Urban Rev
https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-018-0450-4

The Black Teacher Project: How Racial Affinity Professional Development Sustains Black Teachers

Micia Mosely[1]

Abstract The Black Teacher Project (BTP) is an organization that supports, develops and sustains Black teachers for schools in the United States. The organization is building a Black teaching force that reflects the diversity and excellence of Black people in the United States. In our pilot year, BTP offered racial affinity-based professional development supports for Black teachers in the San Francisco Bay Area and New York City, and sought to understand the impact on the teachers who participated. This article describes the findings from these supports, including a yearlong book study, inquiry groups, and drop-in "Rejuvenation Spaces." A key finding from this initial pilot study is that racial affinity-based professional development decreases isolation and increases retention for Black teachers.

Keywords Professional development · Black teachers · Critical professional development · Liberatory consciousness

In January of 2014, I was preparing to co-facilitate a professional development day for Everett Middle School in San Francisco. As I was setting up, I heard a voice behind me say, "Hi, Ms. Mosely." I turned around to see the face of one of my former high school students, now a middle school teacher. Belinda had struggled in my class and I was too inexperienced during my second year of teaching to support her through the trauma she was experiencing and to guide her to academic success. We connected enough for her to agree to join the softball team I started. I did not know how to help her academically, but I knew the value of the physical activity and belonging that being part of a team can create. In the end, we were "cool," but she

✉ Micia Mosely
micia@blackteacherproject.org

[1] The Black Teacher Project, 1720 Broadway 4th Floor, Oakland, CA 94612, USA

Published online: 13 March 2018

needed more than I could give. I was not that dream teacher I saw in the movies. I had gotten burned out and left the school before she graduated. We lost touch. But now, years later, she was standing in front of me as a middle school English teacher. In the following months she told me about her time as a community organizer as well as the structural and cultural difficulties she faced trying to find a path to teach in the neighborhood she grew up in. She was giving it another go at a school in a different neighborhood, but still wasn't sure if this was the field for her. That's when everything changed for me.

I had been thinking about how to support Black teachers since I wrote my dissertation about Black teachers in multiracial urban schools. Over the next 10 years I talked with friends and colleagues about *someday* starting *something* to help Black teachers stay in the classroom, thrive in their practice and to maybe help me find my own path back to the classroom. After reconnecting with Belinda, I knew I had to move from idea to action. Twenty years after I started my teaching career, I founded the Black Teacher Project (BTP) hoping that what happened to me would not happen to Belinda or anyone else. Our vision is that all students will have access to a well-prepared, well-supported Black teaching force that reflects the diversity and excellence of Black people in this country. As a result, we focus on sustaining, developing and recruiting Black teachers to bring out the excellence in themselves and the young people they serve. We execute this vision through racial affinity-based professional development as well as working to transform the environments that Black teachers work in.

This two-part approach seeks to provide Black teachers with the knowledge, skills and community that will help them thrive in their work, while supporting non-Black teachers and other educators to examine how they can shift their own beliefs, practices and structures to attract and sustain Black teachers. Too many schools just want Black bodies in the building to discipline children or act as models of acceptable Blackness (Bradshaw 1995; Lynn 2002; White 2010). Being an excellent Black teacher involves knowing who you are and your craft. Both take time. Even with those elements, Black teachers still have to figure out how to understand, navigate and transform a racist system (Lynn 2002) that was designed to maintain the social and economic order, both of which position Black people on the bottom. We can all point to individual Black people who have figured out this balance. BTP's work is about the collective impact we know Black people can make when we bring our full selves to an institution in this country that touches so many people throughout their development.

Teachers at different stages of their careers need different kinds of support. In addition to the traditional pedagogical and curricular supports, Black teachers also need support to reflect on and navigate through the racial inequity they encounter working in schools in the United States. Black people gathering to focus on healing from hurt together, in order to engage in self-determination, has long been understood as necessary to a path to liberation (Im Akbar 1984; Cone 2000; Woodson 1990). Understanding effective ways for Black teachers to convene professionally is important to creating schools where all of our students can be liberated from an inequitable system.

BTP completed its first full year of programming during a dynamic time in education. Since the 1980s there has been much talk about the need for diversifying the

teaching force, particularly the need to recruit and retain more Black teachers (Graham 1987; Irvine 1988). Recognizing that Black teachers bring specific life experiences and strengths that benefit their students, many foundations, governments, school districts and nonprofits have been working to recruit more Black teachers into the classroom (Bireda and Chait 2011; Haynes et al. 2016; Hawkins 2010; Pabon et al. 2011).

At the same time, Black teachers have left the profession at a higher rate compared to teachers of other backgrounds. A 2015 report from the Albert Shanker Institute revealed that the number of Black teachers in nine major cities in the United States declined since 2003; there was a 28% difference just in Washington, DC, for instance. BTP's work in the past school year suggested that recruiting on its own will not increase the number of Black teachers; instead, the sustainability of Black teachers will be ensured by helping schools and other educational institutions become more welcoming and supportive places for them, where their professional practice can be cultivated over time.

