Black Community Educational Leaders:

Knowledge Production Influence in Education

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Abstract

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Black Community Educational Leaders: Knowledge Production Influence in Education

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While the structural inequities leading to the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) were well documented in scholarly literature, there was surprisingly little research that centered Black Community Educational Leaders' (BCEL) knowledge and wisdom relative to this injustice. To offer a critical perspective on racial disparities directly targeting Black youth, in a qualitative study this research used storytelling as the methodology to counter the normative (or status quo) way of thinking about Black youth and their lived experiences. Eleven Black Community Educational Leaders who met the established criterion were nominated by members in the local community to participate in a critical case study. The research demonstrated how BCEL possessed profound wisdom to confront and address the root causes of racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities that affected Black youth in schools and communities. The context of this study focused primarily in the Promise Neighborhood. Historically these were impoverished communities with underperforming schools. For this research, racialized

exclusionary practices and structural inequities were viewed through the lens of Black student removal from the classroom that potentially led to a culmination of negative disparate academic and social outcomes. Core findings revealed critical perspectives and wisdom from BCEL about the extensive improvements needed in education and community spaces. Specifically, this research acknowledged historical perspectives and highlighted the importance of high-quality education and equitable opportunities for Black youth.

Dedication

To my amazing family and friends who have prayed for me, encouraged me, and not let me give up on this journey, I am forever indebted to all of you. To my husband and wonderful three children, thank you for giving me grace throughout this entire process. I can only hope I have made all of you proud!

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, this journey has taught me, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. I am grateful to God for giving me the inspiration, wisdom, strength, and endurance to complete this dissertation. Before I continue, let me just say, the experience I received from the three dynamic members on my dissertation committee is second to none. For starters, thank you to my brilliant advisor and committee chair, Dr. Joy Howard. Her tough love, guidance, and generosity helped to make this project a success. In addition to the many hours, she spent pouring over my research and providing valuable feedback to me were crucial. I would also like to thank the other two members of my committee: Dr. Elizabeth M. Wilkins and Dr. Yasser Payne. They also provided me with their time and expertise throughout this process. Their willing contributions gave depth to my research, and for that I will be forever grateful. Next, I would like to thank my amazing family. I know it feels like I have been in school since birth but finishing this dissertation is the ultimate triumph. Your thoughts provided the inspiration I needed when my work was difficult to complete. Specifically, I would like to thank my mother, the strongest woman in the world. You have always loved me unconditionally and believed in me and my dreams. To my late father, who often instilled the value of education in me, I hope you are smiling down from heaven and proud of “daddy’s baby.” To my in-laws and the entire family, thank you all for your consistent support and loving me. To my husband Austin, thank you for the support throughout my career. To our loving children, McKenzie, Paisley, and Austin Jr., thank you for always encouraging me and giving me grace when I was present but not always focused on the task at hand. Your sweet smiles, across many miles, made the long days and nights worthwhile. You are the reason for everything I do. Mommy strives to be the best role model to each of you. I love you all deeply and dearly. Finally, I would like to

thank my sister, my late sister, niece, nephews, uncles, cousins, aunts, and all my friends. Each one of you has pushed me toward greatness!

I would be remiss to not acknowledge my community family. Where would I be without the help and support from each one of you? As I emerged from my cocoon before metamorphosing into a butterfly, you all welcomed me with open arms. I am grateful for all the community change makers and the wise Black Community Educational Leaders in the study. As someone not originally from this community, I entered this process with an open mind and left with an abundance of knowledge. The stories from these leaders were inspiring and confirmed, I am operating in my purpose in life and getting into good trouble, necessary trouble (in the words of the late John Lewis).

My hope is for schools and communities to begin understanding the importance of shared governance through intentional efforts to ensure all students and families thrive and flourish. The end result of this study is to inform educators, teachers, administrators, superintendents, board members, students, and members of the community about necessary changes needed to redefine and reimagine traditional practices and structures in schools and communities.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Problem of Practice

Historically systemic racism had been linked to inequities in education among Black youth, yet researchers and practitioners often overlooked the knowledge production processes of Black Community Educational Leaders (BCEL). BCEL were people who currently or previously worked in education and were known for their impact and contributions on a structural level in areas such as spirituality, mental health, housing, education and advocacy for the wellness of Black people in a particular community (see Appendix D for list of terms). There was an abundance of scholarly literature on the school-to-prison-pipeline (STPP) (see Alexander, 2010; Gordon, 2023; Valandra, 2020), yet very limited research on BCEL perspectives to address the root causes of these disparities in education. STPP was defined as a societal trend that pushed youth out of the educational system into the juvenile justice system (Alexander, 2010). Black youth had a higher chance of classroom removal, based on personal perceptions, lack of cultural experiences, and deficit-based mindsets by educators (Harvey, 2019). Deficit-based mindset was defined as youth from historically excluded communities who were viewed through a negative lens and in some cases, families tend to have been labeled as being unconcerned about their child's educational well-being (Betsinger et al., 2001; Valencia et al., 2001). This qualitative study took position that BCEL had deep insight about problems within the education system or the necessary changes needed for a more equitable educational future for Black children. Inequities were highly concentrated in the Promise Neighborhood (PN) which were under resourced areas with historically low performing schools, therefore, this study drew upon BCEL lives or how their work contributed to better understanding underserved Black youth. The

disparate outcomes in Black youth revealed the children in the community were not well, yet BCEL had insight into ways to cultivate positive outcomes.

Significance

This dissertation spoke to the field of educational leadership (Marable, 1998), community-engaged scholarship (Davidson & Hughes, 2021), and the education debt owed to Black students and families (Ladson-Billings, 2006). In the Black community there was a disconnect between the needs of youth and families and the schools that were supposed to serve them. This disconnect was more prevalent in the Promise Neighborhood areas, which historically were concentrated areas plagued by structural oppression. Despite structural inequities in education, Black youth saw success and the community thrived due to the leadership and knowledge of Black Community Educational Leaders. To be clear, the terms thriving, and resilience could have been used interchangeably. It was important to mention however, that Payne (2011) viewed resilience and resiliency as nonlinear constructs, where resiliency was more of the process and resilience was an outcome. Specifically, Payne's research inferred resilience through the lens and experiences of street-life oriented Black men and women (Payne, 2011; Payne et al., 2023). In this study, this understanding of resilience was crucial because it pointed to the significance of wisdom of BCEL as a contribution to both research and practices that sought to understand the root causes of inequity and suggested changes for Black students. To that end, I draw from Franklin (1999) to emphasize the knowledge production (wisdom) processes of Black leaders where personal resilience could have been described as "the individual's effective management of the hassles of daily life, cumulating over one's life history, which enhances one's adaptive repertoire and efficacy in coping strategies" (p. 781). Despite negative experiences, the Black Community Educational Leaders were telling others there were

problems and although these educational leaders were successful, focusing on the community, teachers, and the education system was a top priority. This research added to the culturally responsive moments that schools were a dire necessity. Through intentional research, policymaking, and practices, the voices of BCEL could have been more prominent and influenced meaningful school and community relationships.

In this critical case study, I considered the numerous ways how BCEL who had faced racialized stressors demonstrated resilience (Payne, 2011) using counternarratives (storytelling). This research revealed the essence of BCEL through their voices and impact in the community and in education. From the standpoint of (Alvarez & Tulino, 2022, as cited in Marable, 2015; Woodson, 1990), "Black people have always been expected to remain silent and obedient to white-dominant ways" (p.1). A large amount of research suggested racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities had been negatively linked to academic and social development in children, particularly those from different minority/ethnicities, under resourced communities, and those with disabilities (Vincent et al., 2012). In this study, racialized exclusionary practices were viewed through the lens of Black student removal from the classroom that potentially led to a culmination of negative outcomes such as disengagement, school referrals, manifestations, suspensions, special education, alternative education, expulsions, and disparate academic outcomes (Skiba et al., 2014).

BCEL provided a critical source of information to help address racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities in schools and communities. Frusciante (2014) defined knowledge production as explicit work revealed in a public shared space from individuals who directly connected a change strategy (i.e., issues of information and resources access, voice, and power) to affect structural inequities in a social context. In the context of Black Community

Educational Leaders, knowledge production (wisdom) was defined as Black leaders' ability through action to provide knowledge of their individual experiences in spaces that drove structural change within institutions and communities. Although education reform was a complex policy area; this work strove to transform the lives of youth in schools and communities.

In the study, BCEL were immersed into local challenges and viewed by Black people in their community as the voice for change. These changes occurred in a multitude of areas but not limited to voting rights, affordable housing, quality healthcare, safety, addressing grief and trauma, community organizing, and investment in their communities. BCEL were change-makers who spoke from a place of depth and wisdom that directly impacted the youth and people in their communities. The larger goal of this line of inquiry was to better understand key elements that contributed to empowering communities and to bridge the knowledge gap which perpetuated the opportunity gap (Ladson-Billings, 2006) for Black children.

Purpose of Study

This dissertation explored how the knowledge production (wisdom) of local BCEL could have helped confront or address the root causes of racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities that affected Black youth in schools and communities. By addressing the root causes of these racialized inequities from BCEL perspectives, the aim of this study was to contribute knowledge which would have helped to transform school and community perceptions of Black youth. Root causes were defined as "the deepest underlying cause, or causes, of positive or negative symptoms within any process that, if dissolved, would result in elimination, or substantial reduction of the symptom" (Preuss, 2003, p. 2). This study centered on BCEL whose lives and work supported their deep understanding of the schooling experiences of

Black youth in the Promise Neighborhood (PN) of a midwestern city. To clarify, a "Promise Neighborhood" was a federal education grant funded policy developed under the Obama Administration through the Department of Education in 2007. The goal of the grants distributed was to build 'community capacity' to help address the "effects of concentrated, intergenerational poverty on student success" (Horsford & Sampson, 2014, p. 956). The intent of the PN designation was to operationalize the use of "high equality educational and systematic supports" (U.S. Department of Education, 2013) while helping youth to transition from cradle to career Bethune (1938) readiness.

Research Aim

In this study, the question was posed: In what ways do Black Community Educational Leaders involved in advocacy for educational equity conceptualize the schooling experiences of under-served Black students? The aim of this study was to transform school and community perceptions of Black youth by exploring how the profound wisdom of local BCEL helped to confront and address the root causes of racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities affecting these individuals. This looked like BCEL countering the normative view (status quo) thinking directly targeting Black youth. Uljens (2006) defined normative education as "Education is reduced to finding out practical pedagogical methods for reaching an intended state of art using existing societal practices instead of future ideas" (p.4). Structures in this study were systems or policies implemented at the district level through the administration and leadership teams. Looking through the lens at the district level, I defined structural inequities as disparities (i.e., resources, finances, housing, schools) or biases that were deeply embedded into every facet of learning. Typically, the more financially stabled individuals were more advantaged compared to lower socioeconomic or under-served students and families. Looking through the

lens at the building level, I defined practices in this study as interventions typically implemented by teachers or staff in the classroom.

Lastly, the aim was to move toward collective reckoning to healing-centered engagement in the community using an asset-based mindset. Asset-based thinking was a strength-based intervention with a strong internal focus with the belief all individuals had something to contribute to society and to the classroom environment (Eloff & Ebersohn, 2001). Ginwright (2018) defined this as a strength-based approach that advanced a collective view of healing, and re-centering culture as a central feature in well-being which drove therapeutic interventions. Both healing-centered engagement and asset-based thinking were positive approaches that were necessary to address issues of systemic injustices in schools and communities.

List of Terms: See Appendix D

Chapter 2: Review of Relevant Literature

Black Community Educational Leaders (BCEL) had deep insight about the root causes of problems within the education system and they were very aware of the changes required for a more equitable educational future for Black students. While systemic racism was predictive of major stressors among Black youth (Bernard et al., 2021), researchers had largely overlooked the knowledge production (or wisdom) of BCEL. Therefore, this dissertation examined the knowledge production (or wisdom) of BCEL to reveal the root causes of racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities among Black students to ultimately offer insights into how to change those realities.

Further this dissertation asserted there was a critical need to listen to BCEL who had insight into strategies that could have changed the course of discriminatory practices in education and communities. Resilience in these leaders was inferred through storytelling of their personal experiences. These experienced leaders and educators in the study were destined to counter the status quo of Black youth by improving education, particularly in under-resourced communities. Payne's (2011) conceptualization of resilience resonates well with how to understand resilience among BCEL and students. From this work I identified how race-based stressors affected BCEL and developed the notion of BCEL. In addition, I sought to better understand the ways that people who had been determined by the Black community to have been "our leaders" came to these positions while demonstrating resilience, despite experiences with racism and discrimination.

Moreover, this chapter highlighted the historical and contemporary inequities in schools. This section included barriers to equitable schooling for Black children such as segregation. Related to that, counternarratives are discussed: reframing trauma-informed education (i.e.

STPP, listening, stress, community programming, school resource officers, and relationships). Next, I discussed resilience in healing education (i.e. Black church, family and community engagement). Finally, the review of literature was concluded by discussing the conceptual framework of critical race theory, community cultural wealth, and the knowledge production (wisdom) of Black leadership.

Knowledge Production among Black Community Educational Leaders: Literature Review

There were Black leaders from the past and present whose research was similar to the scope and sequence of the study which centered upon the voices in Black communities (Bethune, 1938; Edelman, 2007; Edelman & Jones, 2008). For example, Bethune (1938) encouraged people from the cradle to the career to "believe in themselves and their possibilities based upon a sure knowledge of achievement from the past" (p. 12). Edelman and Jones (2008) spoke to the disproportionality in Black youth since the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas decision. Similar to Bethune, (Edelman, 2007) addressed the cradle-to-prison pipeline, particularly in Black and Hispanic children. She discussed the importance of community collaboration that included policymakers and legislation advocating for change in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods to disrupt the zero-tolerance discipline standards. Lastly, education had always been important in the Black community (Marable, 1998). Black leaders such as Booker T. Washington embodied successful Black Leadership in the age of Jim Crow earning his certificate in education from Hampton Institute, later becoming a prominent educator and race leader (Smock, 2009). The first major social movement in the Black community began with Richard Allen and Absolom Jones, the founders of the A.M.E. movement in the late 1700s. The Civil Rights and Black Panthers' movement were known as different forms of community organizing (Fisher et al., 2018). These efforts grounded in political economics became more

popular in the South in the 1950s to address racism (Morris, 1986). Not only were the BCEL in the study educated educators, they also were involved in grassroot community organizing in their communities.

Barriers to Equitable Schooling for Black Children

In this next section, the researcher highlighted the historical implications of segregation followed by the landmark supreme court decisions, restoration of educational outcomes, conceptual framework, and healing-centered engagement in schools and communities.

Segregation. The normative view or "status quo" way of thinking suggested segregation was a thing of the past (Oakley et al., 2009). However, Black Community Educational leaders countered this assumption and suggested inequitable practices in education were real and still happening at the time of the study. To this standpoint, systemic racism had led to education disparities in the schools and communities. Black Community Educational Leaders (BCEL) understood racial segregation had persisted in society, particularly in education (Bell, 1992; Du Bois, 1903, 1989; Delgado, 1995; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). In fact, some of these leaders lived through the era of redistricting and desegregation. Systemic racism involved,

> The racialized exploitation and subordination of Americans of color by White Americans. It encompasses the racial stereotyping, prejudices, and emotions of whites, as well as the discriminatory practices and racialized institutions engineered to produce the long-term domination of African Americans and other people of color (Feagin & Barnett, 2004, pp. 1102-1103).

At the heart of systemic racism were discriminatory practices that generally denied Americans of color the dignity, opportunities, and privileges available to White people both individually and collectively. Seemingly the end to segregated schools allowed for redlining and

educational gerrymandering to drive inequality (Burke & Schwalbach, 2021). Because these areas were still not yet fixed, Black leaders could have spoken to the past and current inequitable practices and how they were connected to the history of systemic racism.

There were a number of significant court cases that had affected schooling among Black children. In 1896 the supreme court ruled Plessy v. Ferguson mandated separate but equal public accommodations were constitutional for Black and White people (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014). Fifty-eight years later the constitution was overturned. Brown v. Board of Education in Topeka, Kansas in 1954 was the largest landmark supreme court case decision deeming the issues of segregation in public education unconstitutional (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014). Particularly it addressed the "Separate but Equal" clause in the 14th amendment which suggested schools for Black and White children were unequal (Robinson, 2017). Ultimately these cases galvanized the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s (Patterson, 2001). Although the historic legislation in this case passed almost 70 years ago, schools continue to have been segregated by race, class, and socio economics (Mickelson et al., 2008).

In spite of the fact that Brown v. Board of Education became law in 1954, research suggested this case did not protect Black teachers and administration (Karpinski, 2004). In fact, approximately 38,000 Black teachers and administration in the southern region lost their jobs (Fultz, 2004; Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Tillman, 2004). Due to these discriminatory practices many Black teachers also left the profession (Orfield, 1969). Some suspected the removal of Black educators was strategically orchestrated by the federal government (Orfield, 1969). In other words, with no surveillance or 'official language' detailing the impact of desegregation, particularly in the southern regions (Oakley et al., 2009), there was no protection for Black educators who had a wealth of skill and knowledge regarding educating Black youth.

Segregation not only affected the southern states but non-southern as well. Specifically, "In non-southern states, both residential segregation and the racially conscious placement of schools and configuration of attendance boundaries sustained school segregation even after the Brown decision" (Oakley et al., 2009, p. 2). Research supported the positive impact teachers of color had on minority students in the classroom (Bacon, 1995; Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Stewart et al., 1989). In the past, there were discriminatory laws instituted which greatly affected the careers of Black teachers. In a survey conducted in 1965, it was determined the National Education Association (NEA) began requiring teacher certifications, greatly affecting Black teachers with loss of contracts, removal to White schools (Tillman, 2004) based on the administrators' discretion, "abolishing tenure", and forcing teachers to teach outside of grade level content, then labeling them as "incompetent" (Futrell, 2004, p. 87). In the late 90's one-third of public-schools were students of color with only 14% of diverse teachers (Eubanks & Weaver, 1999; Villegas & Clewell, 1998). Most of the BCEL in the study were one of very few minorities working in a school district and understood the impact of diverse representation in education.

Although some research suggested progress was made during the 1970s and 1980s toward closing the achievement gap (Kober, 2001), more recently it has been noted these two landmark cases and the Civil Rights Movement did not completely end the movement for racial inequality in society. Some even proclaiming Brown v. Board provided only a "glimmer "of hope" (Losenzki, 2017) further exacerbating privilege and oppression that grew out of school desegregation efforts (Hilliard, 1995). According to Feagin and Barnett (2005) there were several factors contributing to desegregation efforts in education to include private schools, the growing number of people of color in the inner cities, the migration of middle-class families in

predominantly White neighborhoods, the trend in Black middle-class families into predominantly White neighborhoods, and the acceptance and resurgence of resegregated schools by the supreme court. For example, Milliken v. Bradley in 1974 was an example of the supreme court seemingly 'backtracking' and blocking attempts to combine the city of Detroit and the suburban schools while leaving the responsibility up to the local government to make decisions. Interestingly, these historical practices were prevalent in most places and not just the local community.

The aftermath of desegregation was affecting many communities across the country including the local distressed midwestern communities in the Promise Neighborhood (PN). In addition, it appeared these schools were met with fewer educational resources, lack of rigor, low expectations, and teacher instability. Research suggested schools serving a large number of Black youth from under-resourced communities typically had less experience and qualified teachers, tended to have been overcrowded, and provided limited curricula (Payne et al., 2023). As alluded to previously, the local PN (explained in more detail in chapter 3) had been known as the "urban" part of town. This area was perceived as a space where there was poverty, low educational attainment, and had all of the indicators of an underserved community. In addition, there were other variables affecting these areas such as an increase in behaviors, poor attendance, limited bus transportation access, lower graduation rates, and inadequate family and community engagement involvement (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014). To have been clear, systemic inequities did not only affect Black children but all children. It also included language-based discriminatory practices (Garcia, 2009; Phillipson, 1992) as schools appeared to have been ill equipped and underprepared to accommodate the growing population of multilingual learning students and families. Diversification of children from different cultural backgrounds was rapidly growing

across many school districts throughout the nation (McFarland et al., 2019). These children, who were mostly students of color, were also subjected to structural discriminatory practices in education (Mitchell, 2013). Because of these oppressive systemic barriers, some Black and students of color struggled to connect with staff who were typically White and new to the field of education. Due to the disconnect in home-school-community partnerships there was minimal awareness of the effects of unconscious and implicit biases toward students. The experiences and insights from BCEL could have potentially provided understanding on these important variables exasperating the school and communities.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. The normative view of traditional teaching limited culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Yet these practices were essential to centering the values of Black youth in schools. Ladson-Billings (1998) argument on culturally responsive pedagogy/teaching underscored how mastery of culture created a more inclusive environment in the classroom. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) challenged (countered) the field of multicultural education and its failure to address systemic issues negatively impacting African American children in the Pre-K-12 school setting (Bryan & Jett, 2018). The multiculturalism framework focused primarily on a "pluralistic diversity approach" instead of race (Aldana & Vazquez, 2020; Gollan & O'Leary, 2009; Gorski, 2006). Ladson-Billings (2013) viewed the racial achievement gap through the lens of the education debt that held society accountable. In fact, her argument on asset-based thinking focused on how the "achievement gap" was actually an "opportunity gap" (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Also, Ladson-Billings (2013) contended schooling disparities were born out of the historical context, socio-political, and economic context. These circumstances compelled Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) to introduce critical race theory (CRT) into the field of education in the mid-1990s which

challenged deficit-based thinking. Ladson-Billings (2020) argued the education curriculum, assessments, school funding, and desegregation efforts all perpetuated the narrative of White supremacy and social inequities toward African American students. Ladson-Billings (2009) believed building meaningful relationships transformed into good teaching practices that cultivated understanding and trust in students. In agreement with her research, there was deep understanding from BCEL about the urgency of centering education for Black youth through a positive lens.

Restoring Educational Outcomes

Counternarratives: Reframing Trauma-Informed Education

The normative view (or status quo) for students exposed to trauma included assigning them wrap-around support (i.e., counselors, social workers) and community-based programming (mentoring) (Chafouleas et al., 2015). Although these practices were important, to counter this notion, BCEL believed these efforts must have integrated cultural inclusiveness. BCEL who had close ties to disenfranchised neighborhoods had knowledge that one possible contributing factor to the school-to-prison (STPP) was the limited access to mental health services (Tate et al., 2014). In education one of the best places in schools to address whole-child needs (i.e. academic, behavior, social emotional, family engagement) using a culturally inclusive lens was through the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework (Sailor et al., 2021). Although this process had been critiqued for being less culturally conscious (Bal, 2018), and sustained oppressive and sociopolitical factors in Black youth (Sabnis et al., 2019), when used with fidelity could have been transformative (Choi et al., 2017; McIntosh & Goodman, 2016) to help address and disrupt racialized exclusionary practices (school discipline) and structural

inequities in education. If allowed to contribute knowledge, BCEL could have provided insight on best practices to include in the MTSS process discussion about youth in schools.

