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Being and Becoming a Teacher: How African American and White Preservice Teachers Envision Their Future Roles as Teacher Advocates

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Being and Becoming a Teacher: How African American and White Preservice Teachers Envision Their Future Roles as Teacher Advocates

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This article captures the life histories and professional futures of preservice teachers at three institutions of higher education. In this article, we focus on the experiences and expectations of 4 preservice teachers. We find that, although African American and White preservice teachers both see themselves as advocates for their students, they envision different approaches to advocacy and their agency along racial lines. African American preservice teachers envision advocacy as serving as role models for their future students, while White preservice teachers advocate for their students through their instructional actions in the classroom. This study complicates ideas of race, agency, and teacher advocacy.

INTRODUCTION

Over two decades ago, Irvine (1988) discussed the issue of the disappearing Black educator. Unfortunately, this issue persists today more than ever. While 90% of the teaching population is White, 6% is African American (Roberts &

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Irvine, 2009; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008), and only 1% of all teachers are African American men (Lewis, 2006). In this study, we aim to better understand the complexities of building a culturally diverse teacher workforce by capturing the perspective of those who aim to join it. While a more representative teacher workforce does not necessarily mean a more effective one, a diverse array of role models can do much to help students from culturally diverse backgrounds identify with the educational system, connect with educators and envision their futures as professionals (Haberman, 1996).

In an effort to understand this phenomenon, previous educational research has focused on gathering African American teachers' stories through first-person narratives (Etter-Lewis, 1996; Foster, 1996, 1997). The literature highlights historical pieces on extraordinary teachers and their success (Dingus, 2008; R. Milner, 2006; Taylor, 2005; Walker, 2005), urban teachers (Lewis, 2006; Lynn, 2002, 2006), and African American teachers in overwhelmingly White schools (Kelly, 2007; H. R. Milner & Hoy, 2003).

However, missing from this literature are the narratives of prospective teachers. Quite simply, Boyer and Baptiste (1996) argue that "little research has been done on the personal experiences of those who apply to join the ranks of American educators" (p. 789), although some recent studies have begun to address preservice teachers' lives and perspectives (Gomez & White, 2010; A. S. Johnson, 2007; Su, 1997). In order to address the gap in the literature, this study focuses on the educational life histories of African American preservice teachers in comparison to their more numerous White colleagues. In this study, we explore how 4 preservice teachers (two African American and two White preservice teachers) frame their futures as teacher advocates. Using Peters and Reid's (2009) advocacy model, we complicate the issue of race and teacher advocacy. We also highlight the affordances and constraints of African American preservice teachers' predominant approach to advocacy as compared to the White preservice teachers' principal approach.

PRESERVICE TEACHERS' MISSING VOICES

Although the literature on life histories of educators is vast (e.g., Brunetti, 2001; Cohen, 1991; Day, 1999), most of the studies in this field focus on practicing teachers. Boyer and Baptiste (1996) point to the lack of research on the lives of prospective teachers. Su's (1997) research on preservice minority teachers' (African American, Asian American, and Latino/a American) life histories in comparison to their White counterparts serves as one of the first in this field. Su studied how the minority preservice teachers viewed their role as a teacher in a manner quite distinct from their majority counterparts. Specifically, the minority preservice teachers viewed their future role as someone responsible for transforming the inequalities embedded within

schools and society. On the other hand, the majority of preservice teachers wanted to be agents of change, but their view was limited to the classroom context.

Gomez and White's (2010) research does a similar comparison to preservice teachers along the lines of race and social class. The researchers looked at the life histories of one Mexican and one White preservice teacher. Through their stories, the researchers analyzed the preconceived notions of racial groups other than their own, and how these might manifest themselves in a class of students. Thus, viewing culturally different students as "Other" highlights the reality of teacher-student interactions framed by race and social class.

Lastly, A. S. Johnson's (2007) work on preservice teachers' lives focuses specifically on White prospective teachers. Using one preservice teacher's story, A. S. Johnson looks at the concepts of equity and social justice. In particular, this preservice teacher views the idea of ethical teaching through cross-cultural relationships established in the classroom. Similar to Su's (1997) findings, the White preservice teachers' perspectives on social justice are only limited to the classroom environment.

These three research studies (Gomez & White, 2010; A. S. Johnson, 2007; Su, 1997) point out some important initial themes. They lay the foundation for using life histories of preservice teachers as a critical area of study. They point to the distinctions between minority and White teachers' frames of reference, and they emphasize that many beginning teachers from a variety of backgrounds aim to serve as agents of change in their chosen profession. In our study, we answer the call of Boyer and Baptiste (1996) by adding to the limited research on the lives of prospective teachers and across multiple contexts. In our research, we examined the life histories of preservice teachers across three teacher preparation institutions. Further, we analyzed the preservice teachers' understanding of advocacy for their future students.

