulged the multitude of ways she advocates for children to have the right services and high expectations and rigorous instruction.

Brianna: *I am always advocating and speaking up for the rights of our students. Especially our students with IEPs. Just because they require special services does not mean they do not deserve the same equitable instruction as all students!*

Brianna stood to make her point. A CAU professor shouted, "Preach!" while she was still speaking. The professor's interjection was an expression of affirmation and unqualified solidarity.

There was another gentleman in the audience who mentioned how he served as the deputy assistant to Dr. Beverly Hall, Atlanta Public Schools superintendent from 1999 until 2010. The gentleman was amazed by our presentation and "to be able to see the results of our work." He mentioned that one could not foresee the future to know that kids would be doubly impacted by urban education reform and gentrification and to see how the achievement motivations launched from Atlanta Public Schools central office landed on the ground was fascinating. The CAU moment furthered our resolve to stand firm in our identities and our scholarship.

Had we not embarked on a collective research journey and committed to the arduous research, analysis, and writing tasks, we ran the risk of not exercising the social action and political change aims of PAR. While our action was not exercised in front a judicial education body, our presentations and writing contributed to a larger dialogue regarding the nuanced form of school pushout at the nexus of urban education reform and gentrification.

Collective Research as Study and Struggle

During a check-in, I asked the co-researchers to review their journal entries and reflect on where we started up until the current point. After 10 minutes of quiet rereading and reflection, Brianna said aloud, "Teach everything you do and do everything you teach." This was her journal entry after we watched the documentaries, "America Divided," "Rosenwald," and "The E-Word," after reading articles about the school-to-prison pipeline, Black communities' struggle for equitable educational access, African-American Vernacular English, and a field trip to a Gwinnett SToPP roundtable. Brianna mentioned that the phrase prompted her to think through a model in which she approaches her position as an educator. It was a 16-point model and she remembered 13 of the 16 points with ease:

Brianna: *First one, building relationships with students. Second, building relationships with the community. High expectations, commitment to coming to work. People do not like to come to work. Love, and then I said tough love, too. Data driven guided reading groups. Intentional lesson planning, teacher encouragement and support. Looping with students, rewarding positive behavior, rewarding growth and quarterly student conferences.*

I asked Brianna to expound upon each one of the points and tell us what it looks like to build relationships with students and communities. Brianna continued by explaining that first she had to take responsibility for her kids saying, "They were our kids." This expression of seeing her students as "our" kids indicated that she treated them as if she would treat her own children.

As Brianna continued to explain, Janae adding to her statement:

Brianna: *The first step was building relationships with students, building relationships with the community, because I'm thinking, Janae and I would go to anything they had. Something across the street in that little park, we were in the park. We were after school for all the different events. Birthday parties, at the park for birthday parties. At the skating rink. At their houses. Like going to Wal-Mart, always at Wal-Mart, being at places in the community.*

Janae: *Driving to [student's] home.*

Brianna: *Driving to [student's] home. All the kids running out. Being in the community. Not being, and not acting like we're scared of them or their parents.*

Janae: *Not being scared, setting high expectations and never dropping them. Commitment to coming to work, because that was an issue at our school. They would – teachers would not come to work. That was an issue. So, coming to work. Giving kids tough love.*

Brianna and Janae described what it means to be a community-centered teacher. Murrell (2000) defines a community teacher as "an accomplished urban teacher who develops contextualized knowledge of culture, community, and identity of children and their families as the core of their teaching practice" (p. 340). Brianna, Janae, and Nichole each possess knowledge of culture, community, and identity of children and their families that is at the core of their identity as teachers. This is evidenced by their intentional relationship building as the first step of the 16-point process. The collective research process, however, helped them to discover the

social, political, and economic factors that encircle their students' learning experiences as these factors dictate how students show up to school daily.

Our collective research process allowed the co-researchers to contextualize their knowledge through additional study and the action of our research allowed them to struggle alongside our students and their families. PAR sits at this intersection of study and struggle in the Black Intellectual Tradition. Kelley (1994, 2002) described the Black Radical Tradition – a type of intellectualism within the Black Intellectual Tradition – as "study and struggle" toward Black liberation. Study and struggle as defined by Kelley aligns with our "double aim" as teachers wherein we were both students in the collaborative research process but also advocating for justice and social change for our students and communities. The practice of study and struggle inherent in the Black Intellectual Tradition was integral to our entire soul-expanding and soul-baring process as the Study-within-the-Study moved us towards *correcting* false narratives about Black students, Black families, Black teachers, and Black communities while also charting a *prescriptive* course for authentic teacher engagement throughout the entire school community. While our research collaborative did not explicitly use the phrase "study and struggle," our consistent discussions, readings, and actions signals our collaborative engagement and advocacy towards achieving justice for our students and communities.

During one of our reflective conversations Nichole mentioned the dilemma that community-centered teachers find themselves in:

Nichole: *There's something that's skipping, because even me sometimes, I want you to just learn how to round these numbers and that's all I'm focused on and I'm just focused on rounding, rounding, rounding. I'm forgetting about what may have happened at your house last night, this could have happened on your way to school this morning, you had to go through this many hurdles. Like that part, it gets lost sometimes in the curriculum, curriculum, curriculum. So, teachers, a lot of us are just mired in how do we get them to pass the test? They need to learn these skills.*

Even in this admission, Nichole did not think all is not lost with teachers to develop the

skills, knowledge, mindsets, consciousness, worldview, beliefs, attitudes, dispositions, or souls,

required to teach Black students.

Nichole: *It's just a cycle. That's where teachers are and our mindsets at this time. I think we need an awakening, like a broadening of our, what we think our job is as an educator is more than just these numbers or these words or these… It should be more of an activist type role that teachers play and I don't think we feel that as a, and I'm just speaking on behalf of what I see. As a teaching community, I don't think we feel that.*

Our collective research charted a course of action to achieve a sort of awakening. Our

collective first demonstrated study and struggle by consistently attending several Saturday

morning sessions to engage in cultural, political, and socioeconomic studies without a clear end-

date. We shared and engaged in collective reading, viewing films, and writing during our

collaborative sessions, and through group texts and email, all in efforts to enhance our collective

knowledge of structural issues plaguing our students and communities for more than two years.

We understand our role as Black teachers in a Black community and we wanted to approach our

collective study with integrity and skill. On several Saturdays Nichole, the only participant with

children of her own, was a latecomer as being a parent who deeply commits herself to other

students is a struggle alone. Her tardiness did not deter our collective study and struggle and we

adapted our time to consider her. We consistently, and oftentimes, overprepared for our action

and advocacy understanding that we not only represented ourselves but also our Black students,

other Black teachers, and the communities we served. Our collective advocacy required building

our knowledge and our collective understanding of available tools for advocacy. Our staunch

preparation is also an indication of us wanting to "do something" and an indication of how we

demonstrated searching to expand our souls. On several occasions throughout our sessions, we

asked ourselves, "What are we going to do?" "What can I do to change this?" or, "This is jacked up! What should be our next move to combat this?" "How can we get other teachers involved?"

Our study and struggle bared our souls as [Black] teachers through the aforementioned ways but also, for example, during an instance when, out of exhaustion, Janae exhaled, "when is this going to be over?" Her question made me wonder, too. After careful thought I realized how invested and committed each of us were to see the process through from start-to-finish. The act of not stopping until the work is done is a manifestation of our soul ties not only each other but also to our students, families, and communities. Our study and struggle also demonstrates the multiple ways we bridged knowledge gaps for ourselves and those around us; how we consistently self-reflected on our own ideological thinking as well as those around us; and how our research training and inquiry process helped us to develop the knowledge, skills, mindset, and dispositions to collaborate with the communities we directly serve.

CHAPTER FIVE

This chapter presents the results of our teacher participatory action research (TPAR) collective Study-within-a-Study wherein we examined the intersection of urban education reform and gentrification in Southwest Atlanta, Georgia. The results in this chapter represent Phase Four – Teacher Transformation and Advocacy – of the research process described in Chapter Three and includes the context for the research questions:

1. In what ways does participatory action research engage teachers to: a) bridge knowledge gaps, b) critically self-reflect on ideological thinking, and c) collaborate with communities they directly serve?
2. How do teachers demonstrate their knowledge, skills, mindset, consciousness, worldview, beliefs, attitudes, and disposition, or souls, through a participatory action research process?

The organization of this chapter follows that of an essay and reflects the messiness of participatory action research. This means I have interspersed quotes from the three listening exchanges, excerpts of our journal entries, and data from the research literature and publicly available data on gentrification and urban education reform to further contextualize the analytical themes of our collective TPAR Study-within-the-Study. The goal of this chapter is to convey how urban education reform and gentrification carry multiple nuances that impact schools, teachers, and entire communities and how these nuances affected us.

I begin this chapter by detailing our collective teacher inquiry and sharing the major themes of our research as well as the response to the first research question. Next, I acclimate readers with the research site, Southwest Atlanta, Georgia. I continue by sharing a brief review of literature regarding the confluence of urban education reform and gentrification. I include factors such as neoliberalism, the Atlanta Cheating Scandal, and anti-Blackness to show how urban education reform and gentrification intersect. This chapter concludes with, and represents,

an analysis of urban education reform and gentrification as "The New School Pushout." The goal

is to leave readers with a perspective of how our collective inquiry led us to recognize urban

education reform and gentrification as "The New School Pushout" and the ways in which

[Black] teachers in this study searched, expanded, and bared our souls in efforts to keep Black

communities together.

Previous chapters identify the co-researchers using pseudonyms. This deliberate and

intentional masking was necessary to protect the identity, security, and privacy of the teacher co-

researchers whose participation in this dissertation study might have jeopardized their jobs in a

right-to-work state. In this chapter, however, our names are our own. Neighborhoods, schools,

streets, and city officials are also named in this chapter. While this unmasking may be confusing,

this choice to reveal our identities highlights our personal and professional commitment to our

schools and neighborhoods. Exposing our actual names in this chapter does not breach the

university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) agreement because the co-researchers'

conversations and thoughts in Phase Two and Phase Three of this study remain masked.

However, this chapter represents our conscious decision to write, present, and share with the

public our collective contribution to research literature as well as education policy discourse. The

names and identities of listening exchange participants are masked. Additionally, our research

site is exposed. Southwest Atlanta is the neighborhood where we each reside, work, and engage.

We do not hide behind pseudonyms to advocate for the protection and security of a place where

we have invested our professional lives, lay our heads at night, and build memories with our

families, friends, and neighbors. The act of self-disclosure is a response to research question two

– teachers in this study demonstrate our knowledge, skills, mindset, consciousness, worldview,

that is to say, our souls, as a result of our engagement in a participatory action research process

through our unabashed public pronouncement against the negative effects of gentrification and urban education reform that we identified – and maintains the promise to create scholarship that is relevant and usable to the broader community.

Teacher Inquiry

In Chapter Four, I shared that an audience member during our CAU presentation thought it fascinating to see how the intended achievement motivations from the APS central office actually landed on the ground in the streets of Southwest Atlanta. Our teacher inquiry is a move towards telling the story "from the ground." Armed with academic literature, publicly available data, personal experience as residents of Southwest Atlanta, and professional teacher observations in Southwest Atlanta schools, our research collective embarked on an inquiry journey to understand the motivations and desires of Black people and new residents more intimately. As mentioned in previous chapters, we hosted three community listening exchanges designed to offer a reciprocal exchange amongst participants and our research team. We hosted each listening exchange in the living room of a Southwest Atlanta neighborhood home.

The first listening exchange was coordinated in partnership with our community partner, Gwinnett SToPP, in a newly renovated house in Pittsburgh, Southwest Atlanta. During this listening exchange the co-executive director of Gwinnett SToPP introduced the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon and how Georgia education policies deepen disparate outcomes for Black children and Black communities. Nasir Muhammad, an Atlanta historian and owner-operator of Black Mecca of the South Tours, provided a brief history of Southwest Atlanta (see Appendix F). The second listening exchange was held in the home of a Washington Park, Southwest Atlanta newcomer (see Appendix D). The third in a Pittsburgh, Southwest Atlanta house loaned

to an area non-profit organization by the owners, the Annie E. Casey Foundation. From the third

listening exchange, we conducted two follow-up interviews with Black grandparents and a Black

mother who reside in Pittsburgh, Southwest Atlanta.

We gleaned a lot during these intimate community listening exchanges where a total of

37 Black and White participants (see Tables 5.1, 5.2, 5.3) introduced themselves and their

motivation for attending.

Second listening exchange (White, male) participant: *I'm Jay [pseudonym]. I think if you live in Atlanta though, you can't ignore race or can't ignore education, like it's everywhere. The two things intersect in very visible ways in all neighborhoods, so if they don't then you're maybe further out, maybe. So, I'm always interested to hear what other people have to say on it, so I'm mostly listening. It's fun to hear conversations, fun meaning often challenging but... My kids also go to[redacted]. So that's why I'm here.*

Second listening exchange (White, female) participant: *My name is Kimberly [pseudonym] and I live in the neighborhood that's on the other side of that street that's called Ashview Heights. And we have two little girls and they are at a Montessori daycare in the neighborhood in Ashview Heights, called [school name redacted]. And what brought me here today? I'm a former teacher and I work in the school systems. I've also noticed how quickly our neighborhood is changing. I've been here more than ten years, but I don't quite know how the schools are changing. And to be honest, before I had kids and I lived over here, and I was teaching in Vine City. I was like oh, my children won't go to the public schools in the neighborhood. They won't be there and then I had kids and I was like not quite sure. And so, I want to be there and I want to be a part of the community's changing schools in my heart. My head is in a different place.*

Table 5.1: First Listening Session Participant Profiles

Participant	Gender	Age Range	Race	Neighborhood
# 1	Female	35-44 years-old	Black	Capital View
# 2	Female	35-44 years-old	Black	N/A
# 3	Male	45-54 years-old	Black	Mableton
# 4	Male	25-34 years-old	Black	N/A
# 5	Male	25-34 years-old	Black	N/A
# 5	Male	25-34 years-old	Black	Norcross
# 6	Male	45-54 years-old	Black	N/A
# 7	Female	35-44 years-old	Black	South Atlanta
# 8	Female	45-54 years-old	Black	Norcross
# 9	Female	35-44 years-old	Black	N/A
# 10	Female	25-34 years-old	Black	Hammond Park
# 11	Female	25-34 years-old	Black	Hapeville
# 12	Female	25-34 years-old	Black	West End

Participant	Gender	Age Range	Race	Neighborhood
# 13	Female	35-44 years-old	Black	Hammond Park
# 14	Male	45-54 years-old	Black	Adair Park
# 15	Female	45-54 years-old	Black	N/A
# 16	Male	12-17 years-old	Black	N/A

Table 5.2 Second Listening Exchange Participant Profiles

Participant	Gender	Age Range	Race	Neighborhood
# 1	Female	35-44 years old	White	West End
# 2	Male	35-44 years old	White	West End
# 3	Female	25-34 years old	White	Ashview Heights
# 4	Male	25-34 years old	Black	Ashview Heights
# 5	Female	25-34 years old	White	Washington Park
# 6	Female	25-34 years old	White	Washington Park
# 7	Male	25-34 years old	White	Washington Park
# 8	Male	35-44 years old	White	Adair Park
# 9	Female	25-34 years old	White	Hapeville
# 10	Female	25-34 years old	Black	Hammond Park
# 11	Female	35-44 years old	Black	South Atlanta
# 12	Female	35-44 years old	Black	Capital View

Table 5.3 Third Listening Exchange Participant Profiles

Participant	Gender	Age Range	Race	Neighborhood
# 1	Female	35-44 years old	Black	Capital View
# 2	Female	25-34 years old	White	Pittsburgh
# 3	Female	35-44 years old	Black	Pittsburgh
# 4	Female	25-34 years old	Black	Pittsburgh
# 5	Female	25-34 years old	Black	Pittsburgh
# 6	Female	35-44 years old	Black	Pittsburgh
# 7	Female	55-64 years old	Black	Pittsburgh
# 8	Female	25-34 years old	Black	Pittsburgh
# 9	Female	25-34 years old	Black	Pittsburgh

From the onset, we built a rapport with listening session participants. At each of the three listening exchanges, chairs were position around a table or in a circle to allow participants to make eye contact with whomever was speaking. The seating arrangement allowed us to have an

even flow of conversation where no one interrupted another person or talked over the next person.

A local realtor and executive director of a housing nonprofit, Ronald Denson [pseudonym], coordinated the first listening exchange location, a vacant, renovated house for sale owned by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Denson also secured food and drinks for the listening exchange through an in-kind donation by a real estate broker. The broker said a few welcoming words at the beginning of the first listening exchange and left business cards. Because this was a vacant house, the sponsor forgot to turn on the air conditioning. It was an early June afternoon in a city affectionally known as "Hotlanta" and the living room did not shed Atlanta's namesake. Even with several fans blowing, the living room was a literal sweatbox. Every participant, however, stayed until the very end. There was a projector white screen positioned at the far end of the living room to display our presentation and listening exchange questions (see Appendix D). To maintain the reciprocal commitment of the listening session, we invited a local historian, Nasir Muhammad, to share the history and legacy of Pittsburgh Atlanta.