School-to-Prison Pipeline (STPP). Goings et al. (2018) suggested Black district administrators and school leaders had been found to 'influence' and mitigate the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP). STPP was a construct that was symptomatic of racial inequity in schools and society. The STPP was a societal trend that pushed youth out of the educational system into the juvenile justice system (Alexander, 2010). As cited in Goings et al., by OCR, 2014, "Black students only represent 16% of the national student population, they comprise 27% of students referred to law enforcement and 31% of students who have experienced a school-related arrest" (p. 32). In fact, Alexander (2010) also called the STPP the "New Jim Crow", suggested the racial caste system was still alive and well in society. The school-to-prison-pipeline was most attributable to the expansion of zero tolerance policies which usually involved harsh disciplinary policies. Zero-tolerance programs disproportionately targeted Black males leading to higher suspension rates (Darensbourg et al., 2010) and according to the NAACP (2005), "In the last decade, the punitive and overzealous tools and approaches of the modern criminal justice system have seeped into the schools serving to remove children from mainstream educational environments and funnel them onto a one-way path toward prison" (p.2). Boutte and Bryan (2021) suggested Black children in early childhood settings and beyond were not faring well because they are subjected to school violence. Specifically, their research suggested the disparities of suspensions for students of color began in preschool; 48% of preschool students suspended more than once were Black and overall Black students were suspended or expelled three times more frequently than White students (Nelson & Lind, 2015). BCEL could have spoken directly to these injustices which were happening in their neighborhoods and throughout

the community at disproportionate rates. The importance of BCEL knowledge production (wisdom) could have mitigated the harm of racialized disparities by working directly with families and getting involved in early intervention solutions and youth-based community programming.

Community-Based Programming for Black Youth. Black Community Educational Leaders were able to create adult-youth partnerships to help reimagine and centralize the voices in community-based educational spaces (Baldridge et al., 2017). Furthermore, the co-creation of adults and youth (Burrowes et al., 2007) in these spaces could have helped disrupt racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities in schools and communities. Baldridge et al. (2017) asserted community-based education was steeped in neoliberal and racialized inequities toward minoritized youth. To counter this notion, culturally relevant school-based mentoring had been found to disrupt deficit-based thinking in schools and communities. In fact, this approach focused on impacting the behavior and social emotional needs of youth (Gordon et al., 2013). Similarly, youth in these programs were known to have fewer absences, lower discipline referrals, and increased connectedness (Gordon et al., 2013). Culturally based community programming created opportunities for youth to heal and resist the status quo that moved beyond academic achievement toward political consciousness (Baldridge et al., 2017). It was necessary for community partnerships to center the unique needs of Black youth with programs such as mentoring, after school programs or community-based youth organizations. Creating community-programming for Black youth was imperative as “Groups of color in the United States have long formed physical spaces to educate and protect young people from racial hostility as well and to affirm their culture and identity” (McKenzie, 2008, p. 383). In many cases BCEL served as mentors, coaches, role models to all children, in this case particularly,

Black youth. Lastly, these individuals understood community organizations were invaluable partners at the heart of fostering student achievement and success in all aspects of the educational journey.

Listening. BCEL were listeners with important stories to tell about anti-racist practices in schools and communities (Krueger-Henney, 2016). Being able to effectively listen to the personal stories of community members was a crucial attribute. Hamby et al. (2019) explained historical trauma as accumulated or long-term multigenerational complex traumatic experiences (i.e. slavery, Holocaust, Trail of Tears) by a specific oppressed ethnic event or group. There was evidence to suggest the impact of sociocultural stressors on DNA methylation, an epigenetic modification was the most commonly studied epigenetic that may have provided a causal link between social adversity and health disparities (Notterman & Mitchell, 2015). One critical aspect of this process involved listening and validating each other's experiences, particularly the knowledge production (wisdom) of BCEL. Listening to counternarratives as a method could have helped to understand an individual's ability to thrive despite race-related traumatic experiences.

Stress. Stress in all communities was pervasive but particularly in historically marginalized communities it seemingly was more exacerbated due to racism (Crocker, 2007). Statistically the dehumanization of Black children manifested itself through disproportionate outcomes (Kennedy et al., 2019). Studies suggested African American youth disproportionately experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACES) as it related to racism (Woods-Jager et al., 2021). Racism and discriminatory experiences further exacerbated executive functioning skills and caused high levels of cortisol elevation in the brain (Carter, 2007). Oppositional, counternarratives were a way to humanize (Kennedy et al., 2019) individual stories. Particularly

in education it brought awareness and action to challenge racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities. Consequently, Black families experienced increased emotional dysregulation when their Black children were “pushed out” of school (Morris, 2016) due to racialized exclusionary discipline practices (Wesley & Ellis, 2017). The STPP also disproportionately impacted the poor and students with disabilities (Witt, 2007). Love (2013) believed racism was the driving force to these youth experiencing dehumanizing conditions. Quiros et al. (2020) called to attention how transformational change happened when Black people felt a sense of meaningful connection and were not viewed as monolithic. For example, Kennedy et al. (2019) provided counternarratives from students enrolled in an alternative school setting. The stories of these students revealed the school system did not have a school-wide discipline matrix for behavior infractions. Consequently, the subjective nature of placement negatively impacted the whole child of these students and for some, their transition back to comprehensive school (Kennedy et al., 2019). If culturally responsive trauma-informed practices were considered to have been counternarratives, professionals in the social service field of education must have considered transgenerational and systematic forms of oppression toward socially just practices (Goodman, 2015). However, moving beyond the social service field, research suggested all educators needed foundational knowledge through “professional development that focuses on historical and structural oppression in the context of historical and intergenerational trauma” (Brave Heart et al., 2011, p. 119). A positive relationship between BCEL and the school community was imperative in order to effectively move this work forward. This process encompassed everyone involved working together in unison for the betterment of all children. There seemed to have been a connection between previous and present generations affected by historical trauma. These connections were visible particularly in communities of

color. There was a trend to discuss trauma-informed practices and policies in schools, however there was a missing voice in this conversation and that was Black Community Educational Leaders.

School Resource Officers (SROs) and Relationships. The normative view of thinking suggested SROs were often used to directly intervene in conflict and keep students safe (Gottfredson et al., 2020). To counter these subjective perceptions BCEL asserted behaviors viewed as overt defiance, verbal aggression, and disrespect (Annamma et al., 2019) could have led to both intended and unintended consequences and acceleration in the STPP. In an attempt to improve school climate and culture such as safety and reduction in crime, some schools had implemented security-related approaches such as metal detectors, surveillance cameras, and SROs (Gottfredson et al., 2020). For instance, some believed SROs provided positive contributions to school discipline infractions when ruling out criminal offenses. Annamma et al. (2019) suggested Black children were considered to have been carrying the "ghetto" with them were overly examined with more harsh consequences in spaces such as schools. Hulvershorn and Mulholland (2018) pointed out these infractions lead to higher rates of racialized exclusionary outcomes such as manifestations, suspensions, expulsions, and dropout rates. BCEL also countered the notion and suggested SRO training should have included culture and insight about who these students were before policing them. Particularly in the educational settings Payne and Brown (2017) suggested Black children from marginalized communities viewed school "sites" as injustices with a poor climate and culture. While others felt that schools were already safe spaces, some believed these individuals (SROs) exacerbated the chances of students' being connected to the school-to-prison pipeline (Gottfredson et al., 2020). Per the research over 50% of high schools with a high percentage of Black and brown students accounted for 31% of

referrals to the police (US Department of Education, 2018). On the contrary, according to research findings, SROs were also known to have positively impacted students' feelings and attitudes along with helping them to have felt safe (Theriot, 2016). Yet some students reported feeling low disconnectedness, likely because they saw their peers being disciplined by SROs for less serious infractions (Theriot, 2016). The goal was to keep the students in the classroom. Research suggested the lack of instructional exposure in the classroom for students of color seemingly was a direct result of low academic performance (Rogers et al., 2022). Lessons from BCEL could have contributed to important training enhancement practices to better equip SROs to have dealt with youth of color.

Implicit Bias. The status quo or deficit-based thinking viewed students who were kicked out of the classrooms and schools (exclusionary practices) were individually to blame based on behavior, potentially leading to the school-to-prison pipeline (Kennedy et al., 2019). However, the storytelling perspective of BCEL indicated the need to train and hire more diverse educators. The researcher asserted BCEL could have been an example for Black children especially those subjected to implicit bias and life-long treatment as criminals (Henneman, 2014). Implicit or unconscious bias were the items underneath the surface and "not easily detectable because they operate automatically, and outside the reach of direct control" (Holroyd, 2015, p. 30). Fostering cultural competence in the classroom was extremely critical especially in urban and highly diverse environments (Milner, 2011). Goldenberg (2014) and other researchers estimated by the year 2050 almost two-thirds of all American children were projected to have been racially diverse. Although teachers were successful daily with teaching students of color, research suggested nationally 80% of the teachers were White (Goldenberg, 2014). To this end, the research suggested most White teachers came from dominant cultures and were often working

with students of color from non-dominant backgrounds (Goldenberg, 2014). The term non-dominant in education referred to the ‘oppressed racial group’ (Carter, 2005), or typically the cultural capital of individuals from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Per research, the lack of cultural competence of teachers and staff increased the chances of biases and the removal of students from the classroom (Bryan et al., 2012). It also provided the opportunity for teachers to lower their expectations. BCEL could have provided wisdom and examples regarding the benefits of high expectations in youth.

Expectations (Pygmalion Effect). The status quo way of thinking about Black youth and their experiences were linked to racism and lower expectations (Ylimaki & Brunner, 2011). Teachers with high expectations for students could have influenced high academic achievement and success in the classroom (Cherng, 2017). Although Anderson (2016) did not argue against this statement, he did counter the language of “high expectations” and implications for students and teachers in urban school districts. He linked expectations to the “epistemology of oppression” (Anderson, 2016, p. 53) and spoke about the “knowers” of the outside making assumptions describing what teaching and learning practices should have been occurring inside of the school building. Specifically, he countered the underlying issues hidden beneath the use of the term “expectations" and believed there was a deeper root cause which was connected to social and economic structural injustices in education. Outsiders enforcing solution-focused high expectation policies did not address the root causes of structural oppression. Instead, a critical approach should have been used to analyze and synthesize the knowledge production of BCEL. Lessons from BCEL could have provided insight about ways to connect with staff and students inside of the building to create best practices.

Resilience and Healing in Education

Healing Justice Movement. The Restorative Justice framework addressed racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities in education (Song & Swearer, 2016). Restorative justice was originally applied to the criminal justice system (Braithwaite, 1989). To date, extensive research had supported the effectiveness of this evidenced-based intervention to non-criminal behavior in schools (Mayworm et al., 2016). The normative view of thinking of restorative practices did not acknowledge the root causes of harm and structural racism in education (Schiff, 2018). BCEL countered this thinking by acknowledging the historical and reconciliation process through the implementation of fair and just practices in school discipline using non-punitive approaches (Song & Swearer, 2016). Resilience and healing in education represented having a supportive school climate and culture that cultivated a strong sense of belonging in all children. Particularly in children, neuroplasticity in the brain was an apparatus that cultivated their ability to change, grow, and reorganize which built resilience (Ludy-Dobson & Perry, 2010). For example, mind-body and medicine (MBM) was another effective intervention supported by neuroscience as an alternative healing method to support emotional regulation despite individual experiences with trauma (Dacher, 2014). Meditation, deep belly breathing, mindfulness, positive behavior interventions and self-expression were emerging as useful tools known to enhance executive control to help regulate attention and foster control (Jackson, 2018). These interventions were particularly helpful in youth of color who had a higher chance of exposure to race-based traumatic stress (Roach et al., 2023). BCEL understood that in order for their wisdom to have helped transform systemic injustices, healing-centered engagement was an effective intervention to address the root cause of the problems.

Healing was necessary to address trauma and long-standing racial tension in a divided community. Ginwright (2018) coined the term Healing-Centered Engagement and defined it as engaging a strength-based approach that advanced a collective view of healing. In addition, this approach re-centered culture as a critical feature in well-being which drove therapeutic interventions. Particularly one must first have understood building empathy was a process that took time. It restored a sense of well-being and allowed people affected by adversity to have felt safe sharing their experiences and ideas (Ginwright, 2018). Despite growing challenges in the Black community such as violence, food scarcity, drugs, lack of trust, incarceration, limited recreational facilities, and low job rates, BCEL were able to determine ways to restore a sense of hope through healing justice work (Ginwright, 2015).

Black Church. The Black church had a deep history of providing advocacy and empowerment to literacy education (Thompson McMillon, 2022). Boutte (2015) believed understanding the root causes and its connection to spirituality in the Black community was critical. In most Black communities' spiritual leaders were known for providing community-based support. BCEL, who sometimes served in spiritual capacities as well, could have helped to address racialized exclusionary outcomes and structural inequities in education. Research studies suggested having one nurturing caregiver buffered the stress or racism experienced by African Americans (Brody et al., 2016; Conway-Phillip et al., 2020; Jackson et al., 2018). The healing justice movement rooted in faith and love was not a new concept. In fact, as previously discussed, past leaders such as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., W.E.B. Du Bois, and Rosa Parks historically advocated for social change. The BCEL in the study worked closely with Black youth in the community. Not only were BCEL leading the charge in activism, Ginwright (2015) suggested young motivated social justice leaders were also organizing protests expressing their

disdain against inequitable practices that affected their health and well-being. Black Community Educational Leaders could have assisted with shifting the narrative from trauma-informed care to healing-centered engagement. Healing-centered engagement used a holistic approach and moved beyond just healing. Throughout history, the Black church had served as an intervention and place of refuge. Many would have argued the mistrust in the Black community (Nunn & Wantchekon, 2011) was connected to the history of enslavement and White supremacy.

Moreover, historically and more recently places of worship such as Black churches were common places for fellowship, healing, and restoration (Davey & Watson, 2008; Galloway, 2003; Neighbors et al., 1998). Bringing community members and educators together in a group capacity to reckon with the historical context of racial relations could have served as a powerful healing experience. In some cases, members of the Black community exposed to racism and discrimination used mindfulness meditation (Woods-Giscombe & Gaylord, 2014) in the form of prayer; although this intervention was not meant to replace religion or spirituality. Bilkins et al. (2016) referred to the church community and Black church leaders as “first responders” to community issues such as violence, mental health, death, and social inequities. The knowledge production (wisdom) of BCEL could have helped provide insight on supportive culturally sensitive interventions, possibly even preventing classroom removal of Black youth in schools.

Family and Community Engagement. Involving families and the community was critical to healing inequities in the community. More importantly, amplifying the voices and presence of families could have contributed to authentic positive educational experiences for their children, specifically as it related to disproportionate outcomes (McKenna & Millen, 2013). Engaging families in education had a positive effect on student achievement and was an important strategy in reducing the opportunity gap (Ladson-Billings, 2006). This plan of action

could have assisted to mitigate disparities and ensure that every child reaches their full potential. The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships founded by Dr. Karen Mapp was a culturally inclusive evidenced-based tool that viewed families as co-creators in the developmental process (Mapp & Bergman, 2019). This theory fostered the importance of relational trusts, asset (strength-based) approaches, systems integration, community and educator empowerment, and linked activities to learning, while striving to build capacity outcomes in schools and communities. Equally important, engaging the voices of all people in the community created opportunities for true education reform and empowerment. Through efforts of collaboration with the entire home-school-community, BCEL could have provided meaningful wisdom that fostered ongoing positive relationships.

Conceptual Framework: A Critical Approach to Knowledge Production

This section highlighted the conceptual framework using Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Community Cultural Wealth (CCW). Both theories focused on counter storytelling and asset-based analysis in schools and communities.

Critical Race Theory. CRT critiqued the institutional and systemic norms that lead to racialized disparities in schools including the STPP. This theory unapologetically called out covert and overt racism and White supremacy (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). CRT was developed in the 1970s and 1980s by legal scholars Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado following the civil rights movement as a way to address social inequities (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Critical race theorists (Bell, 1992; Delgado, 1995) believed race was a social rather than scientific construct critical in the lives of people. These scholars recognize racism was embedded within laws, policies, practices and woven into the fabric of American society. According to Hsia et al. (2004) youth of color represented over 60 percent of youth who were detained in the

criminal justice system. This statistic was similar for Black youth in this midwestern community who made up disproportionate numbers in incarceration and school exclusion (i.e. suspensions, expulsions, special education) (Darensbourg et al., 2010).

CRT Tenets. According to DeCuir and Dixson (2004) there were five major tenets in CRT education: a). Whiteness as property b). The permanence of racism c). Critique of liberalism d). Interest convergence and e). Counter-storytelling, an essential component in education "aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 144). Counter-storytelling provided individuals from underrepresented communities the opportunity to challenge status quo narratives about their lived experiences (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). In education fields CRT historically examined underserved communities from kindergarten through post-secondary education (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). Counternarratives allowed the stories from the BCEL to shape the research design through the sharing of their lived experiences that included racism and discriminatory practices.

Asset-based thinking. Asset-based thinking represented a strong internal focus with the belief all individuals had something to contribute to in society and in the classroom environment (Eloff & Ebersohn, 2001). Black Community Educational Leaders typically advocated for fair and equitable practices in schools and communities. Because they possessed knowledge of the community and understood the community stressors, they could have influenced systematic changes. The researcher centered asset or strength-based literature discussing BCEL ability to demonstrate resilience against societal injustices (Chandler et al., 2015). Too often communities of color were viewed through a deficit-based lens (Yosso, 2005). Deficit-based analysis occurred when students from historically excluded communities were viewed through a negative lens.

These negative perceptions could have labeled families as being unconcerned about their child's educational well-being (Betsinger et al., 2001; Valencia et al., 2001). It was important to understand how the effects of generational trauma and race-based stressors that occurred within communities of color contributed to a poor sense of belonging, lack of acceptance, and feelings of exclusion. To counter this deficit-based analysis, BCEL in the study could have been used as positive examples of perseverance to overcome obstacles.

Critical Theorist. Acknowledging the strength and knowledge of Black youth was essential to their sense of self-worth and development (Travis & Leech, 2014). Yosso (2005) was a critical theorist who believed in educational access and opportunity for children of color. Her work was also connected to critical race theory and social justice education. She critiqued deficit-based thinking and introduced an alternative concept called Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) (Park et al., 2020). CCW represented or debunked the myth that students of color had cultural deficiencies (Yosso, 2005). For example, inspirational, social, navigational, linguistic, resistant and familial were strength-based forms of capital which drew on the knowledge that students of color brought with them from their homes and communities into the classroom (Yosso, 2005). Similarly, Perez-Huber (2009) identified spiritual capital as a potential seventh form of CCW outside of Yosso's original framework. Perez-Huber (2009) suggested Black churches were prominent institutions in support of youth and education. These experiences of Black children were important whether positive or negative, and every single experience they brought to the table had value.

Like Delgado Bernal (2002) who recognized students as leaders, holders, and creators of knowledge based on critical-raced-gendered epistemologies, BCEL gained knowledge from personal experiences, interactions, and observations of Black youth. In a similar fashion, Eve

Tuck's (2009) research discussed damaged-centered interpretations versus desired-based interpretations. These interpretations called on the community, researchers, and educators to champion positive narratives about students of color (Tuck, 2009). This study centered on an asset-based approach that focused on the individual's cultural values and empowered them from a non-dominant perspective (Eloff & Ebersohn, 2001). BCEL could have been used an asset-based approach that focused on problem-solving strategies to have helped individuals navigate success in their current environment (Eloff & Ebersohn, 2001).

Black Leadership. To understand how BCEL obtained their wisdom, it was important to have clarity around personal resilience. Payne (2011) argued resilience should have been viewed broadly and not limited to geographical locations and certain populations. Franklin (1999) described personal resilience as, "the individual's effective management of the hassles of daily life cumulating over one's life history which enhances one's adaptive repertoire and efficacy in coping strategies" (p. 781). There were many historic Black, 'charismatic' leaders such as Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass, Louis Farrakhan, Malcolm X and more who fought for the right to education, freedom, equality, and Black economic advancement (Marable, 1998). Some of these Black leaders were born slaves, yet able to pursue education and employment opportunities such as farming Black-owned businesses. Leadership Now provided a "working definition" of leadership suggesting "leadership is about shared values, vision, and results. It is exemplified through the work people do, the attitudes they adopt and the potential they realize. But it all begins with an intention to influence others…Leadership is intentional influence" (Kitossa et al., 2019, p. 22). Mullings (2020) suggested Black leadership rooted in neoliberalism existed due to the racial hierarchy that was controlled by White dominant groups in society. BCEL had never been afraid to de-center dominance. Instead, they had always evolved and

thrived within the confines of societal adversities rooted in systemic racism. Historically Black communities used community organizing to advocate against the status quo (Fisher et al., 2018). In fact, BCEL were the creators and inventors of thriving businesses, technology, food, schools, and more. For these reasons, the Black community had always known resilience. Yet research suggested Black organizational leaders were disadvantaged and received negative evaluations likely influenced by stereotypes (Carton & Rosette, 2011). Despite experiences with systematic racism, BCEL could have remained resilient through the process of community organizing. These individuals could have galvanized the community while remaining vigilant in their quest for change. This trait cultivated the resilience in BCEL and their desire to foster healing in their communities.

Black Liberation. In this study, the researcher took the position, similar to (Johnson, 2000) that BCEL believed education was part of the process for liberation for their people. Thevenot (2021) suggested, “Black people resisted and utilized their imaginations and intelligence to innovate ideologies, legal and social processes, and movements to cause upheaval to the societal status quo that denied them education, economic, and political opportunities" (p. 112). The purpose of the Black Social Movement was to critique and dismantle both political and moral institutional racism (Marable, 1998). Also, the dissertation drew upon W.E.B. Du Bois’s (1903, 1989) arguments. Du Bois was concerned with the development of African Americans which predicted that racism would have continued to emerge as one of the United States’ key social problems (Johnson, 2000). Marable (1998) examined different models of Black leadership at the turn of the century and during the Civil Rights Movements. He discussed how these models led to solidarity and intellectual leadership despite racial discrimination within the White working class. For example, many years ago after slavery was abolished, the Tuskegee Institute,

a historically Black college, contributed to increased entrepreneurship and was the home to many different businesses in a Southern Montgomery Black community (Marable, 1998). Similar to some BCEL in the study, these historic Black leaders were connected to the church and used Bible scriptures in the Old Testament for spiritual guidance (Barnes, 2005). The Black Social Movement and Black Leadership model revealed how communities remained resilient and empowered through liberation.