MODEL OF TEACHER ADVOCACY

Teacher advocacy is defined in the literature in a variety of ways, but we chose to use Field and Baker's (2004) broad definition of advocacy as "one who pleads the cause of another or one that defends or maintains a cause" (p. 56). It has been argued that teacher advocacy is relational (Balkus, 2006), but it has a deeper context than just the connections teachers make with students. Athanases and de Oliveira (2007) outline three dimensions of advocacy as "viewing all aspects of school as problematic rather than given; learning to locate expertise inside oneself; and being able to envision how schools can more effectively meet all students' needs" (p. 124), and a large component of advocacy comes through self-awareness (Holmes & Herrera, 2009; Liebovich & Matoba Adler, 2009; Peters & Reid, 2009).

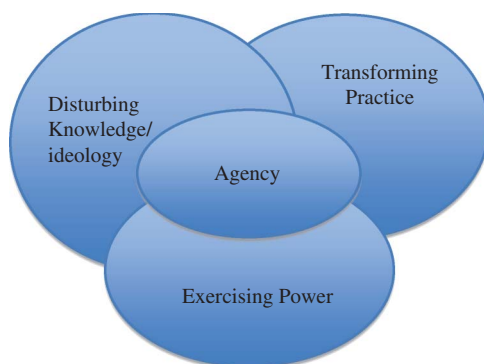


FIGURE 1. Advocacy model for teacher preparation (color figure available online).

(Note: This figure is adapted from Peters & Reid, 2009, p. 556).

We draw upon a teacher advocacy model in order to complicate the concept of race and teacher advocacy. Peters and Reid (2009) share an advocacy model for teacher preparation, which has four components¹: (a) Agency, (b) Disturbing Knowledge, (c) Transforming Practice, and (d) Exercising Power (Figure 1). They posit that

Agency involves both individual and collective advocacy. Advocacy cannot be accomplished without a culture of critical reflection and a deep understanding of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses. A counter-hegemonic discourse emerges from the cognitive dissonance generated from Disturbing Knowledge. Disturbing Knowledge is necessary for Transforming Practice. Practice cannot be transformed without both a deep understanding of discourse and strategic work on the Exercising Power aimed at societal issues of justice and equity. Without the three centers working together around individual and collective Agency, all three are almost inevitably isolated, sporadic and ephemeral in the changes that they attempt. (Peters & Reid, 2009, p. 556)

Peters and Reid recognize that teacher advocacy is multifaceted. In this case, advocacy is “both an end (produces results) and a means (tool or instrument) for social justice and equity . . . and advocates are both instruments of change (noun/subject), and effect change through advocacy (verb/object)” (2009, p. 556).

We accept this model’s four components as teacher education intersects all of these elements. Yet, we focus this article on the component of Agency as a key element in advocacy, as it is complicated by the notion of race. The existing research indicates that minority teacher candidates are

¹The four components are capitalized throughout this article in order to represent how Peters and Reid’s (2009) present the terms in their model.

more committed to issues of social justice than their White counterparts (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). Specifically, one study found that minority teachers, including African American, Latino/a American, and Asian American, see themselves as agents of change, while White teacher candidates often resist active promotion of social justice outside the confines of their classrooms (Su, 1997). Similar to Su's findings, our study suggests that both African American and White preservice teachers aimed to advocate for students in the classroom. However, the two groups of prospective teachers differed in their respective approach, since they seem to view their Agency differently, which, in turn, affects their Exercising Power.

In this article, while using Su's (1997) work as a springboard, we capture the ways in which African American and White prospective educators envision their future roles in the classroom, while illustrating differences in perceived roles along racial lines. We use Peters and Reid's (2009) advocacy model to understand how preservice teachers view advocacy and equity and their effects on their future students' lives. Vital to this model is the idea that advocacy is an informal process of influencing others, rather than a formal form of classroom instruction. Our study investigates this divergence in views around racial identity through the use of life history methodology as a theoretical framework.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is grounded in the theoretical perspective that biography and personal narrative are central to the process of teaching (Carter & Doyle, 1996; Clandinin, 1986; Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996). It draws upon earlier work suggesting that personal history and life experiences are vital in shaping classroom practice, professional relationships, and career direction (Cole & Knowles, 1993; Costigan, 2005; Rinke, 2009). We build upon this theoretical foundation by applying notions of biography to the recruitment of teachers, particularly African American teachers.

Through this lens, we investigate a variety of formative experiences for preservice teachers, including home life, prior educational experiences, and teacher preparation. In doing so, we build upon Foster's life history work with African American teachers:

Life history not only provides material about individual lives but also offers the opportunity to explore how individual lives are shaped by society. Thus, life history research offers critical insights into larger social processes by connecting the lives to society. (1997, p. vvxix)

Foster suggests that the life histories of preservice teachers connect past educational experiences to future perspectives on the individual in society. This was our aim with our theoretical approach to this project.

The collaborative project between three higher education institutions focused on the educational life histories of preservice teachers and the relationship between past experiences and future notions of teaching, learning, and the teaching profession. This article discusses one portion of the larger study, specifically comparing perspectives along racial lines by exploring two research questions: (a) What are the prior educational experiences of African American and White preservice teachers and (b) How do both groups envision their roles as future teachers?