The second listening exchange was in the living room of a White family in Washington Park, Southwest Atlanta. This family had been in the neighborhood since 2009. Lee [pseudonym] worked as a missionary and basketball coach at nearby Washington High School and knew one of the co-researchers since her teenage years at Washington High School. Lee also works with a local foundation. Using her strong neighborhood ties, Lee recruited her circle of friends and neighbors. We supplied bagels, cream cheese, fruit, and coffee for this listening exchange. Instead of setting up a projector white screen, we used blank post-it chart paper as our backdrop. We positioned several urban education and urban housing books across the coffee table and provided each participant with a folder with the consent form, and more than six

articles related to gentrification and urban city schools. One of the participants was the dean of a

charter network. He asked to take a picture with us, and I declined. His response was, "That's

smart to stay out of pictures when you're doing controversial work." We went on to chat about

his days as a doctoral student at Georgia State University (GSU) before he started the charter

network. He mentioned a few GSU professors and alumni and shared that a few were board

members of the charter network.

An additional question was posed during the second listening exchange that was not a

part of the first listening exchange because of the different racial composition of the participants

(Do you consider yourself a gentrifier? Why or why not?). All but one participant was White at

this listening exchange.

The third listening exchange was more informal than the previous two. The Stewart

Center is a local non-profit in Pittsburgh Atlanta and has long served students from Gideons

Elementary School. In fact, I coached teachers who tutored Stewart Center students as part of my

teaching internship in the Georgia State University Urban Literacy Clinic, under the direction of

Dr. Amy Seely Flint. The Stewart Center After-School program coordinator and I have a

longstanding relationship. She mentioned that the Stewart Center partnered with the Annie E.

Casey Foundation to renovate and rent houses to Gideons Elementary School parents in an effort

to keep them in the neighborhood and neighborhood school. Many of the parents were Black

women who could not otherwise afford to purchase a home in the rapidly gentrifying

neighborhood. Amber [pseudonym], the program coordinator, extended an invitation to a

Thursday night meeting where parents and guardians get together to discuss a number of issues

impacting their families including housing. Amber mentioned that the issue of housing was a

pressing one and the parents would love to talk with university researchers about it. This

exchange did not include a presentation, or predetermined questions and it was not recorded. Instead, it was a dining room conversation with Black mothers and Black grandmothers. Because this was an informal session, no notes were written while people spoke. Instead, there was an emphasis of listening intently to their concerns. After the session I wrote journal notes to capture my recollections of what was discussed. One of the mothers capped the conversation saying, "I'm not going to let anyone kick me out. I'm going to fight for my right to stay."

What We Learned

Our research collective embarked on an inquiry journey to understand the education concerns, housing motivations, and desires of Black people and new residents more intimately. Listening exchanges provided a space for us to listen, learn, and also share knowledge with participants. We analyzed transcripts after each listening exchange using an inductive and thematic analysis method looking for patterns across participant statements and expressed ideals. Three distinct yet interconnected themes emerged from our analysis of the transcripts of the three community listening exchanges: 1) anti-Black discourse, 2) Black displacement, and 3) Communities within Communities.

Anti-Black Discourse

During the first listening exchange a Black, male participant remarked: *One of the things that I found interesting about [affluent white school] is a lot of the teachers were Black and a lot of the students were not Black. But they had great education and so it looked like a [sic] oxymoron to me because I expected, I expected that all (pause) most of the teachers were gonna be White and that wasn't the case.* The comment was something that we missed during the listening exchange but the statement bounced off the page during our data analysis. The

participant's comment demonstrates the ways in which deficit-based, dominant narratives label the lives and expectations of Black teachers. The statement of this Black participant did not offer a positive assessment of the wonderful and rigorous work Black teachers were conducting in a White school, but a total shock and surprise that Black teachers were capable of such academic excellence. This statement is aligned with a response from the second listening exchange. When we asked participants to share where they see themselves within the changes happening in the neighborhood and school, a second listening session participant responded this way: *I think when I first moved into the neighborhood, I had a much greater hope for the changes, and I was very active in the neighborhood. I tried to get to know neighbors. And I had a lot of passion for seeing restoration and redemption in the neighborhood. And although I would never have said it at the time, I'm sure there was a part of me that was being fueled by the great white hope, you know, and trying to save the children…my priorities shifted and now I find myself living in the neighborhood, not being involved in it and I don't have a lot of passion like I used to. And so, I almost feel numb.* The White female participant's views of the neighborhood and school were also deficit-based in that she wanted to "save the children" as the "great white hope." In her estimation, Black schools and Black neighborhoods were lacking and there was nothing to be gained from Black schools and neighborhoods because they need "redeeming" and "restoring." Both participants pitch anti-Black discourse through a dehumanizing, deficit-lens. Both participants, one Black and one White, saw no value in Black schools or with Black teachers. Their discourse is an indication of anti-Black rhetoric that openly and casually floats in conversations about education and housing in gentrified Black neighborhoods.

Black Displacement

During the first listening exchange, a Black woman participant raved about a Southwest Atlanta neighborhood where she grew up and the school she attended: *I grew up in my ideal neighborhood. I grew up where my parents were one of the first Black families to move into Cascade. My parents took over West Manor if you look at the pictures from 1964, West Manor class of 1964 it was an all-white school. By 1972, it was predominantly Black school with Black teachers. APS [Atlanta Public Schools] left us alone. APS never came over to West Manor Elementary School: "Leave those Black kids alone. Because those parents do not play, leave them alone, whatever they want." We had music, art, Spanish, PE every day, music every day, art every day. All the stuff they say happens on the north side, we had on the south side at West Manor. They left us alone. We tested off the grid. And we did well. And we had a community around that school that supported that school.* Her statement along with the Pittsburgh history talk by a local Atlanta historian provided a picture of a Southwest Atlanta community rich in community pride, Black excellence, and deep kinships. The Black Intellectual Tradition guided our analysis of such pronouncements in helping to correct the false narrative about Southwest Atlanta neighborhoods and schools.

Black displacement is the reality of Southwest Atlanta and the schools and neighborhoods described by the historian and the Atlanta native are disappearing to flipped homes, and new charter schools, both with fewer Black residents and students. Kimberly's [pseudonym] statement about a neighborhood needing "redemption" and "restoration" showcases an ideology of who (read: White people) will bring a resurgence to a divested community and under enrolled schools. Newcomer participants at the second listening exchange mentioned how there was "nothing there" before they got there, which said to us that Black people were invalidated and invisible in this rapidly gentrifying neighborhood.

During a discussion at the first listening exchange regarding the question, where do you see yourself in the changing neighborhood and school, Shakale, a co-researcher, asked a participant a follow-up question and later remarked how she is concerned about possibly losing her job as a Black teacher: *As a [Black] teacher in the community, when it changes, I'm concerned that the school could change. They may want to change a lot of things that could put my job, you know, at risk.* I never knew Shakale felt this way. Her concerns show just how far-reaching Black displacement reaches. Displacement affects Black students, families, and teachers.

Communities within Communities

After several transcript reads, discussions, and recategorizations, we discovered the multiple communities operating within the larger Southwest Atlanta neighborhood. The second listening exchange revealed how newcomers define community and create networks. Newcomers used the word *community* liberally as a way to signify their place as newcomers and to signal that they are deeply entrenched in their new neighborhoods. Their discussions, however, lacked a connection to longstanding residents. For example, when discussing where to send their children to school, participants mentioned talking to residents whose children were "already at the Montessori schools" and sending their children where they had friends. The newcomers rely on technology to communicate with each other and social spaces such as friends' porch parties, the recently opened brewery, or a new restaurant just off a BeltLine (explained later) entryway.

Participants at the third listening exchange also developed a networked community within the larger community. For instance, they held ongoing Thursday night meetings that were an opportunity to talk through issues that they were facing. They did not post online to find or

share information but looked forward to their meetings to talk in person about challenges and potential resources.

The data analysis process was part of our soul-searching during this inquiry that helped us to develop a deeper more critical lens of our teaching, learning, and leadership practices. Not only did this inquiry raise our awareness, consciousness, and voice as teachers through the data collection and analysis process but many of the themes we identified also intersected with our personal and professional lives as teachers and Southwest Atlanta residents. The themes of anti-Black discourse, Black displacement, and communities within communities (networks) are discussed further throughout the remainder of this chapter and the next.

Our teacher inquiry answers the first research question: In what ways does participatory action research engage teachers to: a) bridge knowledge gaps, b) critically self-reflect on ideological thinking, and c) collaborate with communities they directly serve? Our teacher inquiry taught us how to connect the dots between classroom practices and school and district policies. For example, Shakale often stated, "it's the policies," during Phase Four of our research when thinking about the deleterious outcomes of student achievement, school discipline, and parent participation. Shakale's statement is an indication of her bridging the disconnect between the multiple ways in which students show up in school and the structural policies that shape their opportunities and performance. Shakale's statement is also an indication of her self-reflection on not only her own ideological thinking but the ideological thinking of those around her. For example, Shakale mentioned in Chapter Four how the schools want us to, "teach this, and teach that" without giving any considerations to the structural forces shaping the students' narrative. Reading articles, watching documentaries, and listening to community people helped to shape, not just Shakale's, but our entire collective's understandings of the deficit-based, racialized anti-

Black discourse and policies that shape Black students' schooling experiences. With this new

knowledge and understanding, then, we were able to approach our school communities as allies

understanding the larger structures adding inequitable barriers to teaching and learning. The

remainder of this chapter provides context for the second research question: How do teachers

demonstrate their knowledge, skills, mindset, consciousness, worldview, beliefs, attitudes, and

dispositions, or souls, through a participatory action research process?

Welcome to Atlanta

Legacy of Southwest Atlanta
Nasir Muhammad
Local Historian and Owner-Operator of Black Mecca of the South Tours

Pittsburgh was established in 1883. Pittsburgh is directly connected to Atlanta through the railroad industry. Pittsburgh is one of the oldest African American communities in Atlanta. African Americans in Pittsburgh gained employment through three railroad lines that cross the neighborhood: East Tennessee, Virginia, and Georgia Railroad Company. Pittsburgh, along with an area called Joyland and South Atlanta is where Black money lived. This is also the area where Clark College was established and originally located so Blacks who lived in these areas were connected to the institution. That is why you can go down close to the railroads and travel down through South Atlanta and most of the streets are named after people who were connected to old Clark College.

Carrie Badger Pittman. She had the distinction of being one of the few women who graduated from Atlanta University and also Morehouse. Carrie Pittman's husband, John Pittman, was a Morehouse graduate in 1926. Carrie Pittman graduated from Morehouse at the age of 61. Pittman Park in Pittsburgh is named for her. But one of the things we noticed in Atlanta, when something is named after a woman, for the most part, you never see a picture, you never see a monument, never see a statue. We have like five or six statues of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I am not saying we should not have them. I am suggesting that there should be some balance. Carrie Pittman was the principal at Roach Street Grammar School which is where Blacks were educated and also William H. Crogman School which is of course, now is Crogman Lofts.

Carrie Steel Logan, born into slavery and orphaned as a child, used her $100 a month salary as a stewardess for the Central Railroad to buy land and build the Carrie Steel Orphanage. The orphanage started on Auburn Avenue but it was so small in that little wooden house. She ends up purchasing this big property right here in Pittsburgh which is the same location of where Gideons Elementary School is right now. That was her whole block right there and her school ends up leaving this area and going to the west side where it is now. It is the oldest operating, continuous operating Black orphanage in the United States of America. None outlasts this one

and it is from a Black woman who was in this area of Pittsburgh, working hard to actually do that. No marker for her except the one on Auburn Avenue.

*The original alma mater song of **Clark College** starts off with, "There's a school on a hill." Now you know, right now, Clark Atlanta University, it don't sit on no hill, but if you go over here to Carver High School, that's a hill. The original Clark College was one of the greatest architectural buildings in Atlanta. Black men built Clark College from the ground up. Where Carver High School sits now is the old Clark College, now known as Clark Atlanta University. Clark College had twelve to fifteen properties on campus. Some of the buildings were named after local Black luminaries (Warren Hall, Christman Hall, and Krogman Chapel), while other buildings were named after Caucasians from the north who supported the institution.*

What we have to begin to understand is that the Pittsburgh community, the south Atlanta community, and the Joyland community, were all connected. The brain power, the education, the money, in Black Atlanta all came out of this area.

***Charles L. Gideons** is also a part of Pittsburgh history. He was a longtime school administrator with Atlanta Public Schools and Gideons Elementary School is his namesake.*

***George Washington Carver** doesn't have a school named after him by accident. George Washington Carver used to come to this community right here and if you know where the property Annie Casey has right now, the new development taking place, that was farmland. The students at Clark had to work the farm to make money to stay in school, otherwise, they'd be sent back home. George Washington Carver comes here in the 1890s after Booker T. Washington gives his famous speech at the Cotton Exposition and George Washington Carver begins to teach them how to cultivate the land, to produce, stay in school, and make money selling their produce. He also comes in 1923 and continues to look at their efforts and make sure that they're doing it. How do I know that? Because I have letters from Bishop Henry McNeil Turner talking about George Washington Carver coming to Atlanta.*

*Now, another thing that Pittsburgh does not get credit for is the refuge the community provided after the **Atlanta Massacre in 1906**. Don't let anyone ever tell you that Sherman burning down Atlanta in 1917 was the worst thing that ever happened in terms of fire. No! That's not the worst fire in Atlanta's history. The Atlanta Massacre from Edgewood Avenue to Ponce de Leon Avenue left 10,000 Black people homeless. The Pittsburgh community opened their doors. Pittsburgh churches, communities, and organizations allowed Black families from the Old Fourth Ward to come and live. It is not talked about and when trying to document what happened. Ebenezer and Wheat Street Baptist Church burned down during the great Atlanta fire and so much of the history was lost in the fire. So, you had a lot of Blacks who were left homeless in this situation and Pittsburgh served as a safe place for them. Now, I offer two tours that explain this history. One is over at the Morehouse College and one is right here in Pittsburgh.*

*We say gentrification but there's another type of radical element that's racist in nature and that is the **building of interstate highways**. Once they built I-75, I-85 and I-20, it decimated the community. A lot of people tried to look at the people but the people are a reflection of those in leadership who were passing laws and regulations to decimate their community. The southern*

end tip of Pittsburgh was completely cut off when they built I-75, I-85 and I-20. Yes, people are able to move around but you notice that interstates are not built through White neighborhoods. And the way stadiums are built all across the country, all of these things are directly connected to severing Black communities and so this happens in Atlanta, it happens in Pittsburgh. And unfortunately, only a few people were compensated when they built I-75 and I-85, and that was a few Black women who had property on Auburn Avenue. Most of the people were displaced by eminent domain or they were forced completely out (First Listening Exchange Transcript).

Atlanta, Georgia is one of the largest metropolises in the Southeastern United States. Once nicknamed Terminus because it marked the end of the Western & Atlantic railroad, Atlanta has swelled into an international city that attracts professionals, technology entrepreneurs, entertainment and music artists, and a slew of college students each academic year. Atlanta politicians have billed Atlanta as "A City Too Busy to Hate" because of the number of civil rights legends born and raised here and the subsequent number of organizations dedicated to the civil rights struggle. Atlanta is also affectionately known as the "Black Mecca" because of the vast number of Black professionals, politicians, entrepreneurs, and college graduates that call Atlanta home (Hobson, 2017; Grant, 2018).

Atlanta is an attractive city to many not only because of the number of Black professionals who live and work here, but also because of what some consider to be an affordable cost of living compared to other large urban centers. Atlanta has attracted more Fortune 500 companies recently because of the number of colleges and universities (Georgia State University, Georgia Technical Institute, Spelman College, Morehouse College, Clark Atlanta University, and nearby University of Georgia) that graduate skilled labor.

Amidst these historical facts, a recent Bloomberg analysis listed Atlanta, Georgia as having the highest level of income inequality of all U.S. cities. While several Fortune 500 companies are headquartered in Atlanta, the poverty rate is 24% with many people working low-paying jobs in the hospitality, retail, and service industries (Foster & Lu, 2018). Black residents

comprise the lowest amount of owner-occupant homes (Keenan, 2019), and with the wave of

gentrification Atlanta is undergoing, this disparity is likely to increase. Southwest Atlanta is the

quadrant of the city where these disparities are compounded.
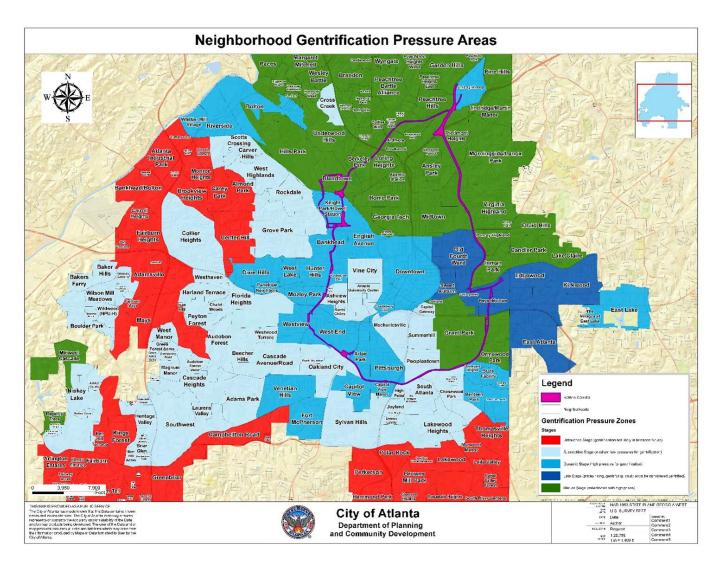

Figure 5.1 City of Atlanta Neighborhood Gentrification Pressure Areas (City of Atlanta)

Southwest Atlanta, Georgia

Southwest Atlanta is a historically Black area of the city. Many of the highways, streets,

and educational institutions bear the names of civil rights icons: Ralph David Abernathy

Boulevard, Joseph E. Lowery Boulevard, James E. Boone Boulevard, Maynard Jackson High

School, and Coretta Scott King Young Women's Leadership Academy. Southwest Atlanta is also home to the Atlanta University Consortium (AUC) comprised of four historically Black higher education institutions: Morehouse College, Spelman College, Clark Atlanta University, and Morris Brown College.