Knowledge Production Among Black Community Educational Leaders

Black Resilience. There was power and resilience inferred through the knowledge production (wisdom) of Black Community Educational Leaders. In fact, Black resilience was birthed and re-configured since the period of slavery and beyond (Clay, 2019). However, more recently it appeared the term 'resilience' was embedded in neoliberalism (Joseph, 2013). BCEL could have demonstrated characteristics of resilience through personal experiences and were able to advocate that youth of color were not lacking grit especially when they often experienced racialized and gendered microaggressions (Hines & Wilmot, 2018). Normative thinking that focused on grit and a growth mindset, "exclude attention to racism" and actually sent a message to students, "sure, racism is tough but if you work hard enough and don't give up, you can learn to deal with it. Just don't give up!" (Drake & Oglesby, 2020, p. 6). In other words, Black leaders generally understood this term (resilience) had become politicized and used as a governmental approach (Joseph, 2013). To counter this notion, the 'ways of knowing' (Dillard, 2021) included a conviction/belief that Blacks must never forget why their ancestors fought the good fight to freedom in order for their leaders to have the wisdom to advocate for access and opportunities. bell hooks (2010), a Black feminist who believed in liberatory pedagogy suggested, "Knowledge rooted in experience shapes what we value and as a consequence how we know what we know as

well as how we use what we know" (p. 8). Her work was rooted in love, justice, and spirituality that challenged the hierarchy of racial oppression (Au, 2022). Relatedly these leaders' knowledge production (wisdom) operated from a social justice framework which factored in the intersectionality of race, class, and trauma from historically marginalized communities (McIntosh, 2019). This scholarly conversation supported my position/understanding that BCEL should have felt a sense of empowerment and have been allowed to contribute their knowledge production (wisdom) to the community at large.

Knowledge Production. Knowledge production (wisdom) of BCEL could have provided insight to the social needs of the schools and communities (Frusciante (2014). Frusciante (2014) discussed the importance of a Knowledge Integrated Strategy that focused on civic engagement in society. Frusciante (2014) defined knowledge production as explicit work revealed in a public shared space from individuals who directly connected a change strategy (i.e. issues of information and resources access, voice, and power) to affect structural inequities in a social context. Knowledge production (wisdom) represented Black Community Educational Leaders' ability through action to provide knowledge of their personal experiences in environments that drove racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities within institutions. It was critical to examine the underlying root causes of these system dynamics. Preuss (2003) defined root cause as "the deepest underlying cause or causes of positive or negative symptoms within any process that, if dissolved, would result in elimination, or substantial reduction, of the symptom" (p. 2). For example, by having a seat at the table BCEL could have provided knowledge about their lived experiences as they related to inequities. Having a seat at the table was defined as individuals such as BCEL not sitting in silence but actively having a voice and influence in practices and/or policy changes. BCEL must not only have had a seat at the table, yet instead

have been actively involved in decision-making at every level in the process (Ogbe, 2022). While at the table these leaders should have engaged in “created dialogue”, a phrase coined by bell hooks. Creative dialogue allowed for identities to have been centered and gave exposure to the oppressor and the oppressed (Au, 2022). Au (2022) suggested involvement would have allowed room for mutual accountability, intentionality, reconciliation (hooks, 2003) and strategies that directly affected youth and community. The skills and concepts of these leaders included building relationships, increasing self-awareness, having a radical imagination, collaborative leadership, and demonstrating empathy. Knowledge production with intentionality led to greater impact and structural changes. Knowledge production should have been exponential and gone beyond equity work (Frusciante, 2014). Thus, the knowledge production of BCEL with intentionality could have influenced higher expectations and improved academic outcomes for Black youth.

Summary

In summary, the researcher compiled theories by providing literature that countered the normative view or “status quo” way of thinking regarding the experiences of Black children and their experiences which informed the methodology, a critical case study in the following chapter. The research questions in the next section were structured to provide counter-storytelling perspectives from Black Community Educational leaders concerning their lived experiences in schools and communities.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Eleven Black Community Educational Leaders (BCEL) were interviewed in a critical case study (Yin, 2013). The researcher drew from Yin (2013) to define the ways in which to approach this critical case study. Another term for case study research included a bounded system when reporting on events that happened to a person in a single unit at a particular point (Terrell, 2016). Case study methodology was selected because it allowed for first-hand examination of critical issues in education that directly affected Black children. Next were guided research questions regarding the overall themes of the study. To present and analyze data, the researcher utilized the CRT tenet of counternarratives (storytelling) (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001). Explicitly, the experiences of BCEL using counter-narratives were be used to oppose the normative views to develop anti-racist school identity, promote activism, disrupt majoritarian narratives, and cure silencing (Blaisdell, 2021). In fact, the importance of stories and oral language and knowledge (wisdom) sharing was pivotal. With the limited discussion on race and colonial practices in the trauma field (Quiros et al., 2020) there was a need to elevate people of color and their race-related traumatic experiences to expose the lack of access and opportunities due to systemic injustices. Informed by Critical Race Theory, Community Cultural Wealth, Yosso (2005) viewed students through a multifaceted lens and debunked the myth that students of color came to the classroom with cultural deficiencies. Together these conceptual frameworks were used to combat dominant culture narratives that "resists erasure and creates space for community voices to create the narrative that defines their own experiences and lives" (Castelli, 2024).

This researcher investigation was nested within a larger community-based research project for the purpose of social change (see Howard & Baker, 2021). BCEL was the critical case

study connected to the network that was referred to here as “FTK” (pseudonym). This was a network of researchers and community leaders committed to interrupting and addressing injustices in education that disproportionately affected Black children's academic and psychological needs. In this study the research questions were as follows:

In what ways do Black Community Educational Leaders involved in advocacy for educational equity conceptualize the schooling experiences of under-served Black students?

1. How do Black Community Educational Leaders describe the root causes of racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities in schools and communities?
2. To what extent do Black Community Educational Leaders believe cultural incompetence lead to school removal of Black children?
3. What strategies or recommendations have Black Community Educational Leaders made or suggested reducing school exclusion?

Research Design

To explore research questions a critical case research design was utilized to understand an in-depth contextual study of a person, people, issue, and place within a predetermined scope of the study (Bhattacharya, 2017). In addition, this methodology generally focused on the role of the social structures of oppression both singular and intersected categories which played out through the lived experiences of people (Bhattacharya, 2017). Baxter and Jack (2008) used research from (Yin, 2003) to determine the root causes in a case study approach. Specifically they indicated, “a ‘case study design should be considered when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in

the study; (c) you want to cover textual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; (d) or the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context" (p. 545). BCEL was nominated for this case study by the community. The goal through the influence of knowledge production was for these individuals to bring awareness and solutions to the root causes of systemic injustices in education and communities. CRT informed the questions and interpretations of data by centering the voices of Black leaders who had direct knowledge and experiences working in education and through their grassroot work in communities.

Context

In this midwestern city, this study focused on parts of the area known as the Promise Neighborhood (PN), also known as the "urban" part of town. Mostly Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) resided in these geographical locations. These particular geographical locations were recently awarded funding from the federal government through the US Department of Education to support the needs of youth and families in the community concentrated by poverty and low performing schools. Although Black Community Educational Leaders (BCEL) were known for advocating throughout the entire city, the Promise Neighborhood (PN) communities were high on the list of priorities. The PN communities in this city encompassed a little over 23, 000 residents. The purpose of the PN was to support the under-resourced communities challenged by poverty and low educational attainment. The goal was for multiple community partners to collectively provide community capacity building, high-quality education, access, opportunity, and exposure to children living in distressed communities.

Black Community Educational Leaders and the people in these communities were asking the question, "Kasserian Ingera" (Boutte, 2015). This was a traditional African greeting passed

down by the Masai warriors that meant, And How Are the Children? Specifically, this greeting placed high value on well-being. To help answer this question in this midsize city, design-thinking and community voice sessions were held by one of the local universities and a well-known community partner. The goal was to capture the voices of the youth, community, leaders, educators, and stakeholders to contextualize the hopes and dreams of people living in the community. In order to address the root causes of disparities and to hear the voices of the people a group of targeted community partners collaborated using evidenced-based action and solutions. These partners included but were not limited to the local school corporation, universities, banks, health department, housing, food security, hospitals, police department, and churches. In this midwestern city the PN covered a total of six schools. The PN grant measured, but was not limited to, academic proficiency, chronic absenteeism, behavior, unemployment rates, health, family stability programs, community safety, violence prevention, high-quality afterschool programs and more. The end goal was for the entire community to declare, “all the children are well”. Through shared governance, the knowledge production of BCEL could have helped to inform important decisions in addressing the well-being and critical needs of children and families in these concentrated locations.

Community Nomination Process

IRB approval was obtained and a social media outlet was utilized to post a promotional flier on a community network called “FTK” to seek community input in nominating potential BCEL for the study. Community members used the information on the promotional flier to contact the researcher (i.e. via email, via phone) to nominate BCEL. Black Community Educational Leaders were people who currently or previously worked in education and were known for their impact and contributions on a structural level in areas such as spirituality, mental

health, housing, education and advocacy for the wellness of Black people in a particular community (see Appendix D for list of terms). Community members were informed the potential nominees must have met all of the following criteria:

- Must be at or over the age of 18 years old
- Must be someone whom the nominees believed self-identified as Black or African American
- Must have previously worked, currently worked, or retired in education (i.e. administrator, professor, teacher, bus driver, cafeteria, paraprofessionals etc)
- Must be actively engaged in the community which looks like collaborating with organizations, thought leaders, conducting and participating in community-outreach, advocated for transformative education, demonstrated the ability to cultivate community voice, demonstrated the ability to work with others with opposing viewpoints, and demonstrated a commitment to fair and equitable practices for Black children

After the email and phone responses were received, I followed up with each community nominee using a recruitment script. The recruitment script was read to each one of the members that met the criterion previously mentioned. After the nomination process was completed, the findings were reviewed by the researcher. Nominations were organized on a Google spreadsheet. I intentionally sought diverse representation across four generations of Black community leaders in education. Diverse representation included various ages, community experiences, education, and work experience in education. After analyzing the demographics and considering all categories, 11 nominated participants were selected out of 14 to participate in the study. Initially,

the research design intended to interview seven participants but after checking the data, I decided to increase the number to ensure a more diverse representation in all categories besides just the names of potential participants. Participants were asked to confirm that they self-identified as Black or African American. It was confirmed by each individual their connection to the city and education. This information (connection to the city and education) was captured during the first round of interviews under the demographic section. All responded and stated at one point they used to live or currently resided in the city. All of these individuals were known for their civic engagement in education and the community. The participants were connected to different community boards, worked directly with youth, were part of grassroot organizations, connected to the churches, and worked in collaboration with various organizations throughout the community. The leadership efforts of these individuals in the community had been known to impact many children and families over numerous generations.

Positionality

The passion for this work lay deeply within my being and began in the Mississippi Delta, the place where the I was born. My father, a social justice activist, resided in the Mississippi Delta his entire life. He was passionate about community organizing and campaigned for historic and successful elections in the Black community. The murder and lynching of Emmett Till, a historic case galvanizing the civil rights movement occurred in Tallahatchie County (Baker, 2006). Both Till (1955) and the body of my late father (2022) were laid to rest at the same funeral home in this historic Black community.

The motivation to enroll into the doctoral program was sparked by the murder of George Floyd in March of 2020. In the opinion of the researcher, this incident mirrored the modern-day

civil rights movement. After this tragic event, I felt compelled to further my education and community advocacy in under-served communities. Since being enrolled in the program, I experienced several affirming moments. The first experience happened one night as the I was deeply engulfed in writing. Out of nowhere I became overwhelmed with emotions as tears began to uncontrollably fall from my face as I was sitting in the kitchen at the table in deep thought writing in the wee hours of the morning. The second tearful moment, I was sitting on the couch at 2:00 a.m. writing while watching an entertaining college football game. Both of these intimate experiences validated my deep connection to this topic.

I considered myself an advocate and BCEL. The work of community organizing defined my passion and purpose in life. I worked closely with many community leaders both Black and non-Black doing community-based organizing. I supported and advocated for individuals from all different backgrounds and ethnicities. I was actively involved in several different grassroots community organizing groups, particularly in under-resourced communities. My research perspective was based on the ways that I had transformed as a teacher, advocate, and community leader throughout my career. It was through these efforts I was able to get to experience the knowledge production (profound wisdom) from various leaders in unique roles. I had been interested and actively engaged in public service work since 14 years of age. I received a bachelor's degree in the field of Social Work. Most of the researcher's time had been spent working with diverse youth in general, and special education. During my undergraduate career, I worked as a child and adolescent therapist in education, primarily conducting community-based school and home assessments. As a result, of working primarily with youth of color, my interest in the psychological development of humans became more heightened. I later received two master's degrees, one in Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling and the other in Applied

Behavior Analysis. While on the journey, I found a direct connection between my career interest and the community. I mainly worked with underserved youth and recognized the importance of diverse representation in education. I acknowledged preconceptions brought into the project based on previous personal and professional experiences, current or past theoretical research (Malterud, 2001, p. 484).

Throughout my career I had assessed disproportionality data in all youth including Black youth. These categories included gender, ethnicity, grade level, special education, and free and reduced lunch. I chose to specifically focus on Black youth due to ongoing systems of injustices in education and limited diverse representation of students of color. I had experience conducting functional behavior assessments to determine the root cause of behavior and had spent a number of years conducting one to one restorative justice (practice) sessions with youth, a high percentage being minority students. The youth in this academic instructional program mostly received resolutions to alternative suspensions from their traditional schools due to office discipline referrals but were able to return to their home school after one or two days. Fortunately, most of these students only attended the program once per school year. However, there seemed to have been a small percentage of students who attended the program more than once per year. From my experience, out of these small percent of students who attended the program more than once per year, a noticeable amount of what appeared to have been Black or minority students ended up in the alternative school. In my opinion, it seemed the school removal of these Black and minority youth who were placed into a more restricted academic setting resembled the trajectory of the school-to-prison pipeline. As a result of seeing Black and minority youth, who were intellectually driven and talented, who previously attended the prevention program transition into the alternative setting, I was inspired to help determine the

root causes behind these systemic inequities. While working through these processes, I noticed there appeared to have been a lack of meaningful and trustworthy relationships between the school-home-community. As someone who worked in public education, the goal was to improve these relationships as they were critical when addressing racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities in schools and communities.

One way to improve these relationships was by establishing effective two-way communication between the home-school-community. Personally, I was extremely active in the community and volunteered as a board member for several different organizations. Since the year 2020, I had been highly involved in community-based work. Particularly in one community-based network called “FTK”. In August of 2020, I had been selected as a graduate research assistant to support community-based efforts for the “FTK” network. This network was born from a September 2018 report issued in a midwestern city documenting local disparities where Black and multiracial males were over-represented in school discipline throughout multiple disciplinary categories leading to expulsion (Baker, 2018). The data from the alternative to suspension program mentioned previously was included in this report. This report commissioned by a local organization that centered the health and well-being Black males made it clear that there was important work to have been done locally to ensure Black and multiracial children should have had equal opportunity to quality educational experiences. When this report was shared locally, a number of community members (i.e. pastors, teachers, parents, social workers etc.) voiced they wanted to have been part of positive change. In response, an important next step was to make sense of the perspectives of families about problems, possibilities and solutions relative to educational inequities.

As a result, conversations were formed with the local community. Part of my responsibility as a graduate research assistant in the Educational Leadership doctoral program was to create a community event connected to my passion and interest. I selected a youth town hall composed of a diverse group of middle and high school students. The event took place in March 2021. During the pandemic, youth participants attended the event in-person while the audience watched from home virtually. Issues were discussed related to stereotypes, racism, and mental health. The event was successful and garnered over 3,000 plus viewers on Facebook. The researcher was a Core Leadership team member for the network. The mission stated, "FTK supports and develops support systems that actively engage in connecting the community in ways that empower African American children to reach their full potential."

The focus had always been on wellness and social justice transformation for children and families in education. During the interviews, I was clear about boundaries of only engaging in specific conversation pertaining to the participants and their experiences. I was clear about my stance on understanding the educational system and not engaging in negative conversation. I explained how this behavior ultimately perpetuated the narrative about the education system. I was clear that the purpose was to dig into the potential root causes of racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities to help bring about solution-focused efforts for the betterment of the community. I was in support of using the findings for strategic action and organizing beyond the study (Nadimpali et al., 2016). The goal was to follow-up with each participant post study for ongoing documentation and critical reflection. This looked like sharing findings with the academic institution and community in a town hall format. Particularly, approximately 12 months post town hall, I planned to follow-up with the BCEL about any changes within the academic institution that involved welcoming of their voices to the table to be part of decision-

making process. By being a tool of the research, as the researcher believed I was the perfect person to do this work. I took pride in walking with and alongside community members, youth, educators, and stakeholders to help bring about transformative change.

Research Procedures

Recruitment Process. As mentioned previously during the recruitment process each community member (nominator) was provided the criteria of a Black Community Educational Leader (BCEL). The criteria was referenced above in the participant selection section. Participants in the study were people who were formally nominated by the community as "our" leaders. The nominators consisted of 30 members from the community. The community members who responded to the flier on social media status ranged from, but not limited to, school leaders/staff, physicians, community volunteers/advocates, professors, parents/families, and pastors. It was important for the nominators to have chosen potential participants who not only met the criteria but who also were able to develop positive relationships with the youth (Stukas & Tanti, 2005, p. 245). After gathering this information from the community nominators, it took the researcher to the next step of the analysis phase which was the participant selection process.

Participant Selection

After the community members nominated the BCEL or potential participants in the study, trends were examined in the chart of selected names. Specifically, I analyzed demographic frequency in the following categories (i.e. name, age, race, occupation in education, community involvement) (see Appendix A for community nominee chart). In order to have a balanced number of participants, all demographic variables were considered. For anonymity purposes, the gender of the participants were not included and it was decided to use pseudonym unisex names.

For the reason being, the size of the community was very small, and the participants' identities were to have remained protected as much as possible. Also, all of the participants were college educated and many at the graduate level. This approach provided a variety of perspectives from all different ages and backgrounds. The community members in the nomination process were not part of the actual study. Instead, they only nominated names of BCEL who met the established criteria. From the nominations 11 names were selected for the study. Given the depth of the study, the choice was to focus on a small number of participants in order to provide the opportunity to speak at length with each participant and gain a deeper understanding about their knowledge production (wisdom) and ability to remain resilient through adversity.

After examining the categorized Google spreadsheet with the different demographic variables of the BCEL, the potential nominees had been contacted. It was explained to each nominee the purpose of the call and how they were selected by community members as Black community leaders in education. Next the verbal recruitment script was read to each nominee to provide an understanding of how and why they were selected by the community. After reading the recruitment script, they were invited to participate in the study. This invitation took place via phone. It was also explained to each nominee the importance of privacy and confidentiality. The names of community members were not disclosed to participants who nominated them for the study. Once the nominees were in agreement to participate, from that point, the process to officially address each one of them as participants in the study began. Next was the demographic information of the BCEL in the study.

Table 1

Black Community Educational Leader Selected Participant Demographics

Leaders of the Community	Age Range	Occupation	Community Involvement
Renee	30-35	School Teacher	Community Organizer
Riley	35-40	School Administrator	Community Organizer
Kerry	50-55	Public Servant	Community Organizer
Drew	50-55	School Administrator	Community Organizer
Jamie	70-75	Long-time educator, School Teacher	Community Organizer
Monroe	70-75	Long-time educator, School Administrator	Community Organizer
Santana	70-75	School Administrator	Community Organizer
Channing	80-85	Long-time educator, School Teacher	Community Organizer
Harper	30-35	School Leader	Community Organizer
Charlie	65-70	School Administrator	Community Organizer
Angel	65-70	Long-time educator, School Leader	Community Organizer

Both rounds of interviews combined were estimated at a total of 20 hours. In addition, there was approximately 250 years of education experience among 11 Black Community Educational Leaders. The BCEL (participants) lives spanned over four generations. The ages

ranged from 30-85 years old. The median age was 58 years old. Over half of the participants at one point in their lives reported living in the Promise Neighborhood, some still currently resided in the area. Most of the participants reported having children and some grandchildren. All participants reported having a bachelor's degree or higher. One of the nominated participants moved away approximately 16 years ago but at one point resided in the city for 40 plus years. Some of the participants reported never having Black educators in school. While some reported having very few Black educators and some reported several Black educators while in school. All participants were highly immersed in community-based work, especially in the Black community.

Post Selection Process

After the nomination process was completed by the community members, the interviews began with the BCEL (participants) who agreed to participate in the study. These individuals, past and present educators, demonstrated in-depth knowledge about the systematic issues which plagued schools and communities. In addition, they were able to provide examples about how their leadership efforts had positively impacted the community, particularly as it related to racialized disparities in education toward Black youth. Their efforts were also aligned with advocacy and education reform that strove to transform the lives of youth in schools and communities. The researcher considered the intersectionality of identity and experiences of these community leaders. The participants in the study spoke English and self-identified as Black or African American. Since English was the researchers first and only language, and the predominant language of the Black population in this community, it was decided to make this the primary communication method for the research study. The next section explained data collection and the analysis process.

Data Collection

The art of storytelling using qualitative research allowed the Black Community Educational Leaders to highlight injustices in various ways. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018) qualitative data collection was more than just single data sources such as interviews, focus groups, or observations. It also could have documents (e.g. public documents, meetings, minutes, or newspapers and journals, diaries, or letters) and audiovisual digital materials (i.e. photographs, videotapes, art objects, computer messages, sound, and film) (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The purpose of qualitative research in this study was to understand, interrogate, and deconstruct BCEL experiences (Bhattacharya, 2017). In particular this process was informed by the researcher's conceptual framework which provided a critical approach to the root causes of BCEL knowledge production about Black youth and inequities in education. In the research study multiple forms of data were collected. This included interviews (first round) and member checks (second round) as part of a case study. The following listed the various steps of the data collection process.

1. **Preparing for the Interviews and Member Checking.** Each interview session was audio and video recorded electronically using a video conference. Each participant agreed to written and verbal informed consent prior to the interview. Audio and video recordings were temporarily stored in Google Drive in a password protected computer. The files were destroyed once de-identifiable transcripts were created. This included transcripts of interviews, audio, and video files. For the first round of interviews, the interview questions were sent to each participant at least one week in advance prior to review (Appendix B).

2. **First Round Interviews.** Qualitative open-ended and semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with each participant. Miles et al. (2020) described open-ended interviews as data being "co-authored and not collected" (p. 31). This approach allowed for the exploration of a more in-depth and complex perspective of the participants. Similarly, the semi-structured approach was utilized, skipping any redundant information, revising, and/or adjusting the amount of collected information (Terrell, 2016). Both of these approaches provided the option of interviewing each participant in-person or via video conference (audio and video) only. The first round of interviews took approximately 60-90 minutes to complete. For this round, all but one interview was in-person. This participant opted to participate via phone. The following was an example of a potential question which was asked during the first round of the interview process. What was the epiphany moment that caused you to see yourself beyond the moment, to a place of achievement, success, or excellence? Consistent questions were used during the interview process to ensure continuity and validity. All of these interview questions were housed in Appendix B.
3. **Post-Interview Clarity.** After initial questions were answered, each participant was asked their personal feelings toward the study or if they would have liked to clarify, or needed any questions clarified before the interview ended. At any point in this research project, the participants had ability and agency to decline their interview to have been utilized for this study- or to have any pieces of their interview redacted from the final transcript. The transcript was automatically transcribed through the video conference platform.