Experiences of Black Teachers

Black teachers working in schools today have been written about with a variety of approaches, including exploring what knowledge and skills they bring to the classroom and the challenges they face when they get there. Black teachers regularly have to combat a number of microaggressions, such as proving their worth and challenging the myth of intellectual inferiority (Lynn 2002; Kohli 2016). The consistent discourse around the deficits of Black students impacts how Black teachers are viewed, as they were once students.

Former United States Secretary of Education John King notes another factor: the "invisible taxes" imposed on Black teaches and other teachers of color. These "taxes" include (1) an expectation to serve as disciplinarians, rather than academic instructors, for Black boys, (2) uncompensated time spent in informal leadership roles as the unofficial liaison with families of Color, (3) being skipped over for more formal (and often paid) leadership opportunities and (4) being expected to teach remedial—instead of advanced—courses (King 2016). Black teachers are also expected to be liaisons for schools and advocates for families (McCready and Mosely 2014).

Nested Contexts of Racialized Expectations, a term that refers to "the multiple interconnected and dynamic sets of conditions in which expectations about people of particular races are situated" (Mosely 2003), is useful for understanding and supporting the sustainability of Black teachers and the complexity of their contexts. Their context actually matters. For example, are they a first-year teacher? Are they teaching a core subject? Are they teaching in a multiracial space? How are other Black people positioned in a space, if they are the only Black classroom teacher (Bristol 2017)? What people teach also matters. There are different expectations of the person who teaches English from the person who teaches a life skills course (Mosely 2003).

The literature also focuses on Black teachers' relationships with Black students. The fictive kinship, the mutual understanding that Black teachers and Black students are kith and kin, can lead to connections with Black students, such that Black

teachers can leverage their shared understanding in their teaching (Ladson-Billings 2009). There has also been a great deal written about the gendered experiences of Black teachers. Black men have reported working through the expectations of discipline (Bradshaw 1995; Lynn 2002). Black women have been seen as surrogate mothers who are expected to care for Black children in ways that schools do not. Navigating an inequitable system is a common challenge for teachers, particularly when it comes to taking and passing exams for credentialing. Many of these exams are barriers to Black teachers entering and remaining in the field (Osler 2016).

Retention speaks to keeping Black teachers in the classroom without an explicit consideration of their experiences and well-being. BTP has chosen to focus on sustainability, thereby committing to ensure that Black teachers have a thriving practice where they and their students are performing at their best, and they are seen as full human beings not just workers. This article fills a gap in the literature by taking a closer look at racial affinity-based professional development and its impact on Black teacher sustainability.

Racial Affinity Professional Development

Racial affinity professional development at its core is about designing spaces of support, learning and healthy career development that are culturally responsive to a specific racialized group who experiences the consequences of institutional racism in particular ways. In the case of BTP, this group is Black teachers, an ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse group, but one that arguably experiences anti-Blackness in connected ways, and one that may also nurture educational liberation in related pro-Black ways. Researchers have acknowledged that teachers of color can be supported by directly addressing the realities of systemic racism, and by drawing upon culture and community as strengths (Achinstein and Ogawa 2011; Kohli 2016; Jackson and Kohli 2016). Black students can be supported by culturally responsive pedagogies that also affirm cultural strengths while critiquing structural injustices (Irvine 1989). Most recently, one might consider such important interventions as the Black Minds Matter course offered by Luke Wood at San Diego State University (SDSU News Team 2017). However, there is no Black Teachers Matter institute. There is less literature about and even fewer supports for sustaining Black teachers.

Liberatory Consciousness

The approaches BTP developed to support Black teachers were created using a liberatory consciousness framework (Love 2010). There are four elements: Awareness, Analysis, Action, and Accountable/Ally-ship. This frame allows for a reality check as to what is happening in the lives of Black teachers coupled with a collective approach to addressing the challenges that are named. Awareness "involves developing the capacity to notice, to give our attention to our daily lives, our language, our behaviors, and event our thoughts. Living with awareness means noticing what happens in the world around you" (p. 600). For critical Black teachers, their

experiences in school are complicated at best. They have figured out how to be successful in a system that was designed for their failure. Black teachers' awareness of racial inequity in schools and their position in it calls for specific support in navigating feelings and emotions that surface and are compounded by hostile professional environments.