Today, several prominent figures reside in Southwest Atlanta including Mayor Keisha Lance-Bottoms, Ceasar Mitchell, Georgia Supreme Court Justice Leah Ward Sears. Southwest Atlanta also houses the recently constructed Mercedes Benz Stadium (which displaced historic Friendship Baptist Church, established 1862) and this part of the city is close to the busiest airport in the country, Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. Southwest Atlanta is also the most rampant site of gentrification in Atlanta (see Figure 5.1).

Before I continue it is important to define gentrification. Gentrification was coined by Ruth Glass (1964), a German-born British sociologist who used the term to describe the takeover of a once working-class neighborhood by middle-class, respectable residents who, in turn, spurred developers to "fix up" surrounding retail. In London, the result was a total removal of working-class residents. Gentry is the root word of gentrification, which means people of "good" social position or nobility in class and birth. Another definition states, "gentry are well-born, genteel and well-bred people of high social class." In sum, gentrification is the removal of a lower, less-genteel, class of people for replacement by a gentry class.

The Atlanta Housing Justice League defines gentrification this way:

> Gentrification is urban revitalization driven by profit that results in the displacement of historically marginalized working-class communities and communities of color. Typically, these communities have struggled with too few jobs, amenities, and services because of years of disinvestment. Gentrification is led by private developers, landlords, and businesses, and often happens in areas where land is inexpensive and the potential to turn a profit is high. While development is usually framed as coming from the

actions of private businesses, government policy plays a key role in promoting gentrification by offering tax incentives, zoning, and infrastructure improvements. As neighborhoods are developed and renovated, newer housing stock attracts higher-income residents as land value, rents, and property taxes all rise. This in turn can lead to widespread displacement of community members, often low-income people of color, who are priced out. Ironically, while development brings much needed amenities such as schools, commercial districts, and grocery stores, the low-income populations most in need of such services do not reap the eventual rewards of investment (Housing Justice League and Research Action Cooperative, 2017).

Shae (co-researcher): *I was taught that purchasing a house is one way for families to build and maintain wealth. However, when your family is victimized and taken advantage of with predatory loans, second mortgages, and interest rates, the American dream is more like a nightmare. My great-grandmother purchased a home in the small, predominantly Black Mozley Park neighborhood on the westside of Atlanta in 1995. This house was the family space, housing more than 3 generations. Growing up, I moved from place-to-place in the city of Atlanta often, but when I tell people I'm from the westside, some of my most vivid memories come from my days in this neighborhood. At the time of her death in 2017, my great-grandmother still owed $59,000 on a house that cost $55,000 when she purchased it more than 22 years ago. Now, in 2019, the house is on the market for $339,000 after being bought and flipped by a real estate investor. This house was not just any house. This house raised me. My family went through many stages of homelessness where we bounced from floors to couches in the homes of various friends and family members, but this house was always our stability. When my mother made the decision to keep our school and community network consistent despite our financial hardships, this house was the address that allowed those connections to remain. When my great-grandmother passed, we were left with a roach-infested, dilapidated house that was going into foreclosure. It was easy for someone to purchase the house, knock down a few walls, slap some paint on it, and make a huge profit. People will say the house was empty and it didn't matter, but it did matter to us* (Journal entry).

Southwest Atlanta suffered decades of divestment and neglect which became an

attractive feature for investors after the 2008 housing crash. Investors saw low property value as

a profitable strategy and greater return on investment to buy, hold, and wait for future

neighborhood investment. Following the 2008 housing crash, two federal agencies – Federal

Deposit and Insurance Corp. and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) –

offered options to stabilize hardest-hit neighborhoods, including neighborhoods throughout

Southwest Atlanta (Grantham & Trubey, 2012). Some homes were auctioned from less than

$3,000 while local groups bought foreclosed and vacant homes to fix up and rent or sell to low-

income homeowners. However, few homes were sold to low-income residents. One profit model

during the buy-and-hold phase was to complete bare minimum work to make the house habitable

for rent through Section 8 housing or Fannie Mae rent programs. By 2014, with the help of buyer

incentive programs offered through Invest Atlanta and the construction of the Atlanta BeltLine,

real estate speculators and investors were able to cash in and spurred a wave of gentrification in

Southwest Atlanta. Invest Atlanta is:

> . . .the official economic development authority for the City of Atlanta. Its purpose is to strengthen Atlanta's economy and global competitiveness to create increased opportunity and prosperity for the people of Atlanta.
>
> Invest Atlanta is a government authority comprised of the Urban Residential Finance Authority, Downtown Development Authority and the Atlanta Economic Renaissance Corporation. We're governed by a nine-member board of directors, chaired by the Mayor of Atlanta. We receive governmental power through two pieces of legislation: the Local Government Authorities Registration Act and the Georgia Redevelopment Powers Law. We are able to receive charitable donations. Building upon the city's rich legacy, we leverage our unique resources to drive growth, capitalizing on our globally recognized thought leaders who have multidisciplinary subject matter expertise.
>
> We serve as the point of connectivity for our partners and constituents locally, regionally, nationally and globally. We build and lead coalitions through our powerful network of businesses, educational institutions, and civic organizations.
>
> Invest Atlanta creates programs and initiatives focused on developing and fostering public-private partnerships to accelerate job creation/economic growth, neighborhood revitalization/investment, and innovation/entrepreneurship. Invest Atlanta's economic tools include bond financing, revolving loan funds, housing financing, tax increment financing and tax credits (InvestAtlanta.com).

Pittsburgh (Black, male) grandfather: *Yeah, I was at a meeting and I used to go to them all the time. Annie E. Casey, when she first started, I went to all her classes and stuff and graduated and all that stuff. That was ten years ago and they was talking about, ten years ago what's happening now. About we gonna do the streets and have this and all, you know, all this so called glamour. That's what they were saying ten years ago, which is happening now. But like I was telling Shepherd at a meeting I went to once, right here at the Salvation Army, right here where we are, been there over ten years and that sidewalk been tore up to where you cannot walk down it. You can't, you can't walk down the sidewalk on the bicycle, if people on a walker or wheelchair, they can't access that particular part of sidewalk. It's been like that over ten years. I told Shepherd about it. She said, "Well, call my office," and I knew then, I'm gonna call your office and you gonna tell me something and, but anyway, long and short of it, the sidewalk is still tore up. You can call Salvation Army and they say, "Yeah, we're gonna do this," and they don't. They spend their money on the campus but they don't spend money on the sidewalks that's on the outskirts of the campus. You know, where they got the front of it looking all pretty but back here where we are, they don't touch it. You know, and I'm like, "Okay," but still, when you go to these meetings, they talk about, "Oh, we are making these changes happening, we gonna do this and we gonna do that," but like I was telling my wife, I'm interested in the right now. I'm not interested in what you all gonna do five or ten years from now because I will probably be dead. You know, so don't be telling me what you gonna do five or ten years when you can't fix the sidewalk been tore up for ten years. You know, and there's lots surrounding our spot right here now. I can't get nobody, you talking about overgrown, this stuff is over six feet high and it's a lot next to us that's been there ever since we been here which I been cutting for over ten years. Do you think I got a penny for cutting, keeping this lot clean? And stuff like that. That's what gets me. And then when you call the city, well, it'll be 30 days, you know, and we'll send a code enforcer. You think I seen code enforcement? No, I'm still cutting it. And I called and I asked them, gave them the location of the property. Girl pulled up and she was saying, well, we don't know who owns the property. I'm like, what? And I said, okay, you don't know who owns it. I bet if I start building something on there, somebody will come up. If I start putting something on that property, I bet somebody gonna come up. But over the ten years, all the times I done cut trees down and I'm talking I'm keeping it manicured, for ten years, I've been doing that. For nothing. You know, because I just don't want it, because if I don't do it, it's gonna grow over here and cover us up* (Interview transcript).

This strategy of displacing Black and poor residents for a Whiter more affluent demographic is not new in Atlanta. Atlanta has long been the test site for housing projects. Vale (2013) calls Atlanta a "twice-cleared community" because of the persistent and historic displacement of Black communities twice on the same land. The first housing project in the

United States was Techwood Housing projects originally constructed for White working-class

residents (Holliman, 2008) and later, in the 1990s, again cleared of Black and poor residents for

the HOPE VI project in preparation of the 1996 Centennial Olympics (Vale, 2013). This strategy

also took shape in other parts of Atlanta, Georgia including East Lake, Old Fourth Ward, and

Grant Park (see Figure 5.1).

In 2014, Southwest Atlanta experienced an 80% spike in home purchases within a half-

mile of the city-funded Atlanta BeltLine (Lartey, 2018). The Atlanta BeltLine is a development

project that connects 45 Atlanta neighborhoods through a 22-mile inactive railroad loop that

encircles the city. The BeltLine offers retail, restaurants, recreation, and nightlife options to

residents and visitors. The Atlanta BeltLine is the brainchild and senior thesis project of Georgia

Institute of Technology graduate, Ryan Gravel. Gravel's original intent of the Atlanta BeltLine

was a grassroots commitment to "use transit as an infrastructure tool…to encourage economic

development in Atlanta's intown neighborhoods" (Gravel, 2005). In essence, Gravel intended

for longstanding communities to benefit from the increased economic development of the

BeltLine. To the contrary, most of the home purchases in Southwest Atlanta are made by White

newcomers and outside investors. The Atlanta BeltLine is the driver of gentrification in

Southwest Atlanta (Housing Justice League and Research Action Cooperative, 2017) and has led

to the displacement of Black students, families, and teachers.

Second listening exchange (White, male) participant: *But when we moved in, I didn't even know the BeltLine was down there and that's just been a beautiful, wonderful thing. I know it comes with other issues, but I think the main draw for loving this neighborhood is the community, the BeltLine. I think everybody is moving or wanting to move towards like a more, like walkable, bikeable lifestyle and a neighborhood like this offers that. I think the part, why I said I don't feel like I'm a gentrifier right now is the profit. We don't have this five-year plan, wait until our house is worth whatever amount and all right, see you later and taking our money and running. We don't have a plan to ever move. So, if I think of gentrification as being profit*

driven? I disagree with feeling that way for myself, but yeah, I don't know. I don't know if I'm just so stuck in my middle-class ways. Our street looks nice and, you know, [the home] was bank owned. It was an empty house, too. So, we didn't just displace anyone necessarily either (Second Listening Exchange Transcript).

Second listening exchange (White, male) participant: *But I feel like a gentrifier partly because just like I'm aware that when I'm out working in my yard and like somebody looking for a house drives by and sees me, it impacts housing values. In some tiny, little way, it just does. You know, and the tiny little way adds up over and over again. So, it's actually not tiny. And so, [do] I feel like it is my presence in the neighborhood leading to my renters next door being evicted? Yeah, a little bit. There's displacement as a result of me living there and that's, that's why I feel responsibility* (Second Listening Exchange Transcript).

Neoliberalism in Atlanta

Our teacher participatory action research collective attended the URBAN Research Action Network convening in Denver, Colorado. There was a mix of doctoral students, high school students, university professors, teachers, and community activist. The word neoliberalism was used liberally during our first meeting. Convening attendees separated into small work groups to use our time to write and strategize. Brianna had a dazed look on her face when we split. After everyone got settled in our small groups space, Brianna blurted, "I'm so confused and overwhelmed right now! I've heard the word neoliberalism so many times and I don't even know what that means!" As the research facilitator, I immediately felt a grave sense of responsibility for this and realized that our exchanges may not have bridged academic theory and grassroots practices well. I write that here to ask for your patience as I explain neoliberalism and demonstrate how neoliberalism fuels urban education reform in Southwest Atlanta.

Larner (2000) argues that neoliberalism is "both a political discourse. . .and a set of practices that facilitate the governing of individuals from a distance" (p. 6). In this argument, Larner (2000) exposed three different interpretations of neoliberalism: neoliberalism as a policy

framework, neoliberalism as an ideology, and neoliberalism as governmentality, with each interpretational lens resting on five values: the individual; freedom of choice; market security; laissez faire, and minimal government. Lipman (2011) argues that neoliberalism is "an ideological project to reconstruct values, social relations, and social identities…to produce a new social imaginary…thus the assault on collectivity, social responsibility, equality and solidarity" (pg. 10). Essentially, neoliberalism is a departure from Keynesian welfarism – or social and well-being politics – to a governance and policy framework that privileges market-based ideologies, disassembles public sector supports and spending, depoliticizes structural inequities, while emphasizing individual and private responsibility to demonize democratic and collective, political action (Apple, 2006; Turner & Beneke, 2020).

Neoliberalism through all three interpretations is present in Southwest Atlanta. Neoliberalism is the policy framework Atlanta Public School employs to educate Black children. APS, through a turnaround strategy, has closed or turned over public schools to charter management organizations to give parents a market of better school "choices." Neoliberalism is also an ideology infecting Southwest Atlanta schools and neighborhoods because newcomers, investors, and politicians have come to believe that Black children and family have the same options as White newcomers. It is an ideology that promotes meritocracy and the false notions of equity. This ideology is catchy but does little to provoke structural change. Neoliberalism as governmentality is what some might call, "The Atlanta Way." Neoliberalism as governmentality is a way of governing that relies on private enterprise to do the work of public government. This means a city governing body dismantles the public structures of government and contracts businesses to perform government functions. Atlanta is a largely Black city teeming with Black politicians, Black professionals, Black higher education institutions, and Black culture. There

are, however, several Black and White Atlanta elites who have established a coded way of doing business at the expense of Black, poor Atlantans. Black politicians are the face of the city, but White elites and White-run corporations largely influence government decisions. Neoliberalism in Atlanta then is personified in the political, anti-Black racialized discourse and political practices of the Atlanta city government, the Atlanta Public School system, and the multiple entities that comprise the Atlanta housing infrastructure.

Urban Education Reform in Southwest Atlanta

Urban education reform in Atlanta is an iteration of neoliberalism. For example, Southwest Atlanta houses many of the schools implicated in the sensationalized, "Atlanta Cheating Scandal." Throughout Phase Four of the research study and the collective teacher participatory action research Study-within-a-Study, we read and discussed, "None of the Above: The Untold Story of the Atlanta Public Schools Cheating Scandal, Corporate Greed, and the Criminalization of Educators" (Robinson & Simonton, 2019). The publishers describe "None of the Above" this way: "An insider's account of the infamous Atlanta Public Schools cheating scandal that scapegoated black employees for problems caused by an education reform movement that is increasingly a proxy for corporate greed" (Inside cover). Our TPAR discussed many facets presented in the book including the people named who are the current owners and operators of the charter schools the where co-researchers work.

In 2009, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution (AJC) published an article claiming that several Atlanta Public Schools (APS) had high erasure marks and improbable gains on the statewide annual Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT), an assessment which measures academic proficiency and growth in English and Math for 3rd through 8th graders. The AJC

article prompted the Georgia Bureau of Investigations to launch an investigation into possible cheating and test tampering. What ensued was a media spectacle that entrapped 35 educators, testing coordinators, administrators, and former APS superintendent, Dr. Beverly Hall, into a long legal battle that played out on American television screens (Royal & Seriki, 2018). All of the indicted 35 educators were Black and 11 received prison sentences (Robinson & Simonton, 2019). In hindsight, this event can be argued as the catalyst for justifying the takeover of public schools in Southwest Atlanta.
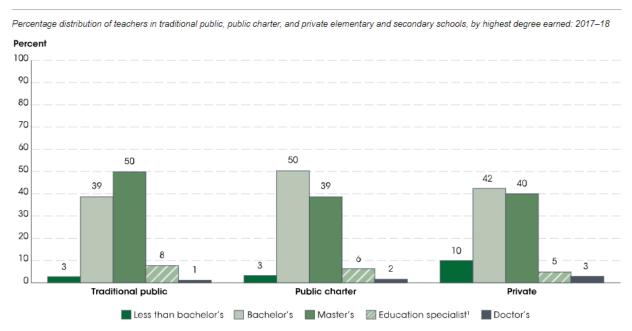
In 2015, Governor Nathan Deal proposed an Opportunity School District (OSD) modeled after the Recovery School District in Louisiana and the Achievement School District in Tennessee. The OSD would have closed or turned over up to 100 failing schools to charter management organizations. In addition, OSD would have given the governor authority to appoint a superintendent who would not report to or consult with a local school board to make decisions. Money to fund an OSD would have come from already strapped public school funding. The OSD was voted down 2-to-1 by Georgia voters during the 2016 election cycle. However, APS superintendent Dr. Meria Carstarphen, who was accused in her former district of pushing a "corporate-reform-backed agenda" (Niesse, 2014), continued to move forward with her APS Turnaround Strategy.