METHODOLOGY

The Life Histories of Future Teachers (LHFE) project examined the perspectives of preservice teachers at one Historically Black University (HBCU) as well as two predominantly White institutions (PWIs), a state university and a private liberal arts college. All three institutions are located in Pennsylvania, a state where 20,000 teaching certificates are annually issued. We selected the HBCU because half of the current African American teachers in the field earn their bachelor's degrees from HBCUs (Irvine & Fenwick, 2009). We also included the state school, as it was originally a normal school, so the roots of the university are grounded in teacher education. Lastly, we picked a private liberal arts college to assist in diversifying the various institutions offered in Pennsylvania.

This project gathered educational life histories from 40 preservice teachers across the three institutions. Participants were selected based on a range of demographic and certification variables and identified as representative of their individual teacher education programs. Life history interviews were conducted with the research liaison from each institution using a common protocol, collaboratively developed and piloted (see Appendix for the complete interview protocol). A. S. Johnson's (2007) study of preservice teachers had an influence on the protocol, as some questions concerning demographics were taken verbatim from her study. Interviews lasted approximately two hours each and were audiotaped, transcribed, and reviewed by participants.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted iteratively both during and following data collection and focused on similarities and differences within and between institutions and demographic groups. We used a computer-assisted software program (MaxQDA) to conduct three types of qualitative data analysis: content analysis, constant comparative analysis, and key words in context. For key words in context, the following words were used for analysis: social justice, role models, mentors, and advocates. We compared candidates' educational experiences, future roles, and professional perspectives

TABLE 1. Featured Participants

Name	Institution	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Year	Certification	Background
Aisha	HBCU	Female	Black	Sophomore	English	Suburban
Tyrone	HBCU	Male	Black	Sophomore	English	Urban
Brett	Private	Male	White	Junior	English	Suburban
Dan	Public	Male	White	Senior	Biology	Rural

while simultaneously looking for emergent patterns in the data. During data analysis, we found that there was a difference along racial lines concerning how the African American and White preservice teachers saw their role as advocates in the classroom.

This article focuses specifically on 4 preservice teachers in the study—Aisha, Tyrone, Brett, and Dan² (Table 1). We did not set out to explore the issue of teacher advocacy, but it emerged as a central theme in the majority of interviews. Specifically, this was the theme strongest among all of the African American participants (20 males and females together), Latina participant (1), and White male participants (5). It was not as evident with the White female participants (14). It is interesting to note that the racial and gender minority representations in the teaching field discussed advocacy unprovoked, but it was not evident within the majority representation (White females).

Four preservice teachers were selected from the larger group of participants in order to provide deeper insight into the preservice teachers' visions of advocacy, compared to looking at the larger data set. We selected 1 female and male African American preservice teachers and 2 White male preservice teachers, as these two groups had the largest focus on the idea of advocacy from within the data set. We also selected 4 participants that were in the same certification area (secondary education), versus elementary or early childhood education, in order to compare and contrast across one educational focus (Table 1).

We opted to not include White female preservice teachers, as they rarely discussed advocacy as part of their life histories. Although they are not highlighted in this article, we acknowledge that their silence on this issue is important and should be further explored.

Aisha, Tyrone, Brett, and Dan each provided a rich story from which to better understand preservice teachers' ideas about advocacy. Each prospective teacher's story briefly articulates their family background, values, schooling experiences, interactions with teachers, and future views as teacher advocates in their future profession.

²All names are pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

BEING A TEACHER: WHO I AM

The African American preservice teachers planned to advocate for students by becoming teachers and serving as “exemplars” for their minority students. As members of a small group of African Americans within the larger teacher workforce, these individuals felt that they could serve as role models and inspirations for a new generation of minority students. As Aisha and Tyrone’s stories will explain, they believed that their presence in the classroom, as an African American teacher (being a teacher), constituted advocacy itself.

Aisha

Aisha, an African American English education major, was a sophomore at an HBCU at the time of the interview. Aisha grew up in a middle-class home in the suburbs of New Jersey. An only child of a divorced couple, Aisha was raised by her ivy-league-educated mother, who was a professor at a local state college. Although her mother worked as an educator, Aisha explained that her mother did not influence her decision to become a teacher.

As with many of our participants, Aisha’s past experiences of schooling influenced how she saw herself advocating for her students. Growing up, she attended both private and public schools. The schools she attended had some diversity, but she was mainly tracked in higher academic classes. Thus, Aisha was often only one of a few minority students in all-White classrooms. In this role, she was often called upon to serve as a representative of her entire racial group. Being put in this role caused Aisha to become quite outspoken about her views. She recalled a formative moment during a Black History Month presentation in second grade:

There was only, maybe, about a handful of minorities in the classroom, and I was very outspoken, especially when we got on topics like Black History Month. . . . I remember one time my mother came in for Black History Month. She talked about different people and everybody looked really disengaged, but me and the other minorities in the classroom, I was like, “Wake up! Wake up! My mom’s talking, you know, it’s important,” and she’s like, [the classmate] “No, this isn’t important. Why should I care?”