Analysis "involves getting information and developing your own explanation for what is happening, why it is happening, and what needs to be done about it" (p. 601). Creating professional spaces for Black teachers to develop their own understandings of the complicated and contradictory spaces they are working in is key to their success in and out of the classroom. The action component of a liberatory consciousness "proceeds from recognition that awareness and analysis alone are not enough. There can be no division between those who think and those who put thinking into action." The action component includes "deciding what needs to be done, and then seeing to it that action is taken" (p. 601). Teachers across races often enter the field to create change in the world. Their environment as well as their analysis of what is happening impact how Black teachers take action. Supporting teachers to recognize that they are not alone can lead to a more liberatory set of possibilities.

The accountability element of liberatory consciousness "is concerned with how we understand and manage opportunities and possibilities for perspective sharing and ally ship in liberation work" (p. 602). When most teachers hear the term accountability they do not initially think about liberation. This framework creates space to reconsider what it means to be successful in education. Black teachers' success cannot be limited to individual accomplishments, even though that is how students' and teachers' work is measured and rewarded. Reminding Black teachers of their collective responsibility allows for a refocusing on the promise of education as a path to freedom for Black people.

Critical Professional Development

BTP's approach to designing workshops and other supports also utilized the framework of Critical Professional Development (CPD). It "frames teachers as politically-aware individuals who have a stake in teaching and transforming society. In both pedagogy and content, CPD develops teachers' critical consciousness by focusing their efforts towards liberatory teaching" (Kohli et al. 2015, p. 9). Critical Professional Development is (1) dialogical (2) honors relationality/collectivity (3) strengthens racial literacy and (4) recognizes critical consciousness and transformation as an ongoing process.

Dialogical experiences encourage teachers to engage in conversations that require deep listening for understanding (Kohli et al. 2015). Through understanding the experiences of other Black teachers, BTP sought to help people be heard, know they are not alone, and help them contextualize their own experience. Collectivity and honoring relationality brings "humanity back to our professional interactions". It is best seen in structures and practices that allow people to work together and connect

on a personal level. Given the often dehumanizing experiences of Black teachers in schools, BTP wanted to bring more experiences of personal connection to our work.

Racial literacy focuses how to identify routine forms of racism and to develop strategies for countering and coping with them (Rogers and Mosley 2008; Twine 2004). The racism that Black teachers experience has been well documented (Lynn 2002; Kohli 2016), but it is less known what supports have been helpful to for Black teachers to navigate and respond to those experiences. As the liberatory consciousness framework notes, awareness is an important step, but action is also necessary for transformation. BTP was careful to ensure that teachers had practical tools they could use to address the racism they spoke about with colleagues.

Critical consciousness and transformation calls for people to be able to identify the shifting manifestations and consequences of racism. Helping Black teachers understand that they are a part of a legacy of Black academic excellence and political resistance was important in contextualizing their experiences with a common result in this type of work: Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF). This involves psychophysiological symptoms, from high blood pressure to anxiety, frustration, shock, anger and depression, that people of color may experience living in and navigating historically white spaces (Smith 2004). By recognizing this in an ongoing part of their professional practice, BTP was explicit about designing professional development that could help minimize the impact of RBF.

Thus, racial affinity professional development for Black teachers must involve both liberation and a critical lens. The Black Teacher Project utilized this approach because of its commitment to reflective practice and racial justice.

Methodology

The findings in this paper extend from BTP's direct programming with, by and for Black teachers. Our programs have evolved dynamically and dramatically based on participants' voices on written reflections, surveys, and inquiry groups, that serve to both evolve existing programs and to imagine new ones. Further, Black teacher participants are many of the leaders and progenitors of our programs, such as the Inquiry Groups, Book Study and Rejuvenation Spaces described in this paper. It is a cycle of praxis, where we collaboratively practice and rethink our practice. My own role as an independent scholar, professional development coach, advocate, and founder means that I am drawing from academic frameworks and current research. We also have a research advisory board of university scholars who act as thought partners. Therefore, our research methodology is best described as participatory action research (PAR) (Cammarota and Fine 2010; McIntyre 2007), where methods, analyses and findings are co-theorized by Black teachers who also benefit from the project. Our data is collected by BTP ethnographers, staff, and participants. BTP produces open-access "Black papers", or short, accessible research-based advocacy pieces, written by different people. In this PAR research, I position myself as a critical listener, co-theorist, and one of many writers.

The particular data set that informs this paper are ethnographic field notes taken during the professional development sessions, surveys, and interviews throughout

the pilot year. Teachers were recruited to participate in the sessions through information shared by BTP and their school districts. Teachers agreed to provide feedback about their experiences in the sessions. 63 Black teachers we were surveyed about their experiences in BTP's affinity based professional development focused on sustainability. Three veteran, four mid-career, and four novice Black teachers were interviewed to understand how the PD impacted their teaching experience and retention. These participants were selected because of their participation in year long programming and drop in programming. After transcription, interviews were coded and re-coded for emergent patterns and grounded theory guided the analysis as I developed and made sense of the themes (Saldaña 2012).