4. **Member Checking Interviews.** After the first round of interviews, the second and the final round of members check interviews had been completed with each participant. All of the second round interviews were conducted via video conference except for one participant (via phone). During the member check interviews, clarifying questions were asked about information that emerged from the first round of interviews. This step was supported by (Terrell, 2016) who described member checking as going back to meet with each participant and reviewing the original interview transcription to ensure they agreed it accurately measured the previous conversation. The first round of interviews and the member check phases of the interviews took place in a desired and agreed upon location at their homes, via phone (one participant), at the local library, and via video conference. As a guaranteed option, the researcher reserved the library in advance as a stand-alone location to meet with each participant. The researcher informed each participant and provided a reminder option about the reserved location at the library. The second-round member check interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes. The member check interviews were scheduled approximately one week after the first round of interviews. During the interviews BCEL (participants) were given the opportunity to provide historical artifacts. Because each participant graciously gave up their valuable time, at the end of the interviews, each one of them was offered $25.00 visa gift card. All participants accepted the offer. One participant opted for their gift card in-person. The remainder of the gift cards were sent electronically to their email addresses and mobile devices. See Appendix B for interview questions. See Appendix C for the interview protocol.

Analysis

After audio and video files were turned into transcriptions automatically through the video platform, editing of the document for readability and clarity occurred in this stage of the analysis. After the transcripts were clarified, the coding process began using the conceptual framework of the critical approach to knowledge production of counter-storytelling and asset-based analysis to confront and address structural disparities in schools and communities. Using the transcript data, common codes were identified and documented on a table. Some of the common codes were accountability, historical context, high expectations, cultural training, relationships, and healing. Thematic analysis used stories told through inductive analysis. An example of inductive analysis was reflecting and chunking data into small categories throughout the process (Bhattacharya, 2017). Thematic narratives allowed people to center and provide meaning to their lived experiences (Bhattacharya, 2017). Next, the codes were arranged to support themes that supported the need for improved school and community relationships in education. The themes were a). Root causes of racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities b). Cultural competence (self-awareness) was lacking among local educational systems and c). Strategies and recommendations to reduce racist exclusionary practices and structural inequities. Stories and the words of the participants were used to create counter narratives that challenged the normative view or status quo for each theme. This information demonstrated Black knowledge and statements about how schools often left these voices outside of the decision-making process. This engagement with the critical framework informed the researcher of the ways BCEL held knowledge production (wisdom) to correct deficit-based practices in education within these communities.

Validity

It was important for this research to truly reflect accurate knowledge production (wisdom) perspectives of the Black Community Educational Leaders (BCEL). Miles et al. (2020) discussed the importance of ontological and epistemological positions such as credibility, dependability, and control for bias when assessing trustworthiness and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell and Miller (2000) described qualitative validity or credibility as a key asset that measured accuracy in findings from the perspective of the researcher, participant, and readers. Dependability measured consistency, quality, and integrity (Miles et al., 2020). The researcher had prolonged involvement with some of the participants in the research study which increased trustworthiness and decreased possible threats of reactivity and respondent bias. The researcher had volunteered intensely doing intentional community-based work to address systemic injustices in education over the last several years. Personal bias was acknowledged (Creswell & Poth, 2018) due to previous and current relationships in the community. However, the past experiences of the researcher and knowledge offered a great deal of insight that represented this connection. In addition, presuppositions about their shared experiences, documented thoughts, negotiations, interpretations, reminders, and personal experiences related to the investigator (Bhattacharya, 2017). Along with the researcher's identity as Black woman and current position in education, yet the researcher considered her identity as a strength and an important connection to understanding the deep-rooted issues of Black children and families in the community. Data was triangulated from both rounds of interviews. It was important to capture marginal notes written in real time throughout the process. I captured direct quotes from each participant, which further amplified their voices. A streamlined system was developed to capture memos throughout the interviews. For example, the interview questions were printed off

(see Appendix B) for each participant and notes were written throughout the paper. The notes were then transferred into the Google spreadsheet to summarize thoughts and interpretations. Writing memos in addition to coding was extremely helpful in organizing and analyzing data in reasonable chunks when sitting down and writing the findings for the summary. During the interviews, clear rules were established (Yin, 2011) for all participants to decrease the chances of bias. Meaning, interviewees' own words were used and phrases by repeating their responses back to them. The overall goal was for the messaging in the community to have been concise and accurate.

Limitations

This study was limited by context (a midwestern city) and perhaps it might have looked differently in an urban city. An in-depth analysis of BCEL and their offerings were contributed through knowledge production (wisdom) in schools and communities. For some mobility, access to email, and location served as a potential barrier. For example, one of the leaders lived out of town and could only meet via phone. There was limited data due to the 11 individual's willingness and ability to participate in the study. This meant the number of participants in the study did not generalize or reflect most of the overall population.

The BCEL participants who were nominated by the community members for the study served as a delimitation. Even though many individuals were nominated by the community, not all were able to participate in the study due to not fully meeting the established criteria or the researcher not having the time and/or capacity to interview everyone. Also, the specific criteria to be a Black Community Educational Leadership participant, self-identification as Black or African American, work experience, and active community engagement limited chances of participation in the study. This criterion potentially eliminated certain individuals from

participating. For example, the researcher was personally aware of other Black and non-Black community leaders (i.e. pastors, family members, youth leaders, physicians etc) who did not work in education but have had an education focus, particularly for disenfranchised communities. These specific requirements ensured the nominated participants in the study community engagement and career experiences aligned with the overall research purposes. Even though all the participants in the study were college educated and many at the graduate level, there was surely Black and non-Black community leaders who were not as educated yet tremendously impacted the community in many different ways. Language served as another possible limitation as English was the preferred language of choice. Meaning, there were people who identified as Black but may have spoken another language. In this process the researcher assumed community members were being honest about their choice of nominations. In addition, there likely were people who did not know about the nomination process due to not being on social media or connected to the social media page. Each leader (participant) was different based on their personal experiences and demographics, although many did share similar characteristics and perspectives about racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities in education and communities. Also, time constraints, physical health, and consistent attendance varied depending on the participants availability.

Lastly, the choice was made to report findings in this qualitative manner to really capture the voices and in-depth experiences of BCEL. Particularly the essence of storytelling was critical when trying to confront or address the root causes or “why” about inequities in schools and communities. This method also eliminated assumptions regarding what people needed and provided clarity on how to specifically support the desired need. In the researcher's

personal opinion, attempting to quantify this type of research would silence the voices and real-life experiences of the participants.

Conclusion

In summary, community members nominated the selected 11 Black Community Educational Leaders to participate in the study. The design of this critical case study explored how the wisdom possessed by BCEL could have confronted and addressed the root causes of disparities affecting Black youth in schools and communities. Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) theories informed the analysis. This chapter discussed research questions, research design, context, participation selection, positionality, research procedures, recruitment process, participant selection, data collection, and analysis. The goal was to inform the schools and communities about the value and contributions of knowledge production (wisdom) of BCEL. The following chapter presented analysis through the counter narratives of BCEL to confront and address racialized disparities toward Black youth in schools and communities.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

While the structural inequities leading to the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) were well documented in scholarly literature (see Alexander, 2010; Gordon, 2023; Valandra, 2020), there was surprisingly limited research that centered Black Community Educational Leaders' (BCEL) wisdom and experiences relative to this injustice. To offer a critical perspective on racial disparities directly targeting Black youth, the researcher utilized counter-narratives/storytelling as the methodology to interview 11 BCEL in a critical case study that explored how BCEL possessed profound wisdom that could have confronted and addressed the root causes of racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities that affected Black youth in schools and communities.

Black youth had a significantly higher chance of classroom removal than their historically marginalized peers often based on subjectively interpreted behaviors such as disrespect, overt defiance, disruption, and verbal aggression (Annamma et al., 2019). Monroe, long-time educator and administrator, believed race should not have dictated outcomes for Black students. To illustrate Monroe stated, “As an educator I don't see where there should be a difference between minority students or majority students. It is a flat line. Race should not play a role” (personal interview, August 15, 2023). While many educators and citizens agreed that race should not have played a role in a quality education, racial inequity in discipline still remained a serious issue (Darensbourg et al., 2010). In fact, exclusionary discipline is linked to higher rates of manifestations, suspensions, expulsions, dropout rates (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018) and low academic performance (Rogers et al., 2022) which increased Black students’ likelihood of being connected to the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP). (Alexander, 2010). To add to the

conversation around disparate schooling outcomes and Black youth over-representations in the STPP, findings from this study highlighted BCEL experiences and insights about these issues. More specifically this study centered the ways that BCEL involved in advocacy for educational equity for Black children described their processes through their wisdom and knowledgeable experiences.

This study asserted there was a crucial need to listen to BCEL who had critical perspectives regarding the factors leading to the STPP as well as strategies and knowledge production (wisdom) that could have changed the course of racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities in education. The findings presented demonstrate that BCEL not only understood the systemic problems that led to the STPP, but they also had a great deal of insight about the changes needed to support Black students who were being failed by schools. The reason that BCEL had important insight about the STPP was because they shared both racial identities and local experiences with educational exclusion with Black students living in what was referred to as the Promise Neighborhood communities in the midwestern city where this study took place. To be clear, Promise Neighborhood were under resourced areas with low performing schools, in mainly urban areas (Horsford & Sampson, 2014). The PN comprised 12 census tracks spanning several miles and had six schools and an estimated population of 23,000 and six distinct communities. Most African Americans in this city resided in two out of six of the census tracts. Over half of the participants in the study at some point reported living in the Promise Neighborhood areas, and several people still lived in this area today. This was significant because for many decades some of the communities in the Promise Neighborhood had been greatly affected by systemic racism and inequality. Additionally, every participant in the study possessed strong professional and personal ties to the Promise

Neighborhood communities. For example, in addition to most of the participants living in the PN areas at some point, participants also reported attending the neighborhood churches, working in the underperforming schools, and actively engagement in community outreach in the area.

At one point in this community, systemic racism was declared a public health crisis by the City Council in 2020 (Common Council of the City of Leefield, VA [pseudonym], 2020). These disparities continue to have been prevalent throughout the community with disproportionately higher rates of Black males being removed from the classroom (Darensbourg et al., 2010). This public health crisis was a problem for everyone in the PN and beyond its boundaries across the city and state. To emphasize this point, Riley, a school administrator stated, “School-to-prison is not just the Black community problem, it's everyone's problem. It's racism” (personal interview, August 16, 2023). This administrator who at the time worked with predominantly Black youth in the PN understood both systemic racism and the STPP was directly linked to the poor academic outcomes in Black youth. In summary, findings from this study spoke to a larger national issue as well as a local issue and the findings here related to the knowledge production (wisdom) of BCEL would have helped researchers, educators (audience) to better understand systemic inequities in education.

Findings in this chapter were drawn from 11 interviews with Black Community Educational leaders who were asked to describe their experiences with racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities in education. Findings were organized into three themes which described the leaders’ perspectives of these disparities in education. These themes included: (1) Root causes of racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities, (2) Cultural competence is lacking among educational systems and, (3) Strategies and recommendations for

reducing racist practices and structural inequities in education. In what follows, the names of each theme and the counter narratives were organized into short vignettes supporting each theme. The vignettes highlighted BCEL perspectives about much needed improvements across education and community spaces if the goal was to address structural practices and inequities in Black youth.

Summary of Findings

BCEL provided profound wisdom about the current disparities in education towards Black youth. The overall findings aligned to the current disproportionate statistics in African Americans and the consequences of the lack of cultural awareness in education. In what follows, the research questions organize the argument of the normative (status quo) versus the counter perspectives.

Research Question 1: How do Black Community Educational Leaders (BCEL) describe the root causes of racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities in schools and communities?

Root Causes for Racialized Exclusionary Practices and Structural Inequities

Brown v. Board in 1954 deemed segregation in public education unconstitutional yet inequities in schools and communities still existed (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014). To counter this notion, BCEL confronted and addressed the root causes of racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities in a variety of ways.

Historical context of racism that began before this generation and is still observable today. In ways that signify permanence of racism- CRT (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

Most believed segregation ended after Brown v. Board of education in Topeka, Kansas in 1954 (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014). To counter this notion, the wisdom from the participants in the study spoke to the importance of the historical context in the city and how it seemingly

contributed to the current state of education for Black youth. Payne et al. (2023) research supported the connection between the historical context and how the "problematic educational legacy" was directly linked to the present experiences of Black youth in the community. Explicitly, it was important to acknowledge the deep history of systemic racism and the impact of White supremacy in the entire community. Charlie, a school administrator illustrated this by discussing the impact of desegregation and the connection to current inequities in the Black community, particularly in education. Charlie indicated,

> The history of forced integration bussing…segregation bussing influenced the entire city. Bussing is a one-way street. There were no programs put in place to address the needs of students that were being bussed out of the communities they lived in. That lessened the strong sense of community that was once inner city when kids walked to school that was only a few blocks from their home. It destroyed a strong sense of community, opportunities for healthy socialization among each other, them being able to engage with each other in recreational pursuits as well as general activities that occur in and out of the community. In my opinion, the ramifications to this is…this has morphed into disconnectedness and the school-to-prison pipeline (personal interview, August 17, 2023).

This participant expressed dissatisfaction with the way desegregation was delivered. Particularly the way Black children were uprooted from their tight-knit communities and sent to a place where they did not feel comfortable and without proper resources to support their academic and psychosocial needs.

Historically Black School. Several participants discussed their personal experiences in what was once, in their opinions, a tight-knit African American community that supported the

academic success of African American students. For example, Jamie, long-time educator, schoolteacher stated, “Tight-knit neighborhoods made a difference back in the day” (personal interview, September 8, 2023). Particularly Jamie spoke about a historically Black school in this community that once thrived academically and produced successful Black leaders. Another participant, Charlie suggested,

> In the inner city back in the day you had police officers, juvenile officers, teachers, counselors, principals who lived in the same neighborhood but that strong sense of community does not exist anymore. Many of those individuals are removed from the neighborhood and no longer have contact to the individuals they serve and that in itself is a detriment to cultural competency (personal interview, August 17, 2023).

Jamie provided an example of the once thriving (academically) historically Black school in the Promise Neighborhood. Stating,

> Marshall School (pseudonym), that used to be historically Black…a lot of those kids were part of the national honor society. Many famous Blacks came out of Marshall. Now it seems they don't have what they had back then with those teachers. I would like to see the old Marshall school flow through our system again for our children (personal interview, September 8, 2023).

To provide some background, Marshall was a historically Black school that was built in GreekTown (pseudonym) in an area that once thrived yet was affected by racism and segregation and now considered a PN community. The history of systemic racism was deeply embedded within the community. Riley discussed the history of racism and segregation in this particular area that most people now call, “Greektown” (pseudonym). Riley suggested the current data and

statistics in education spoke directly to the segregation of Black students in this area. Specifically stating,

> Marshall Ave, a lot of people call it "Greektown." It is still segregated when you think of all of the schools located on the [named a specific side of town]. Still there is a divide when looking at African American students in one place and this includes looking at demographic data. It shows more poverty and low income for people living in that area. Going back years ago you can see the same thing happening then (personal interview, August 16, 2023).

Riley's statement insinuated that racial inequities in school exclusion had been happening for many decades. The alarming statistics about Black children being suspended, expelled, and dropping out of school was not a new phenomenon. In fact, Channing, the oldest participant, and a long-time educator, schoolteacher discussed the effects of segregation in Black youth over many decades. Channing suggested,

> Segregation is all over. Black kids dropping out left and right and not graduating from high school did not just start….it happened many years ago. As a teacher, there were times I would walk into the school building and the Klan would be advertising on the sidewalk to try and get people to join [not me of course]. They would write with chalk on the sidewalk to recruit. I would see it and just walk into the building (phone interview, September 14, 2023).

Although this participant reported direct experiences with White supremacy for many years, at this time in the community, there seemed to have been minimal conversations about the connection between the history of racism and current outcomes for Black youth. Harper, school leader, suggested, “No one is willing to have that conversation about the history of the city and

until honest conversations are had there is no way out for real outcomes to make change" (personal interview, August 29, 2023). Similarly, Monroe discussed the importance of not living in the past and being open to change, illustrating,

> We cannot operate from the same vantage point from 40-50 years ago. There are intentional lines drawn and people who do not fit in a particular area are ignored. The biggest problem is complacency. We have to first recognize that we have exclusionary problems and put the right people in positions to solve the problem (personal interviews, August 15, 2023).

Lastly the participants in the study suggested the success of Black youth was connected to their education experiences. Drew, school administrator stated, "The way we treat, kick out, exclude, and label is about history. The long connected history to White supremacy cannot be understated. Where you go in life is a direct reflection of your education journey, and yes there are exceptions" (personal interview, September 2, 2023). The BCEL in the study countered the normative way (or status quo) way of thinking about Black youth and their experiences with their in-depth wisdom and experiences about racialized outcomes in education that was seemingly linked to the history of racism in the community.

Accountability is Lacking but Urgently Needed

In this section, the status quo view of thinking is that Black students did not deserve accountability. Wisdom examining how participants described a lack of accountability in relationship to racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities for Black students in schools primarily within the Promise Neighborhood communities was shared. Participants provided a critique of a lack of accountability and the need for accountability. For example, participants were very clear in the interviews that professional educators across the school

system as well as the Black community must have shared accountability for the current state of academic and behavioral outcomes in Black youth. Participants attributed a lack of accountability in education to the unrest and resistance within PN schools by the Black community. Black Community Educational Leaders living and working in the PN communities had experienced inequities in education for many years. Unrest meant leaders were speaking out against education inequality, housing inequality, food scarcity, systemic racism, mass incarceration, and when prompted, inequitable law enforcement practices. Drew stated,

> School is the hub of life and the center to what is going on…deep emotions that have served generations of people. Black and brown people, people from low SES, people are tired about what is not happening, so the unrest is not ceasing (personal interview, September 2, 2023).

BCEL was clear that accountability would require intentional disruptions to the status quo. This would include changes such as acknowledging there was a problem in education, particularly with Black youth and potentially disciplinary action or changes in position for adults in power as a means of holding people responsible for better outcomes. In terms of acknowledging the current practices and structures in education, Monroe stated,

> You [education system] don't get it because you don't want to get it, because to get it, requires a level of accountability. What we all do and your refusal to acknowledge tells me a lot. When we acknowledge it, it gives us the opportunity to grow (personal interview, August 15, 2023).

Accountability was a key factor in academic institutions improving their structures and practices to ensure all children received equitable opportunities in education. It was also a way for teachers to build developmental skills and foster ownership in students. Angel, long-time

educator, school leader stated, “You have to have them [community members] at the table of decision-making. They are an afterthought and not a fore thought. They [academic institution] must hold themselves accountable” (personal interview, August 23, 2023). Across multiple interviews, participants called for BCEL to be invited to have been a proverbial table if schools and the district was serious about making equitable changes moving forward.

BCEL participants spoke compassionately about the responsibility of families and the entire community to help support the academic institutions in educating Black youth. In regards to holding families of Black youth accountable, Jamie gave a version of the following stuck point where families held themselves accountable. Specifically, Jamie talked about the difference active family engagement made in student performance. Jamie asked, “How do we help them [family] but at the same time holding them accountable and letting them know they have to do something” (personal interview, September 8, 2023)? This message from the participant confirmed the importance of BCEL supporting families in the community yet also encouraging active participation in the academic success of their children.

Part of the accountability that BCEL named came from open and authentic communication which brought awareness to terms such as the school-to-prison pipeline. Kerry, a public servant, provided an example about being intentional when using less jargon to help families understand the context in order to have meaningful conversations. Kerry suggested, “Having conversations and telling people what the school-to-prison pipeline is, is extremely important. We have to stop using fancy words. It’s time to have a conversation” (personal interview, August 23, 2023). It was important for the local community and families of Black youth to have an equal understanding about the ramifications of the STPP and the effects on Black youth in education. Accountability was urgently needed to begin reckoning with the

causes of inequities in the community. These intentional efforts included having dialogue with leaders in academic institutions. Harper specifically stated,

> The community needs to have honest and intentional conversations with school leaders. It can be about attendance and literacy. If so, what schools have the greatest needs, what things are in place to support the principal getting to the desired outcomes. Though it is not the real family for some of our youth, somebody's family may be the leadership at the school and where they are getting their direction and guidance. We are all a community (personal interview, August 29, 2023).

BCEL emphasized that accountability required institutional leaders and educators to have vision to see beyond the current system and practices. This meant reimagining a vision that applied to all students and families. This vision was not only the responsibility of the school but the entire community. Drew stated, “There needs to be a much broader vision and what education looks like beyond this city to help move them where they can truly serve students” (personal interview, September 2, 2023). The shared vision also included families, students, stakeholders, and community partners taking responsibility for the dire state of Black youth outcomes. Specifically, Monroe stated, “An entire community should be held accountable for the community” (personal interview, August 25, 2023). In conclusion, accountability involved intentional efforts from the community and academic institutions that involved supporting all children in education. Monroe also said, “The focus should always be intentional with uplifting marginalized kids, not just African American kids but all kids” (personal interview, August 15, 2023). The wisdom of BCEL’s did not only apply to Black children but all children in schools and communities.

Educator Relationship's with School Resource Officers

School Resource Officers (SROs's) were responsible for preventing conflict and keeping students safe. However, BCEL believed subjective perceptions (i.e. overt defiance, verbal aggression, disrespect) dominated or deeply informed intended and unintended consequences and acceleration in the STPP (Annamma et al., 2019). This section provided wisdom from participants about the importance of establishing positive relationships and creating a sense of belonging. For instance, Riley stated, "Sense of belonging comes from the community and by community, I mean school as well to create that space" (personal interview, August 16, 2023). Participants also pointed to generations of distrust between schools and Black families. Trustworthiness relationships were the foundation to strong partnerships. To illustrate, Kerry stated,

> If you meet the parents and they trust you with their prize possession, they will give you the child (not in the way they want to take them home) but in a trustworthy way. Showing up for the parents and having those uncomfortable conversations is important. When you don't have a family structure, any family will do. Relationships are the most important things outside of getting to school on time (personal interview, August 23, 2023).

Further Riley's analysis suggested the best way to get families and students to go the extra mile was by building meaningful relationships. Being able to connect with students and families on different levels was essential for a positive climate and culture in the classroom. Jamie also suggested that was very necessary to have been vulnerable with students in the classroom. Jamie stated,

> As a teacher I would talk to students and let them know my background [nothing negative]. If they don't identify with you, there's nothing you can do to help. My students

> and I identify with each other. You have to share your story. We have to plant the seed, what can we do to help these young people now. It's everyone's job to save that young person. Anytime you are building more prisons than schools, something is terribly wrong (personal interview, September 8, 2023).

