BLACK MALES TEACHING TODDLERS?! AN EXAMINATION OF HOW BLACK MALE YOUTH PARTICIPATING IN A GROW YOUR OWN (GYO) TEACHER PIPELINE PROGRAM MADE DECISIONS CONCERNING A LONG-TERM CAREER IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

by

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ABSTRACT

BLACK MALES TEACHING TODDLERS?! AN EXAMINATION OF HOW BLACK MALE YOUTH PARTICIPATING IN A GROW YOUR OWN (GYO) TEACHER PIPELINE PROGRAM MADE DECISIONS CONCERNING A LONG-TERM CAREER IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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Despite research (Cormier et al., 2022; Lindsay & Hart, 2017) highlighting the positive impact Black male educators have on Black students, and Black male students in particular, the representation of Black, non-Hispanic male teachers in the U.S. public and private K-12 teaching workforce remains notably low at 1.3% (Taie & Lewis, 2022). This scarcity is evident across the entire PK-12 education continuum, which includes early childhood education (ECE). This qualitative study examined the experiences of eight Black male youth who participated in The Young Black Male Teacher Project (TYBMTP), a grow-your-own (GYO) teaching exposure pipeline program that affords young Men of Color, ages 18-24, the opportunity to explore teaching as a viable career option by working alongside a lead or licensed certified teacher providing early literacy intervention instruction to students in PreK-3 and PreK-4 classrooms for an academic school year. The study explored how participants, known as "Scholars," during their tenure with TYBMTP, decided whether to pursue or not pursue early childhood education (ECE) as a viable career option post their participation in TYBMTP. The study employed semi-structured interviews, concept maps, a focus group, and two theoretical frameworks (critical race theory and hegemonic masculinity theory) to understand and ascertain to what degree, issues of race, racism, masculinity, or

other factors influenced participants' decision-making. The investigation revealed five critical factors shaping Black males' decision to either pursue or not pursue ECE as a long-term career. For most participants (6 out of 8), the three critical factors that shaped their decision to pursue ECE as a career included pedagogical relations with students, career exposure, and teaching as a counter-narrative. In contrast, the remaining participants (2 out of 8), who opted not to pursue teaching careers in ECE, cited poor compensation and burdensome pathways to teaching as deterrents.

The study adds to current scholarly discourse on recruiting and retaining Black male teachers in ECE by shedding light on the lived experiences of multiple Black males functioning as prospective educators in early childhood education, a context in which they are rarely seen functioning as guardians, nurturers, and caregivers of young children. The research also offers insight into some of the most critical factors influencing Black males' decision-making processes specifically around whether to pursue or not pursue ECE as a viable long-term career option. Finally, the study provides recommendations on actions schools, school districts, policymakers, and education practitioners can employ to attract and recruit more Black males to embark on teaching careers in ECE.

Key Terms: Early Childhood (ECE), Grow Your Own (GYO), Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA), Zero Tolerance (ZT), School to Prison Pipeline, Adultification, Critical Race Theory, Scholars, & Hegemonic Masculinity.

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Chapter I: Introduction To the Study

Statement of Problem

In the United States, nearly ninety-eight percent of all preschool and kindergarten teachers are women (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). In stark contrast, men of all races make up a mere two percent (USBLS, 2019), underscoring the glaring underrepresentation of male educators in early childhood education (ECE) from birth through 3rd grade. Additionally, given that Black males account for just 1.3 percent of the overall U.S. K-12 teaching workforce (Taie & Lewis, 2022), when areas of specialization such as ECE are taken into consideration, Black male educators are even more scarce (Bryan, 2021). In other words, Black men functioning as educators in early childhood classrooms are like needles in a haystack. The shortage of Black male educators across the PK-12 continuum has prompted nationwide initiatives to engage and encourage more Men of Color to pursue teaching careers in public education, from ECE through high school (Bryan, 2021; Bryan & Jett, 2018).

Research indicates that Black educators positively impact all students, especially Black students (Cormier et al., 2022; Lindsay & Hart, 2017), thus underscoring the need to increase their presence in ECE classrooms and beyond. For example, according to Gershenson et al. (2018), when Black students have just one Black teacher by third grade, data show that students are more likely to graduate high school and pursue post-secondary endeavors. Furthermore, investigators of the study also found that student achievement for Black male students grew when taught by a Black male educator and that disciplinary infractions decreased (Gershenson et al., 2018).

However, despite the benefits these Black male educators bring to classrooms, statistics show a noticeable mismatch between student and teacher demographics in K-12 public schools

(NCES, 2016; Noel & Tadler, 2016; Warner-Griffin et al, 2016). Although students of color comprise over half of the total U.S. student population (NCES, 2018), White educators (male and female) still make up nearly 80% of the teaching workforce (NCES, 2018). According to Bianco et al (2011), the representation of Black male educators is so low that it is normal for students to spend all or most of their K-12 public schooling experiences having never been taught by a Black male educator.

The oversaturation of female educators, especially White women, across the PK-12 continuum, not only reinforces stereotypes regarding who teaches and who does not, but it also positions White women as the ideal standard in ECE, embodying the dominant White feminine traits necessary for teaching, nurturing, and caring for young children (Bryan, 2021). Furthermore, given the overrepresentation of female educators across the PK-12 continuum at 77 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018) and the scant presence of male educators across the teaching profession in general, from a young age, children may begin adopting stereotypical notions about gender roles within the teaching profession, specifically about who teaches and who does not (Chodorow, 1978; Johnson, 2008; NAEYC, 2019). According to Solomon (2016), as children develop, their early years of schooling play a critical role in shaping their gender identity. For example, when children don't have the opportunity to establish relationships with male educators from a young age, they are not exposed to the divergent representations of masculinity, which further exacerbates conventional stereotypes about the role and presence of men in ECE (Aina & Petronella, 2011; Brownhill & Oates, 2016; Giese, 2018). Bryan and Browder (2013) assert that challenging prevailing stereotypical notions about gendered occupations is critical, largely because it challenges the status quo, and can be achieved

by encouraging individuals, in this case, Black males, to enter fields where one gender is vastly outnumbered (e.g., ECE).

Meanwhile, although the childcare system in the U.S. relies heavily on the labor of Women of Color, their valuable contributions are often ignored (Meffered & Dow, 2023). Nontraditional-hour (NTH) home-based childcare providers, which is part of the ECE ecosystem, Black and Latina women are overrepresented (Meffered & Dow, 2023) and are among the lowest-paid positions in both the labor and education sectors (Meffered & Dow, 2023). For decades, Black and Latina women have been largely responsible for providing the foundation of home-based childcare services, with limited career growth opportunities for themselves.

Conversely, White women have experienced enhanced career opportunities as Women of Color have facilitated and subsidized their career advancements through critical but undervalued home-based childcare services (Meffered & Dow, 2023). According to the Mefferd and Dow (2023), the high representation of Women of color, especially Black women in caregiving (home-based and non-home based) is directly linked to the country's long history of systemic racism and discrimination within the job market. While Women of Color, particularly Black women teaching in ECE, are not the focus of this qualitative research study, it is important to note that their presence in the ECE ecosystem and their relative absence in the PK-12 settings adds a significant contextual layer to the socio-historical dimension that explains their value and contributions to ECE and the field of education more broadly and further explains the poor presence of educators of color (both male and female) across the PK-12 continuum.

The absence of Teachers of Color has to be understood within a socio-historical context that encompasses American racial apartheid (legal segregation) via public policies and practices

such as Jim Crow and redlining that sanctioned and fueled racial segregation in America during the early, mid, and latter parts of the 20th century (Rothstein, 2013; Rothstein, 2017). Conceived and enforced by Whites, Jim Crow was a system of policies and practices at the local, state, and federal levels, with varying manifestations across the country, committed to the subjugation of Black Americans, other racial minority groups, and anyone who stood in opposition to it (Packard, 2002; Rothstein, 2017). Thus, it is within this context that the exodus of the Black teaching workforce can be understood as a direct result of discriminatory policies and practices that limited access to resources and opportunities for Black Americans and, therefore, Black teachers. Racist policies and practices such as Jim Crow and redlining not only segregated neighborhoods but also contributed to unequal funding for schools in predominantly Black areas, which in turn affected the quality of education available to Black students, fair wages, and job security for Black teachers.