Our overarching questions at BTP are praxis-oriented, "What professional development will help sustain Black teachers?" and "Was our programming effective?" From these broad questions, more specific research questions are always emerging. Specifically, the praxis question that guides this paper is, "What impact would our racial affinity professional development have on teacher sustainability?"

Findings: Types of Racial Affinity Professional Development

Black Teacher Inquiry

The monthly inquiry group meetings utilized an Equity-Based Critical Friends Protocol developed by San Francisco Coalition for Equitable Small Schools (SFCESS). The teachers in the group used a protocol to examine a dilemma they were facing in their practice and received feedback from other Black teachers. ("Appendix" = Equity Based Critical Friends Protocol). Part of the equity focus of this protocol involves naming parts of your identity that feel important to the dilemma. Since all of the participants were Black, teachers had a nuanced discussion of their dilemmas looking at how their race intersected with other parts of their identity. The five Black teacher leaders had all received training through SFCESS prior to The Black Teacher Project being founded.

Teachers reported having a "safe" space to bring their identity into conversations about their practice as unique and important to their work. Participants also appreciated having a space to talk with Black colleagues about navigating the inequity in systems and microaggressions. The structure allowed them to be creative in how they responded to those challenges. Teachers reported that this support gave them knowledge and skills that they did not have before and impacted their decision to remain in the classroom.

Black Teacher Wellness and Rejuvenation

These monthly meetings focused on sustaining the holistic health and wellbeing of Black teachers as well as lifting up the artistic talent of Black teachers. Participants gained skills to support their physical, emotional, and social health as teachers and leaders in their community. One example included a mindfulness workshop

for teachers to learn techniques they could utilize during their busy day. In other sessions they learned physical and mental self-care practices and examined what it meant to heal from internalized oppression. They also had an avenue to share and experience arts-based professional development led by Black teachers. One example included writing a set of cathartic "Black Teachers Blues" songs in small groups. One of the session leaders taught at the local school of the arts. Teachers were also shown how they could use that lesson with their students. "Elder Wisdom" highlighted the voices of veteran and retired Black teachers. They shared their experiences and answered questions from Black teachers navigating the classroom today. The year ended with The Black Teacher Leadership and Sustainability Institute (BTSLI) where teachers learned how to leverage their identity and skills to lead from the classroom. They also gained an understanding of the root causes of some of the stressors that lead to burnout and how to address them.

Participants overwhelmingly reported that microaggressions led to racial battle fatigue and that these spaces "gave them life." The sense of "community in the struggle" decreased their feeling of isolation. One teacher noted, "I'm the only Black teachers at my school. When I come to (these) spaces and hear what other folks are going through I know it's not just me. I know I'm not crazy and that I don't have to fight by myself." Participants also shared that naming what assets they bring to the classroom (one of the activities in the institute) helped them counter the narrative in their school that their main value was "just being Black" without any discussion of what that meant.

Book Study

These monthly sessions were focused on reading and engaging in activities outlined in *Culturally Relevant Teaching and The Brain* by Zaretta Hammond (2014). The sessions were led by the author, a Black former classroom teacher and nationally renowned teacher educator. She supported teachers to unpack two archetypes of culture: collectivism (emphasis on relationships and interdependence) and individualism (emphasis on the individual and independence). She also spoke about the neuroscience of learning and how that connects to the two archetypes. Participants were guided through activities that helped them to understand their culture, their students' cultures and different strategies to respond to their students' cultural ways of learning.

The study showed that participants gained a unique understanding of culture, which was connected to, but distinct from their racial identity. One teacher noted that when she read the book with other colleagues at her school the conversation was focused on "learning to love the students' racialized cultures, which is not even what they book is about. Plus, I already love my kids I need to know how to teach them better. Reading the book with BTP let me focus on nuances of culture and get to the teaching strategies." Participants reported not receiving the instructional support they needed because they have strong relationships with Black students. Through this support participants were able to make meaning of the pedagogical choices they made inside of a new framework (collectivism). Participants felt

that this classroom-based support was important to their sustainability as teachers because it focused on "improving my practice without some one size fits all strategy. I could keep it real about my challenges with my Latino students and I got practical tools I could use. I don't have spaces where I can talk about that. I have to act like it's all good since were all people of color. I finally got to understand what cultural responsiveness means to me."