Aisha explained that this experience in the classroom was a shift in her approach to education. She stated that

Ever since then that kinda had me at risk of me being the disestablishment child and I just wanted to burn down the whole school and all that. So they [the school] kinda kept me on the side . . . I encountered a lot of discrimination at that school.

Aisha spent most of her schooling being outspoken with issues of race in a majority-White school.

During her sophomore year of high school, Aisha had her first African American teacher in her United States History course, Mr. Howard. Aisha talked extensively about Mr. Howard's student-centered approach to teaching and how it extended beyond the curriculum in that "He taught how to interact with people. He taught things that we needed to know outside of just Pearl Harbor." Part of the learning experience with Mr. Howard revolved around being an African American teacher in a majority-White school setting. Aisha explained that Mr. Howard used his racial difference from his students as a learning tool.

He kind of wanted everybody to learn from him because of the fact that he was different from everybody else, 'cause everybody else in the History Department were over 40 and White. So he knew that he was gonna bring something different.

Mr. Howard was influential to Aisha as an African American teacher in the classroom, and she was empowered by how he used his race and experience for the betterment of all of his students.

Aisha's school experiences led her to feel that becoming an African American teacher would be an ideal way to advocate for a new generation of students. Aisha thought that her role as an African American teacher would set an example for minority students. She explained:

I know I wanna teach because I know I should be an example to other minority students because a lot of them don't see themselves in the classroom. That's like, for example, me. I didn't see a minority teacher until sophomore year of high school, so I feel like I can show people what Black educators can do.

Aisha felt that by simply becoming an African American teacher, she was pushing past the norms of the profession, serving as a role model for minority students in her classroom and advocating for her race.

Aisha also saw her role as a teacher to be multifaceted in nature and not just focused strictly on academics:

I feel my responsibility as a teacher is to not just teach English, not just to make sure you put your apostrophes and your commas in the right place, that you know what a semicolon is, or you know what happened to Beowulf at the end of the story. I feel like my responsibility is more than just to teach someone something.

Aisha understood that her role as an advocate comes with various job descriptions. Ultimately, she defined teaching with multiple job descriptions:

It's [teaching] like multi-tasking. You're taking so many jobs at once. You're somebody's mentor. You can actually be somebody's counselor. You might be somebody's referee if there's a fight. I'm supposed to be a role model and make sure they learn something at the end of the day.

Tyrone

This notion of serving as a role model also emerged from the life history of Tyrone, who was also a sophomore English Education major at an HBCU at the time of the interview. Tyrone's educational experiences primarily took place within the large, urban public schools of Philadelphia with majority African American student bodies. But Tyrone's first four years of schooling (kindergarten to third grade) were in a Christian boarding school outside of Philadelphia, which he attended through a scholarship. Tyrone was one of six children to a single mother who was not around often. His grandmother raised Tyrone and his siblings, and the boarding school assisted with the living expenses of six children.

Tyrone's experience at the boarding school was with White teachers and support staff (i.e., dorm parents). When asked if he liked his experience at the boarding school, he immediately replied:

It made me racist because they were racist . . . a lot of people who work there are White and then they have their kids who are White too. And then you have the kids who actually go to the school, but most of them are Black though. Some of the dorm parents' kids went there and we went there too, together. The racism came from them and their kids.

Come fourth grade, Tyrone moved to the public schools in Philadelphia. Although he had African American teachers with his schooling experiences in Philadelphia, his overall schooling experience was nonmotivational. For example, Tyrone recalled his Honors English teacher:

She was in her fifties and she had been teaching for like 30 years, ruining kids year after year I bet [laughter]. All she talked about was how many years she had left before she could retire. . . . All she did was sit there at her desk. So I tried to make the class fun by reading Shakespeare in character, but it was usually little stuff like that, but I then I was like, "Okay, I'm done with this." So I stopped going to class.

Although some teachers lacked the motivation for education, Tyrone still continued to want to learn. In high school, the city transportation system

went on strike for three weeks making it impossible for most of the students to get to school. Yet, Tyrone continued to go to school, “So, I get [*sic*] up every morning like 5 o’clock and walked to school. It took me like an hour and a half to walk to school every morning.”

Tyrone’s educational experiences and tenacity for learning were reflected in how he envisioned himself as an educator. He foresaw his role as a Black male educator as vital for promoting equity in the classroom. This became evident when Tyrone talked about his future teaching context:

I’ll be in the Philadelphia school district . . . I do want to be in the areas where there are people like me who don’t have what I have . . . because there were no mentors, there were no influential people, there was none of that. All there was was you. And then all the people who were just like you were people who were dropping out of school and people who were doing what they wanted to do, people who were making a lot of money doing other things without going to school.

Tyrone alluded that the only influential African Americans in his community were people “working a hustle,” and his mentors at school did not look like him. Tyrone acknowledged that his presence in a school, by just being a teacher, will be influential to minority students and also serve as a positive presence for White students. He explained why he might also want to work in a majority-White school:

I want to go through the other kind of schools where there’s like one Black kid there and things like that. Because I know I’m working for Upward Bound and a lot of those kids are like that, and they need people like me just as badly.