In 2014, Carstarphen worked with school stakeholders to create a strategic plan to support some of the lowest performing schools in the district, many of which were schools in historically Black, disenfranchised, low-income neighborhoods in Southwest Atlanta. This initiative closed several public schools and turned them over to charter management organizations such as Purpose Built Schools of Atlanta, KIPP, and Kindezi through the disguise of improving achievement and school choice. To add insult to injury, these charter management

organizations notoriously hire inexperienced, White teachers through programs such as Teach for America and the New Teacher Project to fill their school ranks. According to Atlanta Public Schools School Turnaround Strategy (2018), the lowest performing schools are defined as schools with a 60 or below College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) score for three consecutive years. Students attending the lowest performing schools are students labeled as having the highest needs in the district. According to Atlanta Public Schools School Turnaround Initiative (2018), one of the key components of the school turnaround process is ensuring that high quality and skilled teachers with previous turnaround experience are hired to teach in the lowest performing schools in the district. Since the turnaround partnerships began, however, the degree, skill level, and high-quality compensation for teachers has decreased. For example, data from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA), shows a significant decrease in certified personnel, years of experience, and certificate level data since the turnaround partnership commenced.

During the 2015-2016 academic year, in one Southwest Atlanta school, 81% of teachers held a master's degree or higher and the average salary was $66,435. Once the turnaround partnership commenced, the percent of teachers holding a master's degree or higher dropped by 45%. Additionally, teacher pay dropped to an average salary of $51,479, a 22.5% decrease. This data shows a clear decrease in teacher experience and teacher pay through turnaround partnerships (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2018). Some might argue that it is an intentional decrease because charter schools control their own budgets and opt to hire less experienced, lower paid teachers (see Figure 5.1). This is a departure from the traditional public-school system where a central office allocates and monitors school budgets and clearly demonstrates a neoliberal school governance model.

Percentage distribution of teachers in traditional public, public charter, and private elementary and secondary schools, by highest degree earned: 2017–18

Percent

Figure 5.2 Highest-Degree Earned in Traditional Public, Public Charter, & Private Schools (nces.ed.gov)

Additionally, similar trends of inexperience and lack of credentials were found among the school leadership teams of the turnaround schools. Since the turnaround partnerships with the public school district are actual market-based contracts, school leaders are not required to hold the same qualifications as traditional public-school leaders with leadership level certification through the Georgia Professional Standards Commission. Consequently, traditional school leaders are subject to rigorous training and skill than that required of charter school leaders. The lack of leadership development greatly affects the overall culture and stability of a school, which in turn, negatively impacts student outcomes and, hence, neighborhood standings. There are more regulations through guidelines, structures, and bureaucracy for leading a traditional public school in APS than leading one of the lowest performing charter managed schools in the district. Larner (2000) argues that "while neoliberalism may mean less government, it does not follow

that there is less governance" (p. 12) and the practice of lessening training, and credentials

required of charter school personnel is a clear depiction of Larner's argument.

Several schools in Southwest Atlanta have been modernized recently or are currently

undergoing renovation to add to the appeal of now highly sought-after real estate (Lareau &

Goyette, 2014). Students who have greatly endured the divestment in Southwest Atlanta schools

will not benefit from these improvements but will be displaced instead.

First listening exchange (Black, male) participant: *In the school where I teach, at Kindezi Gideons. Gideons is supposed get a full renovation and so a new building is supposed to be coming there. It was interesting watching that PowerPoint that Brother Nasir presented because Gideons was built in 1959 and there were never any changes or any renovations from 1959 until now. It is really interesting watching parents or grandparents come into the school and they can recognize where their classroom was when they were students. So now, you know, the gentrification process is about to roll out on this side of town, Gideons is going through like a whole renovation to build a school to fit the needs for the new folks who will be coming to the community* (First Listening Exchange Transcript).

The influx of newcomers, folks who are not connected to the culture and history of

Southwest Atlanta, impacts the mobility rates of Black students in the area. During one of our

listening exchanges, newcomers discussed how they are reluctant to enroll their children in

neighborhood schools and instead opt for privately run schools, homeschooling, or other

nontraditional schooling models which harkens back to Kimberly's vehement pronouncement

that she is "not sending her kids" to a school in Vine City. The newcomers' decisions, in turn,

decrease funding for neighborhood public schools, lessen the public school neighborhood

options for longstanding residents, and add to the contention of fewer housing options. Figure

5.2 depicts the mobility rate percentages of one Southwest Atlanta elementary school compared

to the district percentage. Unsurprisingly, 40% or more of the students who start the school year

at this particular Southwest Atlanta elementary school did not finish the school year at the same school.
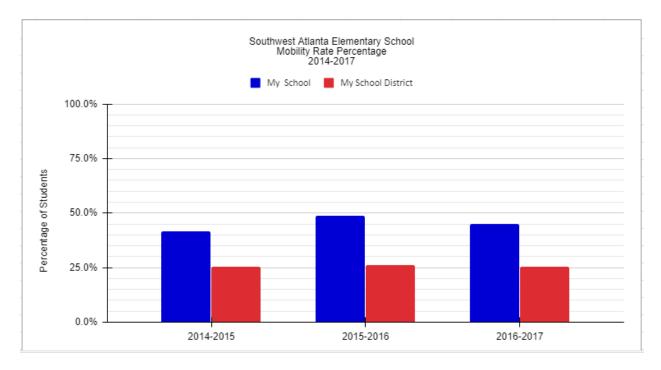
Figure 5.3: Southwest Atlanta Elementary School Mobility Rate (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, gosa.georgia.gov)

High mobility rates lead to children being stripped away from their generational networks, schools, and neighborhoods and forced to contend with new communities with limited community ties. We understand the importance of community and personal connection as teachers in traditionally disenfranchised areas. What stays behind when our students leave teachers and communities are reassuring hugs in the hallway, invitations to birthday parties and sporting events, and impromptu parent-teacher conferences at the grocery stores. The relationships and mutual trust we build with the students and families we serve often lead to better overall educational experiences for kids. The most transient students often struggle to form connections with teachers and peers and may also have academic deficits (Alliance to Reclaim our Schools, 2015).

The Atlanta Cheating Scandal, the proposed Opportunity School District, and Castarphen's School Turnaround Strategy were all markers of neoliberal discourse, policies, and practices in Atlanta, Georgia. Gentrification coupled with the neoliberal urban education reform efforts translates to a more disturbing intention supported by anti-Black, deficit-based ideology. Urban education reform of Atlanta Public Schools as presented does not serve Black, historically disenfranchised students in Southwest Atlanta and does the opposite of what Governor Deal proclaimed. In fact, it is politics as usual by a different name that does not provide Black students with quality and equitable opportunities. Black Southwest Atlanta students, families, and teachers housing, and educational displacement disrupt two mechanisms that Americans trust to boost students' economic and educational mobility: quality education and homeownership. These politics and practices categorically impact the trajectories of Black life and are strong representations of anti-Blackness.

Anti-Black Policies and Practices

In addition to the neoliberal machinations of urban education reform and gentrification in Southwest Atlanta, our collective study revealed anti-Black policies and practices within urban education reform and gentrification that deepened our understanding of school pushout. Dumas (2016) argues that "anti-Blackness marks an irreconcilability between Black and any sense of social and cultural regard" (p. 13). In lay terms, America has a scornful gaze and a fearful fascination towards the Black body in physical spaces where the lack of human, cultural, institutional, individual, and economic regard of Black people is built into the fabric and structures of American society. Black people and Black life are disposable. One could argue that these false notions of Blackness derive from slavery and continued through post-Reconstruction

into Jim Crow and now mass incarceration. However, legislation since the Civil Rights era touts America as a post-racial society where there is not color. Alexander (2010) contends that racist legislation "was uprooted without dislodging either white supremacy or anti-Blackness, now cloaked in race-neutral rhetoric of color-blindness (Heitzeg, 2015, p. 66). Both, anti-Blackness and color-blindness have left us without tactile and practical responses to secure Black communities and schools or buffer our students from the anti-Black experiences, like segregation and ostracism, experienced by previous generations. Malcolm X argued "the General Motors Company brought out a new model of their car every year, that 1960 version differed from the one produced in 1950, but both automobiles were still Cadillacs" (Lipsitz, 1995, p. 701). Essentially, Malcolm X asserted that anti-Blackness just has a new face, body, and contour from decade-to-decade.

Anti-Black rhetoric paints the Black body as "always a problem – as nonhuman; inherently uneducable or at very least, unworthy of education" (Dumas, 2016, p. 16). Neoliberalism offers cunning language to mask anti-Black sentiments. Neoliberalism offers market-based competition, choice, and hyper individualism while altering the fabric of American life at the expense of working-class, Black residents. Neoliberal discourse persuades the public to believe that the urban city center is broken and requires fixing through corporate investment and tax breaks. Neoliberal rhetoric has seeped into the American psyche and is fashioned as every man for himself. Neoliberalism assumes every person has the same opportunities and everyone should just try harder. This ideology gives way to old, stereotypical, racist myths that mischaracterize Black people as lazy, uneducated, money-hungry freeloaders. This ideology is not new but is anti-Black policies and practices by another name.

During our discussions of listening exchange transcripts and "None of the Above" we asked, how do anti-Black policies and practices exist in a city endeared as the "Black Mecca?" We learned from Nasir Muhammad's presentation, Hobson (2017), and Grant (2018), that these practices represent "The Atlanta Way." In 1895, Booker T. Washington delivered a speech entitled "The Atlanta Compromise" in which he implored Black people to not get too full of themselves in post Reconstruction that they could not perform hard labor and continue to build the South. Washington argued that through hard labor Black people would earn the respect and human freedom in the eyes of whites and soon be true American citizens. Atlanta, post-Reconstruction through present-day, has arguably maintained this stance of allowing Whites to dictate the political and economic dealings of Atlanta to maintain the social order. The Atlanta Way is the process of elite Black politicians and Atlantans managing the city while elite Whites negotiate backroom deals. The Atlanta Way is the intersection of urban education reform and gentrification in Southwest Atlanta.

Gentrification Is the New School Pushout

Shae (co-researcher): *Now that I have my own house in the city of Atlanta, not very far from my childhood Mozley Park neighborhood, I am starting to feel the sense of security and consistency that I felt in my great-grandmother's home. However, I am also starting to feel as if my presence in my neighborhood is not wanted. A few months after moving into my home, I received a knock on the door from a couple of white people inquiring about whether I was looking to rent my house out. They claimed they saw a posting online and were interested in touring the house. While I thought it was weird, I put no extra thoughts or energy into the occurrence. But, the first time I got a letter from a realtor to discuss options for selling my house, I was completely shocked. She wrote about how my house was in a desirable location and there were many people interested in the neighborhood and everything it has to offer. What made her think that I did not know the value of my home or the desirability of my neighborhood? Why wasn't I worthy enough to stay in my home and add to the appeal of the neighborhood? The letters and phone calls did not stop after that one. Just recently, I received an unsolicited text message that read, "Hello! My name is [redacted]. Me and my brother own an investment company called [redacted] and*

we were wondering if you are interested in selling the property of which you have just gained ownership. So, if you want to make some fast and lucrative cash [sic] message or call me back at this number or contact one of us on our main line [sic]" (Journal entry).

Shae asked herself: Why wasn't I worthy enough to stay in my home and add to the appeal of the neighborhood? This is a poignant question Shae posed and one many Black families in Southwest Atlanta ponder. I (Thais) was invited to attend a "Homebuyer's Education" course offered by Invest Atlanta at Kindezi at Gideons Elementary School. Ronald Denson, the founder of the housing nonprofit organization, invited me because he wanted my educator opinion in a room full of parents and teachers. Rebecca and Shae also invited me as their school was the venue for the course. Black parents flooded this course hoping to hear promising opportunities about resources to help them keep their neighborhood and school that were rapidly changing all around them. Denson started his spiel by asking, "Is there anyone in here afraid of being displaced?" Every parent in the room raised their hand. One Black mother left her hand up to share her story mentioning how she was pushed out of Grant Park when it was gentrifying and no longer affordable. She convincingly spoke about how she loved the school and neighborhood and was happy when she found the Pittsburgh community in Atlanta. A new library, the Atlanta BeltLine, renovated houses, a charter school, and increased attention to the neighborhood were all signs that she would be pushed out yet again, however. The intersection of urban education reform and gentrification equals fewer Black families and more White parents. It was apparent on all of the parents' faces and apparent in all the transitions happening in the neighborhood that long-term implications were ahead for them.

At the core of school pushout is exclusion; exclusion from instructional time, time with peers, and time in school. Gentrification is neighborhood pushout and displacement. Both school

pushout and gentrification rely on racialized anti-Black policies to control the social and academic outcomes of Black students and Black families. In fact, both school pushout and gentrification employ the same tactics to exclude Black people: police in neighborhoods, police in schools, zero tolerance policies, the perceived criminalization of Black life, and banishment through suspensions, expulsions, and ultimate removal. Urban education reform is an adroit neoliberal tactic to capitalize on the structural inequities and practices Black communities have long endured. Urban education reform and gentrification jeopardize the so-called American dream for Black people in that the two mechanisms – quality education and homeownership – that typically lead to a self-sustaining life with wealth-generating opportunities are not extended to Black communities. To this end, gentrification is the new school pushout!

The Souls of [Black] Teachers

Shae (co-researcher): *Denice (pseudonym) was an extremely intelligent and outgoing child. The middle child of 7, she was extremely social and knew how to navigate her way through any space. As a student in my third-grade class during my first year of teaching, Denice was determined to take over. As she walked in my classroom with her long colorful socks and matching hair bow, she slowly looked me up and down before ignoring my instructions to come in quietly, find a seat, and begin working on the "All About Me" survey on student desks.*

Despite what seemed like her attempt to completely take over the classroom, by the end of the school year, Denice and I built an extremely strong relationship. One day, I asked her if she would like for me to be her mentor? We discussed what it meant to have a mentor and she happily agreed. After speaking with her mother about it, Denice was officially attached to me forever.

Fast-forward to seventh grade. Denice and I still have a strong mentor/mentee relationship. I take her out, she spends time at my house with me and my family, and I assist her mom with getting her what she needs for school. One evening, I got a phone call from her mother. "Hey, I don't know if Denice has been telling you what is going on, but I wanted to know if she could stay with you for a few weeks. We have been living in filthy conditions. We have rats and the plumbing is coming up through the floor. We can't use the toilets or take a shower. Now the city is condemning our house and they are giving us a week to leave." As her mom went on about how

their landlord was neglectful and refused to make any repairs, I could not help but to think about how Denice's life and the life of her six siblings was about to be completely disrupted.

I couldn't sulk for long as I quickly jumped into survival mode. My family and I successfully transferred Denice to the school in my neighborhood, went to court to assign me as her legal guardian, and did everything we could to make her transition to my home as effortless as possible including allowing Denice to pick out paint colors for her very own room. She mentioned that she had never had her own room before. Unfortunately, the transition was far from effortless. What I soon learned was that despite the connection we had, Denice was missing the security and safety that she felt in her own home with her mom, siblings, and grandparents. Even though her house was considered unlivable, her home and network of family and friends in her neighborhood gave Denice the stability and connectedness she needed to not only survive but thrive (Journal Entry).

While gentrification is the new school pushout, Black teachers are the glue holding students' social, emotional, physical, and academic lives together. Shae's story with her mentee Denice is the story the demonstrates the souls of Black teachers. Black teachers are more than classroom instructors and enactors of school policies, but healers, protectors, and spirit keepers of children who are suffering from the longstanding divestment in their communities. Ríos (2018) argues that teachers should strive to embody "Spirit Consciousness" – or existential awareness – because it "moves us from 'I' to the bigger 'We'" (p. 54). Shae's praxis is the manifestation of "Spirit Consciousness". While Black teachers have been demonized and held accountable as the culprits of the academic failure of Black children across Atlanta Public Schools, the behind-the-scenes work of Black teachers often goes unnoticed and without celebration. During the Atlanta Public Schools sentencing hearing in April 2015, Judge Baxter decried that eleven Black teachers took "no responsibility" for the Black children in their care. His outcry could not have been further from the truth and his complaint did not take into the account the multitude of ways Black teachers fill in the gaps that structural barriers have created and maintained throughout Atlanta.

In the chapter, "On the Wings of Atalanta," in "The Souls of Black Folk," Du Bois (1903) describes a character from Greek mythology, Atalanta, who refused to marry a man that she could outrace. Du Bois outlines how Atalanta was seduced and ultimately tripped by golden apples laid out as an entrapment by a romantic interest, Hippomenes. Du Bois offers readers the story of Atalanta as a metaphor to chronicle the "grand rising" of Atlanta explaining how the city is an industrial melting pot of competing interests: former slaves and broken masters. Du Bois laments:

> Atlanta must not lead the South to dream of material prosperity as the touchstone of all success; already the fatal might of this idea is beginning to spread; it is replacing the finer type of Southerner with vulgar money-getters; it is burying the sweeter beauties of Southern life beneath pretence and ostentation. For every social ill panacea of Wealth has been urged, —wealth to overthrow the remains of slave feudalism; wealth to raise the "cracker" Third Estate; wealth to employ the black serfs, and the prospect of wealth to keep them working; wealth as the end and aim of politics, and as the legal tender for law and order; and finally, instead of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, wealth is the ideal of the Public School (p. 66).

Here, Du Bois names how the promise of golden apples is false, inequitable, and disrupts the soul-freeing, soul-connecting work required to repair a fractured city, fractured neighborhoods, and fractured schools. The city of Atlanta remains much like the one Du Bois described, "the City of a Hundred Hills, peering out from the shadows of the past into the promise of the future" (p. 63), paved by the same golden apples that tripped up Atalanta. The promise of wealth in housing and public charter schools – still lined by the golden apples – is still not working for poor Black people in Atlanta but it is the souls of Black teachers that performs the soul-freeing work required to correct all that the promise of wealth will not achieve.