Frequently viewed as casualties of Jim Crow and institutional failures before Brown v. Board of Education (Fairclough, 2004), the mainstream public schooling history under legalized segregation has primarily highlighted the substandard education received by African American children (Walker, 1996). The lack of proper school resources, poor facilities, underfunded schools, and the shortage of essential staff are just some of the frequently cited depictions of Black segregated schools that have fueled the national narrative (Walker, 1996).

However, there is a counter-narrative that challenges the prevailing national discourse that has historically depicted the schooling experiences of Black children in racially segregated schools as inferior (Walker, 1996). While acknowledging the lack of resources and inequities faced by Black schools at that time is important, it is equally important to recognize that the educational experiences of Black children varied widely before Brown v. Board. According to

Walker (1996), remembering segregated Black schools solely for the adversities they faced due to no fault of their own is an incomplete historical depiction. For example, Fairclough (2004) shares how alumni of segregated schools valued Black teachers' dedication to the profession, including their enthusiasm for teaching. Students viewed these educators as having an exceptional commitment to student success, which proved vital in compensating for the inadequate resources available in these schools (Fairclough, 2004).

Black educators served not only as teachers but also as parental figures, mentors, counselors, and advocates for their students (Milner & Howard, 2004). King (1993) noted that these educators had a deep understanding of the potential of Black students and held high expectations for their academic development and progress. Rather than seeing the challenges of Black students as barriers, they viewed them as chances for personal and intellectual growth. Despite enduring inequalities visited upon Black children during the days of legal segregation (e.g., Jim Crow), for many Black Americans, Black schools were symbols of pride and served as crucial sources of unity and support within the community (Fairclough, 2004; Walker, 1996). In fact, teaching was one of the most prevalent and highly respected occupations taken up by middle-class Black Americans before 1955 (Carothers, 2014; Foster, 1997; Pollard, 1997). Further, as several scholars (Anderson, 1988; Frederick and View, 2009) have pointed out, Black educators remained committed to education for liberation despite the inequities and challenges of oppressive sociopolitical conditions and racist policies they faced. They employed a variety of practices, both covert and overt to give Black children resources, skills and knowledge that fostered liberatory spaces.

Many scholars (Foster, 1997; Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Irvine, 1988; Martin Jr., 1998) cite desegregation as the primary nucleus concerning the exodus of Black educators from the

teaching profession. The 1954 Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court "decision signaled the crumbling of the statutory and constitutional apparatus on which Jim Crow stood" (Brown & Valk, 2004, p. 40), and marked a turning point in the professional trajectories of Black educators, but not a positive one (Irvine, 1988; Tillman, 2004). Whites, fueled by the days of legal segregation and the idea that White children could be taught alongside Black children and taught by Black educators resulted in swift retaliatory actions by schools and school districts that adversely impacted the livelihood of Black educators (Tillman, 2004; Martin Jr, 1998). Once the Supreme Court of the United States deemed legal segregation in public schools unconstitutional and thus would not remain the law of the land, it facilitated the dismissal of thousands of Black educators and administrators nationwide (Hudson & Holmes, 1994), leading to disruptions in the important teacher-student relationships between Black students and educators of their own racial background (Fairclough, 2004). The cost of desegregation had a lasting impact on the public school system as schools lost Black educators in large numbers, the effects of which are evident today.

As mentioned previously, Black male educators make up less than 2% of the teaching population and only 9% enrolled in teacher preparation programs making up 1-2 per cohort (Underwood, 2019; Bryan and Williams, 2017). The failure to address the scarcity of Black male educators leads to an expansion of the equity gap (Underwood, 2019). Over the years, multiple recruitment initiatives such as the He Is Me Institute, Early Literacy Kings, and The African American Male Teacher Initiative have worked to diversify the teacher pipeline by increasing the number of Black and Brown males pursuing teaching careers in public education (Bryan, 2021; Bryan & Jett, 2018). Yet, despite the critical role such programs play in building and strengthening the Black male teacher pipeline, each one will undoubtedly have to contend with

the factors that have and continue to deter Black males from entering the teaching profession in the first place. A review of the literature concerning why so few Black males opt not to pursue public K-12 teaching careers shows multiple factors at play. Chapter two of the study's literature review provides a detailed analysis of these factors.

While this investigation stresses the importance of increasing the representation of Black male educators across the public PK-12 continuum, particularly in ECE, it is equally important to note that it is not the intent of this study to promote or idealize hegemonic masculinity or minimize the importance of maintaining and increasing the presence of Black female educators in PK-12 settings. Instead, the need for this study comes from four arguments made in the scholarly literature. First, increasing the representation of teachers of color (all genders) across the public PreK-12 continuum is beneficial for all students, especially Black students (Gershenson et al., 2018), and thus their dwindling presence has profound implications concerning the social and academic trajectories of students, and particularly Black students (Lindsay & Davis, 2017; Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015; Gershenson et al., 2018). Second, the public K-12 teaching profession should be reflective of U.S. society, and thus, should have a diverse teaching workforce, particularly in the areas of race (Husband, 2019) and gender (Solomon, 2016). Third, when more Men of Color and specifically Black males are present in ECE classrooms, conventional stereotypes regarding the context in which Black male educators teach will be challenged. Finally, the increased presence of Black male educators in the ECE classrooms allows students from a young age to see mirrors of themselves and what they could be when they grow up.

Research Purpose

Scholarly research has long delved into the diminishing numbers of Black male educators in public K-12 settings, exploring their reluctance to pursue teaching careers. This body of study includes works by Brown & Butty (1999), Farrell (1990), Foster (1997), Lewis (2006), Pabon et al. (2011), and Woodson & Bristol (2020), as well as investigations by Lynn (2006), Johnson (2014), Goings (2015), and Goings & Bianco (2016). However, because Black men are not homogeneous, we must consider that Black males teaching in early childhood education (ECE) settings have unique experiences and stories distinct from their Black male counterparts that teach in middle and high school contexts, and thus reasons for pursuing or not pursuing a teaching career in ECE may differ. Failure to examine such experiences suggests that we have resolved ourselves to believe that regardless of the grade-level or context, all Black males teaching in public education (K-12) have the same lived experiences and are impacted by the same factors when deciding to embark on a teaching career in education. The gap in scholarly literature makes it difficult to get a rich insight into the lived experiences of Black males participating in grow your own (GYO) teaching exposure pipeline program with a focus on ECE and further, to know how or whether issues of race, racism, gender, masculinity, and other factors shape their decision-making.

Consequently, this also makes it more difficult to know how the previously mentioned concerns intersect with the adverse perceptions associated with the stigmatization of men caring for and nurturing young children in educational settings. The study is open to new ideas and experiences that the participants might narrate besides those informed by the literature. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the lived experiences and factors that shaped the decision-making of eight Black male youth participating in a Grow Your Own (GYO) Teacher

Pipeline Program, The Young Black Male Teacher Project (TYBMTP), and what role issues such as race, racism, gender, masculinity, or other factors played in shaping their decisions. The study employed semi-structured interviews, concept maps, and a focus group to delve into the experiences and decision-making of each participant. The research questions are as follows:

Research Questions

1. How do Black male youth participating in a Grow Your Own (GYO) teacher pipeline program describe and make decisions concerning a long-term career in early childhood education?
2. How do the participants in the study describe their experiences teaching in the GYO program?
3. How do they describe the influences on their decision to either pursue or not pursue ECE as a viable long-term career option.

Scholarly Significance

The scholarly significance of this study is multifaceted. First, the study stands to provide insight into the lived experiences of multiple (eight) Black males who taught in an early childhood education (ECE) GYO teacher pipeline program for an academic school year, a context in which they are rarely seen functioning as educators and caregivers of young children. Secondly, the study sheds light on the most critical factors shaping Black males' decision-making, specifically around whether to pursue or not pursue ECE as a long-term viable career option. Finally, the study allows us to better understand the barriers and challenges that deter Black males from pursuing teaching careers as ECE, and possibly factors that inspire or encourage them to pursue ECE as a career option.

Definition of Key Terms

Key terms in this study help the reader better understand the core ideas, themes, concepts, and, most importantly, the phenomena under investigation. Moreover, employing and carefully defining key terms helps mitigate confusion or the misinterpretation of concepts and themes associated with the investigation.