Similarities and Differences Across Career Developmental Stages: New Teachers

For some new teachers figuring out *how to stay in the classroom* by moving through the necessary requirements for a credential, proved to be their highest need. California has one of the longest set of requirements including exams that are often gatekeepers for Black teachers. One first year middle school teacher shared that he was struggling to pay for an exam that he was required pass in order to return to the classroom. He took the exam before and didn't pass. He knew he needed help, but did not know where to go. So many new teachers reported a similar need that BTP secured a tutor and worked to make the class affordable for the teachers by offering a reduced rate, free space, snacks and a payment plan. While this was not part of the original program plan, or a typical rejuvenation space, it did very clearly meet the need of new Black teachers. As the class began BTP shared the history of these exams with Black teachers, noting that they were developed post *Brown vs. The Board of Education* in order to keep Black Teachers out of the newly integrated classrooms (Osler, 2016). This information opened the door for discussions about how Black teachers felt taking these exams and not passing them. Beyond the acknowledgement of stereotype threat, it allowed teachers to identify these exams as gatekeepers and not a reflection of their intelligence or teaching skill. Over the weeks of the tutoring session teachers talked about their mental, emotional and technical preparation for the exams. Toward the end of the sessions, teachers noted how important it was to "have a study crew" and feel "connected to other Black folks" in a similar situation. At the time of publication 80% of the participants who took their exams passed, and 100% of those teachers returned to the classroom the following year.

The more traditional rejuvenation spaces highlighted the artistic expression of Black teachers. Many of the novice teachers who participated in those programs were also professional artists. While they appreciated the opportunity to bring that aspect of their life into their education work, many expressed feeling conflicted about their next professional steps: "It's hard spend so much energy trying to teach students who may or may not be interested during the day and sell out shows at night where I know I am appreciated. I love the kids, but my heart is in my music. I wish it was easier to do both." The teachers in the School of the Arts stayed in their positions, and one vocal teacher started working in an afterschool program. Another teacher moved to New Orleans to teach after this year in part because "the culture will allow me to be my full self and do my thing. They get it down there."

Most new teachers' focus revolved around how they could make a larger impact on their *classroom*. Several teachers expressed having classroom management issues. Striking the balance between connecting with students and holding behavioral boundaries is difficult for many new teachers regardless of race. Black teachers are often hired with the expectation that they will manage the behavior of Black students (King 2016). A mid-career teacher facilitated a workshop focused on classroom management and focused on techniques as well as the emotional responses to the racialized expectations of Black teachers. The facilitator also connected it to lessons he was learning while participating in BTP book study, which spoke to his ability to be metacognitive and deepen his learning by sharing it with others. New teachers found this frame for classroom managements so valuable that they asked for a second workshop in order to reflect on the practices they intended to try and to go deeper on the issues that were raised.

During the Inquiry Group several new teachers shared their struggle with what they expected of themselves and what they were able to deliver. A second year middle school teacher shared, "I am feeling like I am not being effective as a teacher… not handling my responsibilities well. I am not on top of grading, not on top of scaffolding, I am not on top of lesson plans, I am not organized; I am not a good enough teacher, for one kid in particular, James." Her dilemma read, "As a black queer poly 26 years young and a second year teacher, how do I teach every student, but especially students like James (a dark skinned black male student, who is chronically absent and in conflict with his peers) with fidelity connecting their academic choices so that they can develop into independent learners and thinkers and connect academic choices with positive and negative consequences?"

More experienced teachers cautioned her to be easy on herself and to recognize that she is on a learning curve. They also affirmed her desire to connect with her student even though she did not come from a similar class background. "I didn't struggle the way he is struggling. I had support. My parents made sure I did well in school and were very hands on. I had a middle class K-12 experience and knew how to succeed in school. I don't know how to relate to him in certain ways. I can't pretend I've been there. I struggled, but my struggle was different." The group supported her to stay rooted in authenticity and find a connection with her student. As they peppered her with questions about her identity, interests and communication, she realized that she and James both love video games and there were entry points to lean into through the specific games they both liked to play. She shared that her primary goal was to connect with him, and this was a place to build on. During her end of the year reflection she stated, "participating in the BTP inquiry group helped me stay in the classroom."

Similarities and Differences Across Career Developmental Stages: Mid-career and Veteran Teachers

Mid-career teachers were focused on *making an impact in their schools*. They wanted to gain skills to interrupt racial inequity in their schools through their work with other adults as well as students. Several teachers sat on leadership

teams (grade level, department, culture, etc.) and used the experiences in BTP to support their work with colleagues. As one-seventh grade ELA teacher explained,

> When I think about being a Black teacher whose students made the highest gains in my English Language Arts department last year on their Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium tests, I believe those scores were a testament to the work that I did inside and outside of the classroom with the Black Teacher Project. I was engaged in collaboration with my planning team and also engaged with my BTP inquiry group—being a part of this dual process allowed me to navigate workplace triggers. As a result, I was able to keep the focus on the growth of my least-reached students without becoming burnt out due to racial microaggressions.