Tyrone felt that he has much to offer students from a variety of backgrounds.

Ultimately, Tyrone talked about his role in education as part of a larger social movement, “So, that’s my goal is to start that movement within my school and within my district and within my state, and so on.” Tyrone further articulated his role in this movement toward greater societal equity:

This whole problem with the achievement gap and all this stuff, I’m tired of talking about it and trying to see if we can realize it. I want to actually contribute and be a major part of fixing it. And not just exposing the gaps with numbers and records, but to actually help people be educated and people to actually really do something and for people to be proud of what they’ve done and to go to college and become what they want to become because they’ve had the [academic] background to do whatever.

Tyrone believed that by being part of this movement toward greater educational equity, he can help students gain a stronger education.

Both Tyrone and Aisha articulated the importance of being an African American teacher. They embraced the idea that teachers have responsibilities above and beyond academic instruction. Aisha and Tyrone envisioned their futures as educators as multifaceted advocates for their students, both inside and outside of the classroom. These views stemmed from their own experiences in school.

BECOMING A TEACHER: WHAT I CAN DO

In contrast to their African American peers, many of the White preservice teachers in this study also wanted to advocate for their students, but they envisioned doing so through their direct actions (becoming a teacher) rather than through their presence in the classroom (being a teacher). As Brett and Dan's stories will explain, for them, advocacy was through curricular actions that occur within the classroom environment.

Brett

Junior English Education candidate Brett agreed that actions were a means to advocacy for students. Brett grew up in an upper middle-class suburb in Connecticut. He lived with both of his parents and younger sister. The area where Brett grew up was predominantly White, and Brett attended the public school system that was, at the time, a Blue Ribbon school. More recently, however, the high-quality schools brought in an influx of student diversity. Brett explained:

The [Navington] school system is pretty well renowned in [Foxlane] County as being a very good school system. We have a lot of influx of people moving in for the school system. That's usually the reason people move to [Navington]. It's because they have kids and because they know the schools are awesome.

The school system lost its blue ribbon status his sophomore year in high school, but Brett talked highly about his school experience and that the overall quality of education was excellent.

Specifically, Brett had teachers that really advocated for his educational well-being through curricular action. For instance, in eighth grade Brett was in Ms. Castanza's (who he called Ms. C) Integrated Math program. Brett's grade average in the class was an 83, but the students needed an 85 to stay in the program. Ms. Castanza decided to discuss with Brett and his mother about moving down a math level. Brett recalled:

Ms. C said, “Well, you know, I think that it would probably be best if we dropped you down to the regular math level.” And I said, “You know, I think that probably would be best.” But then my mom said, “No. I’m sure you can do it if you just work harder.” And that was the first time I had sided with a teacher over a parent, which was a weird and almost sort of liberating experience for me.

Brett reflected that Ms. Castanza’s advocacy on this issue really helped him to be more successful in math.

I am just so grateful to her for that because if she hadn’t spoke up, I probably would have not spoken up for myself, and I wouldn’t have felt empowered to make the change myself, and I probably would’ve beat myself up all year, trying to push myself through the Integrated [Math] program.

Brett’s experience with Ms. Castanza’s approach became embedded into his own views of teaching. For example, Brett anticipated advocating for his students with his future school administration:

From an educational standpoint, I just foresee a situation in which a department chair or even administrator might tell me, “Look. This is how you need to teach this.” And I might say to them, “Alright. That’s how I’ll teach it.” But if I truly believe that that is not the best way to get to the kids with the material, I’m going to do it my own way anyway. And yeah, that’s eventually probably going to trickle back to the people in charge and will probably, yes, eventually lead to my termination as an employee there.

Brett acknowledged that he may need to make drastic decisions in order to advocate for his students. However, he was willing to act decisively in order to ensure the quality of his students’ education. Through his actions as a teacher, he saw a way around the political structures that might negatively affect students.

Overall, Brett viewed himself as a teacher who will support his students so that they can achieve their best:

I don’t genuinely, wholeheartedly believe that I can make a difference as an educator . . . Because I’m not a hero. I will never be a hero. I’m not that kind of person. I’m not going to go into a school, for example in Baltimore, and turn it around and go all Freedom Writers on it. That’s not me. You know, I’m not going to invent a new technology that ends hunger or anything like that, but one of my students might be able to do that. And if there’s anything that I can do to make that more likely, that’s my responsibility.

Yet, there were boundaries to Brett's responsibility to his students. Unlike Aisha or Tyrone, Brett did not envision his future role as teacher with multiple facets:

I want students to be comfortable and to be able to talk about that if they feel like they really need to. But if they don't really need to, let's avoid it. I don't want to be a guidance counselor. That's just not a place I want to be. That's not a role I want to fulfill. It's a role I think students need fulfilled by a guidance counselor or by a school psychologist or by a parent or coach or what have you.