1. **Early Childhood Education (ECE):** Early childhood education involves teaching young children from zero to eight years of age (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2020).

2. **Grow Your Own (GYO):** GYO programs are multifaceted. According to Valenzuela (2017), they are designed to address a wide variety of issues, such as "Teacher shortages, retention issues, and teacher diversity, by engaging in a variety of strategies that aim to recruit teachers from local communities in hopes that the pool of candidates will increase in diversity and will be more likely to stay teaching in the community" (p. 1).

3. **Hegemonic Masculinity:** Is predicated on the notion that maleness reigns supreme in society, and to maintain it, the subjugation or domination of women is required (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Mankowski & Maton, 2010). At its core, hegemonic masculinity is a dominant form of masculinity that sets expectations for men to conform to certain prescribed behaviors (i.e., gender roles) and attributes that perpetuate male superiority through the belittling of femininity (Donaldson, 1993; Malamuth, 1991), and the avoidance of traits associated with femininity (Murnen et al., 2002).

4. **Critical Race Theory:** The overarching premise of CRT is that racism is deeply rooted in every facet of American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998) and thus permeates throughout the nation's social, educational, political, and legal institutions (Delgado 1995).

5. **Gendered:** The term “gendered” relies on two critical variables. First, there is a substantial variance in the gender composition of the workers (Kanter, 1977), such as 90 percent of the employees are women, and 10 percent are male. Additionally, the perception of the job is shrouded with gendered “values” and often defined in gendered terms (Kessler & McKenna, 1978; Leidner, 1991), which implies that certain types of work are associated with certain genders or social groups due to societal norms and expectations (Chalmers, 2014).

6. **Scholars:** As part of the de-identification process, the researcher employs the term "Scholar" (pseudonym) to substitute for the participant's official job title during their tenure in The Young Black Male Teacher (TYBMTP). Because TYBMTP is a program housed and led by a community-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit rather than a traditional or alternative teacher certification program, it is important to note that although the researcher refers to the Scholars as "teachers" and "educators" throughout the study in recognition of the valuable work they performed as participants of the program, Scholars were not certified as licensed teachers. Consequently, terms such as pre-service and in-service are not employed in this study.

7. **Zero-Tolerance:** Are policies and rules that require consistent consequences or penalties for particular violations without taking into account the situation, past disciplinary incidents, or the age of the student (Education Commission of the States, 2002).

8. **Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA):** The Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA) is a federal law that enforces a zero-tolerance policy for behavior deemed harmful, including violence and illegal drug use. This law mandates severe penalties, even for initial infractions (Potts et al., 2003).

9. **School-to-prison Pipeline:** The pipeline metaphorically refers to policies and practices within education and public safety that lead students away from the classroom and towards involvement in the streets, juvenile justice system, or criminal justice system (Archer, 2009).

10. **Adultification:** A phenomenon in which children display behaviors typically associated with adults or are exposed to information that is more appropriate for mature individuals (Goff et al., 2014).

Chapter II: Literature Review

In order to comprehend the shortage of Black male educators in U.S. public schools spanning from early childhood to high school, I found myself pursuing multiple threads of literature, and in particular the socio-historical circumstances that precipitated their underrepresentation. Thus, the roots of American public education, the shift towards a predominantly female teaching workforce, the impacts of desegregation post-Brown v. Board, and the systematic exclusion of Black educators—irrespective of gender—across the nation lays the foundation for contextualizing various educational disparities that persist today. Alongside this history is the corrective history of Black education that historians of Southern Black history have illuminated. Scholars like James Anderson (1988), Ron Butchart (2010) and Fairclough (2004), among others, have challenged previously incomplete and deficit views of the educational aspirations of Blacks and have successfully shown evidence of the central place of education and the prominence of Black educators throughout the history of Black people, starting from enslavement through segregation and after.

Within these contexts, a search of several academic databases such as the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), JSTOR, Research Gate, and Academic Search Elite (EBSCO) showed that a vast majority of the scholarly literature on Black male educators is typically set within a middle or high school context. Issues such as the genderization of the teaching profession, legal segregation, desegregation, professionalization standards, race and racism, harsh disciplinary policies and practices, racial stereotypes, and hegemonic masculinity have all contributed to the low representation of Black male educators across the PreK-12 continuum. I begin with an overview of the origins of the U.S. public school system, its

evolution, and conclude with an examination of how grow your own (GYO) programs are being used as a catalyst to attract and recruit more Black males into the teaching profession.

The Origins of the U.S. Public School System

In the 1830s, the Common School movement marked the start of what we know of today as the public school system (Osgood, 1997; Spring, 2011; Pawlewicz, 2020). Initially, exclusively for Whites and initially taught primarily by men, the general premise of the Common School was based on the notion that all children, irrespective of race or social standing, would have access to free universal public education mainly funded through taxpayer dollars (Salomone, 1996; Osgood, 1997; Spring, 2011; Pawlewicz, 2020). Yet, despite purporting that all children, irrespective of race or social standing, would have access to free public schooling, initially, many freed Blacks and Irish Catholics had minimal or no access (Salomone, 1996; Pawlewicz, 2020).

Spring (2011) contends that the Common School movement of the 1830s and 1840s with the promise of a universal free public education was also used as a conduit to help preserve and protect dominant Anglo-American culture from what was seen as an increasingly growing multicultural nation driven by Irish immigrants and enslaved Africans (Spring, 2011). Spring's assertion aligns with a fundamental principle of critical race theory (the permanence of racism), which suggests that racism is a permanent fixture in every aspect of American society, culture, policies, practices, and institutions, including education (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Further, racism is naturalized and taken for granted so that without a critical perspective, it may be obscured (Delgado, 2012).

While Horace Mann is frequently recognized as a key figure in the development of modern public schooling, historians (Anderson, 1998; Butchart, 2010) have pointed out that

education was a priority for Black people in the South as they emerged from slavery to emancipation. As early as 1860, Black individuals, both free and enslaved, had established their own schools (Anderson, 1998), especially since public education during the antebellum era was not an option, with states like Georgia, Virginia, and South Carolina passing laws prohibiting the instruction of enslaved people (Cornelius, 1991; Neem, 2016; Williams, 2005). Some individuals within the enslaved community were willing to defy the law at great personal risk in order to ensure that at least a few members could read and write (Neem, 2016; Williams, 2005). For instance, "certain enslaved Americans clandestinely acquired knowledge from their enslavers, the enslavers' mistress, or their children, often defying legal restrictions. The majority of educational opportunities for the enslaved community were covertly pursued" (Neem, 2016, p.351). Understanding the danger associated with their learning, learning sometimes occurred individually and collectively through "camouflaged" networks (Neem, 2016).

As tensions heightened leading up to the Civil War and fears of slave uprisings grew, laws became increasingly restrictive (Cornelius, 1991; Genovese, 1974). According to Genovese (1974), local regulations added to state statutes, making it illegal in some areas to provide writing materials to enslaved African Americans or establish schools for free Blacks. Yet, despite the legal barriers that prevented enslaved individuals from obtaining an education, Blacks recognized the significance of learning and viewed it as a means of empowerment. Free Blacks living in the North also valued education, but much like their enslaved counterparts, they also encountered widespread discrimination that varied across states, resulting in segregated and under-resourced schools (Jones, 1978).

Between 1865 and 1870 the Reconstruction Amendments ratified the 14th Amendment to the U.S constitution that acknowledged Blacks as full citizens and the 15th Amendment that

granted Black men the right to vote. The newly ratified citizens immediately demanded books and ballots (Butchart, 2010). Anderson (1998) described the efforts of Black Americans to access education. With the end of reconstruction, the once covert educational networks utilized by formerly enslaved individuals ceased operating in secrecy (Neem, 2016), and began to serve as critical elements in the fight for public education for African Americans (Neem, 2016). However, both Anderson (1998) and Butchart (2010) argue that historical records can testify that even if well intentioned, the funding institutions, government agencies and Northern White teachers who purportedly came to the South to educate Black children diluted the radical purpose of education imagined by Southern Blacks. Instead of educating Black children so that they would be equal to Whites, the education offered was designed to keep Blacks subordinate to Whites as skilled farmhands. By denying Black people an equal education, White elites maintained their position of power.