This teacher's words are reflective of the experiences of most teachers in BTP. For mid-career teachers experiencing microaggressions with non-Black adults were compounded by a lack of appreciation for their professional skill. White parents consistently questioned the competence of Black teachers when their children received less than As. In some cases teachers reported anti-Blackness within Latino communities, where Latino parents refused to speak with them and asked that their children be removed from their classes. These incidents came to the surface during rejuvenation spaces and the inquiry group. The conversation with elders allowed teachers to hear language that they could use when navigating the space. The Leadership and Sustainability Institute helped teachers learn how to navigate triggering events, so that they can avoid the trope of being the "angry" Black teacher. The inquiry group helped teachers know they are not alone and develop specific language to address communication issues that arose.

Veteran teachers focused on having an impact on their larger educational community (districts and charter management organizations). They appreciated the opportunity to be seen as leaders and to have their work valued. They expressed feeling like they are not seen for all that they have to offer. As a 22 year veteran math teacher explained,

> They want me to handle the Black boys. Never mind that I have 20+ years of experience teaching math. I've been asked to help individual teachers and I get tapped outside of the district to present at conferences, but no one inside looks at me to lead a PD for the mostly white and Asian math teachers in this district.

These challenges are compounded by consistent offers to leave the classroom and become coaches, administrators or to shift to a non-profit environment. Three veteran teachers and two mid-career teachers facilitated the BTP Inquiry Group. They were invested in holding space for their colleagues to shine and returned to lead the space the following year.

There are some needs that transcend the amount of time a teacher has spent in the classroom. One need is to be seen as a professional educator and not simply a babysitter for Black children. Teachers across tenure reported not getting the instructional support they needed because they did not have behavioral

issues in their classes. Black students were sent to their class (in some cases even when teachers did not know them) to calm down. Some teachers were asked to help Black students with their work in other subjects during their lunch periods because they "have great rapport." One teacher reported being asked to sit in on a parent conference with a Black student they didn't know. The principal argued that the family "might feel more comfortable" with the Black teacher present. These teachers were never publicly acknowledged or compensated for their time or skill in being an advocate for families and/or a liaison for the school. A teacher in her eighth year shared, "I just want them to stop taking me for granted and recognize that this is work, especially when I disagree with what the school is doing to the child." Through participation in rejuvenation spaces, Black teachers were able to identify problematic language and behavior from their colleagues, and clear some of their emotions so that they could respond strategically given their identity and position.

Black teachers also need time to feel connected to their colleagues, and the teachers in this study reported needing that connection to be along racial lines. Several of the teachers in this study were one of a few, if not the only Black teacher in their school. They noted that the isolation was a major factor in them considering leaving. Gathering in racial affinity allowed them to feel connected to a professional learning community where they could "be (them)selves and not have to talk a certain way or hide emotions". The spaces were purposeful and included time to vent and share the challenges of being a Black teacher, but to also share strategies and techniques that helped teachers tap into a resilience that stemmed from a Black community connection.

In one rejuvenation space a teacher asked an elder, "How did you deal with the microaggressions and drama that comes from some white colleagues and administrators?" A Black male 23-year veteran English teacher shared that growing up in segregated schools gave him a strong foundation of who he was and how to not let "white folks worry him." A retired Black woman educator who had been taught by Mary McLeod Bethune and currently leads a oratory group for Black youth in Oakland noted that "we've experienced more than harmful words. The key is to be excellent and know how to speak about your excellence, first to yourself and then to anyone who is confused about who you are, and the quality of your work." Teachers attending this space shared that the greatest impact of the evening was feeling connected to a legacy of Black teachers and seeing examples of folks who "had been through what (they) are going through and weren't beat down or bitter."

It is important to note that the traditional classifications of novice, mid-career and veteran do not fit as smoothly with the teachers in this study. While time in the classroom is an important factor in understanding how to help teachers sustain themselves, we must consider life experiences that shape a teacher's experience. These experiences are complicated by intersectional identities (including race, gender, class, sexual orientation, etc.), which should push providers to think more critically about the support they offer. Navigating and healing from racial inequity in schools emerged as a salient theme across the majority of participants.

Black teachers felt a decrease in isolation as they listened to one another's experiences. Infusing offerings from Black academics and artists strengthened racial literacy in authentic ways, and allowed teachers to build relational and collective environments of trust.

All teachers wanted to have space to be in community and share their experiences of marginalization and resilience. They also appreciated learning skills about how to respond to some of the issues they faced. The Inquiry Group changed the structure of the meeting to include more self-care in lieu of pedagogical inputs related to common core. They argued "I can get the latest literacy strategy from the district, but they do not care if I am so stressed that I am getting sick, or that I had to stop myself from putting hands on a white so called colleague who said some wack ass shit. We need part of this time to decompress in a safe space. I need to learn how I can take some of this back to school with me to make it until next month." Black Teacher Project offerings recognize the importance of addressing cognitive and emotional challenges teachers face.