CHAPTER SIX

Discussion

It brings me great joy to write this final chapter of my dissertation as it is the chapter in which I answer both research questions through the tale of two Black Atlantas in two parts. Part One, the Atlanta where anti-Blackness is extant in urban education reform and gentrification and, Part Two, the Atlanta that represents the love, community, support, warmth, and souls of Black teachers. In this chapter I recap the anti-Black ideologies, policies, and practices we uncovered through our teacher participatory action engagement that generated our collective research study. I also revisit and answer the research questions:

1. In what ways does participatory action research engage teachers to a) bridge knowledge gaps, b) critically self-reflect on ideological thinking, and c) collaborate with communities they directly serve?

2. How do teachers demonstrate their knowledge, skills, mindset, consciousness, worldview, beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions, or souls, through a participatory action research process?

Woven into the discussion in Part I, "Anti-Blackness in Urban Education Reform and Gentrification," are my interpretations of the overall results of the participatory action research process: my dissertation study and the collective teacher participatory action research study-within-the-study. In Part II, "The Black Intellectual Tradition and the Souls of [Black] Teachers," I circle back to the Black Intellectual Tradition showing the multiple ways our professional work and our personal lives align with the historical and contemporary intellectual movements of our Black forerunners and comrades. I also revisit Marable's characterization of the BIT by detailing the corrective, descriptive, and prescriptive action of our work. Next, I discuss the implications of this two-part study answering for the reader the question: Why does this matter? More specifically, why does a study of Black teachers engaged in conducting a study

on urban education reform and gentrification matter in the current context of education practice, including teachers' professional engagement, research, and policy-making? I conclude this chapter with recommendations for next steps: Not just next steps for research, but next steps for community organizations, like Gwinnett SToPP, next steps for Boards of Education, and Black mayors in Black cities across the country.

Part I: Anti-Blackness in Urban Education Reform and Gentrification

As a first step in the discussion of my analysis, explicating anti-Blackness in urban education reform and gentrification in Southwest Atlanta, it is necessary to further define anti-Blackness. Dumas (2016) asserts that anti-Blackness has not been fully theorized in the educational context. As a result, scholars must pull from current race theories to make sense of the contextualized forms of anti-Blackness in education discourse and education policy. Dumas (2016) explains Blackness from a Eurocentric view to show how such disdain and contempt for the Black body manifests in the United States. As I discussed previously in Chapter Two, colonialism and slavery are part of the historical roots of anti-Blackness in which the Black body is legally positioned as brute, unintelligible, uneducable, and incapable of humanity. This ideology has served the capitalistic goals of settlers and enslavers, and constituted Black people as nonhuman, without rights, and as criminal, even when Black people resisted and sought human freedom. Anti-Blackness then is the formation of the U.S. and woven into every fiber of the fabric of the nation.

Anti-Blackness cannot be willed or wished away, boxed into multicultural discourse, or tucked neatly into other Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), or multicultural, discourses because Blackness and the Black body are the antecedent for violence against humans in America and this violence justifies the treatment and oppression of other ethnicities. This fact

alone tells why there is no justice and liberation for humankind without justice and liberation for people of African descent.

Wun (2016) argues that anti-Blackness rests within the characterization of Blackness as criminal and deviant. Alexander (2010) also makes this assertion and contends that anti-Blackness persists through discourse that informs policy:

> What has changed since the collapse of Jim Crow has less to do with the basic structure of our society than with the language we use to justify it. In the era of colorblindness, it is no longer socially permissible to use race, explicitly, as a justification for discrimination, exclusion, and social contempt. So we don't. Rather than rely on race, we use our criminal justice system to label people of color "criminals" and then engage in all the practices we supposedly left behind. Today it is perfectly legal to discriminate against criminals in nearly all the ways that it was once legal to discriminate against African Americans. . .We have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it (p. 50).

Wun (2016) goes on to argue that anti-Black racism lives in perpetuity and is the foundation of institutional policies and social relations. Kandaswamy (2012) argues for the inclusion of an intersectional analysis of the relationship between race, gender, and sexuality in understanding race formation in America. Smith (2012) contends the centrality of colonial violence to racial formation and racism is chief. Feagin (2013) argues that White-on-Black oppression is the foundation to the US and shapes other forms of racial oppression. Sexton (2010) asserts, you cannot adequately study or address racism in the US without comprehending the depth and entirety of racism in which centering the relevance of anti-Black racism is paramount. James (1996) contends punishment of Black bodies is a spectacle ingrained in the "dreams and desires" of the U.S. racial society and its citizens.

Hines and Wilmot (2018) refer to "antiblack microaggressions" to explicate how anti-Blackness is exercised and rooted in historical legacy of anti-Blackness. Pierce (1970) defines

microaggressions as "offensive mechanisms" that shape the Black experience and influence Black people's race-based aggressions from non-Black people. Sue et al. (2007) adapts Pierce's definition of microaggressions to define racial microaggressions to include three forms of microaggressions and a thematic categorization of racial microaggressive categories: microassaults (name calling), microinsults (disparaging one's character through hidden insulting messages), and microinvalidations (negating one's sense of belonging). The cataloging of racial microaggressive categories include alien in one's own land; ascription of intelligence; color blindness; criminality/assumption of criminal status; denial of individual racism; myth of meritocracy; pathologizing cultural values/communication styles; second-class status; and environmental invalidation (pp. 275-276).

Anti-Blackness then is twofold. First, anti-Blackness includes acknowledging the historical, economic, political, and social foundations of the dehumanization and criminalization of the Black body and, secondly, undoing it requires a bold assertion calling out anti-Blackness as the crux and foundation of racial oppression, subjugation, and the center of political discourse. In essence, anti-Blackness is "spirit murder" (Williams, 1987, p. 129).

Anti-Blackness was nearly omnipresent throughout the participatory action research dissertation study, including, the teacher collective inquiry. Our responses to the several iterations of anti-Blackness the research identified illustrates how teachers engaged in participatory action research that a) bridged knowledge gaps, b) critically self-reflection on ideological thinking, and c) collaborated with communities we serve.

Bridging Knowledge Gaps about Anti-Black Ideologies

Although Brianna is a Jewish-American woman, she felt the sting of words steeped in anti-Blackness hurled at her when she excitedly shared with her Philadelphia cousins how she is

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conducting research on the school-to-prison pipeline. Instead of probing deeper or asking

supportive questions, they dismissed her efforts and wished her "good luck," as she strove for

equitable treatment and practices for Black students. Brianna was "shocked" by their responses

because they are so liberal. The signs and decorations in their house indicate that there is "no

room for hate" and that "Black Lives Matter." So, she couldn't fathom that the Black lives her

cousins referred to were not those of poor Black kids in the south. Their ideology and sentiments

are not uncommon and validate Pierce's (1970) assertations of race-based microaggressions from

non-Black people which is the manifestation of anti-Blackness. Their treatment of and response

to Brianna are not surprising considering how the neoliberal agenda has seeped into personal

identities and infected notions of collectivism and self-interest. This experience provided Brianna

with an opportunity to bridge a significant knowledge gap regarding the ways that neoliberalism

is personified and operates. The experience also provided a valuable lesson to critique the

ideological thinking of her family members. As stated in Chapter Five, neoliberalism is a form of

governance that has seeped into our American psyche that every man is for himself and every

person has the same opportunities as the next person. Brianna's experiences as an educator and

co-researcher, however, taught her that this notion is untrue. She sees with her own eyes daily

how Black students show up to school living with a multitude of economic, health, housing, and

social insecurities. Brianna witnessed how charter management organizations say one thing but

do another as if they are lining their pockets on the backs and struggles of Black children when

the schools are not meant for them. The neoliberalism Brianna experienced on a personal

familial level was rooted in the same anti-Blackness students that feel and experience in their

neighborhoods and schools where politicians proclaim that education policies will "lift students

out of poverty" while effectively cutting off two primary sources America touts as achieving

wealth: quality education and homeownership. Much like Brianna's cousin's house, the decorative elements do not match the words and actions.

We also experienced anti-Black ideology during the community listening exchanges. One of the Black, male listening session participants spoke out stating his shock at the number of Black teachers at a White school in Atlanta. *One of the things that I found interesting about [affluent white school] is a lot of the teachers were Black and a lot of the students were not Black. But they had great education and so it looked like a [sic] oxymoron to me because I expected, I expected that all (pause) most of the teachers were gonna be White and that wasn't the case.* He expressed an internalized race-based ideology that regards Black teachers as incapable of achieving academic excellence. His statement stands as an anti-Black microaggression that invalidates Black people's intelligence and their sense of belonging in a high achieving school.

During the second listening session, one of the White, male participants mentioned how he didn't see himself as a gentrifier in a historically Black neighborhood because nothing was there before their family moved in. The house was empty. *[The home] was bank owned. It was an empty house, too. So, we didn't just displace anyone necessarily either.* His statement troubled us as a research collective and his statement troubled one of the Georgia State University Alonzo A. Crim Center Sources Conference attendees during our presentation: "*They were asleep, they were asleep during the recession. They slept through the recession! Like they slept through the entire thing to say… the house was empty. I mean they didn't wake up until last week!*" His belief that nothing was there before they moved in is an anti-Black microaggression that erases the existence and visibility of Black people, their struggles, and their history. More specifically, his words do not account for the predatory lending practices intentionally targeting

Black people, that left millions of Black people with foreclosed homes and nowhere to go. Atlanta, specifically Southwest Atlanta, experienced the highest percentages of foreclosures in the country. Perhaps this is why some newcomers feel like they have to be "the great white hope" or the redeemers of Black spaces. Their beliefs and discourse translate into policies that legally impact Black people.

The participatory action research approach afforded our collective an opportunity to bridge our knowledge gaps regarding the multiple ideologies contributing to anti-Black policies in urban education reform and gentrification. First, using community listening exchanges provided an intentional data collection method to engage in intimate conversations with parents, teachers, and neighborhood newcomers. The process of analyzing transcript data provided an illuminating professional learning experience that we are not afforded through in-service professional development. Through this process, we were able to analyze the ideologies of people surrounding our Black students and communities. This process also helped us to bridge our own knowledge gaps and understand that "it's the policies" that invite, create, and maintain anti-Black policies that effectively exclude Black students, Black families, Black teachers, and Black communities.

Critically Reflecting on and Rejecting Anti-Black Policies

A policy is a written legal contract or code that dictates and governs practices. When I refer to anti-Black policies, I am referring to the written and unwritten ways anti-Black practices are informed by racialized policies. This research revealed anti-Black policies at the core of urban education reform that teachers engaged in participatory action research process critically reflected upon. Public schools in urban areas have become the latest frontier for neoliberals and those that see Black communities as needing "redemption" and "restoring." The discourse and

rhetoric that shape anti-Black policies derives from education policies that rely on high-stakes testing and accountability as a way to educate children and measure the success of their education. These measures, though, are culturally and racially biased and inflict actual harm onto Black families. (Hilliard, 2000). Gideons Elementary School, the school in which Brianna and Janae worked, and the school where the Pittsburgh grandfather sent his grandchildren was on the list of schools implicated in the Atlanta Cheating Scandal. Black teachers were arrested, indicted, tried, and charged as criminals for alleged test cheating and replaced by teachers with fewer credentials and fewer years of experience. The recurring pattern of indicting Black teachers, Black families, and Black students as deviant and in need of fixing fuels the anti-Black discourse which in turn led to policies that made it palatable for Governor Deal to say that he wanted to "lift [Black communities] out of poverty" by closing schools in low-income, divested, Black neighborhoods.

Urban education reform is synced with institutions such as Invest Atlanta and the Atlanta BeltLine that incentivizes renovation of once "bank owned, empty houses." As the listening exchange participants' comments presented in Chapter Five show, Invest Atlanta incentives and the Atlanta BeltLine became a draw for White newcomers. In fact, during the second listening exchange, one of the White, male participants remarked, *the Beltline was down there and that's just been a beautiful, wonderful thing. I know it comes with other issues, but I think the main draw for loving this neighborhood is the community, the BeltLine. I think everybody is moving or wanting to move towards like a more, like walkable, bikeable lifestyle and a neighborhood like this offers that.* Invest Atlanta was confronted for not offering longtime residents funding to repair their homes while giving millions to people to renovate "empty" houses. The Pittsburgh grandfather shared with us the harm in this policy: *They spend their money on the campus but*

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they don't spend money on the sidewalks that's on the outskirts of the campus. You know, where they got the front of it looking all pretty but back here where we are, they don't touch it. You know, and I'm like okay, but still, when you go to these meetings, they talk about oh, we are making these changes happen, we gonna do this and we gonna do that but like I was telling my wife, I'm interested in the right now. He also shared with us how his new neighbors frequently call code enforcement to complain about the repairs he cannot afford to make and how his elder age keeps him from completing repairs himself. These facts alone make him afraid that he and his family will be displaced.

Chapter Five presented the frustrations this longtime Pittsburgh resident and grandfather of a Kindezi Gideons student voiced about the weeds overgrowing on the lawn next door to his home. He exhausted the proper channels to have issues like the sidewalk fixed so that elderly residents could ride their motor scooters down the sidewalk without worry of riding into the street with oncoming cars. His frustration was palpable while his resolve was untethered. His experience encapsulates the fullness of anti-Black policies operating in Southwest Atlanta. Dumas (2016) argues that "anti-Blackness marks an irreconcilability between Black and any sense of social and cultural regard" (p. 13). The fact that the Pittsburgh grandfather's complaints, petitions, and actions were not given any attention speaks to the presence and persistence of anti-Blackness and anti-Black practices in all-Black, rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods. There is an ideology menacing Black life in certain neighborhoods. It is as if politicians are looking past current residents towards the future.

Urban education reform coupled with incentives funding housing development in historically Black, divested neighborhoods dominoes into gentrification hence pushing Black people out of their neighborhoods and schools. The incentives have created an attractive

opportunity for newcomers to buy cheap and reap the benefits not just of their increased housing values but of all the amenities that accompany Whiter, more affluent residents. It is as if the housing funding and reformed schools incentivize the removal of Black students, Black families, and entire Black communities.

By convening the listening exchanges as a service to the community, our research collective resisted and rejected anti-Blackness. We sought information straight from the source to more intimately understanding what quantitative data about Southwest Atlanta was not able to narrate for us. This process of listening intently to Black communities corrected several falsehoods: Black people abandon their neighborhoods, Black people do not care about education, and Black people do not take care of their houses to name a few. Phase Four of the Study-within-the-Study and our teacher participatory action research process help to shape our understanding. Our process of gathering publicly available data, reading and discussing "None of the Above," and writing our findings through a Round Robin writing approach helped us to critically reflect on and vehemently reject anti-Black policies. Our rejection is evident through our collective writing, our thoughtful presentations, all from a Black teacher perspective. This process also illuminated for us our "marginalization by association" and the need for Black teacher participation in all policymaking impacting Black students, Black families, Black teachers, and Black communities.

Collaborating with Communities against Anti-Black Practices

The anti-Black microaggression, invalidating one's sense of belonging, was present in my reflection as well as Shae's reflection. In my own residence in Southwest Atlanta the lessor wrote into the lease the option to surveille my day-to-day living despite the fact that I paid my agreed upon rent by the agreed upon date. It was if I was a criminal in the making that required

constant surveillance. Securing housing in a once divested neighborhood and handed over to investors and now rapidly gentrifying equated to an anti-Black, voyeuristic, but unresponsive contract. As I mentioned in Chapter Four my housing lease had an entire section legalizing the surveillance of my private living. However, just as the Pittsburgh grandfather, whenever I called with maintenance issues, my calls were ignored and unanswered. Even newcomers projected their anti-Black ideologies and practices onto children in the neighborhood, going as far as sending postcard mailers requesting that residents "dial 911" when they see certain people hanging out in the street, as to rid the neighborhood of perceived criminal elements.

Janae did not know that sleeping couch-to-couch as a child was a problem because she was surrounded by the love and support of her family. Janae's experiences are similar to those of her own students in that they experience poverty in the face of politicians who promise to promote policies that will "lift them out of poverty." Their policies do not take into account the structural barriers preventing children from showing up with their full potential everyday. Some scholars would call this "grit" or the combination of your passion for learning and your ability to persevere no matter your circumstances. This logic and argument in itself is inhumane and anti-Black. Dumas (2016) argues that anti-Blackness as the "psychic and material assault on Black flesh" (p. 12). Ignoring the physical well-being needs of a child and instead promoting "grit" reaps psychic and material harm that takes years to undue, if ever. This same psychic and material assault on Black flesh plays out with school-age children present-day. Black children's needs are cast aside and labeled as a drain on an already strapped public education system where it is presumed every person must take responsibility for themselves.

The participatory action research process provided an opportunity to deepen our understanding of being "marginalized by association" and extended the anti-Black

microaggressions we experienced related to housing. Our process illuminated for us how we need to function as allies for our students and parents. Our allyship is evidenced in the ways Nichole found it necessary to persistently attend community-based, grassroots meetings to take information back to her parents that would help keep her kids in the neighborhood and in her school. Our allyship is also evidenced in the way Shae "could not sulk for long" when her former student and mentee needed a safe place to stay while her family transitioned. Our allyship is one of the many ways we expanded and bared our souls through this TPAR process.