In this context, Black families, churches and educators worked in opposition to the public discourse which undermined the value of education that Black people honored and instead spread ideas of Black inferiority and White superiority. Despite these efforts, Black Americans constructed an identity in opposition to the dominant discourse. They attended schools that were meant to educate them for lesser roles, and yet, this did not dim their advocacy for continually striving for schools and education for Black Americans (Anderson, 1998). The historical struggle for an equal education finds its echoes in the post-Brown era and to the present day as a variety of different policies including tracking create new types of inequality albeit in a new guise. Alongside the struggle for an equal education, the growth of teaching as a profession also had an impact on the role and demographics of the teachers.

Growth of Teaching as a Profession

The nation's views about teaching as a profession prompted reform efforts that centered explicitly on teachers' work (Pawlewicz, 2020). Such efforts were largely the result of education reform advocates such as John Eaton, who served as the U.S Commissioner of Education during the late 1800s, who, like Horace Mann,-believed that teachers played a significant role in shaping the nation's citizenry (Pawlewicz, 2020). Others, such as Joseph Mayer Rice (education reformer), purported that one of the most significant liabilities facing the teaching profession were its feeble professional standards, which could only be resolved by adopting more rigorous standards (Pawlewicz, 2020). Thus, suggesting that the quality of public education was largely dependent on the rigor of the education received by the educator. Moreover, despite dueling opinions amongst education reformers, policymakers, and the general public concerning ailments that afflicted public school teachers, the blame game led stakeholders to move full steam ahead with reform efforts (i.e., professionalization initiatives) that were supposedly geared toward enhancing teacher preparedness.

Urban cities like New York City were at the forefront of the professionalization reform movement, serving as ground-zero as policymakers and public-school reform advocates experimented with teacher certification tests, civic partnerships, standardized hiring processes, tenure, and more, with the hope that it would lead to a skilled corps of education practitioners (Pawlewicz, 2020). Parallel to professionalization initiatives for teachers and the growing economic changes within the country, the development of state school systems increased employment opportunities for men, resulting in a gender demographic shift within the profession (Spring, 2011; Pawlewicz, 2020). In addition to growing economic and employment opportunities occurring within the U.S. during the mid-nineteenth century, so too was the

expansion of public schools and the demand by policymakers and education advocates for more teachers to join the workforce, specifically women (Pawlewicz, 2020). Given the increasing exodus of White males from the profession, stereotypical notions about women's abilities to nurture and care for children, coupled with the fact that few employment opportunities existed for women during the time, many policymakers and public-school advocates saw women as "natural" fits for the profession (Pawlewicz, 2020). Thus, contributing to the influx of women entering the profession, and ultimately the feminization of the teaching workforce.

The Social and Cultural Role of Women Teachers

Prior to the suffragette movement of the early 1920s, career options for women were mainly limited to domestic roles. However, men considered women, particularly White women, as ideal candidates for teaching because of their perceived nurturing and childcaring abilities. The expanding job market for White men also played a role in encouraging more women to join the teaching profession, as teaching positions for White men were often temporary, low-paying, and seen as steppingstones to other non-educational career paths (Strober & Lanford, 1986; Boyle, 2004; Pawlewicz, 2020). Women were also deemed favorable candidates to replace men due to sexist societal perceptions of their inferior status compared to men, enabling them to be paid less (Richardson & Hatcher, 1983).

According to Boyle (2004), the introduction of women into the teaching profession helped perpetuate the notion that the occupation itself was "low status" and therefore not held in high regard. The feminization of teaching expanded the purpose of education from instruction in academic skills to teaching social and cultural norms. White women teachers embodied the middle class, Anglo-Protestant identity that educators hoped would lead to the civilizing of immigrant and native children as well as African American children. Schooling meant teaching

both literacy and Americanization (Moss, Glenn & Schwab, 2004). White female teachers typically taught in well-resourced schools serving White students (Fultz, 1995).Equally important to the story concerning the evolution of the feminization of the teaching profession is the issue of race, as White women are often idealized and portrayed as the epitome of early childhood education and care (Bryan, 2021), while the contributions of Black women are frequently disregarded or ignored (Cunningham & Osborn, 1979; Rose, 1999; Turner, 2020). Following the abolition of slavery, Black communities turned inward to rely on their own resources and ingenuity to address the educational needs of their children (Roberts, 2005).

Given the enduring exclusion of Black people from public institutions, including education throughout the 19th and a significant portion of the 20th century, Black women leveraged their diverse skills and expertise to establish independent schools in churches and in clandestine settings to meet the immediate and emerging needs of the community (Cahan, 1989; Collins, 2016b; Cunningham & Osborn, 1979). Given that the majority of Black individuals lived in southern states including the federal district of Columbia between 1890 and 1930, Black teachers, especially Black women, frequently found themselves teaching in underfunded segregated schools for Black students. The dedication and resilience of these Black women, as they faced ongoing inequalities, exemplified their unwavering commitment to enhancing the well-being and progress of Black people. The social and cultural role of education was enmeshed into their positions as teachers, a responsibility that they embraced as it positioned them to be progressive activists. African American women teachers provided inspiration and resources along with academic skills to African American communities. Further, they extended their work as teachers outside of the schoolhouse into the community as many of them worked a double

shift, teaching children during the day and the children's parents at night school (Moss, Glenn & Schwab 2004).

Additionally, the discussion surrounding the experiences of Black educators and Black students who taught and attended segregated schools prior to the Brown v. Board Supreme Court ruling has largely been omitted from the varied accounts of school desegregation in the U.S. (Baker, 1996; Beals, 1994; Davison, 1995; Harlan, 1958; Kluger, 1977; Payne & Strickland, 2008). Yes, Black schools faced significant disparities such as dilapidated buildings, inadequate funding, and limited resources long before the landmark Brown v. Board decision (Fairclough, 2004; Walker, 1996). However, equally important is the fact that despite these disparities, Black schools and Black teachers still achieved success in educating Black students even in the face of legal segregation (Fairclough, 2004; Walker, 1996). To underscore this point, I reference Vanessa Siddle Walker's account of the Caswell County Training School in rural North Carolina, which thrived from 1934 to 1969 despite operating under segregation (Walker, 1996). Walker (1996) reveals that the connection between the Caswell County Training School and the Black community it served went beyond just a school; it was a source of pride and empowerment, so much so that the school and the community were interdependent, whereby families made financial sacrifices to sustain the school, while educators and leaders devoted additional hours to enhance their skills and provide tailored support services geared towards their students' immediate and emergent needs.

Other scholars (James-Gallaway & Harris, 2021) leverage scholarly accounts of Black female educators during the era of legal segregation, asserting that these teachers implemented a critical pedagogy rooted in political and cultural awareness, whereby their teaching practices sought to reinforce and validate their students' cultural, racial, and political identities,

perspectives, and strengths. Their assertions are affirmed by Fairclough (2004) who contends that former Black students of racially segregated schools have affirmed the dedication and expertise exhibited by their Black teachers, as some recalled that segregation fostered a distinct sense of commitment among Black teachers, which served as a vital compensatory factor for the educational shortcomings that plagued these schools. Loder-Jackson (2012) adds that Black female educators, particularly in the South actively worked to promote positive representations of Black individuals in a society dominated by White supremacy, and that these same educators were intentional about instilling a deep sense of racial pride in their students and led efforts aimed at empowering the academic advancement of Black communities.

Today's PK-12 teaching workforce continues to be gendered and raced with more White women than Black women and overall, more women than men, and as the purpose of this study indicates, with scarcely any Black male educators in ECE settings. Because data (Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015; Lindsay & Davis, 2017; Gershenson, Hart, Hyman, Lindsay, & Papageorge 2017) show that teachers of color play a key role in the success of all students and especially students of color, having a workforce that is not reflective of the student population creates an "opportunity gap" (Schott Foundation, 2021). The gap, metaphorical in nature, refers to the disparity in access to quality schools and vital resources, which includes access to quality teachers that students need to be successful (Akiba, LeTendre, & Scribner, 2007; Schott Foundation, 2021) and in this particular case, teachers of color. Thus, adding to the opportunity gap wherein, children do not have access to racially diverse Teachers of Color in public PreK-12 settings, other factors of enduring racism and systemic exclusion resulting in an unequal education, the continued barriers to keep educators from getting the credentials required to teach

all add to ways in which the system works to keep Black educators out of the teaching profession.