Moreover, dialogue about race was conspicuously absent from Brett's vision of his future career as an educator. While he recognized its presence in society, he did not appear to connect race to his own personal experience in the classroom, that is, Brett did not plan to draw upon his Whiteness in an effort to advocate for students. Based on his background, Brett was inherently unable to advocate through representation. Instead, he drew upon personal experiences to propose a more curricular focus to his notion of advocacy.

Dan

Dan also shared Brett's views about action for advocacy with students. Dan, a White Biology Education major, grew up in a predominantly White, rural, industrial town in Pennsylvania. His father worked the third shift as a plant manager, while his mother was a stay-at-home mom who took care of Dan and his younger sister.

Dan attended the public schools in his small hometown. The schools were very education focused and many students ended up choosing teaching as a career. "[St. Claire's] puts out a lot of teachers. My graduating class, I'd say, 20–25 are going to graduate with education degrees. This is out of like 180," explained Dan.

The majority of Dan's informative and important interactions with his teachers came after high school. Upon graduation, Dan attended a large research institution in Pennsylvania as a premedicine major. Unfortunately, Dan's experience in the major was generally negative:

I can only describe the experience as like soul crushing. I mean as a White male you pretty much needed like a 3.85 to get into med school so every test could make or break, so I was incredibly stressed out. I was getting 2–3 hours of sleep a night. I never went out and never had any fun.

In Dan's soul searching about being a doctor, he decided to go home one weekend to talk with his former high school principal. He was very close to the principal, and he wanted some advice on possibly becoming a teacher:

I talked with him for quite awhile. He met with me in his office, and I said I'm not happy. I think I want to go back to being a teacher and just a real conversation that left me realizing that I need to change.

Based on this conversation, Dan finally decided to change majors and to transfer to a public institution known for teacher education in Pennsylvania.

Since Dan lived in a small town, word got around that Dan was no longer a premedicine student. Not all of Dan's former, influential teachers thought that becoming a teacher was a good idea. Dan recalled:

I went home [from college] and I was dating a girl who was in high school at the time. I went home one weekend and was picking her up from school, and a teacher who had asked me to—by far one of the biggest influences on me in high school who I would have considered a close friend—came out and in front of everyone as they're leaving the high school started yelling, "You're wasting your life. You're throwing it all away. You're going to throw away your life."

This former teacher of Dan's was not his only teacher to express the same sentiment. But again, Dan sought support from his principal:

But it wasn't just her. A lot of other teachers, I was very close with a lot of my teachers, and I used to go visit them on breaks, and a lot of them expressed that they were disappointed in me. That I was making a wrong choice. . . . I remember going back to my enrichment teacher and the principal that I talked to and I said, "Do you think they're right?" He said, "No, these are people who shouldn't have been teachers. You stick with it, this will be right for you."

Dan benefitted from close relationships with many former teachers as well as the emotional support he continually would seek from his principal.

In school, Dan described himself as shy with his peers. This experience had an effect, as he described one of his future roles as providing a safe space for students to learn. Dan discussed his idea of teacher advocacy:

I'd advocate for my students over the safety of my job any day. I am there for the kids . . . I think that it's important that students have a safe environment and a big thing is letting them be safe and not harassed.

Dan reinforced the idea that advocacy comes from the teacher's actions toward providing a safe learning environment for all students. He viewed his future classroom environment as one that was safe and supportive of his students:

I want to be able to be that teacher for my students, if there's something going on I want to help. I want to make my classroom a safe haven. I just want it to be safe for them to come in and be themselves.

Like Brett, Dan's vision of student advocacy was clearly confined to the walls of the classroom and focused around instructional issues. And, like Brett, he envisioned advocating for students through the type of classroom environment he constructed. Dan did not explicitly include race as part of his vision as a teacher advocate and, as a White preservice teacher, was also inherently unable to use his race as a model for minority students. Dan instead planned to construct a classroom environment that will be accepting and supportive of all students as the core of his advocacy concept.

DISCUSSION

Advocacy Through Being a Teacher: Affordances and Constraints

Aisha, Tyrone, Dan, and Brett all agreed that advocacy was central to the role of a teacher. They had each chosen to enter the teaching profession in an effort to empower their students to learn and succeed. However, they differed along racial lines with respect to the way they intend to go about supporting students in their classrooms. The African American preservice teachers envisioned an exemplar advocacy primarily through their racial identity, while White preservice teachers planned to advocate through their actions.

For example, Aisha and Tyrone both acknowledged that their presence alone, as African American teachers, can encourage and support other racially diverse students. Aisha articulated this idea when she said that, just by being a minority teacher, she could set an example for minority students. She planned to "show what Black educators can do." Thus, Aisha alluded to the fact that her being an African American educator would also support the White students as well. This supports Irvine's (1988) theory that African American teachers are sometimes the only positive minority role models for both Black and White children. Irvine further argues the idea that "the presence of black teachers in schools helps counter negative stereotypes that white children have about black people" (1988, p. 506).

Tyrone extended this idea of advocacy and empowerment to the token African American students in majority-White classrooms (like Aisha's educational experience) who also need a teacher that looks like them.