Searching, Expanding and Baring our Souls, Towards the Corrective, Descriptive, and Prescriptive

Anti-Blackness is present in education policies, practices, and at the crux of urban education reform and gentrification. The crux of race formation theories is the characterization of Blackness as deviant, criminal, and in need of correction through punishment and expulsion. Understanding anti-Blackness coupled with neoliberalism is essential for explaining the ways participatory action research engages teachers to a) bridge knowledge gaps, b) critically self-reflect on ideological thinking, and c) collaborate with communities they directly serve. And explaining how teachers demonstrate their knowledge, skills, mindset, consciousness, worldview, beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions, or souls, through a participatory action research process. PAR, through its democratic functions, provided a safe space for teachers to tease out their misconceptions and misunderstandings and reflect on ideological thinking of those around them and the ideologies baked into the schools' founding, goals, policies and practices without fear of retribution or punishment. Teachers were able to explore topics of race, class, language, and inequity without worry, express frustrations without worry and ask questions without worry.

This is especially true and great for teachers like Janae who has been demonized for advocating for students and asking questions about schools' plans to fix what's broken. This opportunity also provided Nichole with backing to approach the CEO of her CMO. Not backing in terms of putting her up to it, but provided her with literature, language, and the understanding of what was happening around her to be able to challenge the status quo and deficit-based discourses happening at her school during faculty meetings. Brianna was able to boldly say at her new school that she "studies the New School Pushout" and explain what that means and lead with this understanding as an assistant principal of a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood charter school.

The PAR process provided an entry point to collaborating *with* and working *within* communities for the benefit of the students they serve. Instead of the typical teacher-parent discourse where teachers often share limited information around instructional strategies to do at home, conversations turned into sharing opportunities for parents to stay within the community and encouraging parents to advocate for specific needs. Anti-Blackness and neoliberal rhetoric made it clear that teachers had to join the fight against residential and educational displacement. Our sessions would often be laced with, "What are we going to do about it?" and "What's next?" Doing something about it was raising our voices as teachers and adding a contextualized understanding to the effects of gentrification and urban education reform. That we raised our voices was the reason why one of the participants at the Clark Atlanta University presentation remarked "to see how [APS] work landed on the ground" was fascinating. This also explains why many of our presentations steamrolled into continued invitations to present, a publication, and a planned website lesson plan. The fullness of our work was *corrective*, *descriptive*, and *prescriptive*.

Part II: The Black Intellectual Tradition and the Souls of [Black] Teachers

The Black Intellectual Tradition acknowledges the reality and brilliance of Black life from the perspective of Black people first. According to Marable (2000), acknowledging the BIT requires scholars to be *descriptive* in telling Black experiences, starting with Black people at the center. This study is about Black people by Black people which means as co-researchers we paid particular attention to what counted as science, research, and evidence during this process. Much of the urban education research literature approaches Black life from a damage-centered research approach (Tuck, 2009) that it "intends to document peoples' pain and brokenness to hold those in power accountable for their oppression" (p. 409) but after the research is done and published, communities are left with the same damage documented at the onset. Black scholarship tells us that more is possible. By starting with and inserting this scholarship, we are not only able to frame urban education problems through a Black intellectual lens, but also avail an analysis that shows a corrective and prescriptive path forward. As scholars and co-researchers, insider, participant-observers in this process, we took careful consideration in telling the truth of people's collective experiences. This meant that throughout our studies, we relied on Black thought and Black ideals to problem-pose and engage with our communities. We also relied on historical Black intellectual figures to examine contemporary urban issues in schools and communities. We started with Black people first understanding their history, their needs, their struggles, their intellect, triumphs, and advancements.

Secondly, the Black Intellectual Tradition critiques and challenges dominant narratives and discourses projecting falsehoods about Black life. In this regard, our

scholarship is *corrective* in that it "vigorously condemns and disputes theories of Black people's genetic, biological, and cultural inferiority…and distorted forms of representation of Blackness found in the dominant culture" (Marable, 2000, pp. 17-18). Our teacher participatory action research project holds up correct information about Black students, families, and communities and rejects the notion that Black people need fixing or saving. Our research highlights the possibilities of Black teachers, students, families, and communities working towards the same goals for our collective advancement. Our research corrects falsehoods about Black teachers, Black neighborhoods, and Black schools and offers an asset-based way of thinking about what is necessary for those that enter Black spaces.

The BIT bridges a critical praxis between Black scholarship and social transformation and is *prescriptive* as scholars chart a "practical connection between scholarship and struggle, between social analysis and social transformation" (Marable, 2000, p. 18). Wiggan (2010) summarizes the BIT this way, "scholarship aimed at social, economic, and political transformation, and…questions and challenges oppressive institutions…while providing voice for the oppressed [with] direction and blueprints for the progress of the masses" (p. 133). Hence, the Black Intellectual Tradition serves to represent, empower, and advance the lives, experiences, and struggles of those with whom we share "culture, heritage, and struggle." The action in our participatory action research study details an intentional prescriptive process for ways of engaging with Black communities. When we engaged in our collective research study, we did not approach Black communities as objects of a study for our gaze and critique. Instead, we approached Black families and communities as all-knowing experts who know what is

best for their children and what they need schools, political, and education leaders to do for their families. Our collective research goal was to capture and illuminate Black community and Black teacher expertise for public consumption, hence adding a prescriptive course of action for those that seek to do work in Black schools and communities.

PAR provided a space for us to work within the double aim existing both as students and facilitators throughout the process. The process allowed us to not only work through our fears, assumptions, biases and misconceptions regarding Black students and communities but also build our consciousness and knowledge of the economic, political, and social constructs that have created disparate realities for Black students and communities. Freire (1970/1993) defines the oppressed as those dehumanized through history and alienation. In this study, teachers represent the oppressed within an oppressed community. The oppressed then must not become oppressors of the oppressed. PAR allowed us to express our multiple identities as community members, teachers, women, Black, and Jewish while providing a space and process to explore and resolve our misunderstandings and disagreements of our own oppression. Our open dialogue—talking back, cursing, uninhibited calling out and challenging each other—served as a 'collective praxis approach' in which our praxis helped us to "reflect and act upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 51). These PAR characteristics chart a path to examine how one develops teachers' souls.

The Black Intellectual Tradition is a wide-ranging phrase encompassing the intellectual freedom and humanistic liberation movements of Black peoples. The BIT is a way of existing against a hostile country filled with acts of violence against Black people. The BIT also stands in stark contrast of anti-Blackness and is instead pro-Blackness. The Black Intellectual Tradition

then is a foundation for analyzing and contextualizing the knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, mindsets, worldview, consciousness, dispositions or, the "souls" of Black teachers. The BIT frames how we bared our souls and approached the action, or "P", in participatory action research to combat anti-Black ideology, discourse, policies, and practices.

Our collective research study represents Marable (2000) three-pronged approach to und policy understand the enactment of the Black Intellectual Tradition: descriptive, corrective, and prescriptive. Our work was descriptive in telling the stories and colorful histories of the neighborhoods from whence we studied. This was an intentional and deliberate act, especially when participants from the second listening session were adamant about not displacing anyone stating that "their house was empty" before they moved in. What they were missing was a descriptive explanation of what was there long before they arrived. Nasir Muhammad's presentation and thematic explanation of "*the brain power, the education, the money, in Black Atlanta all came out of [Southwest Atlanta]."* There were also participants who talked about the glory of Southwest Atlanta that did not include white people but "untouchable" Black students, Black teachers, and Black families. Our study was also deliberately descriptive in the ways we approached our professional and personal lives in Southwest Atlanta. Janae grew up in the area and purchased her own home in the same quadrant of Atlanta despite the predatory offenses against her family. Nichole advocated for her students to stay and be included in the renewed attention to the area and schools. She was so committed to her students and work that she purchased her own home in Southwest Atlanta. Brianna took a similar stance as her mother – when she refused to jump on the White flight bandwagon – and refused to allow gentrification to sway her treatment of students with the highest needs. The insertion of our stories is bold and powerful as it stakes our claim and shows teachers what being a soul-baring teacher looks like.

Naturally, our descriptive narratives are corrective as they correct false narratives about Black students, Black families, Black teachers, and Black communities. During the second listening session, a participant remarked how she had dreams of being "the great white hope" for the neighborhood she was moving into. Her ideology indicates that she did not see any beauty, positivity, of legacies of excellence in the Black community she was gentrifying. Instead she saw her whiteness as a correction, especially in the schools where she worked. Our research and subsequent narratives rebuke her assertations and demonstrate the Black beauty and brilliance that was already there. Brianna, Janae, Nichole's community-first approach to teaching correct her deficit narrative in multiple ways. First, they are "not afraid of the students" and find value in spending time with their students and their families. It brings them joy to establish roots with their students so that their students have a place to come back to where they recognize and acknowledge their teachers and say hello. There was also this menacing narrative of abandonment as if Black people abandoned their residential neighborhoods. The Black mothers from the third listening session refuted this by their will to stay in their neighborhood and not get "pushed out." These were also working mothers and grandmothers who made time to engage in dialogue every Thursday night about their children, the community school, and the neighborhood they resided. The Pittsburgh grandfather supremely corrected the false neighborhood about Black people not caring about or abandoning their neighborhood. He decried how he didn't make one red cent when cutting the overgrown lot next to him. Had he not cut overgrown lot, it would have swallowed their house. He also did his civic duty by reporting broken sidewalks and housing code violations, all of which were unanswered. His taxes have gotten so high that he was afraid he would not be able to afford them and is in fear of being displaced.

In April 2015, eleven Black, Atlanta Public School educators were handed a guilty verdict on federal racketeering charges by Judge Jerry Baxter, who wailed that they "take no responsibility" for their students' achievement. The Black faces plastered across news programs, and newspapers provided education reformers with faces to pin the complexities of public education. To those not familiar with the inner workings of public education, the guilty verdict implied that Black teachers are criminals and are the problem of urban education who must be locked away in order to save the most vulnerable children. The imagery of the Atlanta Cheating Scandal has paved the way for not only urban education reform to flourish but also for the gentrification of Atlanta, Georgia. Both of which have displaced Black students, Black families, and Black teachers.

Our research and voices are not only corrective but also a counter-narrative (Matsuda, 1995) to the one thrust into the public by the Atlanta Cheating Scandal. A counter-narrative in which Black teachers are not criminals or the problem of urban education. Instead, Black teachers are at the center performing in ways that are in direct opposition to Judge Baxter's claim and are instead "taking responsibility," working in the institutions that have taken over traditional schools, while also experiencing the menacing effects of gentrification. Black educators are taking responsibility by holding schools and communities together where local, state, and federal policy tore them apart through high-stakes testing, scripted and historically inaccurate curriculum, and high surveillance. Our professional lives and identities as Black and social justice teachers reject the notion by Judge Baxter that Black teachers "take no responsibility" for student achievement. Not only do we take responsibility for Black student achievement, but we also attend to the whole child understanding that an urban education reform agenda does little to repair the long-standing damage inflicted upon Black students, families, and communities

through race-based policy and practices. Black teachers are doing double duty of providing instruction and opportunities that equip students with academic and life skills while adding to students' academic and social identities in neighborhoods and schools that consistently remind them of structural failures.

If our work is descriptive and corrective then it is also prescriptive by charting a course of engaged, action-oriented, community-centered scholarship by [Black] teachers. Especially scholarship by Black teachers who privilege the lives, experiences, and advancement of Black children and Black communities. Our work also paints a picture of what is possible through our work with a grassroots parent advocacy organization, Gwinnett SToPP. The idea of engaging teachers is grassroots work was born out of my attendance at Gwinnett SToPP Finding New Directions (FND) meetings. These meetings were a necessary component of parent advocacy and similar to our own study and struggle as Black teachers. During FND meetings, parents, district-level personnel, Georgia Department of Education, and community organization members would unpack discipline handbooks and discipline data of the local school district. This was an empowering and informative act that armed participants with knowledge and confidence to advocate for Black students in their care. Teachers, particularly, Black teachers were missing from these meetings. I immediately thought of the increase in power if teachers were apart of these conversations especially since they are closest to the issues of school discipline and the school-to-prison pipeline. Attending Gwinnett SToPP events and engaging in roundtable discussions with Gwinnett SToPP parents was a powerful act and led us to understand the gravity and depth of consciousness raising and soul-connecting required for all Black students, Black families, and Black communities to achieve liberation and human freedom. Our engagement with Gwinnett SToPP was also a powerful professional development tool as it

helped us to contextualize the lives and experiences of students showing up in our classroom daily. In fact, there was a student who broke into Brianna and Janae's school with two of his peers. Instead of recommending this child for suspension or expulsion, Brianna suggested a community circle, which is a restorative practice, to help him see the harm of his actions and take restorative steps to correct them. I believe Brianna's advocacy was in part because of her understanding of the school-to-prison pipeline.

Our work sets a precedence of engaging teachers in grassroots, social justice, and politically motivated work; it provides a template for starting, monitoring, and evaluating work with both teachers and communities; a deep critical literacy component, collaborative data collection privileging the needs and experiences of the community, collaborative data analysis, and collaborative ways of sharing the knowledge publicly.

Study Implications

Why do these results matter? What is the big deal about [Black] teachers examining the intersection of urban education reform and gentrification in Southwest Atlanta? The implications for this study are multiple and overlapping. In Chapter Five, I shared how the federal judge, Jerry Baxter, preceding over the Atlanta Cheating Scandal case read the verdict with a preface stating that Black teachers took "no responsibility" for their students' achievement. His statement implied the accused and indicted teachers did not care about their students. Judge Baxter's rhetoric is also the discourse that fuels the urban education reform agenda by painting Black teachers as the problem needing to be replaced by underqualified, and non-credentialed White teachers (Buras, 2015; Robinson & Simonton, 2019). This research defies this notion and recounts the multiple ways in which Black teachers show up and take responsibility for not only their students, but their students' families and school communities. For example, Brianna and

Janae counted the multiple ways they are present, visible and immersed into their students' whole lives: "*First one, building relationships with students. Second, building relationships with the community. High expectations, commitment to coming to work. People do not like to come to work. Love, and then I said tough love, too. Data driven guided reading groups. Intentional lesson planning, teacher encouragement and support. Looping with students, rewarding positive behavior, rewarding growth and quarterly student conferences.*" These acts are not written into or required by teacher contracts or even an inherent trait in teachers. Brianna and Janae's actions demonstrate their knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, mindset, worldview, consciousness, and dispositions – or souls – towards their students and their Black students' families.

Brianna, Janae, and Nichole's actions also follow the long tradition of Black teachers as intellectuals and activists on behalf of Black communities. In Chapter Two, I shared the works of Carter G. Woodson, Ella Baker, and Septima Clark who are three Black pedagogues who advocated and sacrificed for the intellectualism and humanity of Black communities. Woodson stressed that "the study of African descendants be scholarly, sound, creative, restorative, and directly relevant to the [B]lack community" (Dagbovie, 2007, p. 44). Our work stands as the embodiment of Woodson's assertions. Throughout our process, we privileged the lives and well-being of Black communities. We sought to understand the ways policies and practices negatively impact our students and use this knowledge to disrupt hegemonic and oppressive ideologies, policies, and practices. This way of being also explains why Nichole only wants to teach Black students in Black communities and explains a direct alignment with Ella Baker's philosophies of projecting a "deep and profound sense of connection to and love of humanity" (Ransby, 2003, p. 363). Our work stands on the shoulders of Septima Clark in that we were [Black] teachers strategizing and teaching from obscure political spaces while maintaining a powerful intellectual

presence and a moral and ethical compass (Ransby, 2003) *with* and *within* the communities we serve.

In a neoliberal Atlanta, our process shows how teachers advocate for collective wealth building through residential housing and equitable schooling experiences for Black students and Black families. Nichole consistently attended community housing advocacy meetings led by grassroots organizations. Nichole did not attend these meetings for her own individual gain but to share the wealth of resources with her students' families. Nichole believed that her students should reap every new and incoming benefit of a long-divested neighborhood and school they endured. As a teacher and mother of three, it would have been easy for her to look down on her students as lazy, uneducable, or undeserving of wealth-generating opportunities. Instead, Nichole responded in a way that bared her soul – knowledge, skills, attitude, beliefs, mindset, worldview, consciousness, and disposition – and showed her soul connections to her Black students. Nichole's ways of being and doing marks her kinship to her "folks" or as Gooding-Williams (2020) argued, folk as a "characterization of African Americans as a group united by a collectively shared ethos, or spirit."

Myles Horton, founder of Highlander Folk Center stated that his colleagues "saw problems that we thought we had the answers to, rather than seeing the problems and the answers that the people had themselves. That was our basic mistake. Once you understand that, you don't have to have answers, and you can open up new ways of doing things" (Horton, Kohl, & Kohl, 1990, p. 68). Our new ways of doing things was overlapping in that we changed the way we approached our collective research study examining the intersection of urban education reform and gentrification understanding that communities themselves had all of the answers because they were the closest to the problems and this also had implications for us as teacher-activists

because who better than us to voice the problems affecting our students and our ability to provide quality education to our students? Our community listening exchanges was our intellectual and strategic way of embodying the principle of privileging the experiences of those closest to issues. Our writing and presenting is our way of "returning what [we] learned to the source" (King, 2017).

Warren and Venzant Chambers (2020) contend that "Critical perspectives on the sociocultural and political contexts of education made possible through Social Foundations of Education scholarship equips researchers and practitioners to more effectively respond to the competing demands over the purpose and possibilities of public education in urban schools settings, especially during times of unprecedented displacement in historically Black and Latinx communities following decades of municipal disinvestment" (p. 369). This work also follows the goals of social foundations through understanding that in order to achieve academic achievement the house must be in order. The house is indicative of the social, economic, political, and social structures that shape a students' experience before they even show up to a school building.

Lastly, this work has implications for how we expand the hearts and minds of those who work with marginalized, historically disenfranchised communities. It is important because it involves the souls of teachers in schools that are filled with acts of violence towards Black students and families (Ríos, 2018). Our research is morally engaged and defies damage-centered research extended by some scholars (Tuck, 2009). These implications will implore school districts, education policymakers, and educational stakeholders to address racial hegemony and oppression directly.