The Expulsion of Black Educators

The disproportionate number of Black educators (male and female) across the public PK-12 continuum is palpable and rooted in a sociohistorical context that includes desegregation, a context that some (Foster, 1997; Irvine, 1988) suggest is arguably one of the most singular factors that precipitated the decline of Black educators within the teaching workforce. During the era of legal segregation, Black students were mostly taught by Black educators (Madkins, 2011), largely because most Black people resided in the south prior to 1955 (Morris & Monroe, 2009), not to mention the fact that segregation laws (i.e., Jim Crow) in the south forbade the integration of public spaces including public schools. During this period, for many Blacks, especially Black women, the teaching profession was held in high esteem (Madkins, 2011), resulting in generations of other Blacks pursuing teaching as a profession (Dingus, 2006). However, after the 1955 Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court's decision, the profession once held in high esteem by Blacks, was now a fleeting dream.

While the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court ruling symbolized the dismantling of the legal infrastructure that aided and abetted Jim Crow laws (Madkins, 2011), the ruling also marked a pivotal moment in American history, especially for Black Americans (Brown & Valk, 2004). This ruling ties in with another central tenet of Critical Race Theory, namely, interest convergence, where the law dismantling desegregation, that was meant to benefit Black people, nevertheless protected the privileges and the power structure of the Whites. The effects of Brown v. Board had unforeseen consequences that adversely impacted the professional trajectories of Black educators nationwide (Irvine, 1988; Tillman, 2004). For

instance, following the Supreme Court's ruling that banned legal segregation in public schools, more than 38,000 Black educators and administrators, primarily from southern and border states loss their jobs through concerted efforts designed to reinforce and entrench White superiority in public K-12 schools (Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Tillman, 2004; Martin Jr, 1998; D' Amico, Pawlewicz, Earley, & McGeehan, 2017; Gershenson et al, 2021).

Such efforts included modifications to tenure laws for teachers, the termination of individuals with connections to civil rights groups like the NAACP, the implementation or intensification of certification and competency exams, and raised standards for passing these exams (Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Tillman, 2004; Martin Jr, 1998; D'Amico, Pawlewicz, Earley, & McGeehan, 2017; Gershenson et al., 2021). As noted by Madkins (2011), "First, Black teachers were not hired in desegregated schools, and then as other professional opportunities opened up in society, fewer Blacks entered the teacher pipeline" (p. 417). With the emergence of new professional opportunities outside the teaching profession, fewer Black individuals pursued teaching careers (Madkins, 2011). Consequently, many former Black educators pursued new career pathways to support themselves and their families (Madkins, 2011).

White opposition to desegregation was not just systematic but varied and extensive (Green, 2004; Tillman, 2004). The vague wording of "with all deliberate speed" in the Supreme Court's ruling allowed White segregationists to effectively stall and impede the progress of integrating public schools, enabling them to sustain a White supremacist system of apartheid (Brown & Volk, 2004; Martin Jr, 1998). According to Jones (1978), "Southern state legislatures proceeded to enact new laws to thwart desegregation. This included repeal or amendment of compulsory school attendance laws,' financial assistance to White- segregated academies, and permission to close or cut off state aid to court-ordered desegregated school" (p. 7). Thus,

without clear direction on how integration should be implemented, many courts lacked the wherewithal, and in some instances, the desire to adequately respond to the vast resistance brought on by Whites, which required them to desegregate (Lash & Ratcliffe, 2014), thus making clear that Brown v. Board was not going to even the playing field for Black Americans (Lash & Ratcliffe, 2014).

Decades later, some of the consequences of Brown v. Board remain. For instance, despite the increasing diversity of the student body in U.S K-12 schools, they continue to be segregated along racial, ethnic, and economic lines (Nowicki, 2022; Rothstein, 2013). Following the desegregation of schools, teacher proficiency exams were employed to determine which educators would be reassigned to newly integrated schools in both Northern and Southern states (Stennis-Williams, 1996). Today, these same exams (albeit different iterations) continue to be used by teacher preparation programs and state education departments as a gateway into the teaching profession (Gitomer et al., 1999; Murnane et al., 1991), irrespective of the fact that evidence suggests that Black teacher candidates disproportionately perform worse on these exams when compared to their White counterparts, regardless of grade point average (Taylor et al., 2017), thus placing Black teacher candidates at a disadvantage while also establishing a cultural and racial incongruity that creates obstacles or barriers that are non-existent for their White counterparts.

Depending on the college or university, prospective teacher candidates are often required to achieve passing scores on the core portion of Praxis (Praxis I) before being admitted into a teacher preparation program. The Praxis, which consists of two parts (I & II), is one of the most widely used standardized tests assessing foundational skills and subject area content knowledge (Educational Testing Service). However, critics argue that standardized multiple-choice tests,

such as the Praxis, are not the best means to determine teacher certification because they do not provide any insight into teacher effectiveness, nor are they sound measures for teacher preparation (Albers, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2000) mainly because the emphasis is on evaluating knowledge versus one's pedagogical expertise (Albers, 2002). These issues are just some of the pervasive challenges facing schools, school districts, and policymakers who hope to attract more Black male educators into the teaching profession.

Others (Milner & Howard, 2004) argue that the dismissal and demotion of thousands of Black educators in the aftermath of Brown v. Board has contributed to the academic regression of Black students, continued disinvestment in Black schools, and consequently, in Black communities. Thus, the underrepresentation of Black educators goes beyond desegregation and therefore includes systemic racism, urban neglect, and poverty (Foster, 1997; Gordon, 1994; Irvine, 1988; Madkins, 2011). Decades later, the presumed beneficiaries (i.e., Black students) of Brown v. Board are arguably one of its most significant casualties, as Black students are often cited as one of the most underperforming student racial groups in U.S. public schools (Milner & Howard, 2004).

Collectively, it is clear Brown v. Board is instrumental in anchoring our understanding of the dwindling presence of Black (male and female) educators across the public K-12 continuum, and its enduring impact on the professional trajectories of Black educators. The next sections of this literature review will expand upon earlier discussions to provide additional context regarding the reasons behind the underrepresentation of Black males in public education, particularly in early childhood education (ECE).

Problems With Recruiting and Retaining Black Male Educators

The scarcity of Black male educators across the public K-12 continuum in U.S. public schools has persisted for quite some time (Brown & Butty, 1999; Lewis, 2006; Lewis & Toldson, 2013). Their paucity is such that they are underrepresented in almost every subject area across the PK-12 continuum (Singh 2018; Vilson 2015; Waite et al., 2018). A review of the literature concerning why so few Black males opt not to pursue teaching careers in public K-12 teaching show multiple factors at play, some of which include low pay (Meidl, 2019; Daniels, 2010), adverse perceptions of teachers and the teaching profession (Graham & Erwin, 2011), inadequate representation of other Black males functioning as educators (Meidl, 2019), the perception that women mainly pursue teaching careers (Wiest, 2003; Dogan, 2010), negative schooling experiences (Goings & Bianco, 2016), low expectations from teachers, racial stereotypes (Goings & Bianco, 2016), and the belief that the schools themselves function as institutions of racial oppression (Graham & Erwin, 2011). When examining the literature for recurring themes often cited by Black males for not pursuing teaching careers in public K-12 education, low pay (Meidl, 2019; Daniels, 2010), and the stereotype or perception that women mainly pursue careers in teaching (Dogan, 2010; Millward, 2014; Wiest, 2003) appeared repeatedly. Given the prominence of these two themes, Millward (2014) stresses the importance of intentionally debunking the narrative that teaching is mainly suited for women and that all teachers are poorly compensated. Yes, it is true, some K-12 U.S. public school teachers are underpaid, and overworked, however, that is not the reality for all school teachers.

With less than two percent of Black males serving as public K-12 teachers in U.S. schools, it is essential to consider some of the challenges they have and continue to encounter. While examining factors concerning the retention of Black male teachers in public K-12 settings,

I quickly discovered many issues, one commonly referred to as the "invisible tax." This metaphorical tax refers to unrealistic and burdensome expectations and responsibilities placed upon Teachers of Color (male and female) that go beyond the scope of their roles as educators (Achinstein et al., 2010; Cheruvu et al., 2015; King, 2016). According to King (2016), Black male teachers are expected to be a jack of all trades, especially when it pertains to dealing with Black male students. The 'tax' is exacerbated when they are the sole male Teacher of Color in the school building and expected to tend to disciplinarian challenges exhibited by students of color (King, 2016; Sandles, Jr, 2018), serve as behavioral specialists (King, 2016), role models (Cheruvu et al., 2015), surrogate father figures (Pabon, 2016; Brown & Thomas III, 2020), and de facto racial or diversity experts within the school (Cheruvu et al., 2015), in essence typecasting them as Black saviors who have entered the teaching profession with the sole purpose of addressing the afflictions of Black urban students.