Meaningful relationships also included having open dialogue and showing empathy. Several participants spoke about their relationships with SROs while being an administrator. They also touched on the fractured history of distrust in the African American community with police officers which could have furthered complicated relationships. Santana, a school administrator said,

> Relationships are very important. We have to be truthful enough with our young people to have a conversation with them. We need to help parents understand, they (SROs) are employees of the schools…SROs used to be called Officer Coolness (pseudonym). There were programs and they used to work on specific things with the kids. As an Administrator, I had a relationship with the SROs in my building. This helped the relationship with other students. Now I do realize SROs can exacerbate the chances of student removal from the class and the relationship has not always been a positive experience with the African American community and the police officers. It doesn't help that they are called in for negative things (personal interview, August 22, 2023).

Santana's insight revealed that a positive relationship, no matter if one was an educator or SROs, was the most important aspect to cultivating connections with the youth. Families were their children's first teachers and knew their children the greatest. In this theoretical spirit Drew stated, "Relationships are the driving factors in low academic performance or extracurricular. We need to include families as they are their sons and daughters first teachers and they do know

them best" (personal interview, September 2, 2023). It was important to recognize strained parental relationships with the school system was sometimes likely to have affected the developmental process of a student.

Renee, a schoolteacher, talked directly about the impact positive relationships have on their students, who were mainly from underserved communities. Renee reported witnessing physical responses from students when the "police" were involved. However, Renee noted the more students saw SROs in a positive light, the more likely they were to have felt comfortable. Renee's response,

> If you don't know how to build relationships, you can't connect and that goes for teachers or admin. I think they (SROs) can be beneficial if they are used in a positive way, and they need to be seen in the community. I have had an experience with my students because they are petrified of the police and associate them with being taken away. I have seen physical reactions with them seeing the police. If I see you enough it's not so scary to me but I know it can be hard to make sure all police are doing their job that would be positive for our students to see (personal interview, September 12, 2023).

To be clear, it was not only the role of SROs to connect with students but staff and teachers as well. For example, Harper spoke about the importance of teachers attending cultural events to learn about the environment of their students. Harper specifically stated, "Teachers should attend Black functions. It's something about seeing a child in a different environment than their school environment" (personal interview, August 29, 2023). In addition, Angel illustrated the importance of properly trained SROs and including the parents to help address behavior. Stating,

> Some of our students are extremely hostile because of not what happened in the school but what happened in the community. I do think they (SROs) are needed because we do have hostile kids and you have to be in a safe environment to promote learning and to encourage self-esteem. SROs have to be trained and respect that person as a person. If an officer is caring and willing to go the extra mile, he earns that respect. Admittedly kids have seen some things and as a result, there is distrust (personal interview, August 23, 2023).

Several participants talked about how deficit-based thinking could have increased the chances of Black youth and their connection to the STPP. Riley spoke about the importance of all staff using a growth mindset to create positive relationships. Specifically, Riley stated,

> Anyone that has a negative mindset towards a child exacerbates the chances of the school-to-prison pipeline. Not just non-Black teachers. I have seen negativity pushed by Black teachers as well. All teachers need professional development. Relationships in the schools are essential to a child's development and have the potential to change the trajectory of a student's life. If all the student's encounters are negative, it is going to have a negative impact on that student. From the beginning there should be something set up (personal interview, August 16, 2023).

In summary the participants provided various examples about the importance of developing two-way communication. Participants emphasized relationships as a critical component for educators and SROs. SROs whose presence was often viewed through a negative lens (Gottfredson et al., 2020) were often called into classrooms and school spaces to address conflict that sometimes resulted in removal of the student from the classroom. However, findings were mainly positive about SROs being visible and interacting with students more regularly but

strongly emphasized the need for cultural training and acknowledgement of police brutality in the Black community.

Lack of Asset-Based Expectations Relative to Black Children

In this section BCEL dispelled the normative view of Black youth that narrated their actions and advocacy from a deficit lens. BCEL wisdom centered on the importance of asset-based expectations and excellence in Black youth. This looked like getting to know the students and families beyond the classroom, building rapport, acknowledging their grades and attendance, listening, and understanding the different ways the youth see the world. Harper discussed how current expectations for Black youth were connected to the racialized historically context,

> Given the historical practices with a racial tone, it does not always allow for problems to be solved. It's important for the school-community to collectively meet the kids where they are. Expectations can be clouded by reality. But there needs to be the proper support put in place for the child to meet the expectations. This includes community support, school support or home support (personal interview, August 22, 2023).

On the other hand, Angel believed going beyond the classroom and rewarding students was important. Specifically, Angel stated,

> It starts with opportunities and exposure for our youth. The answer is being clear with the rules and expectations….building rapport. Working with the kids and students long before you get into that scenario of tension. When a kid knows you have their back and is working with them, they are more likely to comply. Good sound report cards. Recognize not only high achievers and kids with sound report cards but kids with Bs plus or average, recognize them as well (personal interview, August 23, 2023).

Recognizing any efforts of students could have improved their motivation and engagement to thrive in schools and communities (Goodenow & Grady, 1993). Several participants spoke of the importance of an asset-based approach even if the students possessed challenging life circumstances. This statement insinuated the unfair assumptions about what students could and could not do was debilitating. Charlie suggested the educational institution was disconnected from the long-term impact of discriminatory practices and believes someone should "Confront them with the realities of student underachievement and how underachievement destroys family legacies" (personal interview, August 21, 2023). In addition, Riley highlighted how all children came from different places and experiences. Particularly Riley implied high expectations looked like providing all students with high-quality opportunities in all schools no matter their socioeconomic status. Riley noted,

> When there is a poverty mindset, there is poverty thinking and what we think kids are capable of doing. I have encouraged educators that just because a kid is from this environmental factor does not mean the kid won't excel. I would like to say things are equitable but they are not. Everyone is not starting the race in the same space. We have to offer the same classes to all students. They have them available to some schools and in some they do not (personal interview, August 16, 2023).

This statement discussed the importance of an asset-based mindset and equitable resources in schools. Another participant, Jamie, expressed that although they understood times have changed, in the past, the education system strongly encouraged students to declare a major and minor in high school. Jamie did not believe these practices were still happening but implied these expectations provided a pathway towards student success. Specifically, Jamie stated,

> At one point, school systems used to tell students they had to declare a major and minor in high school….you were going to know what direction you are going. This set the tone and expectations for the success of our students (personal interview, September 8, 2023).

In conclusion, high expectations for Black children was not only the responsibility of the school system but the entire community. BCEL could have helped influence change through an asset-based lens. Santana stated,

> High expectations not only come from the school but the community as well. We are always pushing them to be productive adults. Everyone is not going to college but you have to work. Helping them to understand finances. Helping young people to understand, learning never stops and is something that happens 24/7. I don't think that we have high enough expectations for children of color. So, they are at a disadvantage because the expectations aren't there and they don't have access to the same things as other kids do (personal interview, August 22, 2023).

It took a holistic approach to address racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities in education. Deficit-based mindsets only further perpetuated the false narratives about the performance of Black youth.

Fear of Black Children. The normative view was that Black children should have been feared. This next section shared wisdom from participants describing the ways in which fear and reluctance to address racialized historical trauma can sometimes lead to overrepresentation and in some cases underrepresentation in fair educational opportunities. Renee discussed how fear manifested through “Stories that get passed on and now we are afraid of something that we have never experienced” (personal interview, September 7, 2023). Riley implied these implications could have had long-term effects on Black children. Suggesting,

> I believe some people operate out of fear. I really want to alleviate fear and talk about Black kids in a way people understand. Every day anyone interacts with a child you are defining moments for them and writing part of their story. So, what you say may be meaningful but for a student it can last them a lifetime. That's why you have to be intentional about what you do and how you do it (personal interview, August 16, 2023).

The previous statement demonstrated the importance of talking about Black children using an empathic tone. Several participants expressed fearful perceptions that tended to stem from unconscious biases that likely required some level of cultural training. Drew took it further and spoke about creating a pipeline for teachers at the university level to help alleviate fear of the unknown. Specifically stating,

> There is so much fear with Black and brown males and they know that and they feel that. So, when we treat you like you are scary, nobody grows and nobody gets better. There needs to be formal training on cultural values and norms. For teachers…starting at the university level and providing resources and experiences when they are teacher candidates" (personal interview, September 2, 2023).

Research suggested fear and anxiety could have led to punitive consequences toward African American males in school (Darensbourg et al., 2010). BCEL participants' insight could have helped provide knowledge and insight about fear through a cultural sensitivity lens by using their wisdom to discuss misperceptions of the Black community.

This section taught the power of systemic racism and the link to current systemic injustices in education. The historical context was the root cause of cultural incompetence which led to a culmination of negative consequences such as lower expectations, bias, and fear of Black

children. The Black Community Educational Leaders countered the status quo thinking and provided wisdom on the importance of building positive relationships using a growth mindset.

Research Question 2: To what extent do Black Community Educational Leaders believe cultural incompetence lead to school removal of Black children?

Lack of Cultural Competence Among Most Educators as a Norm in the School District

The normative educational structure suggested all children should have been treated equally (Espinoza, 2007). However, BCEL counter storytelling strongly suggested a lack of cultural competency was very responsible for the school removal of Black children. Two sub-themes addressed the lack of cultural competence in education: (1) Professional development on implicit bias for educator leaders at the district level, specifically Black culture and history and (2) Professional development on implicit bias at the building level among teachers and support staff, specifically Black culture and history. In this section the researcher challenged the status quo way of thinking by using counter storytelling through the lens of BCEL to address disparities in schools and communities.

Professional Development (District-Level). Countering the normative view that people in leadership roles tended to have been more culturally competent, BCEL suggested that staff begin professional development on implicit bias for educator leaders at the district level, specifically on Black culture and history. Individuals were not consciously aware of personal stereotypes and prejudices (Holroyd, 2015). Monroe stated, “Unconscious and implicit bias is huge” (personal interview, August 15, 2023). In most cases, leadership at the district level was equally lacking cultural knowledge on Black students and families. Study participants demonstrated a shared awareness of the importance of cultural competence training not only for teachers but all school staff. Best practices on cultural training included feedback from both the

district and building level staff (Fullan, 1994). Along with systematic processes in place for the teachers. Charlie suggested at the district-level,

> Programming should be able to prop the education process up, we have to devise a systematic process for propping up the teachers who do not have knowledge of the cultural values of the young people they are serving as well as the education process they are trying to deliver in the classroom (personal interview, August 17, 2023).

Santana suggested school administration and leaders should have allocated time for implementation of the learned practices. The intense mandates for teachers throughout the day left limited time to intentionally build their individual cultural self-awareness.

Santana suggested,

> Teachers need more time to put what they learned into practice in all areas. There needs to be more time for professional development. Time for more discussions. Time to conduct book studies. Has to start with the school leaders and their thinking (personal interview, August 22, 2023).

Deficit-based thinking tended to lower expectations for youth in schools. Drew asked the following question, “What does it look like to have empathy versus sympathy” (personal interview, September 2, 2023)? It seemed sympathy hindered the ability for youth to reach their full potential. Districts without school-wide discipline matrices further increased the chances of disproportionate racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequitable outcomes, particularly in Black youth (Kennedy et al., 2019). Monroe suggested,

> Discipline policies contribute to exclusionary policies and practices. It starts with ownership. We have to communicate the expectations so that the young people can rise to that. The youth should be part of any policies or practices we put in place (personal

interview, August 15, 2023).

Drew discussed equitable outcomes when implementing a discipline matrix, suggesting, “The student code of conduct matrices help exclusionary practices and policies and treat people equitable” (personal interview, September 2, 2023). This matrix could have helped teachers to make informed decisions before removing students from the classroom. Listening to the voices of teachers was critical to the success of students. Harper suggested how cultural competence training not only helped to understand the root cause and built self-awareness, it also built meaningful connections. They talked about the importance of listening to teachers, stating,

> In every school there should be a teacher to connect with the kids. We need to listen to the voices of the teachers. They see things with a different lens. We need to listen to them. (personal interview, August 22, 2023).

The effects on implicit bias at the district level was just as important as the building level. Individuals at the district level tended to create and/or control policies and practices that affected Black youth in school. However, it was also very important for these leaders to have been culturally competent as well about educational inequities. Drew, for instance called for a more neutral approach,

> Outside training and coaching for all staff including central office. A national partnership. First, we have to want to truly hear this or be better. We need to recognize there is a problem. Committing to this is going to be hard and recognize there is a lot we haven't done and there is a lot we will do moving forward (personal interview, September 2, 2023).

In conclusion, implicit bias tended to have been subjective and negative toward certain ethnic groups (Axt et al., 2014). Not having a discipline policy also left room for less objective

perspectives toward certain ethnicities (Axt et al., 2014). As a result of these practices, Black youth had a higher rate of classroom removal, suspensions, and expulsions compared to their peers (Staats, 2014). BCEL's critical insight informed an analysis on universal practices in the district.

Professional Development (Building-Level). In this section I shared wisdom from BCEL about the need for professional development on implicit bias at the building-level among teachers and support staff, specifically Black culture and history. For instance, Renee, a schoolteacher implied most staff were unaware of how their personal values or beliefs impacted the way they perceived and interacted with students. In fact, Renee suggested that "Unconscious and implicit bias-sometimes they don't even know they are acting this way" (personal interview, September 12, 2023). Riley also discussed the harm caused by staff's assumptions about so-called aggressive Black students. Specifically, Riley noted,

> If you assume Black kids are aggressive…Black girls are assumed to be more aggressive…assumption as ghetto or whatever terms. If you already have that assumption about the non-Black students, the Black students even if they didn't trigger are more than likely to get in trouble. When you are a teacher, you have to dig into yourself and understand. All teachers have to take a look at themselves, so they are not biased about things (personal interview, August 16, 2023).

This aggressiveness should have been addressed in cultural training. Monroe suggested,

> We have to look at the demographics of the people who work within the confines of the establishment. Training takes time to get people to a certain level. Frustration takes away because there is not enough time. When you don't understand kids and their background and how they respond, the easiest way to deal with an unruly student is to get

> them out of the classroom or get them in special ed (personal interview, August 15, 2023).

Cultural training for teachers could have improved their understanding of youth before making informed decisions about the trajectory of their education journey.

Professional Development. It appeared teachers working with underserved communities, in some cases were newer, and seemingly ill equipped to effectively work with students of color. Renee suggested in addition to cultural training, there should have been intentional conversations with Black educators who also exhibited cultural biases. Renee touched on how,

> There needs to be explicit professional development, having conversations with Black educators and understanding that some people don't know what they don't know even Black leaders. Unconsciously sometimes they don't even know they are acting this way. Sometimes it's just a lack of knowledge (personal interview, September 7, 2023).

With the changes in State house bills and curriculum throughout the nation about what could and could not have been taught in schools, many teachers felt their individuality and authenticity had been stripped from their teaching abilities as schools were becoming more diverse at a rapid pace throughout the nation (McFarland et al., 2019). Ongoing training and professional development for teachers and staff was needed. Angel stated,

> The training and instruction has to be ongoing, particularly when a teacher has come from an environment that has very little interaction with people of color to really understand kids and work with them. Have to have an environment that encourages… that promotes cultivates a thirst or hunger of aspiration and without such a child who could, perhaps won't, is a child that can but is easily discouraged because this whole thing doesn't work for him or work for her and then you see things that a person really

should do because they don't see any hope or aspiration (personal interview, August 23, 2023).

Channing was the oldest participant in the study who discussed the importance of fostering an environment that empowered Black children. As a teacher who worked in a predominantly White school, Channing spoke about experiences while working with high school students during in-school suspension with Black and brown students with behaviors and disabilities. Channing discussed similarities then that were still happening now at the time of the study. Channing suggested the immediate need for cultural training since these practices were deeply embedded into racial disparities. Specifically stating,

> There needs to be training for everyone. I experienced Black kids and special ed kids in in-school suspension quite often. They all were sent down to me when I was placed in the basement. This has been happening for many years (phone interview, September 14, 2023).

In conclusion, in some cases, Black kids tended to have been labeled as disrespectful, overtly defiant, disruptive, and verbally aggressive (Annamma et al., 2019). These cultural biases were potentially linked to the education workforce where nationally 80% of the teachers were White (Goldenberg, 2014). Although race did not assume a teacher was good or bad, research linked racialized exclusionary practices to White and middle-class teachers from dominant backgrounds (Goldenberg, 2014) to unconscious bias (Delpit, 2006). Cultural training on implicit bias should have been followed-up with actionable strategies to improve critical consciousness in teachers and staff.

Research Question 3: What strategies or recommendations have Black Community Educational Leaders made or suggested reducing school exclusion?

Strategies to Reduced Racialized Exclusionary Practices and Structural Inequities

In this section the status quo viewed students removed from the classroom (exclusionary practices) were to blame based on behavior (Kennedy et al., 2019). To counter this notion, the BCEL were saying, educators needed to understand how Black children learned and how to interpret behavior. African American educators, leaders, and stakeholders must have been included in the policy-making process that informed inclusive practices. The following BCEL discussed the importance of welcoming community voices to the table to help influence structures and practices through collaborative and meaningful home-school-community partnerships, targeted youth engagement programs, and healing-centered engagement practices. Although district-level discipline matrices were mentioned in the previous section, these principles could also have been applied to this section as a universal structure to reduce subjective perspectives in Black youth, likely leading to classroom removal.

Community voice was needed for hiring and retention of African American educators.

In this section the researcher shared wisdom from participants about the need for community voice in hiring and retention of African American educators that would have assisted with interrupting the status quo of minimal teachers of color working in education. The Black community could have spoken directly to the effects of diverse representation in the classroom. Monroe candidly stated, “There needs to be intentionality with hiring people of color” (personal interview, August 25, 2023). Charlie linked an increase in parent and family engagement in education to staff of color working with their children. Specifically, he suggested, “Individual

cultural competency is second nature to many Black leaders and educators therefore advancing the hiring practices of Blacks in the school corporation will increase the likelihood of advancing parent participation in the education process of Black youth" (personal interview, August 21, 2023). Lastly Charlie discussed the organizational structure of the institution as a possible underlying issue for the lack of African American staff and teachers. Specifically implying,

> We need to address the root cause. It seems, we do not have a preparatory process for the recruitment of African American educators. The administration does not value forward-thinking. What does it look like for the school-community to create culturally competent programs with the assistance of municipal government appropriations to build community centers that focus on increasing opportunities for student and overall community engagement (personal interview, August 23, 2023)?

In conclusion there seemed to have been an urgent need to hire African American staff both at the district and building level. With the increased cultural diversity in the classroom, representation mattered in education and communities even more to the students (Goldenberg, 2014). This process required reimagining organizational structures and hiring processes within the institution. Lessons from BCEL could have contributed to redefining the hiring processes in education.

Community voices were welcomed to the table to help influence structures and practices through collaborative and meaningful home-school-community partnerships.

The normative view of the Black community included limited involvement in the education process of their children. In this section the researcher shared wisdom from participants regarding the importance of welcoming community voices to the table to help influence structures and practices through collaborative and meaningful home-school-community

partnerships. It included placing ownership on the education system and the Black community. Collaboration looked like getting all parties involved to work together for one ultimate goal which was thriving students and families in school communities. A place was needed where youth felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings about their education experiences. Santana suggested,

> Particularly with the students, they feel like they are engaged, can talk to the adults about what is going on, them feeling safe, and whatever is going on and they feel like they are not going to be judged and punished and people will listen to them about what they can change and how to better serve students (personal interview, September 14, 2023).

Allowing the voices to be heard were the responsibility of the village. There is a saying, "It takes a village to raise a child." Channing suggested,

> Education systems should get involved with the teachers, parents, and church people. Let them know what they are doing. Let them know it makes a difference. Go to the house and welcome those parents. It makes a difference (phone interview, September 14, 2023).

In addition to collaboration between the home-school-community, another important aspect was listening to each other.

Listening. Listening was one way to center the voices of Black youth and families in the school and communities. The participants in the study discussed how the power of listening could have influenced structural changes. In addition, the participants spoke about the importance of community listening from an education institution and a community listening perspective. Jamie stated,

> The community wants to be heard and feel like people are listening to them. Specifically, young people feel like their friends are listening. They want you to listen to them and know they are not going to always get in trouble. Don't be afraid of the young people, be willing to correct them. Have a relationship not just with them but the whole family (personal interview, August 23, 2023).

The power of listening held strong value and could not have been understated. The BCEL discussed the importance of academic institutions working collaboratively and getting policy makers involved. Santana stated,

> The education system has to have the willingness to be open to hear from the community. It is important to get the policymakers involved. The school and community needs to come together and set goals before they meet with the policy makers to let them know, these are the things we need you to help us with (personal interview, August 28, 2023).

Santana acknowledged there was work to have been done outside of the school and within the Black community to reimagine positive outcomes for Black youth. Suggesting,

> As an African American community, we need to come together and collaborate to tackle 1-2 things. How are we coordinating all of this money to ensure the kids are getting what they need like reading? Talking to parents and letting them know, yes, your child can read but they are not at the level that they need to be. Being out in the community and talking to people to help them understand the struggle. We have to build relationships and help them understand we are not criticizing them and supporting them. It has to be a time parents are available (personal interview, August 28, 2023).

In addition to helping support the parent engagement, Charlie alluded to the obligation of the community to support families. He stated,

> We all have a moral and civic obligation. Like showing up to schools, graduations, recognizing them at their churches, going to the schools and finding the young people who are doing well. Connecting with parents, taking them out to dinner and just letting them know you really appreciate everything they have going on (personal interview, August 23, 2023).

Charlie continued by discussing intentional responsibilities of community leaders outside of the school setting stating, “We have to provide more services to support the community. We have to intentionally engage parents of students that are having adjustment and conduct issues” (personal interview, August 21, 2023). This included advocating for parents and families to connect with teachers about the needs of their children. Kerry suggested, “The parents have got to show interest and encourage the teachers to keep encouraging your child” (personal interview, August 23, 2023).

Parent Advocacy and Voice. One way for parents to show interest was by voicing their concerns to school board members. At these meetings, the school board representatives and central office administrators were readily available to address public comments. Monroe stated,

> The Board of Trustee should be questioning the deepness of exclusionary practices. Identify who the leaders are to bring them in. Who are the minority leaders that people trust and rely on who are committed to working with the education system? We have to listen to the youth. Let them know that their opinion and their voices matter. Have to begin to practice those things that are causing kids to feel excluded. A lot of it is unintentional. As community leaders, we have to go and talk to the parents. Oftentimes it’s about trust and they feel excluded from school (personal interview, August 25, 2023).