Implications

Racial affinity grouping has been discussed relative to supporting people to have authentic cross racial dialogue. It has also been discussed in terms of racialized outcomes and in the analysis of the challenges that Black teachers face. This study demonstrates how racial affinity spaces can help sustain teachers in their practice of transforming educational spaces. While much of this study was focused on the teachers themselves, there are implications for many of the people who interact with and seek to support Black teachers. Below a brief list of implications for teacher educators, human resource administrators, principles, and professional development leaders are outlined:

Teacher educators can:

- Adopt an anti-racist and culturally responsive approach to curriculum selection and pedagogy. This includes but is not limited to teaching all pre-service teachers the fundamental structural, systemic and interpersonal ways racism operates in the school environments they are likely to teach in.
- Create space for racial affinity professional development. Discuss racialized expectations with all pre-service teachers. Have them reflect on what they expect of themselves in the racialized body and what others expect of them.

Human resource leaders can:

- Make racial affinity professional development requirements by districts and allow them multiple ways to meet these stipulations.
- Provide tutoring and financial support for mandatory exams.

Principals can:

- Ensure they are creating and maintaining school environments where discussions of how race and racism impact young people and adults in their community are structured into professional development, curriculum and in conversations with parents.
- Ensure their hiring practices are equitable through an examination of implicit bias and openness to diversities of expression.
- Provide opportunities for Black teachers to share their expertise and compensate them accordingly.

Professional Development Leaders can:

- Include conversations about the racial implications of school policies and practices (e.g., how restorative justice practices may play out differently for teachers of different races).
- Create opportunities for the expertise of Black teachers to be highlighted in their trainings, including using examples from Black teachers' classrooms.

Supporting Black teacher sustainability requires more than the latest instructional technique. It means allowing who they are, including their racial identity, to be brought into their professional learning environments in multiple ways. Creating opportunities for Black teachers to learn in racial affinity professional development spaces can allow them to bring more of who they are to their work. We must recognize the complex expectations that come with being Black in an education space. Supporting Black teachers to navigate those expectations in ways that make them stronger teachers, keeps them in the classroom longer, and allows them to develop as leaders in the multiple communities they are a part of. Schools across the United States will be transformed when we have a Black teaching force that is high skilled, well supported and self-actualized.

Appendix

San Francisco Coalition of Essential Small Schools

Critical Friends Protocol

Adapted from Consultancy Protocol created by Gene Thompson-Grove et al. (n.d.).

Purpose	A Critical Friends Protocol is a structured process for helping an individual or team think more expansively about their APT Equity Dilemma
Time	Approximately 50 min
Roles	Presenter (whose work is being discussed by the group)
	Facilitator (who sometimes participates, depending on the size of the group)

Steps

1. The presenter gives an *overview* of the APT Equity Dilemma with which s/he is struggling, and frames a question for the Critical Friends Group (CFG) to consider. The framing of this question, as well as the quality of the presenter's reflection on the APT Equity Dilemma being discussed, are key features of this protocol. If the presenter has brought student work, educator work, or other "artifacts," there is a pause here to silently examine the work/documents. The focus of the group's conversation is on the APT Equity Dilemma (~5–10 min).
2. The group asks *clarifying* questions of the presenter—that is, questions that have brief, factual answers (~5 min).
3. The group asks *probing* questions of the presenter. These questions should be worded so that they help the presenter clarify and expand his/her thinking about the dilemma presented to the CFG. The goal here is for the presenter to learn more about the question s/he framed or to do some analysis of the APT Equity Dilemma presented. The presenter may respond to the group's questions, but there is no discussion by the group of the presenter's responses. At the end of the ten minutes, the facilitator asks the presenter to re-state his/her question for the group. (~10 min).
4. The group talks with each other about the APT Equity Dilemma presented (~15 min). Possible questions to frame the discussion:

   - What did we hear?
   - What didn't we hear that they think might be relevant?
   - What assumptions seem to be operating?
   - What questions does the APT Equity Dilemma raise for us?
   - What do we think about the APT Equity Dilemma?
   - What might we do or try if faced with a similar APT Equity dilemma?
   - • What have we done in similar situations?

   Members of the group sometimes suggest actions the presenter might consider taking. Most often, however, they work to define the issues more thoroughly and objectively. The presenter doesn't speak during this discussion, but instead listens and takes notes.
5. The presenter reflects on what s/he heard and on what s/he is now thinking, sharing with the group anything that particularly resonated for him or her during any part of the Critical Friends Protocol (~5 min).

6. The facilitator leads a brief conversation about the group's observation of the Critical Friends process (~5 min).

References

Achinstein, B., & Ogawa, R. T. (2011). *Change(d) agents: New teachers of color in urban schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Bireda, S., & Chait, R. (2011). *Increasing teacher diversity: Strategies to improve the teacher workforce*. https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2011/11/pdf/chait_diversity.pdf. Accessed 29 October, 2017.

Bradshaw, R. (1995). All-black schools provide role models: Is this the solution? *The Clearing House, 68*(3), 146–150.