Study Limitations

Study limitations are weaknesses in the research design that may influence or impact the study's outcomes and conclusions. As a community-engaged scholar with a commitment to conducting research that is usable to a broader community, it is my moral obligation to share the limitations of this study. Firstly, there was a lack of available data regarding the number of Black teachers in Atlanta Public Schools along with their highest education and certification levels. I searched several sources for this data: Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), and Georgia Governor's Office of Student Accountability (GOSA). I even reached out to Georgia State University College of Education librarian asking for support in locating this data. This data would have added value to the literature review in the examination of the souls of teachers in a school district with disparate school suspension and expulsion rates. While this does not change the analysis of the study, this is a future research opportunity especially in a city hailed as the Black Mecca that was partly responsible for electing the first United States Black woman Vice President.

Secondly, there is a lack of prior research studies on my topic, both by Black women conducting PAR studies and Black teachers participating in PAR studies. I theorized in Chapter Four why this may be, but this does not negate the need for additional PAR studies by Black women with Black women as co-researchers in the process especially in research fields where Black women and girls are understudied like education. There is also a lack of empirical research studies examining teachers' souls (Ríos, 2018). This lack presents an opportunity in a polarized sociopolitical and sociocultural landscape with staunch ideological differences.

Next, while the data collection tools I employed were methodologically sound, they also presented a limitation. I regret not conducting a follow-up or exit interview with co-researchers,

even if just through a photovoice method which would have proved a powerful tool to analyze their transformation and expansion and baring of their souls. The time and labor intense nature of the two studies caused great fatigue. We conducted research while also working, parenting, attending school, and maintaining our familial and social lives.

Lastly, self-reported data is a typical limitation in qualitative research studies. Self-reported data takes on several representations: selective memory (recalling or not recalling experiences and events), telescoping (recalling events that occurred at one time as if they occurred at another time), attribution (attributing positive events to one's own doing but assigning negative events to external factors), and exaggeration (embellishing events as more significant that actuality). Self-reported data was especially a possibility during the listening exchanges in which participants had an audience intently listening to their words.

Some possible limitations of me as the researcher include, access and bias. The majority of our sessions were conducted in a conference room, in living rooms, and on conference stages. As a researcher, I did not have access to teachers in their school environments with students. This may have proved valuable in my analysis in examining how teachers demonstrate their souls – knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, mindset, worldview, consciousness, and disposition – in the school building. Additionally, I am a Black woman operating within oppressive institutions with dominant narratives about the ways I should act or exist. My experiences as a Black woman shaped this study and my analysis.

It is important to note that the study limitations nor my limitations as a researcher impacted my ability to answer the research questions. The study results are valid for answering the research questions.

Study Recommendations

In addition to the future research recommendations offered in the previous section, Study Limitations, there are additional recommendations from this study that are two-fold: 1) recommendations for education institutions and education policymakers as well as 2) recommendations for grassroots organizations conducting liberatory and humanizing work. First, this study is a novelty in that the Black Intellectual Tradition was theoretical framework framing the research process and analysis. Black studies, and the intellectual movements of Black peoples, should be normalized in school curriculums, and especially teacher preparation and teacher engagement initiatives. The policy and practice should be to harness the power of Black communities and persistently invite their intellectualism into our classrooms and school decision making. Besides, it is the communities that know best what they need. Perhaps all teaching, learning, and policymaking starting with and within Black communities would propel the process of shedding anti-Black ideologies, practices, and policies.

When we study Black history in schools, it should not be limited to trivia or food-based celebrations but comprised of true inquiries into the power, intellectualism, and resilience of Black people and Black life. Our research charted a course for what this looks like when engaging teachers. Place-based history is a great place to start. For instance, how many Kindezi at Gideons or Purpose Built at Slater Elementary School students know the history and significance of the land and building names they congregate in daily? In rapidly gentrifying cities, particularly historic Black cities, this is doubly important to preserve, expand, and bare the histories that newcomers think are "empty."

School districts and Boards of Education should carve out deliberate time and space for Black women to lead and ready the souls of all teachers. Especially those teachers who have

community kinship and longstanding community ties like Janae. This hard work of teaching inside classrooms while healing students and communities outside of school should not belabor or be relegated to Black women. All teachers should strive to embody the characteristics of the teachers highlighted in this study. This work is necessary to expand and bare their skills, knowledge, mindsets, consciousness, worldview, beliefs, attitudes, dispositions, or souls, in historically Black urban spaces. This is deeply important work when the soul of a country is deeply polarized. In 2020, more than 71 million people voted for a White man who refers to African nations as "shithole countries," banned people of religious faith form entering the country, snatched children from the arms of their asylum-seeking mothers and locked them in cages, and publicly called self-labeled white supremacists marching with tiki torchers chanting, "you will not replace us," "very fine people," while never publicly acknowledging that Black Lives Matter. One has to think that one or some of these 71 million voters are working with Black students in schools.

In cities like Atlanta where government, corporate, and philanthropic organizations are fueling gentrification, it is important to have people from different facets of life helping to drive decisions. Gentrification disproportionately impacts Black students, Black families, and Black communities. Black teachers, then, should be invited to serve on boards, chair committees, and allocate funds specifically for Black students, parents, and families. Besides, families and schools are the core of healthy neighborhoods. Black mayors in Black cities across the country should establish, fund, and catapult Black teacher advisory boards to conduct inquiry projects such as this study and inform policies that attend to the whole child and the entire community. I am not recommending tokenistic, symbolic teacher representation, but teachers with souls, who are closest to these issues, to advocate on behalf of Black children, families, and communities.

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In Chapters Three, Four, and Five, I shared the necessary, important, and impactful work of Gwinnett SToPP, a parent-led grassroots organization. Their policy work is powerful and will have lasting implications for Black students for years to come. Teachers, particularly Black teachers, must be a part of this work going forth. This is not to say that the onus falls on Gwinnett SToPP to ensure teacher participation, but the culture and climate of public education must shift to afford teachers opportunities to engage in advocacy work. Besides, teachers are closest to the problem (sometimes the culprits and sometimes as mere enactors of policies). Who is better to advocate and lead policies for positive school and classroom change? Gwinnett SToPP hosts a robust Parent Leadership Institute (PLI) and Youth Leadership Institute (YLI). The work outlined in this dissertation offers a significant additional possibility as a potential Teacher Leadership Institute (TLI). The co-researchers of this study have charted the way for what is possible.

Lastly, teachers should have options to live and work in communities close to their students. Brianna, Janae, and Nichole showed us the power in this. Teachers should not be priced out of neighborhoods. If they are, that means communities rely on police to watch over and protect our children. Police watch and protection carries a different meaning in Black, rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods. This is why it is imperative to create housing opportunities for teachers either through pay increases or specialized housing packages, or both.

Conclusion

This dissertation is aptly titled, "The Souls of [Black] Teachers: A Participatory Action Research Approach Engaging Teachers with Communities Against Anti-Black Policies and Practices." Some might wonder why Black is bracketed. This dissertation outlines a collaborative and transformative approach to engaging teachers against anti-Black policies and practices. The

findings suggest that all teachers should embody the traits of the co-researchers in this study. All students and communities benefit when teachers possess skills, knowledge, mindsets, consciousness, worldview, beliefs, attitudes, dispositions, that is to say, souls required for liberating and humanizing views of Black students, families, and communities. If we remove the word Black from the title, we are still left with "The Souls of Teachers." In an era where educational, social, political, cultural, environmental, and economic challenges are multiple and layered, this humanizing, asset-based, collaborative scholarship will continue to move us towards liberty and justice for all.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Community Partner: Gwinnett SToPP

Gwinnett SToPP is a community-based, grassroots organization in suburban Atlanta whose mission is to increase awareness of the injustices children face in the educational system and promote policy changes through data accountability and fact-based incident reporting. The coalition formed in 2007 starting with a year-long strategic planning effort that included forming a mission, creating measurable goals and developing engaging collateral materials. The coalition has a list of national demands that inform their work. The demands are:

- Use positive interventions instead of suspensions, expulsions or arrests.

- Shift funding from school police to counselors and positive discipline.

- Fully implement positive alternatives such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Restorative Practices.

- Engage students and parents in decision-making about discipline policies.

Initially the organization created two interactive workshops aimed at increasing awareness and policy changing practices of parents. The workshops are free and empower parents and caregivers with the tools they need to strategically advocate for children. The workshops are titled, *What your Student/Parent Handbook Didn't Really Tell You....Reading Between the Lines*, and *Has Your Student Received Suspension/Detention; Is it Time for an Intervention?* Both workshops are designed specifically to engage the community in understanding the intersections between students' behavior, Georgia County Public Schools disciplinary policy, the loss of education opportunity, and the juvenile and adult court system. The workshops also describe which student behaviors are more likely to result in disciplinary actions and loss of instruction.
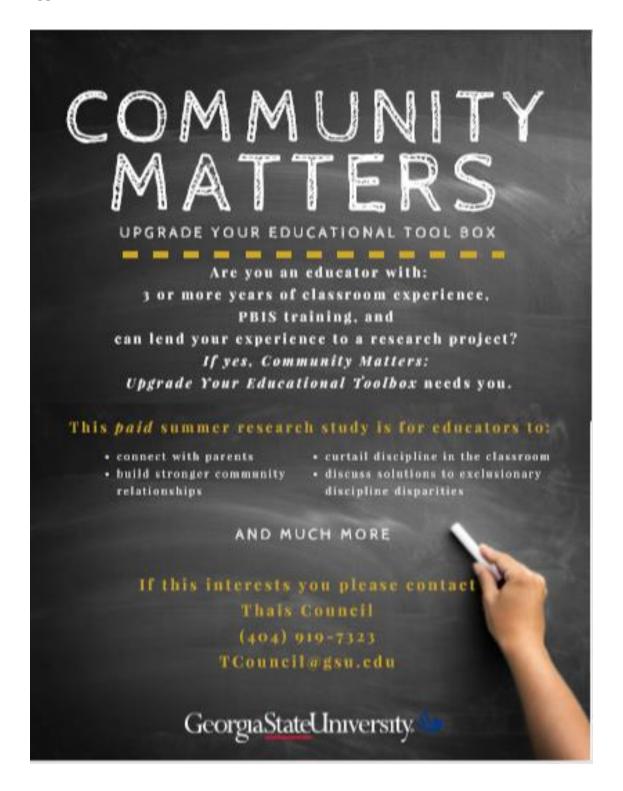
In 2011, Gwinnett SToPP launched the Parent Leadership Institute (PLI) which is an extensive grassroots education advocacy successive training model designed to ultimately improve the learning climate in all Georgia County Public Schools (GCPS). The PLI pairs grassroots community leadership training with education advocacy training and school discipline reform tools. The parents commit to a two-day retreat at the outset of the PLI and one Saturday per month, culminating with a school-community project in the participants' respective school cluster. Subject matter experts in and around Gwinnet County present a myriad of practices such as restorative justice, navigating the juvenile justice system, media relations and student codes of conduct.

More recently, Gwinnett SToPP has added a Youth Leadership Initiative or YLI. The YLI was born out of the knowledge that students are the most impacted by the STPP, yet are rarely asked to inform the solutions for dismantling the STPP. When Gwinnett SToPP formed, they enlisted the assistance of University of Georgia law students to collect anecdotal data from students regarding their experience with disciplinary alternative education settings. The resulting study was extremely useful in informing a campaign to change disciplinary education settings. Understanding the value of youth voice, several years later Gwinnett SToPP implemented a small pilot program with students enrolled in disciplinary alternative education. The goal was to give the students a space to develop their voice and further change their environment. The next step was to integrate YLI with PLI. The students were an asset to the PLIs as their insights and experiences from inside the school offered parents a different lens to strategize from. Hence the YLI was born.

To date, Gwinnett SToPP has successfully advocated for the following policy changes:

1) Eliminated the contact quota once required for School Resource Officers.
2) Development of a community-based review of the disciplinary code of conduct revision.
3) Policy change to provide transparency and increased education equity for every state district involved in Investing in Educational Excellence (IE2) contracts with the Georgia Department of Education.
4) Closed a loophole that GCPS used to amend their IE2 contract without public review. Districts must now renegotiate their entire contract to gain release from new state rules.

5) Made parents and students aware of Official Code of Georgia Annotated (OCGA) violation in the GCPS Student/Parent Handbook that would result in referral to a School Resource Officer and possible criminal charges.
6) Decreased the number of infractions that would result in a referral to the school police.
7) Successfully campaigned and challenged the creation of a proposed disciplinary program for elementary school students and increased public transparency for the issue.
8) Supported the *Safe Schools Initiative* that dramatically changed the use of restraint and seclusion in Georgia schools.
9) Filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) against GCPS' Investing in Educational Excellence Partnership contract.

Appendix C

<div align="center">

Georgia State University
Department of Educational Policy Studies
Informed Consent

</div>

Title: Community Matters: A Participatory Action Research Study with Teachers
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Joyce King
Student Principal Investigator: Thais Council

I.   <u>Purpose:</u>

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to investigate the extent to which a community-informed professional development institute contributes to the development of a cadre of culturally and socially informed teachers who are able to serve as critically aware advocates of instructional and disciplinary practices that can reduce racial disparities in exclusionary discipline. You are invited to participate because you are a practicing teacher within the metropolitan Atlanta area with three or more years of classroom experience and you have been trained in Positive Behavior and Interventions Support (PBIS) discipline framework. A total of 6 participants will be recruited for this study. Participation will require no more than 50 hours of your time for a total of 14 sessions.

II.   <u>Procedures:</u>

If you decide to participate, you will be asked engage in no more than 14 sessions during which time you will be asked to be interviewed twice by the student PI, engage in discussions with other teachers, listen to presentations by community advocates, watch films, journal about your experiences, read brief pieces of literature and be audio recorded. Each session will last no more than 3 hours. This research will be conducted at Georgia State University in the College of Education and Human Development. You will be compensated with a $200 gift card at the culmination of the study for your time, contribution and any travel expenses.

III.   <u>Risks:</u>

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

IV.   <u>Benefits:</u>

Participation in this study may benefit you personally. We believe you will benefit from participating in this study by being able to reflect on your values, beliefs, and experiences about discipline disparities and teacher perceptions. Additionally, you will contribute to the greater body of knowledge regarding the racial disparities in PK-12th grade exclusionary discipline in metropolitan Atlanta. Overall, we hope to gain information about decreasing and eradicating racial disparities in exclusionary discipline.

V.   Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in research is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or to withdraw your consent at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to stop or withdraw from the study, the information/data collected from or about you up to the point of your withdrawal will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed unless you make a written request to remove, return or destroy the information.

VI.   Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Dr. Joyce King, Professor of Education Policy Studies and Benjamin E. Mays Endowed Chair for Urban Teaching, Learning and Leadership, serves as the faculty sponsor for this study and Thais Council, Educational Policy Studies Doctoral Candidate, will serve as the student Principal Investigator. Both Dr. King and Thais will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). We will use your pseudonym rather than your name on study records. The information you provide and all data and audio recordings collected during this study will be stored on a firewalled, password protected computer cloud. All audio recordings will be destroyed once they are transcribed. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form. You will not be identified personally.

VII.   Contact Persons:

Contact Dr. Joyce King (jking@gsu.edu) at (404) 413-8265 or Thais Council (tcouncil@student.gsu.edu) at (404) 413-8266 if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this study. You can also call if you think you have been harmed by the study. Call Susan Vogtner in the Georgia State University Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu if you want to talk to someone who is not part of the study team. You can talk about questions, concerns, offer input, obtain information, or suggestions about the study. You can also call Susan Vogtner if you have questions or concerns about your rights in this study.

VIII.   <u>Copy of Consent Form to Subject:</u>

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be audio recorded, please sign below.

_____   _____

Participant   Date

_____   _____

Principal Investigator   Date

Appendix D

COMMUNITY VOICES

A LISTENING EXCHANGE
ABOUT URBAN EDUCATION
REFORM AND
GENTRIFICATION IN
SOUTHWEST ATLANTA

Are you:

- A **parent or guardian** with a child or children enrolled in a local public charter school?
- A **teacher** who works at a public charter school?
- A **resident** of a Southwest Atlanta neighborhood with a public charter school?

If so, we invite you to attend the Listening Exchange and share your experiences.

Join us

Saturday, July 14th, 2018

11:00 am - 1:00 pm

1

Atlanta, Georgia 30314

We are recruiting up to 30 people for this study. Light brunch will be served from 10:00-11:00 am

To RSVP or if you have questions about this listening exchange, please contact Thais Council at (404) 919-7323 or tcouncil@gsu.edu.

Appendix E

Title: Community Voices: Urban Education Reform and Gentrification in Southwest Atlanta

Protocol Version Date: May 14, 2018

Principal Investigator (PI):
Name: Dr. Joyce King
Address: 30 Pryor Street SW Office #414, Atlanta, Georgia 30303
Phone: (404) 413-8265
Email: jking@gsu.edu

Student Principal Investigator:
Name: Thais Council
Phone: (404) 919-7323
Email: tcouncil@student.gsu.edu

I. Objectives & Anticipated Outcomes

 We seek to gain insight into the impact of multiple forms of school pushout on impoverished families and communities of color in urban Atlanta. While there is an abundance of research regarding the inequitable and discriminatory policies and practices of the school to prison pipeline and the disproportionate impact on students of color (Fasching-Varner et al., 2016; Mallett, 2016; Raible & Iziarry, 2010), we rarely hear directly from these students or their families (Weissman, 2015). We will conduct a community listening exchange to examine how issues related to housing, jobs, poverty, school closings, and public charters have impacted communities, families and students. We aim to use the qualitative data from these interviews to examine a community perspective around the narrative of school pushout, from those directly impacted. Through this process, we hope to:

 1) **Bring awareness** to housing, jobs, poverty, school closings, and public charters as a form of school pushout;

2) **Empower communities and families** to be active and vocal about the impact of housing, jobs, school closings and public charters on their communities;

3) **Emphasize** the importance of including the perspectives of students and families in the schools and communities that are impacted by exclusionary practices and policies that lead to school pushout.