Tyrone acknowledged this with working in an Upward Bound summer program with African American students who were in schooling situations as such, and he was the first African American mentor they have encountered up to this point. Tyrone recognized that his presence in a school, by just being a teacher, would be influential to minority students (Kelly, 2007).

Further, both Aisha and Tyrone viewed their future responsibilities as educators extending beyond the classroom walls. Aisha viewed her prospective role as a teacher as also counselor, referee, and role model. Tyrone viewed his role championing his students and exposing the ills in an educational system that holds back African American students. Aisha and Tyrone's view of the multifaceted teacher that advocates for their students, even outside the classroom, connects with Su's (1997) findings. Su found that

Minority students enter teaching with a keen awareness of the inequalities experienced by the poor and minorities. Consequently, they tend to perceive the good teacher as someone who not only cares for children and learning, but also takes the responsibility to transform schools and society. (p. 337)

Aisha and Tyrone internalized their roles as teachers expanding beyond instructional responsibilities.

Aisha and Tyrone understand their Agency (Peters & Reid, 2009) as individuals who represent a collective. By becoming a teacher, they are the means (instrument) through which advocacy occurs as a change (noun/subject) in students' perceptions of African Americans and, for some, of themselves. Their instrumentation comes through being a positive representative of African Americans for others to view and emulate. Thus, they saw their Agency as taking a multifaceted approach by Exercising Power as a teacher, counselor, mentor, and other roles that their students may need in order to secure continued success in school and life.

The affordances of Aisha and Tyrone's view of Agency emphasize the idea of empowering students with their presence as African American teachers. It is the simple gesture of just "being" that can bring further support and understanding to their future students. Moreover, their presence as African American teachers helps to develop the workforce of minority teachers in the classroom setting (Gordon, 2000; Irvine, 1988; Lewis, 2006; Duhon-Sells, Peoples, Moore, & Page, 1996).

On the other hand, there are various constraints to this form of advocacy. Since these teachers advocate through their very being, they also carry the weights and charges of a whole race on their shoulders. In a sensitive time in education where there is significant teacher turnover, close to 50% of the teacher population leaving after 5 years (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Ingersoll, 2001; Zeichner, 2003), the pressure of representing an entire group of people (the collective) as an individual (Peters & Reid, 2009) may

be too much to bear. Moreover, just being a teacher does not guarantee that the pedagogical practice of the teacher is sound, as we heard in Tyrone's educational experiences.

Advocacy Through Becoming a Teacher: Affordances and Constraints

Brett and Dan understood their Agency as advocates in a different way than Aisha and Tyrone. Brett and Dan saw their Agency as more of an individual form of advocacy. Their advocacy was a means to an end (produces results) in order to affect change (verb/object) (Peters & Reid, 2009) within their students' academics. Thus, Brett and Dan primarily saw their future positions as advocates for their students inside of the classroom in a more singular approach.

In particular, Brett mentioned how his role was not to be a guidance counselor or school psychologist. He clearly circumscribed the role of a teacher, Exercising Power (Peters & Reid, 2009) within the classroom walls. Dan also hoped to echo his past experiences by developing a positive environment for learning within the walls of the classroom. Brett and Dan aimed to support their students through curricular and environmental choices, rather than influencing self-concept or larger issues of societal equity.

Dan and Brett's definition of a teacher also speaks to how they saw themselves as advocates for their students. Dan viewed his role of advocacy as ensuring a safe classroom environment for his students. Brett viewed his advocacy as ensuring that his students have the best curriculum to support their learning—even if that means going against administration's wishes. In short, Brett planned to navigate educational power structures (Singh, Urbano, Haston, & McMahan, 2010) in order to support the learning he feels is best for his students. Similar to Su's (1997) findings, the White preservice teachers saw themselves as advocates and change agents primarily through the curriculum and confined to the classroom. In this way, our findings again expand Su's (1997) work in identifying that White teachers not only see their roles as confined to a classroom context but also view the role of a teacher as, in essence, an academic leader. We believe that this approach reveals an underlying difference in African American and White male teachers' views on what is needed to achieve success. The former see the road to success as facilitated by positive role models and mentors, while the latter see merit and academic achievement as the primary method to self-improvement.

There are various affordances to this particular form of advocacy. First, the approach focuses on the importance of productive teaching and learning within classroom contexts. Because it is confined to the classroom, it is perhaps more easily attainable for teachers. Currently, there are many outside reforms (Mawhinney, 2008) that provide added pressures on teachers

and their classrooms. In this approach, the teachers hold the power to take actions within the classroom. This can bring a sense of empowerment to the teachers, along with the students, that is often missing from schools. Further, Brett and Dan's approach to advocacy has set boundaries within the classroom, which can be very healthy. Often teachers "take their work home," but by keeping the advocacy focused on academics and the classroom environment, this model creates a healthy boundary where teachers can thrive.