Bristol, T. J. (2017). To be alone or in a group: An exploration into how the school-based experiences differ for black male teachers across one urban school district. *Urban Education*, *53*(3), 334–354.

Cammarota, J., & Fine, M. (Eds.). (2010). *Revolutionizing education: Youth participatory action research in motion*. New York: Routledge.

Cone, J. H. (2000). Black liberation theology and black Catholics: A critical conversation. *Theological Studies, 61*(4), 731–747.

Graham, P. A. (1987). Black teachers: A drastically scarce resource. *The Phi Delta Kappan, 68*(8), 598–605.

Hammond, Z. (2014). *Culturally responsive teaching and the brain: Promoting authentic engagement and rigor among culturally and linguistically diverse students*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Hawkins, B. (2010). 'Call me Mister Initiative' succeeds in recruiting, developing Black teachers. http://hechingerreport.org/call-me-mister-initiative-succeeds-in-recruiting-developing-black-teachers/. Accessed 29 October, 2017.

Haynes, R., Forbes, P., Chism, H., & Harris, C. (2016). Improving teacher training, recruitment, and diversity in New York: ESI and NYC Men Teach. https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/nyar_vegas/2016/poster/18/. Accessed 29 October, 2017.

Im Akbar, N. (1984). *From miseducation to education*. Jersey City, NJ: New Mind Productions.

Irvine, J. J. (1988). An analysis of the problem of disappearing Black educators. *The Elementary School Journal, 88*(5), 503–513.

Irvine, J. J. (1989). Beyond role models: An examination of cultural influences on the pedagogical perspectives of Black teachers. *Peabody Journal of Education, 66*(4), 51–63.

Jackson, T. O. & Kohli, R. (2016). Guest editors' introduction: The state of teachers of color. *Equity and Excellence in Education*, *49*(1), 1–8.

King, J. (2016). The invisible tax on teachers of color. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com.

Kohli, R. (2016). Behind school doors: The impact of hostile racial climates on urban teachers of color. *Urban Education*. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916636653.

Kohli, R., Picower, B., Martinez, A. N., & Ortiz, N. (2015). Critical professional development: Centering the social justice needs of teachers. *The International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, *6*(2), 7–24.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Love, B. J. (2010). Developing a liberatory consciousness. In M. Adams, W. J. Blumenfeld, R. Castañeda, H. W. Hackman, M. L. Peters, & X. Zúñiga (Eds.), *Readings for diversity and social justice* (2nd ed., pp. 599–603). New York, NY: Routledge.

Lynn, M. (2002). Critical race theory and the perspectives of Black men teachers in the Los Angeles public schools. *Equity and Excellence in Education, 35*(2), 119–130.

McCready, L., & Mosely, M. (2014). Making space for Black queer teachers: Pedagogic possibilities. In C. W. Lewis, Y. Sealey-Ruiz, & I. Toldson (Eds.), *Teacher education and black communities: Implications for access, equity and achievement* (pp. 43–58). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

McIntyre, A. (2007). *Participatory action research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Mosely, P. (2003). *The gap in black: How black teachers experience racial disparity in achievement.* Unpublished Dissertation. University of California, Berkeley.

Osler, J. (2016). *Beyond brochures: Practicing "Soul Care" in the recruitment of teachers of color.* http://www.wcstonefnd.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/SFTR-SoulCare-Final1.pdf. Accessed 29 October, 2017.

Pabon, A. J. M., Anderson, N. S., & Kharem, H. (2011). Minding the gap: Cultivating black male teachers in a time of crisis in urban schools. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *80*(3), 358–367.

Rogers, R., & Mosley, M. (2008). A critical discourse analysis of racial literacy in teacher education. *Linguistics and Education, 19*(2), 107–131.

Saldaña, J. (2012). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

SDSU News Team. (2017). *SDSU to Offer Black Minds Matter Course*. http://newscenter.sdsu.edu/sdsu_newscenter/news_story.aspx?sid=76934. Accessed 29 October, 2017.

Smith, W. A. (2004). Black faculty coping with racial battle fatigue: The campus racial climate in a post-civil rights era. In D. Cleveland (Ed.), *A long way to go: Conversations about race by African American faculty and graduate students* (pp. 171–190). New York: Peter Lang.

Thompson-Grove, G., Frazer, E., & Dunne, F. (n.d.). *Pocket guide to probing questions*. Denver, CO: School Reform Initiative Incorporated. http://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/probing_questions_guide.pdf.

Twine, F. W. (2004). A white side of black Britain: The concept of racial literacy. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 27*(6), 878–907.

White, E. F. (2010). *Dark continent of our bodies: Black feminism and politics of respectability*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Woodson, C. G. (1990). *The mis-education of the Negro*. New York: AMS Press. (Original work published 1933).