II. Background and Significance

Traditionally, school push out is positioned as the school-to-prison pipeline whereby students of color, students with disabilities, low-income students and students who identify as lesbian, bisexual, gay, queer, or transgender (LBGQT) are disproportionately suspended or expelled from school for minimal offenses and entangled in a complex web of policies that decrease their academic, economic and social mobility (Mallett, 2016; Fasching-Varner, 2017). These students experience the juvenile court system at a young age, even though they pose a minimal safety risk to their schools (Mallett, 2016). Students of color are immersed into the criminal justice system rather than being cultivated for a quality education. In addition to the stated position of traditional school push out, recent literature suggests there is a new form of school push out on the horizon for marginalized students and families (Mordechay, Auscue & Orfield, 2017).

According to Freedman & McGavock (2015), a lack of affordable housing options continues to blight students and their families in their communities. Additionally, housing affordability, lack of quality jobs, poverty, and school closings have contributed to the displacement of students and their families in communities with persistent poverty. This is a consequence of gentrification and urban education reform and it is an under researched form of school exclusion that pushes low-income, students of color out of school by creating a lack of housing stability for families who have long-resided in divested communities. Educational policymakers charged with creating equitable pathways to college and careers consistently share less of a focus on revitalizing, investing, and rebuilding unique communities and instead create conditions ripe with perpetual inequalities (Downey, 2018).

Additionally, blighted neighborhoods and failing schools are inextricably linked. During the 2016 legislative cycle, Georgia Governor Nathan Deal proffered the Opportunity School District (OSD) to turnaround schools persistently labeled as failing across the state. All of the schools listed as failing were schools with a majority-minority population, served a majority low-income population or fit into both categories (Dingerson, Dunn & Council, 2015). The schools located in Atlanta are in rapidly gentrifying areas. To date, neighborhoods throughout urban Atlanta have been inundated with public charter schools whose mission is to offer a rigorous curriculum while engaging students and communities through a social justice framework. The problem lies within the intersection of the mission and actions of the public charter legislation, public charter schools as the lack of jobs, affordable housing does not serve or meet the needs they campaigned or promised to address.

III. Research Study Design

This study will be conducted on Saturday, June 2nd, 2018 during which time, the student principal investigator will host and moderate a community listening exchange, at a residential home (see site permission letter), where community members, parents and teachers will be invited to share their thoughts on two questions: 1) How would you describe any changes happening in your school and neighborhood? 1a) How do you feel about and/or what do you think about those changes? 2) Where do you see yourself and your family in the changes currently happening in your school and neighborhood? The listening exchange will be audio recorded (no video recording) and transcribed. Each listening session attendee will contribute no more than 120 minutes of their time. The participants are parents/guardians of students and community members who reside in the community where public charter schools are located. Parents/guardians and community members will be asked two general questions outlined in the *Interview Protocol A* listed below.

Conceptual Framework:

Counterstorytelling—one of the five tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT)—inserts the voices of the historically marginalized and silenced (Delgado, 2000). Counterstorytelling stands in direct

opposition to the dominant narrative often projected by those in power as it offers a grassroots, local, community-centered narrative of schools, neighborhoods, educational polices to those in dominate, power-wielding circles. Counterstorytelling offers the researchers an analytical frame to gain in-depth understanding of new forms of school pushout juxtaposed to the narrative proffered by school district and school-based personnel.

Research Questions:

1) Does the lack of jobs, affordable housing and transportation push low-income, students of color out of public charter schools?

2) How are parents and students in marginalized settings invited to participate in educational policymaking processes?

IV. About the Subjects

This study will enroll no more than 30 research participants in 3 categories: (1) Parents/Guardians; (2) Teachers; and (3) Community Members.

Research Subject	Number to be enrolled in each group	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Parents/Guardians	**10**	Has a child or children who are enrolled in a public charter school in the neighborhood.	Does not have a child or children who are enrolled in public charter school in the neighborhood.
Teachers	**10**	Works at a public charter school in the neighborhood.	Does not work at a public charter neighborhood school.
Community Members	**10**	Resides in the neighborhood/zone where public charter is located.	Does not reside in the neighborhood/zone where public charter is located.

V. Vulnerable Populations

The vulnerable population in this study are teachers as they work at the schools in question. Coercion will be avoided with this population by explicitly informing them that participation in the research is voluntary and they can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or retaliation. Researchers will also use precaution to conceal the identity of participants. Participants will be asked not to take pictures or post to social media during the listening exchange.

VI. Recruitment Methods

Parents and Community Members will be recruited through the local neighborhood planning unit (NPU) which are citizen advisory councils that make recommendations to the Mayor and City Council on zoning, land use, and other planning issues. The NPU meetings are held once monthly and the student principal investigator will ask the chair to allot time on the agenda to recruit participants. A flyer will be posted on www.NextDoor.com for focused neighborhood and NPU dissemination.

VII. Compensation

Participants will be compensated with a $5 gift card from select vendors for their study participation. The funding for this compensation will come from researchers' personal funds.

VIII. Consent Process

All listening exchange participants will sign an informed consent form giving permission to be audiotaped, also understanding that Georgia State University will take several measures to keep all information confidential and protected. All participants will be consented at the listening exchange before audio recording begins.

IX. Interview Protocols

Interview Protocol A

1) How would you describe any changes happening in your school and neighborhood?

   1a) How do you feel about and/or what do you think about those changes?

2) Where do you see yourself and your family in the changes currently happening in your school and neighborhood?

X. Data Management

Original copies of completed interviews and transcriptions will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the office of the principal investigator, Dr. Joyce King. Dr. King's office is located in the College of Education and Human Development, Department of Educational Policy Studies at 30 Pryor Street SW, Atlanta, Georgia 30303. Additionally, electronic copies of completed interviews and transcripts as well as audio recordings will be uploaded and stored in a web-based, cloud strictly only accessible to the principal investigators of the study.

XI. Withdrawal of Participants

Participants can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participants do not have to return or repay the $5 gift card provided at the beginning of the study. If participants decide to withdraw, their data through the point of withdrawal will be used in the analysis and findings reporting.

XII. Management of Risks

Careful consideration will be employed to mask the identity of each participant. A spreadsheet notating the age, race, school affiliation and neighborhood of each participant will be created. Each participant will be notated with an initial to denote if they are a teacher (T), parent (P) or community member (C) and a number to denote which of the 10 participants they represent. All interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. Once audio recordings are transcribed and

analyzed, the audio recording will be destroyed. All audio recordings will stored on a password-protected web-based storage cloud which only the principal investigator and principal student investigator have access to.

XIII. Potential Benefits

Community members, parents and teachers will benefit from this study by having their opinions, concerns and thoughts represented. Additionally, the findings of this study will provide district-level and local school leadership with an additional voices and community context to respond to the challenges of jobs, poverty, affordable housing and transportation urban schools and neighborhoods.

XIV. Cost to Participants

Participants will not incur a costs from participating in this study.

XV. Sharing of Results with Participants

The researchers will share any conference presentations, publications or grant funding submissions with the community via NPU announcement platforms and meetings.

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WELCOME TO
A LISTENING EXCHANGE
EXPLORING URBAN EDUCATION
REFORM & GENTRIFICATION IN
ATLANTA

AGENDA

1	2	3	4	5	6
Lunch is provided by RBC Bank and will be served from 12:00 pm-12:45pm .	Welcome	Words from our co-sponsors • Marlyn Tillman, Gwinnett SToPP • Derrick Duckworth, Committed to Communities	A brief history of Pittsburgh and South Atlanta/Joyland • Nasir Muhammad, Black Mecca of the South Tours	Listening Exchange	Closing and Next Steps

Please share:

-Name

-Neighborhood

-School Affiliation

-What brought you here today

YOU MATTER

GWINNETT STOPP

Marlyn Tillman
www.gwinnettstopp.org

COMMITTED TO COMMUNITIES

Derrick Duckworth
www.committedtocommunities.com

BLACK MECCA OF THE SOUTH TOURS

Nasir Muhammad

URBAN EDUCATION REFORM

An attempt to alter public schools in urban city centers.

Issues in urban schools:
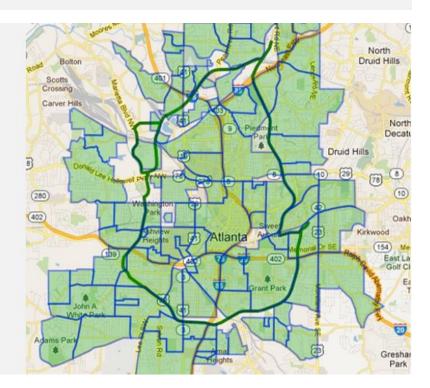
- School pushout
- Curriculum
- Large Class Sizes
- High-Stakes Testing
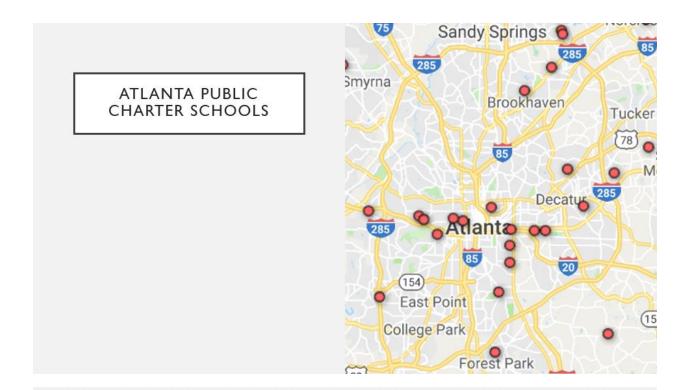- Lack of adequate funding, resources, and quality teachers

ATLANTA BELTLINE

The Atlanta BeltLine is a sustainable redevelopment project that is transforming the city. It will ultimately connect 45 intown neighborhoods via a 22-mile loop of multi-use trails, modern streetcar, and parks – all based on railroad corridors that formerly encircled Atlanta.

https://beltline.org/about/the atlanta-beltline-project/atlanta-beltline-overview

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ATLANTA PUBLIC
CHARTER SCHOOLS

A BRIEF HISTORY

NEIGHBOR PROFILE

BELTLINING:
GENTRIFICATION, BROKEN
PROMISES, AND HOPE ON
ATLANTA'S SOUTHSIDE

HOUSING JUSTICE LEAGUE
AND RESEARCH|ACTION
COOPERATIVE

OCTOBER 2017

Alison Johnson, Housing Justice League member, report author

"My family started out in what is now a nearly forgotten neighborhood of Buttermilk Bottoms, a largely white neighborhood at the turn of the century. A fire in 1917 destroyed many of the houses and most of those that remained were the rental properties housing the Black families that worked in houses in the area. My great grandfather was a chef to a family that lived in Ansley Park, about three miles away from his house. He raised my father and my uncle when their mother married and moved with her husband up north to Detroit, looking for a better life during the great migration era.

By the 1960s the neighborhood was a working class Black neighborhood with a strong social and cultural life but also known for needing substantial improvements to the infrastructure and housing. I remember my father reminiscing about finding his grandfather standing outside of their rundown apartment with only the things he could gather when he came from work to find that their building had been condemned without warning and they were to leave the property immediately. My family moved a few blocks up, lived there for nearly five years, only to be told the exact same thing—they had to leave again. This time because of the construction of the highway. This history was not uncommon for Black Atlantans. Buttermilk Bottoms, completely razed in the 1970s, once home to 3,000 Black residents, is today the site of the Atlanta Civic Center and the accompanying businesses and parking lots.
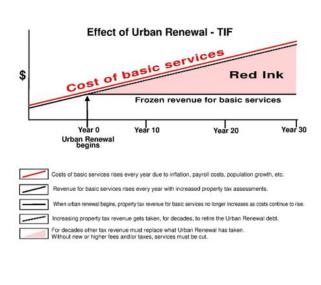
When they left Buttermilk Bottoms, the only area they could afford was the neighborhood of Summerhill on the city's Southside. Yet with this move tragedy struck: only six months after leaving the only area my great grandfather knew as home he died. My father always equated his death to the stress of being forced to move and with each move his travels by foot to get to work got further and further.

Soon after the move to Summerhill, my parents met and married really young and began to rent a shotgun home. After about three years of renting, they were thrown out in the Leon Eplan era of "getting rid of the slums." [11] They moved in with family members but just after moving learned that their relatives were also in the process of being displaced via eminent domain as the Fulton County Stadium was being built. Again they were forced to migrate out of the community to a nearby area where the homes were somewhat affordable, but the school system was failing and jobs were rare. Our family suffered a lot because of the instability of not having a secure home.

Fortunately, after moving to Kansas to support his family by obtaining his GED and a commercial driving license, my father moved back to Atlanta, settled in Peoplestown, and was employed by the City of Atlanta as a sanitation worker. Eventually he gained his rank within the City. Because of his hard work and dedication to his job, my parents were able to become first generation homeowners.

But, sadly, my father died early, and basic family survival became a struggle. Survival continues to be a generational issue for Black families in Atlanta, and it is made even more difficult with past histories and future threats of displace-

Photo by Maggie Kane

TAX ALLOCATION DISTRICTS OR TAX INCENTIVE FUNDS

Effect of Urban Renewal - TIF

- Costs of basic services rises every year due to inflation, payroll costs, population growth, etc.
- Revenue for basic services rises every year with increased property tax assessments.
- When urban renewal begins, property tax revenue for basic services no longer increases as costs continue to rise.
- Increasing property tax revenue gets taken, for decades, to retire the Urban Renewal debt.
- For decades other tax revenue must replace what Urban Renewal has taken. Without new or higher fees and/or taxes, services must be cut.

LISTENING EXCHANGE

NORMS FOR LISTENING EXCHANGE

- Be present
- Please silence cell phones
- Your voice is important
  - We encourage participation from everyone
- One mic
- You are welcome to leave at any time

PLEASE DESCRIBE THE CHANGES HAPPENING IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD AND/OR SCHOOL.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE CHANGES IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD AND/OR SCHOOL?

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF WITHIN THE CHANGES HAPPENING IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD AND/OR SCHOOL?

1) WHAT DOES YOUR IDEAL **NEIGHBORHOOD** LOOK LIKE?

2) WHAT DOES YOUR IDEAL **SCHOOL** LOOK LIKE FOR YOUR CHILD?

1) Does your school-aged child attend the local public school? Why or why not?

2) If your child is not of school-age, will they attend a local public school in the future? Why or why not?

1) What do you think you have to offer to your **neighborhood**? What can your neighborhood offer you?

2) What do you think you have to offer your **local public school**? What can your local public school offer you?

WHAT IS GENTRIFICATION?

- the process of renovating and improving a house or district so that it conforms to middle-class taste. ~**Google**

- the process of making a person or activity more refined or polite. ~**Google**

- Gentrification is urban revitalization driven by profit that results in the displacement of historically marginalized working-class communities and communities of color. Typically, these communities have struggled with too few jobs, amenities, and services because of years of disinvestment. Gentrification is led by private developers, landlords, and businesses, and often happens in areas where land is inexpensive and the potential to turn a profit is high. While development is usually framed as coming from the actions of private businesses, government policy plays a key role in promoting gentrification by offering tax incentives, zoning, and infrastructure improvements. ~**Atlanta Housing Justice League & Research Action Cooperative**

DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF A GENTRIFIER? WHY OR WHY NOT?

QUOTE FROM PREVIOUS LISTENING EXCHANGE

There are certain things that I've learned to look for because she was at **Elementary School. Like investing in the PTA. In our community, we don't know how to do those things. And so there's a lot that residents could do but it doesn't happen. And then to piggyback on what she said about how do you feel about the changes that's happening in schools, one of the things that I found interesting about **Elementary is a lot of the teachers were Black and a lot of the students were not Black. But they had great education and so it looked like a oxymoron to me because I expected, I expected that all ___ most of the teachers were gonna be White and that wasn't the case...

QUOTE FROM PREVIOUS LISTENING EXCHANGE

Good afternoon. I teach early childhood education but I'm in an overserved community. My passion is for my area and the area I live in surrounding here....

I: Follow-up question. Define overserved community for us, please.

Well, I mean, they have more than enough of everything to the point that, that stuff is wasted without thought. I mean, time, money, resources, food. The school I work in, materials and food are thrown away on a daily basis. I'm just, and it's the best of the best. It's the organic, it's the, you know, it's all the good stuff that's thrown away and parents have the time where they're both able to come in and visit with children at the school. They're able to leave work for every, for all physical activities that we have. All, you know, for that month, to come in and be a part of it so that's part of it.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SAY TO:
-POLICYMAKERS?
-THE MAYOR?
-COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS?
-(NEW) NEIGHBORS?
-SCHOOL PERSONNEL?

WHAT QUESTIONS SHOULD WE HAVE ASKED THAT WE DIDN'T?

DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS FOR US?

PARTING THOUGHTS & NEXT STEPS

Appendix H