According to Brown (2011), the typecasting of Black male educators, particularly as role models, can be traced to the 1930s and is deeply rooted in the absent Black father narrative. Scholars (Goli et al., 2010; Pabon, 2016) suggest that overemphasizing Black male educators as role models is problematic because 1.) It suggests that Black males are the antidote to improving schools, drawing attention away from other critical factors that warrant their presence in schools. 2.) It idealizes race and gender stagnant identities, and 3.) The prevailing Black male role model discourse presumes that Black male educators entering the profession are okay with assuming and performing the responsibilities that go along with being a surrogate father. Such typecasting is compounded by the fact that these educators are still expected to engage in pedagogical and administrative responsibilities that coincide with their prescribed roles as disciplinarians, surrogate parents, and mentors, which eventually become burdensome (Brockenbrough, 2015;

Sandles, Jr, 2018). In a study examining the school-based experiences of 27 Black male teachers across 14 schools in a single school district, data showed that the participants found it challenging to navigate the stereotypical expectations of their colleagues and school administrators (Bristol & Mentor, 2018). For example, the study participants contend that their colleagues and school administrators expected them to operate and serve as disciplinarians first and teachers second, an expectation they rejected and felt was primarily based on their race rather than their effectiveness as educators (Bristol & Mentor, 2018).

Consequently, Black males are then stuck between having to navigate their roles as educators, in addition to the expectations associated with their gender and Blackness, where suppositions and expectations are built mainly around their race rather than their skill set. Given that Black males already encounter an array of barriers before they enter the classroom, the question becomes, in what ways do these racially based expectations from colleagues and school administrators impact the development of Black male educators who are already in the classrooms and their desire to stay in the profession? A 2016 report by the Education Trust highlights a qualitative study in which they conducted 28 focus groups across five states to acquire a better understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of Black and Hispanic teachers in urban public schools. Data showed that Black and Brown teachers felt they experienced workplace challenges unique to people of color such as being stereotyped as disciplinarians, not being seen as equals to their peers who were not stereotyped, feeling isolated and not supported. Some indicated that their value and engagement from colleagues and school administrators almost always centered around topics concerning the control and disciplining of students of color, and very rarely around academics.

Such issues further underscore the persistent problems that impact both recruitment and retention of Black males into the public K-12 teaching workforce. According to Brown and Butty (1999), for many Black males, the decision to embark on a teaching career in education is often shaped by the number of Black males who graduate high school and then attend and graduate from college. Unfortunately for Black males, the pipeline from high school to college is replete with barriers, making the pipeline leaky and unstable (Brown & Butty, 1999). In a study conducted by Lewis (2006) on Black male educators in an urban context that examined their rationale for entering and remaining in the teaching workforce, he found three prominent themes: 1.) The need/desire to help young people succeed; 2.) Wanting to make a meaningful contribution to the community/society, and 3.) The need for employment. However, “any discussion of recruiting African American males into teaching must first acknowledge how the public school system has tragically failed the very population we most need in our schools" (Bianco, Leech, & Mitchell, 2011, p. 368). The next section delves into the treatment of Black males across the public PK-12 continuum that severely impacts their academic success while reinforcing a school to prison pipeline.

The Treatment of Black Males in Public Schooling (PK-12)

The academic and social subjugation of Black males compared to other groups is unparalleled (Noguera, 2008; Howard, 2008), and the socialization of Black males into our nation's criminal justice system often begins at school (Noguera, 2014). Thus, examining how policies and practices have shaped students' academic and social trajectories, particularly Black males, is necessary. Given the wealth of research that has consistently shown that minoritized students, particularly Black males, are the consistent and disproportionate recipients of punitive and exclusionary school discipline policies and practices (McIntosh et al., 2014), we begin with

the topic of zero-tolerance (ZT), which has its roots in the drug enforcement agencies of the 1980s (Henault, 2001), but ushered into U.S. public schools by the Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA) of 1994, a product of the Clinton administration.

According to Stader (2004), schools across the country often adopted a zero-tolerance approach in line with the Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA), although the legislation itself does not explicitly require this. Zero-tolerance policies are rules that require consequences or penalties for various violations (minor and extreme), without taking into account the situation, past disciplinary incidents, or the age of the student (Casella, 2003; Education Commission of the States, 2002; Schoonover, 2009). Over the years, urban schools started resembling correctional facilities and police states, as noted by Bell (2015). This shift saw discipline policies being enforced in a manner more akin to criminal offenses that would typically be handled by law enforcement and the criminal justice system rather than by school administrators, as highlighted by Noguera (2005).

For example, some schools' zero-tolerance policies began to include things such as disrespect, talking back, the possession of over-the-counter drugs such as tylenol and aspirin, toy guns, classroom disruptions, truancy, clothing violations, and others (Schwartz & Rieser, 2001; Essex, 2004; Axman, 2005). Even though many of the previous examples posed minimal to no threat to the student or his/her peers, the policy offered no room for remediation (Henault, 2001; Sughrue, 2003; Villaruel & Dunbar, 2006). Figure 1 contextualizes incidents and outcomes associated with zero-tolerance in public schools, and how wide-ranging incidents and outcomes can be across school districts.

Figure 1

Selected Zero-tolerance Incidents and Outcomes Across The United States

Incident	Outcome	Source
A five-year-old kindergartner tells friends she will shoot them with bubbles with her Hello Kitty Bubble Gun.	A 10-day suspension for a "terroristic threat."	CNN
A boy, 13, is seen by school security taking a swig of Scope mouthwash.	One-week suspension for violating the school's zero-tolerance policy regarding alcohol.	Los Angeles Times
A 12-year-old girl doodles on a desk with an erasable marker, writing "Lex was here 2/1/10" and "I love my friends Abby and Faith."	Handcuffed, arrested, and ordered to complete eight hours of community service, a book report, and an essay.	NBC News
A five-year-old little Black girl has a temper tantrum while in school. She throws books, writes on the walls, smashes a candy dish, and hits two school officials.	Arrested and charged with battery.	New York Times
A Black male high school student in Texas goes to school with his hair braided.	He was suspended for allegedly violating the district's dress code and transferred to a disciplinary school program.	New York Times

Note: The selected events are examples of zero-tolerance incidents that made national news. Collectively, the selected examples represent how wide-ranging the incidents and outcomes concerning zero tolerance in schools can be.

As zero-tolerance increased across schools and school districts, so did suspensions and expulsions (Skiba & Leone, 2001). Thus, despite the initial intention of GFSA, which was largely meant to deter students from engaging in egregious or dangerous misconduct while at school (Bell, 2015) the extensive use, and one-size fit all approach of zero-tolerance began to have devastating effects on students across multiple demographics (Black, 2016; Schoonover, 2009). Many of the casualties included students that were mostly Black and Brown, especially Black males, low-income, and poor (Black, 2016; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; McNeal & Dunbar Jr, 2010). Understanding why students from these particular demographics accounted for most of the zero-tolerance incidents requires us to examine the perceptions held by those often responsible for its implementation and enforcement, school administrators.

In examining how urban and rural school administrators implemented zero tolerance, Dunbar and Villarruel (2004) found that the perceptions principals held about the communities where schools were situated played a significant role in their rationale for supporting zero-tolerance. For example, if principals perceived the neighborhoods they served as unsafe or dangerous, that same sentiment would apply to the school (Dunbar & Villarruel, 2004) and, arguably, the attendees of that school (i.e., the students), which could serve as a predicate for enacting zero-tolerance policies. In a similar study conducted by Heilbrun et al. (2015), which explored principal attitudes regarding zero tolerance and racial disparities in school suspensions, the investigation found that when it came to disruptive behavior, principals suspended Black students at a much higher rate than their White peers, while White students were mostly suspended for more severe offenses such as drugs and alcohol. The findings from Heilbrun et al. (2015) highlight racial disparities in the way discipline is sometimes administered within schools and indicate a potential bias or discrepancy in how discipline policies are applied based on the race of the student involved.