Trusting parents/families meant centering their voices in the process. Based on community conversations, it seemed families from underserved communities were unaware of their individual rights for themselves and their children. Renee suggested,

> Board meetings are very important, I would argue 70% of my parents don't have transportation to the board meetings, know when they are, and how they actually work. We have to advocate for all students. We have to educate the educators or admin. We need help from policy makers. We have to start higher than our teachers even though it needs to be there, too. Relationships are important. We need to provide time and space to build those relationships ...be very surprised to see the academic swing and growth if you build those relationships. I know because I did it (personal interview, September 7, 2023).

Based on this statement it appeared board meetings were underutilized by the community. Renee spoke about the importance of these meetings and a way for families to center their voices on changes needed in education. None of this work was possible without viewing parents and/or family as co-authors in the education process. Participants in the study hoped one day, the people in the community would understand the power of their voices. Some even implied the Black people in the community seemingly acted oppressed, depressed, and were lacking hope. Renee, a schoolteacher, spoke compassionately and stated,

> I hope that the community sees there are educators out there who care and want the best for your Black child. We are raising and developing and growing leaders. Community steps start by building the relationship. All of our schools could use a lot more community partners and not just for financial reasons (personal interview, September 11, 2023).

Lastly one participant discussed the power of community voice and how it could have influenced change on many levels. Drew addressed the following critical points,

> How do you get them to recognize their voice and how their collective voice can move mountains? That is how communities change. Community responsibility is not accepting the status quo. Communities should find a policy that they are aiming for. Research what this should look like. What is it that you are wanting? What is the expectation? It will involve a task force of people. Where is the highest achievement happening in public education with Black and brown students? How can you create a proposal for people to come to Leefield [pseudonym] to be a partner (personal interview, September 2, 2023).

The previous participant alluded to the community coming together through galvanizing efforts to change the state of education. Specifically, Charlie suggested,

> There is not enough outreach to grassroot members who may not have the necessary academic preparation but they have an abundance of practical ideas for the advancement of youth in the education process. Such 'common sense realities' possessed by grassroot Black Leaders are cognitively important in developing engaging curriculum that influences student development (personal interview, August 21, 2023).

Centering cultural proficiency created action and ultimately could have shifted mindsets (Brion, 2022). The BCEL in this section revealed the importance of the entire community as a whole using their voice to make the change they wanted to see in education.

Targeted youth engagement programs to support Black youth in schools and communities.

In this section the researcher countered the normative way of viewing "traditional youth programming." Instead, the researcher shared wisdom about targeted culturally relevant

evidenced-based youth engagement programs to support Black youth in schools and communities. Although teachers in the classroom spent the most time with students, Renee suggested schools should have been a "safe space" for children after hours. Renee stated,

> It comes down to more than being a classroom teacher. Schools should invite the community beyond just school events and community partners should share what they can offer so it can be mutual and happening both ways. For example, are you opening up the schools for kids to play basketball after school to give the kids a safe space (personal interview, September 7, 2023)?

Additionally inviting community-based organizations such as mentors into the schools also makes a difference.

Mentoring. In some cases, BCEL was involved with before, during, and after school programming such as transportation, tutoring, and mentoring to counteract the status quo perspectives. Channing stated, "You got to check up on them. You have to put them in some type of club and kids in this club usually get scholarships…with youth, you have to share interest and be genuine" (phone interview, September 14, 2023). Drew advocated for exposing youth to opportunities beyond the midwestern city. Specifically stating,

> There should be different programs. Send them outside of Leefield (pseudonym) on college campuses elsewhere. There needs to be an external force to help move the youth and work forward. Demonstrate consistently, be a voice, demonstrate and remind them of the other places, remind them of all Black students are doing other places. We need to be reaching back to make sure other people have the same opportunities and more (personal interview, September 2, 2023).

BCEL could have served as a buffer to provide support to youth during school and after hours. Monroe asked the question, “What resources do we have between the hours of 3-7? Oftentimes barriers are that they have to be involved in transportation” (personal interview, August 25, 2023). These resources would not only have benefited Black children but all children. Monroe made it clear, “Marginalized groups are not the only one's committing violent crimes in our communities” (personal interview, August 25, 2023). Many participants in the study spoke about the importance of having a positive role model. There was strong research to support the impact of school-based mentoring. A study conducted by Watson et al. (2016) suggested the Black and Latino participants attributed having a mentor at school as a “humanizing” experience that gave them a sense of purpose. Mentorship could have served various roles to youth. In more recent years the wait time for mental health support for youth was extensive. In some cases, families were reporting long wait periods of six months or longer to see mental health professionals. School social workers and counselors were inundated with large caseloads of students who needed additional social emotional support. As Kerry stated,

> Biggest thing we need to do right now is to focus on attendance and then go deeper and focus on the why…so many barriers and a lot of parents who do not trust the system. We have to identify the problem. There is a root to every problem. If the community brings resources together and changes our mindset about what resources are. We all can do it together (personal interview, August 23, 2023).

It appeared Charlie echoed the sentiment of youth mentoring programs for Black youth. Suggesting paid positions and grassroots efforts were needed to develop a curriculum that provided better developmental opportunities for Black youth. Charlie suggested,

> We have programs that no longer exist such as Paper Academy (pseudonym). College

> prep classes, GED classes, career awareness classes that played an intricate role in the community. We need more peer mentoring. Large and small group programming that provides STEM…meet the youth at their point of need. Culturally relevant programming. Paid positions as advisors to the school corporation will open up ideas for programming to enhance student learning (personal interview, August 17, 2023).

Harper seemingly disagreed with some of the current programming to support Black youth. Harper also raised questions about the success or outcomes within these organizations. Specifically, Harper stated,

> There are a lot of people doing things with youth but they have to ensure they are effective in ensuring academic success. We should ensure that students still come every day as a requirement to improve literacy. There are things we can do to encourage literacy and healthy behaviors. Tutoring, exposure, opportunities and beyond. Making sure reading levels are where there are supposed to be. There are a lot of kids who aspire to go to college but have no clue of what that looks like and they aren't exposed or prepared to get them to college and be successful while in college (personal interview, August 22, 2023).

In addition to involving community organizations, Charlie discussed the importance of innovative ways to get different businesses involved in the community to create opportunities for all kids. Charlie specifically stated the school, and the community have been,

> Future mentoring for the youth. Workshops trying to convey to parents the importance of your child being in school. Set up a framework so that people don't get themselves in trouble. It is more than the school and/or the community to deal with. We need to be counteractive very early in school to push and promote student achievement. And even

> for these kids who are being incarcerated, having meaningful work programs where they can cultivate and develop marketable skills, so they can go into a job, having meaningful skill sets. Maybe give companies financial incentives to invest in the schools to help our children do well (personal interview, August 23, 2023).

These meaningful programs could have included restorative practices for students who struggled with emotional regulation. Most importantly, these programs should have been developed with school leaders who were assigned to school discipline to counter the perspectives that Black youth were disruptive to the learning environment. Specifically, Santana stated,

> The education system has to have the willingness to be open to hear from the community. Something like the Community Coalition that brings different community organizations together to talk about how we can all collaborate and serve the young people in the community. Meeting with the people who are in charge of discipline. Restorative practices and really looking at those restorative practices…these practices even hook up with the juvenile court system (personal interview, August 28, 2023).

In conclusion, BCEL had the presence and ability to impact stronger youth-engagement programs in the community that supported successful outcomes in Black youth.

Healing-Centered Engagement

Finally, BCEL provided wisdom about healing-centered engagement to address damaging inequities in education and communities that were frequently accepted as normal/just the way it was. Kerry stated, “Healing can only happen when you acknowledge that there is a problem. We as a community need to know what we are healing from…what has been our problem…sickness within our community” (personal interview, August 31, 2023). Monroe

implied, it depended on what side of town one lived in or what school a person attended that allowed others to draw conclusions about your character. Noting,

> We have to get past our schools, west side, east side and those are the changemakers who have to be willing to sit at the table and come up with some type of solutions to move the community forward. Involve the police and social workers. An entire community should be held accountable for the community (personal interview, August 25, 2023).

Moving the community away from conversation about what side of town someone was from required honest dialogue and acknowledging past experiences. Specifically, Monroe stated,

> Healing looks like owning one's history. We don't want to talk about it let alone admit something is wrong. When we reckon with the past, it empowers the disconnectedness and trust in the disenfranchised community (personal interview, September 2, 2023).

Owning one's own history required accountability and intentional efforts. Monroe specifically stated,

> Healing begins when school personnel and members from all fractions of the community can come together with a willingness to work together by not only discussing issues but putting plans that are deemed priorities that will ensure the best educational opportunities for all students. It is when all sides' opinions are respected and valued. It is the assurance that all sides hold each other accountable for shared values and high expectations for all students with valid data to support those premises. It occurs when all look at students from holistic points of view. Healing will require intentional work (personal interview, August 25, 2023).

Kerry talked about becoming uncomfortable to become comfortable. Kerry asked multiple important questions to gain an understanding of the healing process. Kerry started out by saying,

> What steps do we take to heal within our community? There are many questions and I'm not sure we have all of the answers. There comes a time where we as the community have to make ourselves uncomfortable in order to be made comfortable. There are several questions that we need to ask ourselves: What are we hurting from? What do we need to heal from? How do we heal? If the healing is set right, how do we see what works? Are we healing properly? Is grace being extended to one's who are not healing properly or quick enough? What atmosphere are we healing in (personal interview, August 31, 2023)?

Part of acknowledging the problem was admitting the connection between the historical context and the more current ways of knowing. What did it look like for the community to navigate in a space that seemed to have been shattered for decades? As Charlie suggested,

> We must first reconcile that history has taught us that we did not execute properly the overall process of school integration. Healing can occur among decision makers, however the dreams and aspirations of generations who were affected by the decision, cannot be rectified. But forgiveness can be realized. We must go back to the drawing board, admit we were wrong, and redevise, reinvent and transform the present institutional culture. There is hope (personal interview, August 21, 2023).

Meanwhile Riley descended further into healing and its connection to academic success, suggesting, healing looked like “Closing the achievement gap, improving housing and poverty”

(personal interview, October 9, 2023). According to Santana, closing the gap could have happened when,

> Everybody is working together. People are honest with one another. Particularly with the students, they feel like they are engaged, can talk to the adults about what is going on, them feeling safe, and whatever is going on and they feel like they are not going to be judged and punished and people will listen to them about what they can change and how to better serve students (personal interview, September 14, 2023).

It was important to acknowledge that BCEL understood healing, partially because of the personal pain they felt regularly from witnessing the inequities in the schools and communities. Although BCEL in the study were compassionate and actively involved in their schools and communities, they also verbalized the emotional toll it took on their body. Kerry stated, “The stress of what we are not practicing is a burnout and that includes togetherness, cohesiveness, unity” (personal interview, August 23, 2023). As a means to cope with the stress of this work, Charlie stated, “I do a lot of praying and then find people I can trust” (personal interview, August 17, 2023). In order for the community to have moved forward to support the needs of Black youth, the schools and communities must have been willing to come together collectively, dialogued, and have had difficult conversations about moving beyond the status quo way of thinking to reimagining a better education for all children.

Conclusion

In conclusion, BCEL challenged the normative or status quo way of thinking by using counter storytelling to look beyond the current frame of reference in education. Specifically, Angel stated, “You have to implement policies that promote some and sustain others. It's always good to be celebrated and not tolerated. We need a frame of reference for the child of color. We

need a frame of reference…we have to peel those things away and treat children with dignity" (personal interview, August 23, 2023). Particularly three major themes examined the findings in the research study to include: (1) root causes of racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities, (2) the lack of cultural competence at the district and building level, and (3) strategies and recommendations to reduce racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities in education. In the next and final chapter, the researcher explained these findings as they connected to theory and research.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Introduction

This dissertation explored how Black Community Educational Leaders's (BCEL) critical perspective on low-income Black students in schools addressed and confronted the root causes of racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities. Particularly this research used asset-based counter-narratives/storytelling as the methodology to counter the normative view (status quo) thinking about Black children and their lived experiences. I focused on Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) as the conceptual framework as both approaches valued the lived experiences people bring to the table. In the context of this community, BCEL was asking the question "Kasserian Ingera" (And How Are the Children?) (see Boutte, 2015). The results of the study supported the Black children in the community were not well. However, the participants in the study believed part of their ownership was to continue to ask the question "Kasserian Ingera" until all the children were well.

This research was particularly concentrated in areas known as the Promise Neighborhood which were historically underserved communities with low academic performing schools. Racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities in this study were viewed through the lens of Black student removal from the classroom that potentially led to a culmination of negative outcomes such as disengagement, school referrals, manifestations, suspensions, special education, alternative education, expulsions, and disparate academic outcomes. (Skiba et al., 2014). Each one of these negative consequences manifested themselves through the school-to-prison pipeline or as (Alexander, 2010) called it, "The New Jim Crow." In this study the BCEL clearly emphasized, although the STPP term seemed to have been driven by political gains, the concept was not new and had been around for numerous years. Over 90% of the participants in

the study had direct experience working as educators in the classroom. Resilience in this study was inferred through the wisdom and lived experiences of BCEL. The leaders recognized that while it was true discipline disproportionalities may have reflected patterns in the criminal justice system, the schools should have been distinct educational spaces where students were safe from the injustices of the broader society.

Summary of Findings

Black Community Educational Leaders were clear about their disposition on racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities in education. However, all participants verbalized inclusiveness not just for minoritized youth but all youth. For instance, Monroe, long-time educator and school administrator illustrated, "The focus should always be intentional with uplifting marginalized kids, not just African American kids but all kids" (personal interview, August 15, 2023). Plainly stated, BCEL emphasized that Black youth needed these things to have been successful, vision, empathy, and high expectations, they were not getting them, and therefore the children were not well (nor achieving academically).

It seemed the only way to move the work of reducing and/or eliminating racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities in education was through intentional shifting of collective mindsets and action-oriented change. This included moving away from the traditional discipline approaches to sharing powers with the entire school community and viewing students as engaged leaders (Jones et al., 2018). Frankly, if academic institutions were not first holding themselves accountable, the rest of the key areas would have unlikely led to transformational change. There was a famous saying, if you do what you have always done, you will get what you have always gotten. If the mindsets were conveniently about the comfort of "nice adults" and how they have felt or perceive change, then things would have continued to remain status quo.

Relatedly Monroe, supported this by stating, “We cannot operate from the same vantage point from 40-50 years ago. There are intentional lines drawn and people who do not fit in a particular area are ignored” (personal interview, August 15, 2023). To interpret this statement, if the same practices that existed for Black youth over 50 plus years ago had not changed, the poor outcomes would have continued to remain the same.

The participants in the study spoke with a variety of emotions about the importance of acknowledging the ramifications of the root causes of racialized disparities. Specifically, they acknowledged the history of White supremacy in the community that potentially contributed to the lack of cultural competence, inconsistent systems and strategies, and the divisiveness within the community. Nunn and Wantchekon (2011) had also argued that mistrust in the community was likely connected to the history of White supremacy and racism. Harper, a school leader stated, “Given the historical practices with a racial tone, it does not always allow for problems to be solved” (personal interview, August 22, 2023). Similarly, Drew, school administrator stated, “It’s important to reckon with the reality about race in education” (personal interview, September 2, 2023). From the standpoint of Alvarez and Tulino (2023), these important factors threatened community efforts of reckoning and healing-centered engagement, causing more harm, when history and the social context was not considered.

The BCEL in the study believed it took efforts of shared-governance from the entire home-school-community to address and confront inequities in Black youth. Santana, a long-time school administrator suggested it took a cumulation of,

> Everybody is working together. People are honest with one another. Particularly with the students, they feel like they are engaged, can talk to the adults about what is going on, them feeling safe, and whatever is going on and they feel like they are not going to

be judged and punished and people will listen to them about what they can change and how to better serve students (personal interview, September 14, 2023).

Charlie emphasized the importance of working with and alongside of the "village" instead of in silos and "Intentionally engaging parents of students that are having adjustment and conduct issues" (personal interview, August 17, 2023). Collective efforts from the academic institution, community, and families were one of the most effective ways to address barriers in education and communities.

The researcher found that the Black Community Educational Leaders provided the school and community with intentional and authentic methods of restoring hope and healing in the city. Particularly these results were about vision, action, and honoring the voices of Black Community Educational Leaders with vested wisdom and knowledge. Drew stated, "There needs to be a much broader vision and what education looks like beyond this city to help move them where they can truly serve students" (personal interview, September 2, 2023). The participants in the study had encountered generations of students and families through the education system and greater community. These combined experiences had equipped them with the expertise to speak truth to power. With that being said, this research was not about trying to fix a broken system, but to redefine how we view education. This looked like reimagining how we viewed non-traditional leaders in a community. Interpretive analysis was used to break down the root causes through the lens of BCEL as it related to education institutions at the district-level (leadership), teachers at the building level, and the community-level. The key findings from the developing Brooks Root Cause Analysis framework was a pivot away from normative (deficit-based) thinking of Black youth and their experiences. The wisdom or asset-based thinking of BCEL provided strategies and recommendations that required accountability, positive relationships,

historical value, high expectations, cultural awareness, and healing-centered engagement to improve structures and practices in schools and communities.

Interpretations and Analysis

Education Institution (District Level)

The results of the study helped to address underlying issues linked to racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities in schools and communities. The key findings in the study (i.e. accountability, relationships, historical values, high expectations, cultural competence, and healing-centered engagement) brought awareness to the urgent need to streamline cultural competence in schools and communities, particularly as it related to racialized school removal of Black youth. These findings confronted the history of race relations in the community. The wisdom of BCEL provided asset-based recommendations and strategies that district-level leadership could have used to address these racialized disparities.

Accountability. Accountability started with the institution reflecting on the academic and behavior outcomes of Black youth, understanding potential root causes, and dismantling structures and practices that were ineffective (Lee & Wong, 2004). According to the US Department of Education (2018), African American males and females made up only 8% of student enrollment in the United States, yet both subgroups made up the highest percentage of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. Accountability was the integration of equitable practices into every facet of student learning. It appeared like encouraging growth mindsets of staff, creating clear and measurable goals, and being willing to accept feedback from staff and community about action-oriented steps and changes.

Accountability using normative thinking was using traditional approaches to address inequities in education. The participants in the study spoke transparently about having a vision to

move the work forward on a larger scale. Specifically, Monroe in the study emphasized, “It’s called vision and when you do not have that, complacency sets in” (personal interview, August 15, 2023). The lack of vision only perpetuated negative outcomes towards Black youth. Charlie, school administrator in the study stated intentionality started with “Forward-thinking” (personal interview, August 23, 2023). The researcher interpreted this statement as mindset and practices being directly aligned with the goals of the district’s mission statement and continuous improvement processes. These practices and structural changes should have been developed through cultural and professional development opportunities for all staff within the institution. This included equitable practices which should have been embedded in every facet of learning. These facets included academics, social emotional, instructional technology, hiring and retention of high-quality teachers, coaching models, and identifying and disrupting barriers driven by data analysis. Particularly several participants implied different versions of the message. Monroe stated, “We have to first recognize that we have exclusionary problems and put the right people in positions to solve the problems” (personal interview, August 15, 2023). Similarly, Charlie stated, “We need to address the root cause. It seems we do not have a preparatory process for the recruitment of African American educators” (personal interview, August 23, 2023). Including BCEL in the hiring processes could have helped to increase diverse representation within the institution.

Participants were clear that equitable efforts were not only the responsibility of one person but all personnel who worked with children. This statement insinuated it was not always about the quantity of personnel you hire. Instead, the goal should have been to hire the right personnel with a growth mindset and the skillset to drive systematic change within the institution. Especially with the historical implications of thousands of Black teachers and

administrators losing their jobs due to discriminatory practices in education (Fultz, 2004; Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Tillman, 2004). This standpoint was supported in recent research by Goldman et al. (2021) who found that “Increasing representation of underrepresented groups enables public sector agencies to carry out their missions and provide excellent service to their communities” (p. 1). Diverse representation in hiring practices should have been initiated with intentionality at the highest level within the institution. Monroe stated, “If those people are of the same like-minded, it's difficult for them to appreciate other cultures. There needs to be intentionality with hiring people of color” (personal interview, August 25, 2023). Soliciting the voice from all people to include not only district-level leadership but also building-level staff was critical. A top-down approach in this case was known to fail during implementation (Fullan, 1994). If allowed to have been at the table, BCEL could have assisted with the hiring of diverse applicants to serve in these roles.

Relationships. The next important factor that BCEL made clear was that building meaningful relationships with the community was needed to begin addressing these disparities. The normative way of thinking uses one-way communication methods. Santana stated, “Relationships are very important” (personal interview, August 22, 2023). Another critical aspect was improving two-way communication. The use of two-way communication included using a variety of platforms to communicate with families to meet them where they were. This looked like but was not limited to email, focus groups, social media, phone, video chat, text, papers sent home, home visits, and encouraging community attendance at the board meetings. Although most of these practices happened at the building level, district-level leaders also had the ability to shift mindsets through these efforts. A family-centered approach was known to improve academic performance and reduce the opportunity gap in culturally diverse students (Ladson-

Billings, 2006). Creating open dialogue did not mean everyone had to agree with one another. However, it could have helped to remove unconscious layers from people who wanted to remain in their comfort zone and followed the status quo. For most people the ability to have felt, seen and heard made a significant difference in them feeling valued to contribute their knowledge production. Relationships at this level could have looked like bringing in people with different jobs such as the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) to work with district leaders. In addition to implementing parent-teacher or student-led conferences as a district initiative, engaged parents/families in the larger community conversations (i.e. creating a District Community Voice Coalition) and open transparency could have helped to cultivate stronger relationships.

Historical Value. The normative view avoided talking about the historical context in education and communities (Oakley et al., 2009). BCEL countered that change must have started with re-education and acknowledgement about the historical context of the community and how this history permeated throughout the current mindsets, behaviors, and practices of adults. To have been clear, acknowledgement did not mean staying in that same particular place. Instead, it meant delving into history and moving forward toward more just practices. This acknowledgement included the direct effects of desegregation. Charlie stated, “There were no programs put in place to address the needs of students that were being bussed out of the communities they lived in” (personal interview, August 17, 2023). This statement sounded like the lack of programs and opportunities exacerbated the disparities in education, particularly for Black youth. Systemic racism was directly connected to the outcomes for Black youth in the community. Payne et al. (2023) affirmed these perspectives by suggesting the historical context was a direct link to current outcomes of Black youth in the schools and communities. One way to acknowledge the history was by visiting the local Black Museum and inviting BCEL to educate

the leadership staff about the historical inequities in the entire city, particularly the Promise Neighborhood communities. This education should not have been a one-time experience but continuous and intentional.