On the other hand, some may argue that this classroom boundary is a constraint. Although White teachers cannot use their race to serve as role models, there are many positive avenues for them to work toward greater societal equity in their roles as educators. Teachers of all backgrounds often go outside their classroom walls with education, such as teaching conflict resolution education (Lieber, 2003) or social justice to students (E. Johnson, Oppenheim, & Suh, 2009). They are expected in informal ways to teach moral concepts outside the structure of typical academic subjects. Thus, learning happens for many outside the classroom, although White preservice teachers may or may not conceptualize this portion of their future role in advance. Ultimately, there are rewards and costs with both of these highlighted teacher advocacy approaches.

Putting the Pieces Together

Peters and Reid (2009) articulate that there are multiple routes to advocacy. It is clear that these African American and White preservice teachers view their future roles as teacher advocates and Agents in distinct ways. But it may be important to point out that their choice of higher education institution may interact with those views. Aisha and Tyrone attended an HBCU, which has a long rooted history as to their missions for African Americans (Jean-Marie, 2006):

First, they provided education to newly freed slaves that was rich in Black history and tradition. Second, they delivered educational experiences that were consistent with the experiences and values of many Black families. Thirdly, they provided a service to the Black community and the country by aiding in the development of leadership, racial pride, and return service to the community. (p. 87)

This establishment of racial pride could indicate that the institution emphasized the importance of African American teachers in order to empower their students through racial pride. Aisha and Tyrone self-selected to attend an HBCU, and they may already have a strong sense of racial identity and how it connected to their future profession. On the other hand, Brett and Dan were representative of their respective PWIs, where the focus on race and

racial identity are not at the forefront of the institutions and their missions. Thus, the concept of racial pride and identity was secondary to the focus on academics.

It is interesting to note that the African American and White preservice teachers navigated their future roles as teachers using their worldviews and the empowering notions that go with it. This study of Aisha, Tyrone, Brett, and Dan opens the doors to further research to explore questions concerning preservice teachers' perspectives on the profession. Continuing to explore these issues could help to better understand recruitment and retention issues in the profession. Currently, the concept of advocacy in teacher education programs is subtle (Athanases & de Oliveira, 2007; Liebovich & Matoba Adler, 2009), if discussed at all. This research can help teacher preparation institutions to embrace each distinct form of advocacy and Agency. Specifically, through a more complete understanding of the life experiences and perspectives of African American preservice teachers, both independently and as compared with White peers, the teaching profession can design more relevant recruitment, preparation, and support approaches for our future educators and can enhance educational opportunities for their future students. While these efforts by no means ensure the effectiveness of the teacher workforce, they can take initial steps toward making the teaching profession more representative of and responsive to the culturally diverse student body that populates today's schools.

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APPENDIX INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Life History

- What is your name, address, year of birth, marital status (year of marriage), birthplace?*
- Who would you identify as being in your immediate family? How many brothers and/or sisters do you have? Birth order and spacing.*
- How many years did you live in the house where you were born? Has your family moved since then? For what reason did you family make these moves?*
- How old were your parents when you were born? What were their occupations? Work hours? Did they have other jobs before or after they became that? Did they also do any part-time jobs? Do you remember your parents ever being out of work? What are their highest levels of schooling/education?*
- Who looked after the children while your parents were at work?*
- What type of schools did you attend growing up (public/private/religious/size/student demographics)?
- What do you remember about how you were taught in school (discussion, teacher-directed, student-directed)? How did you respond to those methods?*
- How did your teachers describe your abilities on your report cards?
- How did you spend your time outside of school? Did you participate in any clubs or sports? Describe your participation (time commitment, intensity, affiliation).
- Were there any teachers, coaches, or other adults that particularly stand out in your mind as influential in your childhood? Describe your relationship with them.
- Did you have any contact with teachers outside of the classroom? What was your interaction with them? What did you think of teachers?
- When did you decide that you wanted to pursue teaching? How did you come to that decision? What were the primarily individuals or events influencing your decision?

- How have your family members, friends, and other important individuals in your life reacted to your decision to teach?

Teacher Education

- Tell me about your decision to attend [higher education institution]? How did you make that decision? What were the primary factors influencing your choice? Has the college been what you expected? In what ways does it meet or not meet expectations?
- Tell me about your decision to pursue teacher education. Describe your experiences in the teacher education program at [higher education institution]. What have been some of the most defining experiences (either positive, negative, or both)?
- In what ways has teacher education been what you expected? In what ways has it been different?
- Describe your relationship with other students in the teacher education program. Describe your relationship with the faculty, cooperating teachers, and supervisors. Which individuals particularly stand out to you and why?
- What do you consider to be your primary goals as a teacher? What factors have influenced these goals? Have these goals changed since entering the teacher education program? If so, how?
- Describe what the teaching and learning will look like in your future classroom. What factors have influenced this image? Has this image changed since entering the teacher education program? If so, how?
- Describe your relationships with your future students, colleagues, parents, and administrators. What factors have influenced this image? Has this image changed since entering the teacher education program? If so, how?
- How do you envision your career as an educator? Describe where you would like to see yourself 5, 10, and 20 years after graduation. This includes work context (type of school), responsibilities (teaching, coaching, administration, etc.), professional growth, and family situation (marriage, children).

**The asterisks indicate that the questions were taken directly from A. S. Johnson (2007).*