The disparities illustrated in both studies (Dunbar & Villarruel, 2004; Heilbrun et al., 2015) highlight a deficit subtext that is often associated with urban schools, communities, and students, which suggests that the "moral fabric of those who attend inner-city schools is flawed, and therefore draconian measures must be instituted to address moral and behavioral decay (McNeal & Dunbar Jr, 2010). Zero tolerance policies are an example of the tenet of Critical race theory - that of the permanence of racism. Because the enforcement of zero-tolerance in schools has been largely driven by those in positions of authority (i.e., teachers and school administrators), the question becomes, in what ways has its draconian application impacted the social and academic trajectories of those disproportionately affected by its enforcement,

particularly that of Black male students? The following section explores how those in positions of authority, specifically White teachers, impact Black male students' academic and social trajectories.

The Impact of White Teachers on The Academic & Social Trajectories of Black Male Students

Research shows that teachers play a critical role in perpetuating or eliminating classroom inequalities and enhancing academic success (Hyland, 2005; Douglas et al., 2008; Gershenson, 2016; Gershenson et al., 2017; Lindsay & Hart, 2017). According to Douglas et al. (2008) when teachers arrive in the classroom, they bring with them epistemological assumptions, assumptions formed from previously lived experiences that ultimately inform their pedagogical practices (Douglas et al., 2008) and possibly how they interact and build relationships with their students. Thus, despite evidence showing that educational outcomes for Black males have improved over the years (Harper, 2012; McGee & Martin, 2011), the factors that shaped those educational outcomes are equally important. For example, understanding the role that teachers play, specifically White teachers in the academic trajectory of Black male students is essential because although students of color account for a vast majority of the student body in public school settings (K-12), as previously noted, the teaching workforce is predominately White and female (National Center for Education Statics, 2017-18).

As evidenced by scholarly literature, White educators often operate from a dominant sociocultural epistemological lens replete with deficit predispositions (Darder, 1991; Boykin, 1992). For example, Allen (2015) posits that when considering the intellectual prowess of Black male students, many White educators reference their dominant cultural "normative" assumptions, which are rife with deficit predispositions, and result in a lowering of academic expectations. As

extensions of the state apparatus, White educators may directly or indirectly project or assert their dominant cultural norms onto Black students (Douglas et al., 2008; Howard, 2008). The projection and implementation of these norms mitigate a teacher's ability to leverage students' cultural capital to facilitate the learning process, resulting in curriculum and instructional approaches that fail to meet the immediate, emergent, and cultural needs of their Black students (Milner IV, 2007).

This does not mean that White teachers are not capable of employing pedagogical practices that meet the immediate, emergent, and cultural needs of Black students. Neither are Black teachers incapable of operating from a deficit lens. The focus on White teachers stems from the fact that because the teaching workforce is largely White (NCES, 2017-18), students of color are more likely to be taught and have more educational experiences with a White teacher than a Black teacher. Because Black males are not monolithic, it should be a surprise to no one that their experiences in life and public schooling are diverse and wide-ranging (Howard, 2013). However, for many Black males, their experiences in public schools (K-12) are usually impacted by the sentiments held by those charged with the responsibility for teaching them and are generally rooted in fear and control (Ladson-Billings, 2011). A contextualization of this fear and control is articulated by Ladson-Billings (2011), who asserts:

> The paradox of Black boys' experiences in school and society is that mainstream perceptions of them vacillate between making them babies and making them men. When they are somewhere between the ages of three and six years they are acknowledged as cute but rarely as intellectually capable. This notion of little Black boys as cute does not last long. Before long they are moved to a category that resembles criminals. Their childhood evaporates before they are eight or nine-years-old when teachers and other school officials

> begin to think of them as ‘men.’ The fear and control previously referenced appears to be activated and the once ‘cute’ boys become problematic men (p. 10).

Thus, the treatment of Black males is often predicated upon how they are perceived, seen, and framed in the broader context of society, especially in educational settings (Ladson-Billings, 2011; Howard, 2013). Take for example a study by Halberstadt et. al (2020), who found that the participants of the study (e.g., prospective teachers), most of whom were White and female, exhibited high instances of racial bias toward Black students (boys and girls) in that they falsely and often perceived them as being angry more often than their White counterparts (Halberstadt et al., 2020). The researchers of the study refer to this as “racialized angered bias,” which occurs when someone claims to see anger but lacks the evidence to support the claim (Halberstadt et al., 2020). According to Jennings & Greenberg (2009), how teachers interpret and misinterpret students' emotions could impact their willingness to respond to the needs of those students.

The phenomena of "racialized angered bias" coincides with the notion of implicit bias in that both are rooted in prejudice and have contributed to the adverse treatment of Black males in public education (K-12). For quite some time, scholarly evidence has demonstrated the impact teacher bias has on students' social and academic trajectory (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2011; Gershenson & Papageorge, 2018). The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race & Ethnicity at The Ohio State University (2015) characterize implicit bias as "attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. These biases, consisting of positive and negative evaluations, can be triggered automatically without an individual's conscious knowledge or deliberate influence (Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race & Ethnicity at The Ohio State University, 2015). When employed in a classroom setting, implicit bias can lead to teachers' adverse behavior (conscious or unconscious), such as lowering standards and

expectations, excessive disciplinary actions toward minority students, and more (Nkansah-Amankra & Desruisseaux, 2020). Gershenson and Papageorge (2018) found teacher expectations of students, mostly White and a reflection of the U.S. teaching workforce; White teachers exhibited far fewer expectations for Black students than their White peers. Such findings reaffirm the fact that regardless of whether teachers espouse egalitarian views concerning equity within schools and classrooms, their implicit bias informs their behaviors/actions, which includes the stereotyping and deficit-oriented labeling of Black males

The Misperceptions and Labeling of Black Males

Compared to other male peers, Black males represented the largest percentage of zero-tolerance-related suspensions (Caton 2012; Kang-Brown et al. 2013). According to Kang-Brown et al. (2013), national data from 2009-2010 showed that over 31% of Black male middle school students were suspended from school at least once. Shockingly, even preschoolers became casualties of zero-tolerance. A 2014 study by the Civil Rights Snapshot showed that although Black preschoolers accounted for less than 20% of the student body, they accounted for nearly 50% of the suspensions in 2011-2012, revealing that Black boys' trouble begins at the very early stages of their education (Mittleman, 2018; Wright & Ford, 2016).

Their troubles start with how they are viewed through deficit frameworks that categorize their behavior as wild, hyperactive, and aggressive (Wright & Ford, 2016). As a result, the deficit characterizations lead to stigmatizing labels shared amongst teachers from one school year to the next and eventually adopted and internalized by students themselves (Wright & Ford, 2016). Deficit practices, combined with harsh disciplinarian policies, lead to a downward spiral of young children, mostly young Black boys, resulting in early exposure to the criminal justice system. (The Advancement Project and The Civil Rights Project, 2000; Mowen & Brent, 2016).

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2019), adults perceive Black boys as menacing and threatening from a very early age compared to their White male peers. This phenomenon is known as adultification and occurs when children employ "adult-like" behaviors or are exposed to information that only adults should be privy to (Goff et al., 2014). Moreover, adultification robs Black children of their innocence and perpetuates a false and harmful narrative that the behavior of Black youth is deliberate and harmful, instead of giving them the benefit of the doubt and taking into consideration that their behavior may be associated with their immaturity (Goff, et al, 2014). Moreover, although the focus of this study centers around Black males, I would be remiss to ignore the fact that Black girls face many of the same adversities as their Black male counterparts (Epstein, Blake, & Gonzalez, 2017). For example, Black girls are also afflicted by adultification, and when compared to their White female peers, Black girls are perceived as more aggressive, needing less protection, needing less nurturing, and are hypersexual (Epstein, Blake, & Gonzalez, 2017). Such sentiments serve as part of the rationalization for policies and practices rooted in White supremacy that unfairly and disproportionately punish Black and Brown bodies.