High Expectations. The normative way of thinking lowered expectations for Black children in schools (Ylimaki & Brunner, 2011). BCEL unanimously pointed out, high expectations in education and communities were mandatory for all children. Santana stated, “I don't think that we have high enough expectations for children of color. So, they are at a disadvantage because the expectations aren't there and they don't have access to the same things as other kids do” (personal interview, August 22, 2023). High expectations included having asset-based mindsets and creating a positive climate and culture throughout the district. It included district-level staff believing and empowering teachers and principals to perform at high levels, investing in high-quality professional development, aligning structures and practices to the district's continuous improvement plan that addressed the root causes of systematic inequities. Specifically, leadership or the “knowers” outside of the school building should trust the building level staff to foster a positive learning environment (Anderson, 2016). High expectations can also have been effective by adopting best practices from other school districts with successful outcomes.

Cultural Competency. The normative way of thinking minimized cultural competence skills in leadership staff. BCEL asserted the importance of district-level staff participating in cultural competency training. Particularly due to the history of race relations in education and the communities. Drew discussed the importance of a national agency providing cultural training to all staff suggesting, “Outside training and coaching for all staff including central office. A national partnership” (personal interview, September 2, 2023). These resources should include

having a universal discipline matrix for the entire district that decreased the chances of subjective analysis (Kennedy et al., 2019). Drew supported this statement by saying, “The student code of conduct matrices helps exclusionary practices and policies and treat people equitable” (personal interview, September 2, 2023). Without the implementation of this practice, Black youth were at an increased risk for unfair discriminatory treatment in schools. From the standpoint of Goldenberg (2014) society in general was becoming more diverse, particularly with students of color. Therefore district-wide cultural practices were needed to support the growing needs of diverse learners. Districts should have invested in resources that created fair and equitable practices to help eliminate cultural bias and avoidable classroom removal of students. Continuous training was needed for all staff with the focus on implicit bias and personal self-awareness.

Healing-Centered Engagement. The status quo way of thinking avoided historical conversations on racism and injustices (Thomas et al., 2018). Drew countered this perspective by noting, “Healing looks like owning one's history” (personal interview, September 2, 2023).

Santana noted one way to heal from unjustly practices was through “Restorative practices and really looking at those restorative practices” (personal interview, August 28, 2023). Implementation of restorative practices from a district-level could have created an environment that potentially decreased exclusion and school removal at the building level since most of the issues occurred in the classroom. Restorative practices principals were inspired by indigenous values and include bringing people affected by poor decisions together and to heal relationships as best as possible (Yusem, 2016). These practices were used mostly in education and in the justice system to transform structural change (Yusem, 2016). There was a misperception that these practices were only used to help address racial disparities in school discipline. Contrarily

speaking, these practices should have been used instead of zero tolerance practices (Clark-Louque & Sullivan, 2020). When used proactively these practices also helped to create strong connections and built a sense of belonging in youth. Healing-centered engagement (Ginwright, 2018) could have looked like district-led initiatives such as affinity groups for students and staff creating “brave spaces” for more equitable experiences. “Brave spaces create a place for connection and recognition while also confronting within-group biases and internalized oppressions” (Myers et al., 2019, p. 3). Building affinity groups could have encouraged success of students and staff. These groups could have also created a space for educators and community members to address inequitable disparities in education and communities. BCEL could have provided support and guidance that created healing in these spaces.

At the district-level these key findings (i.e. accountability, relationships, high expectations, historical value, cultural competency, healing-centered engagement) confronted and addressed the root causes of racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities in schools and communities. These findings encouraged academic institutions to have been responsible and intentional with addressing poor outcomes in Black youth. These findings included leveraging the voices of the community, particularly with the hiring of African American educators. However, before understanding the nuances of cultural competence, one must have first understood the history of race relations and Black culture in the community. These keys areas created opportunities for improved self-awareness and healing on a systems level.

Teachers (Building Level)

The themes provided asset-based recommendations and strategies for teachers and staff to address disparities in schools and communities. The wisdom and experiences of BCEL could

have supported the results at the teacher (building-level). For example, BCEL could have shared their wisdom through professional development, school-based mentoring, modeling, tutoring, observations, and volunteering. These key findings (i.e. accountability, relationships, high expectations, historical value, cultural competency, healing-centered engagement) informed the importance of developing cultural self-awareness in schools and communities in order to create an environment for students to thrive and have a strong sense of belonging.

Accountability. The normative view of thinking held teachers accountable to adhere to the state curriculum standards (Ladson-Billings, 2020). Although this was extremely important to drive academic success in children, BCEL suggested teachers must also have been accountable to foster a culturally responsive learning environment that met the needs of all diverse learners (O'Leary et al., 2020). Teachers were the first responders to students in the classroom. The classroom was where students spent most of their time. Therefore, teachers were primarily responsible for the success or failure of students. Parents, families, and caregivers trusted teachers to cultivate an environment that brought out the best in their children that prepared them for college and career readiness. In most cases, teachers were also the ones making the decision to remove students from the classroom. BCEL were adamant that proper accommodations and support must have been given to the unique learners in the classroom.

Relationships. The status quo of fearing Black youth led to anxiety (Darensbourg et al., 2010). Yet, BCEL wisdom confirmed what many researchers (Annamma et al., 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Yosso, 2005) have said; relationships are the foundation to successful outcomes. Riley, a school administrator stated, "Relationships in the schools are essential to a child's development and have the potential to change the trajectory of a student's life" (personal interview, August 16, 2023). Teachers were the backbone in education and highly

impressionable to youth in the classroom (Pathania, 2011). Harper suggested for teachers, “There should be an understanding of the neighborhood they are working in” (personal interview, August 22, 2023). This understanding of the environment could have helped teachers to increase understanding and cultivate a strong sense of belonging. Building relationships looked like being intentional to learn and engage in student’s cultural backgrounds, listening, using monotone voice levels, creating meaningful two-way communication, providing students with options, offering student and parent-led teacher conferences, showing empathy, sharing personal stories, and possibly attending student and/or family functions. BCEL were unwavering in their responses about the importance of cultivating positive relationships.

Not only were relationships with teachers important but also with other school personnel such as School Resource Officers (SROs). Black and students of color account for a high percentage of referrals by the police (US Department of Education, 2018). In fact, in most instances, teachers were more likely to have called for support to remove students from the classroom. This support typically included administrative leadership or SROs. Some participants including Santana attested, “SROs can exacerbate the chances of student removal from the class and the relationship has not always been a positive experience with the African American community and the police officer” (personal interview, August 22, 2023). All participants in the study, including Charlie, agreed but also discussed the importance of positive relationships suggesting, “SROs can be helpful if they are properly trained. I don't know if they are properly trained to understand the cultural implications of law enforcement that exist in an education environment. Where they are trained to not focus on law enforcement but individuals that can enhance the education of youth” (personal interview, August 17, 2023). Culturally relevant training for SROs was imperative to decrease biases of Black youth and to increase their ability

to cultivate positive relationships with students (Theriot, 2016). Positive SRO interactions with students looked like making connections through greetings, using non-contingent attention or getting to know students and their families at school and in their personal environments, and educating students and families about their roles and responsibilities. BCEL could have served as buffers to educate the educational institution and community about the pros and cons of SROs as it related to law enforcement in the Black community.

Historical Value. Status quo teaching styles overshadowed the historical context of racism in America (Ladson-Billings, 1995). BCEL was clear that district-level staff as well as teachers must have understood the historical context especially since having one nurturing caregiver buffered the stress of discrimination and racism in African Americans (Brody et al., 2016; Conway-Phillip et al., 2020; Jackson et al., 2018). In order for teachers, who mostly came from White backgrounds (Goldenberg, 2014) to grasp the historical context of systemic racism, a deeper self-refection was necessary. Angel insinuated, teachers come from an "Environment that has very little interaction with people of color" (personal interview, August 23, 2023). A more in-depth awareness of their own cultural beliefs and values would have greatly helped teachers to create strong tiered instructional practices through the use of culturally responsive teaching in the classroom (Sailor et al., 2021). Strong tiered instruction addressed the whole child through a primary prevention strategy used in the classroom which could have increased all students psychological and achievement growth (Sailor et al., 2021). Examples of cultural competency would have been provided in the building level cultural competence section.

High Expectations. Status quo perspectives of Black youth in the classroom were informed by sympathy and not empathy (Yosso, 2005). For instance, Drew countered this assumption by asking, "What does it look like to have empathy versus sympathy" (personal

interview, September 2, 2023)? The classroom should have been a place of high expectations that valued the unique characteristics students brought to the table (Yosso, 2005), particularly in urban and highly diverse environments (Milner, 2011). Students in the classroom were able to sense a non-welcoming environment which could have increased the chance of emotional dysregulation. Teachers with high expectations led to success and improved performances for students in the classroom (Cherng, 2017). High-expectations looked like teachers showing respect to students and families, teachers showing they cared for the well-being of students and families, teachers empowering students through modeling and asset-based language, and teachers offering students high levels of support. BCEL remained steadfast in their approach about the importance of high expectations in the classroom and communities.

Cultural Competency. The normative way of thinking, through legislative mandates, limits teacher's ability to provide authentic teaching centering the diversity of students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). BCEL countered this notion and suggested due to structural inequities such as systematic racism, culturally responsive teaching/pedagogy (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) was a critical and necessary practice to use in the classroom. This provided a way for teachers to connect with students. Harper suggested, "In every school there should be a teacher to connect with the kids. We need to listen to the voices of the teachers. They see things with a different lens. We need to listen to them" (personal interview, August 22, 2023). Professional development opportunities were critical to developing cultural competence skills in teachers. Especially since teachers' personal experiences were typically vastly different from their students. Monroe asserted the findings of the study support "Unconscious and implicit bias is huge" (personal interview, August 15, 2023). All participants offered stories, examples, and punctuated their observations of bias in schools. One leader, Drew noted, "Discipline policies

contribute to exclusionary policies and practices" (personal interview, September 2, 2023). Research suggested the disproportionate discipline referrals for Black students were based on personal perceptions "often yielding negative consequences for students of color" (Staats, 2014, p. 7). These biases tended to have been subjective in nature toward certain ethnic groups (Axt et al., 2014). In a predominantly White teacher workforce, diversification of staff was extremely important to help mitigate implicit bias.

Charlie was very clear with their feedback on the need to hire and "Recruit African American educators" (personal interview, August 23, 2023). The lack of diverse perspectives led to subjective analysis or harsher discipline outcomes (Blank et al., 2016). One suggestion from Alex was the need for "Explicit professional development, having conversations with Black educators and understanding some people don't know what they don't know even Black leaders" (personal interview, September 7, 2023). One of the best ways to develop professional development that was unique to the individual was through the use of the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). This evidenced-based instrument targeted individual cultural self-awareness while shifting and adapting behavior to cultural perspectives on commonalities and differences (Hammer, 2008). In one study educators working in a similar K-12 setting took the IDI questionnaire in addition to a pre and post-test (DeJaeghere & Cao, 2009). This study's findings revealed the district found an overall significant increase in educator performance based on the district-wide intercultural training initiative (DeJaeghere & Cao, 2009). Cultural competence manifested as teachers truly valuing the history and culture of Black youth and families. Teachers could have exposed themselves to the local Black Museum, training, webinars, readings, and different community events. Teachers needed to recognize their own unconscious biases and strive to create a culturally responsive classroom (i.e. pictures on the

wall) where students saw themselves represented. Further, teachers should have also exposed themselves and students to culturally relevant opportunities both inside and outside of the classroom. In addition to having culturally relevant books available in the classroom, creating culturally relevant lesson plans, and welcoming families and communities into the classroom to educate students about different cultures. Angel, long-time school leader noted, “The training and instruction has to be ongoing” (personal interview, August 23, 2023). Continuous cultural competence training could have helped to empower teachers and improve their overall skill set in the classroom.

Healing-Centered Engagement. The normative way of thinking allowed very limited time in the classroom for teachers to dig into the root causes of inequities (Ladson-Billings, 2023). BCEL emphasized strong tiered instructional practices in the classroom to make it easier to implement strategies such as mindful breathing and restorative practices which not only affected the entire classroom but also the overall school climate and culture in the building. Santana stated, “Teachers need more time to put what they learned into practice in all areas. There needs to be more time for professional development” (personal interview, August 22, 2023). During restorative practices, mindful breathing (Jackson, 2018) was another technique that could have been used to facilitate breathing strategies known to decrease stress load in the brain. Racism and discriminatory experiences further exacerbated executive functioning skills and caused high levels of cortisol elevation in youth (Carter, 2007). Therefore, deep breathing was another strategy to help decrease emotional regulation in youth before removing them from the classroom. Teachers who were intentional with understanding Black history and culture and their own personal biases could have potentially shifted personal perspectives of Black student removal from the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Community-Level

The key findings at the community level helped to address underlying issues linked to racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities in schools and communities. The themes (i.e. accountability, relationships, high expectations, historical value, cultural competence, healing-centered engagement) placed ownership on members in the Black community to move beyond the status quo. For instance, Charlie shared his experiences with schooling inequities, “I am a product of an alternative school but yet was able to overcome adversity due to the guidance and empowerment of Black leaders in the community” (personal interview, August 17, 2023). In this example, Charlie was an example of resilience driven by community support.

Accountability. BCEL suggested community accountability was critical to redress racism and dismantle Eurocentric practices in schools and communities. Eurocentric practices adhered to normative or status quo ways of teaching. Reyes (2018) suggested “love is central to working against normative schooling structures and practices that marginalize culturally and linguistically diverse urban youth” (p. 3). As taxpayers, the community had the right to hold the education system accountable for the outcomes of Black youth. Santana illustrated, “The education system has to have the willingness to be open to hear from the community” (personal interview, August 28, 2023). These efforts should have been driven through the use of community voice, school board meetings, school surveys, Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), home visits, community advisory boards and other various two-way communication methods. Monroe stated,

> The Board of Trustees should be questioning the deepness of exclusionary practices. Identify who the leaders are to bring them in. Who are the minority leaders that people

trust and rely on who are committed to working with the education system (personal interview, August 25, 2023)?

To have been clear, it was not only the responsibility of the educational system to create spaces for thriving Black students and families. Families were the first teachers and were able to provide valuable input regarding the needs of their youth. The success of the academic institution also depended on the support from the home environment of the student. Kerry notes, “For the Black youth, somebody has got to be pushing them at home too. You can't do it alone at school” (personal interview, August 23, 2023). Although there was a history of oppression in the Black community over generations, Santana did not believe this could have been used as an excuse to not move forward. Santana noted, “As an African American community, we need to come together and collaborate to tackle 1-2 things” (personal interview, August 28, 2023). This statement alluded to the ineffectiveness of the Black community and the school system operating in individual silos. It instead should have been focused on a pathway toward progression, Angel noted, “The community has to be comprised of things that are developing. Everyone in the community has a tremendous responsibility to ensure our kids are excelling” (personal interview, August 23, 2023). The BCEL suggested both the community and education system had a joint responsibility to address the needs of providing youth with brave spaces, exposure to mentoring, after school programming, youth community-based organizations, and service-learning opportunities. The academic and social outcomes in Black youth suggested the need for both the school and community to work in unison to encourage healthy socialization and close the opportunity gap (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Charlie stated, “We need more peer mentoring. Large and small group programming that provides STEM…meet the youth at their point of need…culturally relevant programming to provide resources” (personal interview, August 17,

2023). The results supported the importance of these programs for Black children, particularly Black males from underserved communities who were likely more prone to violence during peak times for youth after school ends (Woodland, 2008).

In a study conducted with Black and Latino youth, school-based mentoring was described as a “humanizing” experience (Watson et al., 2016). Participants in the study revealed strong connections to spirituality and the Black church. The historic roots of the Black church were prominent institutions in support of youth and education (Park et al., 2020). However, the Black churches in the community could not do it alone. Riley stated, “There are churches on every corner. The problem is there are so many churches, but we are still in the space that we are in” (personal interview, August 16, 2023). This individual insinuated, although the churches played a major role in the community to support Black youth in education, improvements were still needed for a greater impact in student outcomes. To conclude, accountability in the Black community looked like members working in unison with the education system to improve outcomes and members of the community acknowledging barriers and the important changes needed to accelerate the Black community forward.

Relationships. Silence of voices in the community created unhealthy environments and maintains the status quo (Roberts, 1999). Renee, a schoolteacher countered this notion by stating, “Community steps start by building relationships” (personal interview, September 11, 2023). By community this meant families, educators, caregivers, youth, and stakeholders. The results revealed the importance of welcoming and not silencing the voices of community members. It instead confirmed the importance of allowing the community to provide input on racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities in education. Krueger-Henney (2016) described hearing the voice of the people as “embodied social listening to the permanence of anti-Black

racism as a full body engagement with our racialized social living environments that are informed by how its historicized structures and ideologies materialize within the multiple layers of the human body" (p. 52). In conjunction with Monroe's statement, the results revealed this can be done through "Collaboration across various entities who are willing to work together to move things forward" (personal interview, August 25, 2023). These entities included strong community partnerships with other agencies who shared a common vision of thriving youth in the community. One way to build relationships in the Black community was to get actively involved in the community to better understand what was happening in the community. This included members of the Black community and the academic institution. There were opportunities to have been part of the local grassroot organizations. Charlie implied, "There is not enough outreach to grassroot members who may not have the necessary academic preparation, but they have an abundance of practical ideas for the advancement of youth in the education process" (personal interview, August 21, 2023). For example, there was a network called "FTK" that was committed to empowering Black children and families to reach their full potential by using the influence through diverse platforms to advocate for educational equity owed to Black children in the form of opportunities, policies, and curriculum that expected Black excellence. Some of the BCEL were connected to this network and able to provide guidance and insight on how this network fosters change in the community.

Moreover, the community provided insight on the education system listening to their perspectives such as welcoming their voices to the table (Yosso, 2005) to discuss much needed change in the schools and communities. Jamie revealed, "The community wants to be heard and feel like people are listening to them" (personal interview, August 23, 2023). Also taken community voices seriously included authority listening to young people instead of making them

feel like their friends were the only ones listening to them. Jamie said, “Young people feel like their friends are listening. They want you to listen to them and know they are not going to always get in trouble. Don’t be afraid of the young people, be willing to correct them. Have a relationship not just with them but the whole family” (personal interview, August 23, 2023). All participants stated, building relationships included the community and the academic institution listening to each other and working together toward the same outcome which looked like low-income Black students flourishing schools and communities.

Historical Value. The normative view overlooked or dismissed the history of segregation in the community. For example, after Brown v. Board of education in 1954, discriminatory practices against thousands of Black teachers and administrators persisted (Fultz, 2004; Hudson & Holmes 1994; Tillman, 2004). BCEL countered this assumption by remarking on how history of systemic racism was embedded in institutions including schools. Community leaders also suggested systemic injustices were responsible for the school-to-prison pipeline. Related to this, Monroe and Charlie revealed,

> Monroe: Policies or practices contribute to Black student outcomes and exclusion unfortunately stems from [student] behavior. Because of behavior, you never really get to the real crux of what is going on and never really recognize how intelligent the child is because the child is acting in a way the teacher is not familiar with (personal interview, August 15, 2023).

Charlie: “We must first reconcile that history has taught us that we did not execute properly the overall process of school integration” (personal interview, August 21, 2023). Charlie and Monroe suggested the implementation of desegregation efforts lacked accountability, ultimately contributing to racial exclusion and discriminatory practices

(discipline) towards Black youth in schools (Orfield, 1969). For these reasons, Black students were perceived by their behavior instead of academic abilities in the classroom.

Community leaders such as Jamie and Charlie, argued the Brown v. Board mandate changed the entire landscape of the once, Jamie: “Tight-knit neighborhoods that made a difference back in the day” (personal interview, September 8, 2023). Charlie noted,

> It destroyed a strong sense of community, opportunities for healthy socialization among each other, them being able to engage with each other recreational pursuits as well as general activities that occur in and out of the community (personal interview, August 17, 2023).

Charlie and Jamie suggested more opportunities and resources were available in the Black community prior to desegregation. In addition, there really was value in learning about the historical context in the community such as the history of race relations and the connection to exclusionary practices and structural inequities in schools and communities. However, not everyone was educated about the history in the city and this included educators and Black community members. BCEL emphasized that we as a community must have equipped parents and families with the tools to better understand the history in the community such as offering free events, offering educational classes, and finding innovative ways to communicate and meet families where they were.

High Expectations. The normative press in society, particularly the mass media, highlighted the Black community through a traumatic lens, shaping false narratives about people and their lived experiences. The BCEL demanded nothing less than high-quality education and excellence in youth. Drew discussed the importance of Black excellence, stating,

> Black excellence helps young people celebrate not only their beauty and blackness but other people too. Give them a barometer of what is worthy of celebration. Ready them for any one pathway they want to explore after high school including college (personal interview, September 2, 2023).

This looked like advocating for rigorous high standards and affirming students until they started to believe they could thrive in all environments. Rigorous education was more than standardized testing, Charlie stated, “We rely too much on standardized curriculum as opposed to enhancement practices” (personal interview, August 17, 2023). Black Community Educational Leaders could have helped to educate the community about “high-quality education” and what this looked like for their children. Monroe stated, “It boils down to expectations and parents ensuring their kids are placed in those classes beyond high school” (personal interview, August 15, 2023). Riley revealed the results of high expectations looked like, “We are closing the achievement gap, improving housing and poverty” (personal interview, August 16, 2023). Angel stated,

> The community has a tremendous responsibility. If my kids are going to that school and the policies that are implemented are going to affect my kids and the communities, it only speaks to the fact that the members of the community should be actively engaged included but not limited to the board meetings (personal interview, August 23, 2023).

Angel also noted the responsibility of Black leaders and community members (not just educators) in the community was,

> Showing up to schools, graduations, recognizing them at their churches, going to the schools and finding the young people who are doing well…connecting with parents,

taking them out to dinner and just letting them know you really appreciate everything they have going on (personal interview, August 23, 2023).

In conclusion, the community demonstrated high expectations through advocating, modeling, and being actively engaged in the lives of children and families.

Cultural Competency. The normative thinking in the Black community dismissed the fact that the world was changing. BCEL emphasized that community members must have understood the way things were in their day was not the same as the current day. It was a different world and times had changed forever. Channing, a school administrator stated, “It’s important to share interest and be genuine with the youth” (phone interview, September 14, 2023). One critical aspect of cultural competency in the community included intergenerational communication and how to related to Black youth. The only way to become familiar with youth was by centering their voices in the process. Specifically, Monroe stated, “We need to ask Black youth what they want” (personal interview, September 2, 2023). Although it may not have felt the most comfortable or always appropriate, community members should have immersed themselves into youth culture. Angel stated,” We must listen for what is said and listen to what is not said and then evaluate what they say” (personal interview, August 23, 2023). Aside from talking to Black youth, educators and the community could have listened to their music, attended poetry events, attended community events, attended school events, attended sports events, attended their churches, and learned about their environment and neighborhoods. In conclusion, involving Black youth in the decision-making process could have helped to accurately influence structures and practices that affected them long-term.

Healing-Centered Engagement. The normative view of healing, in some cases, in the Black community was to keep quiet and not speak about the real issues. From the standpoint of

(Alvarez & Tulino, 2022, p. 1, as cited in Marable, 2015; Woodson, 1990), “Black people have always been expected to remain silent and obedient to white-dominant ways.” Monroe emphasized,

> Healing begins when school personnel and members from all fractions of the community can come together with a willingness to work together by not only discussing issues but putting plans that are deemed priorities that will ensure the best educational opportunities for all students (personal interview, August 25, 2023).

In conjunction with this statement, Riley summarized the importance of healing by stating, “Healing means we are getting better as a community” (personal interview, October 9, 2023). Racial healing required truth telling, dialogue, empathy, and action in order to sustain transformative change in schools and communities. Monroe and others believed the best way to move the work of reconciliation forward was through open dialogue which could have looked like, “All sides' opinions are respected and valued” (personal interview, August 25, 2023). BCEL were adamant about the importance of healing-centered engagement being used as an asset-based approach to address issues of systemic injustices in schools and communities. The findings revealed, despite the history of race relations, the Black community had a responsibility to uphold the same values as schools to address racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities in schools and communities.

Implications

The focus of this study was regarding how Black Community Educational Leaders, and their knowledge production (wisdom) could have potentially confronted and addressed racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities in schools and communities. My research used a critical case study design that focused on the lived experiences of BCEL that countered the

normative (or status quo) way of thinking about Black youth experiences in education and communities at the time of the study. Currently there is not a lot of research that discussed how educational institutions intentionally welcome BCEL who were nominated by the community to come into their private spaces to discuss the root causes of disproportionate school removal of Black youth. However, there was an abundance of literature on the school-to-prison pipeline whose work was connected to disparities about Black boys and girls linked to classroom removal. For example, Bettina Love writing centered the importance of abolitionist teaching. Her latest novel was titled, “Punished for dreaming how school reform harms Black children and how we heal” (Love, 2023). Gloria Ladson-Billings was another culturally responsive scholar and author known for, “From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. schools” (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Gloria Boutte whose focus was to prepare educators to teach Black children, wrote the book “Educating African American students: And how are the children?” (Boutte, 2015*).* Lastly, Nathaniel Bryan was known for scholarship on exclusionary practices targeting Black children starting in pre-school, “School-Playground-to-Prison Pipeline” (Bryan, 2020). The wisdom of these scholars enhanced the results of this study and provided clarity and guidance on ways to view racialized disparities in schools and communities.

The focus of this study contributed new knowledge to the field as the 11 participants in the study were nominated by the local community as they met a specific criterion. BCEL can support academic institutions' use of evidenced-based research to help address “effective non-exclusionary discipline practices” (Jones et al., 2018, p. 20). Also, the focus of my research included not only people who worked in education but educators who were actively involved in the community. This research was significant because BCEL were able to provide specific

details about their direct experiences and connections to racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities in education and communities.

Future Research

This research examined an in-depth analysis of qualitative findings and results through the knowledge production (wisdom) of Black Community Educational Leaders. The timing post-Covid had revealed more gaps and inequities in education than ever before. Because of my active community engagement, I acknowledged the potential of bias and trustworthiness in the study. I would recommend a broader demographic of the participants in the study to provide more insight compared to the sample size of the 11 participants. Although a quantitative sample could have revealed larger numbers, the stories of BCEL lived experiences might have been minimized but that was not what I did here. Also, I did not reach out to all the members who were nominated by the community because I chose to focus on the eleven who were most frequently identified in specific categories. In addition, the data did not include the other members who were identified by the community. In the future, I would recommend a larger sample with multiple interviewers and/or research team especially since my research consisted of two rounds of interviews which totaled over 20 hours of conversations across four generations of educators. From my experience these interviews could have gone on for hours talking about the urgent need for changes in education and communities. These leaders had a lot to say about the current state of not only the community but society in general. Half of the participants in the study were over 50 years old. In the future, I would recommend more younger perspectives to provide insight on how BCEL could use technological instruction to influence knowledge production (or wisdom) in education and communities. In addition, the importance of capturing the voices of youth and families emerged. In a larger subsequent study, I would recommend that researchers use the same design

but with a different context of individuals. This could involve a single researcher or co-researchers conducting a similar critical case study to hear the untold stories of the youth and families in the community. Oftentimes it seemed these were the main individuals affected by change, but their voices were left out of these critical conversations. In my opinion, the best way to accurately create policies and practices for "the people" is to ask "the people" what they need and how we can support their specific needs. In addition, I would recommend interviewing other impactful Black leaders and/or community advocates (non-Black) without an education background but with an education agenda, to serve as an important next step. For instance, I know and volunteer with many impactful Black and non-Black leaders in the community who had never worked in education but are driven by education reform for Black and marginalized youth. These individuals are leading community organizing efforts and able to effect change through their knowledge and personal experiences. Lastly, I would recommend opportunities to hear the voices of district-level leadership directly working in education who are mainly influencing structures and practices regarding the best ways to confront and address racialized injustices in schools and communities moving forward.

Conclusion

The results from the Black Community Educational Leaders proved these individuals were resilient with a lot of valuable knowledge and wisdom to contribute to schools. The essence of Black leadership had been around for many years, starting with the Black Social Movement with historical Black leaders to name a few, but not limited to, W.E.B. Du Bois, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and Rosa Parks with goal to critique and dismantle sociopolitical institutional racism (Marable, 1998). School in itself is a microcosm and an integral part of society (Vishoni, 2021). Although this study primarily focused on the P-12 setting, it could have been applied to

all educational institutions and communities. Specifically, this research mostly referenced the Promise Neighborhood communities. While the focus was narrowed down to these specific communities, the overall goal was for the knowledge production (wisdom) of BCEL's to infiltrate throughout all schools and communities inside and outside of the census tract. This was particularly relevant because students living within the Promise Neighborhood communities were dispersed to various schools across town within the district. Also, this study primarily focused on the needs primarily in the African American communities. Truthfully speaking, this research could have been applied to any ethnic group who were interested in having their voices heard about policies and practices in education affecting their personal communities.

Practices. The results from the study confirmed the need for strong systematic practices and high-quality education from a structural standpoint. Building capacity of the staff and investing in infrastructure to expand cultural knowledge creates sustainability. The importance of an unbiased frame of reference is critical. Charlie noted, "We need a frame of reference for the child of color. We need a frame of reference…we have to peel those things away and treat children with dignity" (personal interview, August 23, 2023). It is likely beneficial to bring in an unbiased national agency with a different frame of reference outside of the midwestern city and state to provide ongoing cultural training to intentionally move the work of equity, justice, and reconciliation forward.

Figure 1

Sample of the Brooks Root Cause Analysis Framework (in progress)

The *Brooks Root Cause Analysis* framework (in progress) is a tool to continue to be developed and may be a useful starting point when doing research with BCEL as it relates to educational inequities. The findings allowed the researcher to address (1) root causes of racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities, (2) the lack of cultural competence (self-awareness) among educators, School Resource Officers (SROs), and staff as a norm in the school district among building level and district level and provide (3) strategies and recommendations for reducing racist practices and structural inequities in schools and communities.

The researcher recommends the *Brooks Root Cause Analysis* framework (in progress) could be applied to both the schools and communities. The hope for this framework is that it can help to challenge the status quo or deficit-based thinking by encouraging changes in structures and/or practices through the use of asset-based and/or growth mindsets that address barriers in schools and communities. The status quo approach to Black youth in schools and communities is ineffective. Both groups (schools and communities) were responsible for holding themselves accountable to improve academic and social outcomes in Black youth. This starts by building positive relationships (i.e. listening, dialogue) both inside and outside of schools among school

leaders, students, families, and stakeholders. The hope was for these relationships to allow space for all parties to discuss the historical implications of race relations and the connection to poor outcomes (low expectations) in Black youth. As it currently stand, there is limited cross-communication about race relations in the community. Prioritizing and improving cultural competence in schools and communities can help redefine practices and structures that disrupt racial inequities in Black youth. These changes could help schools and communities heal the past and look forward to a brighter future.

Policy. BCEL such as Angel and others are striving to empower the community to recognize the power of voice using a "multifaceted" (personal interview, August 23, 2023) approach. Drew asked, "How do you get them [community] to recognize their voice and how their collective voice can move mountains? That is how communities change" (personal interview, September 2, 2023). Lastly, the best way to sustain this work is through the support of the local, state, and federal government. Charlie noted,

> State legislators and policy-makers participation is imperative to formulate strategies for urban development and funding for building programs. The use of schools as community centers for excellence is a ready resource that is not utilized as social gathering places. Budget appropriations as standard operating procedures without demanding the administrators of the federal and state department of education is a must (personal interview, August 21, 2023).

Healing in the community and within the Black community can help to bring about transformative change in families and in education.

Action. These changes in education should be driven by current data and statistics that reveal the hard truth about poor academic and behavior outcomes in Black youth. The results

will be revealed where the study takes place in the midwestern city. I plan to disseminate research findings to those involved in the community to participate in a town hall setting. This town hall will be specifically organized to discuss and present my findings to the community as we begin to rethink practices surrounding school equity and the effects of deficit-based practices. As a community we will discuss the next steps and review the findings. We will then discuss the necessary points on how collectively as a community to move this work forward. Hopefully, through this discussion stakeholders within the community with active influence will begin to think about and consider the wisdom of Black Community Educational Leaders within the community. I hope to use the developing *Brooks Root Cause Analysis Framework* in future research to continue countering the status quo ways of thinking about systemic inequities in education and communities and capitalize on the wisdom of BCEL as the way forward toward productive change.

It was beautiful to hear the BCEL discuss the history of the once thriving historic Black community. Recently, parts of the Promise Neighborhood communities had been officially recognized as the "historic district" by the National Register of Historic Places. It reminded me that Black Wall Street did not only exist in Tulsa, Oklahoma or Durham, North Carolina but also right here in this midwestern city. It is very well possible for the once thriving Promise Neighborhood areas, academic institutions, and businesses within these communities to flourish as such once again. The topography of education is complex and ever changing in today's society. The writing of these findings come from my direct experiences of working in education and within active grassroots community engagement. In this study, despite eight decades of work in education across four generations surrounding racialized exclusionary practices and structural

inequities, these 11 BCEL are still engaging in the same conversations about disproportionate outcomes affecting Black youth.

Lastly, the importance of meaningful family and community engagement helped to create a strong school climate and culture. It takes collective efforts from the entire school-home-community to create culturally proficient partnerships to help eradicate structural disparities affecting Black youth. Although the BCEL provided critical insight in the study, it was only a small step toward progress. Family and community engagement is equity work. Robust research supported the effectiveness of family and community engagement that empowered families to take on new challenges, advocacy, and gain confidence in their ability to shape their children's education (Mapp et al., 2017). Family and community engagement is known to show improvement in student performance seen through earning higher grades and test scores, enrolling in higher level programs, exhibiting faster rates of literacy acquisition, earning more credit, reduction in stress load, better social skills, graduation, and going on to higher education (Mapp et al., 2017). Finally, after many years of the same practices, BCEL in the study are beyond ready for change. The BCEL spoke openly and honestly about their careers and community experiences. It is important to remember these leaders are human and also get tired. Specifically, Monroe stated, "Absolutely the stress affects my burnout, I am human" (personal interview, August 25, 2023). Harper echoed this same sentiment stating, "Stress is high in the community. That's why I travel so much. People are burned out from dealing with the same fight" (personal interview, August 29, 2023). The pressure of leading distressed communities came with a great deal of fatigue and burnout. Yet these individuals are able to persevere and push through. For these reasons, resilience was directly inferred through their lived experiences. To be frank, although backpacks and food drives for families are necessary and helpful, more

time needs to be spent listening to BCEL about the potential root causes of generational trauma and inequities that affect Black youth and families. Welcoming these leaders to the table is not enough. Instead, there needs to be an agenda that includes vision and action-oriented change. Stated plainly, we as a society can no longer sit around at the convenience of adults. We can no longer attend meetings that take up time that does not drive transformational change. The time to address the issues of our children is not tomorrow but right now. Black children are not disposable and should be treated as humans (Wynter-Hoyte & Smith, 2020) and viewed through a lens of excellence. Drew emphasized, “Black excellence helps young people celebrate not only their beauty and Blackness but other people too” (personal interview, September 2, 2023). I believe all children have the ability to maximize their highest potential no matter their environment or circumstances. The lives of all youth are valuable and Black youth deserve equal access and opportunity to thrive in a global society. There seems to be much optimism about the current direction of the community. Black leaders, younger and older, are motivated to disrupt structural inequities throughout all institutions. Centering their voices is critical to disrupting systems of oppression and exclusion that drive social change. The Black Community Educational Leaders in the study have one common goal, which is liberation and thriving communities for all people, particularly youth and families in disenfranchised neighborhoods.

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Appendix A: Community Nominee Chart

This was part of the "community nominee process" and "not a list of participants." The purpose of this table was to identify potential participants who the community thought met the established criteria as a Black Community Educational Leader. The researcher used this instrument to determine the opportunities for potential participants in the study. Information about each potential participant was documented in a google spreadsheet.

Name	Age	Race	Occupation in Education	Active Community Engagement • Advocating for Public Education • Community Voice • Conducting Community Outreach • Participating in Community Outreach • Leaders of Community: Organizations (Pastors, Board Members, Chiefs, Executive Director, Current and Retired Teachers, Education Administrators)

Appendix B: Interview Questions

First Round Interviews

Demographics (optional)

1. What is your name?
2. Where were you born?
3. What's your highest level of education?
4. How long have you lived in this neighborhood?
5. What is your age?
6. Married, siblings, children, parents background, where are they from?
7. What part of Leefield (pseudonym) are you from? How long have you lived there?
8. How would you describe your role in education? How many years did you work?
9. How would you describe your role in the community? How many roles do you have in the community? How long have you been volunteering?
10. How long have you been doing work related to the School-to-Prison Pipeline (STPP) or exclusionary policies and practices?

Schooling Around Black Neighborhoods

1. In your opinion, is there a relationship between the historical context in this city and current practices in education? Is this connected to the current deficit-based mindset in the school-community?
2. From your experiences, how do people who reside in predominantly Black neighborhoods view a sense of belonging and education for their children?

3. How have you seen Black Community Educational Leaders attempt to use strength-based strategies to disrupt racialized exclusionary schooling patterns with positive strategies? What have you specifically done to contribute?

School Resource Officers (SROs)

1. What are your thoughts on SRO? Do you believe they can be helpful?
2. Did you have them SROs when you were in school?
3. What has been your interaction with them?
4. Do you think they exacerbate the chances of Black youth being connected to classroom removal (i.e., STPP)?

Teachers and Staff Cultural Competency

1. Do you feel like schools provide enough resources to teachers and staff to equip them to work with students of color? If not, how can they better support teachers?
2. What were your experiences with teachers? Did you have teachers of color?
3. How are teachers and the lack of cultural competency connected to school removal of Black youth?
4. What significance do you think unconscious and implicit bias play in the decision-making of student removal from the classroom?
5. What is some asset or strength-based strategies teachers/staff can use to improve their cultural competency?

Black Student Outcomes

1. What specific policies or practices contribute to racialized exclusionary outcomes (i.e. STPP & low academic achievement) in education toward Black youth in this community?

2. How many Black students or youth do you see inside or outside of school?

3. Did you experience racialized exclusionary practices (i.e. behavior or academics in school)?

4. What is the youth telling you about their experiences in school as it pertains to racialized exclusionary policies and practices? How can we better use their voices to advocate for their human rights? How can we better use community voice?

Adversity and Stress load

1. Does the stress of racialized exclusionary practices affect your burnout?

2. What do you (BCEL) do to cope, considering the state of your community as it pertains to youth and the STPP?

3. How do you (BCEL) support the community who struggle to cope with racialized exclusionary practices in schools?

4. What role does religion/spirituality play in the community when coping with adversity or stress load? What ways is religion/spirituality useful or a barrier in this regard?

Outside and Inside Community or Professional Programs for Black Youth

1. What is your involvement with Black youth in the community?

2. What are professional programs both inside and outside of the school to support Black youth? How do these programs minimize their chances of being connected to racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities?

Recommendations

1. How do we help Black youth who are connected to the STPP feeder line system? How do we stop it?

2. How important are relationships in schools? How can the education system build positive relationships with Black youth?

3. How can the schools and communities collectively work together to eradicate the STPP?

4. How can community leaders such as yourself help support Black excellence in education?

5. What was the epiphany or ah-ha moment that caused you to see yourself as successful or intellectually capable or even excellent? Was it a person or mentor? Was it an experience that was transformative? Going to college?

Second Round Interviews

1. How can the education system benefit from the knowledge production (wisdom) of Black Community Educational Leaders?

a). Do you feel like there is enough Black community leadership presence in education to help address and influence racialized exclusionary practices and structural practices? If not, how should the education system go about bringing in those BCEL voices?

2. What responsibility does the community have to help support the education system with addressing change in racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities in schools and communities?

b). How can the community go about doing this and what do the steps look like?

3. What asset or strength-based strategies can schools use to support students instead of removal from the class, suspensions, or expulsions? What roles do families play? How can we as a school and communities better support the voice of families?

4. Do you think racialized exclusionary practices and structural inequities (i.e. school-to-prison pipeline) are bigger issues for the education system and community to tackle alone?

5. What role do policy makers play at the local, state, and federal level in addressing these issues?

6. What does academic excellence look like in/for Black youth? How can Black Community Educational Leaders support this effort?

7. What does healing look like for the school and the communities?

Appendix C: Interview Protocol Form

Dissertation: Black Community Educational Leaders: Knowledge Production Influence in Education

Date:

Time:

Location:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Approximate Length of Interview:

Release form signed? Yes or No? Add date.

Operationalized Steps:

1. Trinisia begins with providing introductory comments:
    a. Welcome and thank you for volunteering to participate.
    b. Introduce the researcher as the presenter and person taking notes.
    c. Hand out consent form to participant.
2. Ask the participant to review, ask any questions and then sign the consent form. Offer a copy of the consent form (unsigned) to each person. Some will want a copy, others will not, but always offer.
3. Give a very brief overview of the project goals for the interview. For example, "Today we will discuss the impact of Black Community Educational Leaders in the community. I would like to know about your experiences and how we, together can bring about collective change."
4. Give participant information about the process, times, breaks, emails, coding, edits

transcripts and so forth. Adapt pertinent guideless for individual interviews:

a. If you feel uncomfortable during the meeting, you have the right to leave or pass on any question. There is no consequence for leaving. Being here is voluntary.

b. The meeting is not a counseling or social group.

c. I can provide community resources for support after the meeting if needed. This includes education, mental health professionals, medical etc.

d. Keep personal stories “in the room”; do not share the identity or what the participant has said to any other individual outside of the interview.

e. The interview ideas will be respected.

f. It is okay to take a break if needed or to help yourself to food or drink.

g. This will be a shared back and forth conversation. Please feel free to stop me or ask clarifying questions if needed.

h. You have the right to pass on a question if you do not feel comfortable.

i. There are no right or wrong answers.

j. Do you have any questions?

k. Let the participant know that the interviewer will be taking notes about what is discussed, but that individual names or identifying information will not be attached to comments.

5. An opening question can help break the ice and should be easy to answer. A first question can be as simple as, “How did you hear about this project?” The goal is to put the participant at ease while keeping the focus on getting the information that is needed. Key questions for any interview will focus on the task at hand. Black Community Educational Leaders lived experiences, and strength-based replacement strategies.

6. Let the participant know when you are going to ask the last question. This cue the participant to share relevant information that may have come up in answer to your key questions. For example, “Is there anything else you want to share that we haven’t talked about yet?”
    a. Explain the methods to the participant of disseminating results.
    b. Thank the interviewees for participating.

Interview Questions Responses and Reflection—Example of one interview question

Can you tell me a little bit about yourself, education, background and what brought you to the interview?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer:

Appendix D: List of terms

Asset-Based Thinking- Strength-based interventions with a strong internal focus with the belief all individuals have something to contribute to society and in the classroom environment (Eloff & Ebersohn, 2001).

Black Community Educational Leaders (BCEL)- BCEL are people who currently or previously worked in education and known for their impact and contributions on a structural level in areas such as spirituality, mental health, housing, education and advocacy for the wellness of Black people in a particular community.

Community Organizing-A community of people advocating for a common cause. Specifically for change in policy efforts and against the status quo which looks like having uncomfortable conversations and advocating for fairness, particularly in disenfranchised communities (Fisher et al., 2018).

Deficit-Based Thinking-Students from historically excluded communities are viewed through a negative lens and the family can be labeled as being unconcerned about their child's educational well-being (Betsinger et al., 2001; Valencia et al., 2001).

Healing-Centered Engagement-Engaging a strength-based approach that advances a collective view of healing, and re-centering culture as a central feature in well-being which drives therapeutic interventions (Ginwright, 2018).

Knowledge Production (wisdom)- Frusciante (2014) defines knowledge production as explicit work revealed in a public shared space from individuals who directly connect a change strategy (i.e. issues of information and resources access, voice, and power) to affect structural inequities in a social context. In the context of Black Community Educational Leaders, the researcher defined knowledge production (wisdom) as Black leaders' ability through action to provide

knowledge of their personal experiences in spaces that drive structural change within institutions and communities.

Normative Perspectives or Status Quo- "Education is reduced to finding out practical pedagogical methods for reaching an intended state of art using existing societal practices instead of future ideas" (Ulgens, 2006, p. 4).

Personal Resilience-Franklin (1999), which is described as "the individual's effective management of the hassles of daily life, cumulating over one's life history, which enhances one's adaptive repertoire and efficacy in coping strategies" (p. 781).

Practices-Practices in this study are interventions typically implemented by teachers in the classroom or by staff at the building level.

Promise Neighborhood Communities-The PN is a federal education grant funded policy developed under the Obama Administration through the US Department of Education in 2007 and put into action in 2010, with a goal of building 'community capacity' to help address the "effects of concentrated, intergenerational poverty on student success" (Horsford & Sampson, 2014, p. 956).

Racialized Exclusionary Practices–Viewed through the lens of Black student removal from the classroom that potentially leads to a culmination of negative outcomes such as disengagement, school referrals, manifestations, suspensions, special education, alternative education, expulsions, and disparate academic outcomes. (Skiba et al., 2014).

Root Cause- Preuss (2003) defined root cause as "the deepest underlying cause or causes of positive or negative symptoms within any process that, if dissolved, would result in elimination, or substantial reduction, of the symptom" (p. 2).

School-to-Prison Pipeline- A societal trend that pushes youth out of the educational system into the juvenile justice system (Alexander, 2010).

Structural Inequities in Education-Disparities (i.e., resources, finances, housing, schools) or biases that are deeply embedded into every facet of learning. Typically, the more financially stable individuals were more advantaged compared to lower socioeconomic or under-served students and families.

Structures-Structures in this study are systems or policies implemented at the district-level through the administration and leadership teams.