In one of the first extensive studies on preschool expulsion, the study showed that from a national random sample consisting of 4,500 public Pre-K classrooms across forty different states, preschoolers (ages 3-4) were expelled three times as often as children in grades K-12 (Gilliam, 2005). The same study also found that Black students were expelled twice as frequently at schools devoid of a psychologist or psychiatrist (Gilliam, 2005). However, expulsion chances decreased drastically for schools that had access to professional behavioral specialists (Gilliam, 2005). This underscores the reality that expulsions and suspensions disenfranchise thousands of Black students from the right to an education (Wallace Jr et al., 2009), starting at an early age,

which in turn prevents them from acquiring critical academic and social skills (Costenbader & Markson, 1998) needed to be successful in life.

Black (2016) states that "The risks associated with suspension and expulsion are so high that, as a practical matter, they amount to educational death penalties, not behavioral correction tools" (p. 7), which show that suspensions and expulsions have real-life consequences. Take for example a study that examined the effect of school discipline on student success and their connection to the juvenile justice system, some of the key findings revealed that Black students, especially those with disabilities, were a.) Suspended/expelled at higher rates than other students (Fabelo et al., 2011), b.) Had a higher propensity to be held back a grade or drop out of school altogether versus students that didn't receive any disciplinary infractions (Fabelo et al., 2011), and c.) Students who received disciplinary infractions (expulsion or suspension) were subsequently more likely to come in contact with the criminal justice system (Fabelo et al., 2011).

Thus, the evidence suggests that low student achievement, coupled with academic ostracism, and low educational attainment, specifically as it pertains to minoritized and disabled students, are all characteristics indicative of the school to prison pipeline (Lerner & Galambos, 1998; Wald & Losen, 2003). Metaphorically, the school to prison pipeline is a "collection of education and public safety policies and practices that push our nation's schoolchildren out of the classroom and into the streets, the juvenile justice system, or the criminal justice system" (Archer, 2009, p. 868). Wald and Losen (2003) posit both adult and juvenile correctional facilities across the U.S. are rife with individuals, who as children, matriculated through the school to prison pipeline at some point in their public schooling (K-12) likely having been subjected to substandard teaching, harsh disciplinarian practices, teachers ill-prepared to work

with minoritized students, high referrals to special education, and much more. And, according to a 2014 report by The Hamilton Project, federal and state policies are significant drivers in the growth of incarceration rates, and that the aggregate risk of imprisonment for Black males without a high school diploma is approximately 70%. Such statistics suggest a sustained and systematic condemnation of Black males both within the public education arena and life.

The Condemnation of Blackness: The Need to Control Black Male Bodies

The stereotypes regarding Black men are wide-ranging, but the two that stand out the most concerning this study are the notions that Black men are dangerous and, thus, need to be controlled (Saint-Aubin, 2007). This is evidenced by the fact that although the U.S. accounts for only five percent of the world's population, it accounts for twenty percent of the world's incarcerated, most of whom are Black and Brown (Alexander, 2010; Prison Policy Initiative, 2020). In short, the United States incarcerates more people than any other country in the world (Alexander, 2010; Prison Policy Initiative, 2020).

The brutal murder of George Floyd televised on national television refueled the call for America to reckon with her long history of race and racism. Minneapolis officers murdered George Floyd for allegedly passing a counterfeit $20 bill (CNN, 2020). Whether Mr. Floyd was passing a counterfeit bill or not, his life was brought to a tragic end over 2,000 pennies, the equivalent of $20. In many ways, Mr. Floyd's death served as a new entry point to helping White America see and understand America's obsession with the need to control Black bodies. Further evidence of this perceived danger and the need to control Black male bodies is evidenced by the brutal murders of other unarmed Black men across the United States at the hands of law enforcement and White vigilantes. Take, for example, the 1955 chilling murder of Emmett Till. Emmett, a fourteen-year-old African American teenager from Chicago, was kidnapped, brutally

murdered, and dumped into the Tallahatchie River while visiting family in Mississippi for allegedly whistling at a White woman by the name of Carolyn Bryant. The perpetrators of the crime, Carolyn Bryant's husband (Roy Bryant) and Mr. Bryant's brother-in-law (J.W. Milam), openly bragged about killing Emmett and were seen by multiple eyewitnesses kidnapping him. Despite that evidence, an all-White jury acquitted both men of all charges.

In February of 2020, while jogging in his neighborhood in Georgia, Ahmaud Arbery was stalked, hunted, and eventually shot down by White vigilantes who perceived him as a burglary suspect (CNN, 2020). He was not. In 2012, Trayvon Martin, a seventeen-year-old Black male teen was walking back to his father's fiance's home after having just purchased snacks from a local convenience store. On his way home, a neighborhood vigilante by the name of George Zimmerman spotted Trayvon and called 911 to report "a real suspicious guy" (CNN, 2020). Mr. Zimmerman went on to tell the dispatcher that "This guy looks like he's up to no good, or he's on drugs or something. It's raining, and he's just walking around" (CNN, 2020). After the dispatcher asked Mr. Zimmerman if he was following Trayvon, Mr. Zimmerman replied, "yes" (CNN, 2020). The dispatcher instructs Mr. Zimmerman to stop following him (CNN, 2020); Mr. Zimmerman disregards the dispatchers' request and proceeds with his pursuit of Trayvon (CNN, 2020). At some point, instead of waiting for law enforcement officials to arrive, Mr. Zimmerman decides to leave the safety of his vehicle to confront Trayvon while armed with a 9mm semiautomatic handgun. During the altercation, Mr. Zimmerman fires a shot striking Trayvon, for which he later dies at the scene. Mr. Zimmerman would later claim that he fired the gun in self-defense because he feared for his life.

In 2015, Walter Scott, 36, a father, brother, son, and former coast guard veteran, was pulled over by a South Carolina police officer for a broken taillight. After being stopped, Mr.

Scott decided to flee from his vehicle on foot, which the police officer then pursued him. Once the officer caught up with Mr. Scott, the two men wrestled; Mr. Scott broke away and proceeded to run away from the police officer for a second time. However, instead of continuing the pursuit of Mr. Scott on foot, the officer shoots Mr. Scott 5 times in the back, resulting in Mr. Scott's death (NPR, 2017).

According to Wun (2016), "the punishment of Black bodies is not necessarily about discipline for the purposes of normalization. Instead, the spectacle of punishing Black bodies is ingrained in the 'dreams and desires' of the US racial society and its citizens" (p. 740). Such examples require one to consider if this is how Black men are treated and perceived in the larger context of American society, how are they treated and perceived within the context of public education? This is answered by Ladson Billings (2011), who asserts that when it comes to Black boys, learning and academic achievement are not the principal tenets of their educational experiences; instead, it's order and control. Thus, the evidence suggests that to some degree, public schools are a reflection of society and that Black males often do not feel safe in school and regard the teachers and administrators with distrust. However, despite that distrust, more Black males educators are needed across the public PK-12 continuum, which includes early childhood education (ECE).

Why The Presence of Black Male Educators in Early Childhood Education (ECE) Matters

The importance of seeing Black men in spaces where they have been historically absent and thus not expected to be seen, such as in early childhood education (ECE) classrooms, cannot be overstated. Consequently, society should not expect Black boys who will eventually grow up to become adult Black men to grow up wanting to be something they typically do not see (Milner, 2006; Goings & Bianco, 2016;). Role models play a significant role in children's lives

because they allow them to consider the wide-ranging possibilities available in career and life (Bryan & Ford, 2014; Milner, 2006). Furthermore, it is also about identity building, children being able to see themselves as successful learners and envision themselves functioning as educators in those same spaces when they become adults. That is why the scarcity of Black male educators from ECE classrooms is even more troubling.

Although representation (i.e., role modeling) is an essential part of the discourse concerning the need for more Black male Educators of Color, it is equally important that such discourse is not seen as the sole reason Black males are needed across the public PK-12 continuum. Instead, the role-model discourse concerning educators of Color must be balanced by other relevant factors supported by scholarly evidence. For example, over the past decade, research (Egalite et al., 2015; Lindsay & Davis, 2017; Gershenson et al., 2017) has reaffirmed that Teachers of Color positively impact students' social and academic trajectories, especially Black students. Some examples are higher test scores, reduced absences and suspensions, higher expectations of Students of Color, and increased referrals to gifted and talented programs (Egalite et al., 2015; Lindsay & Davis, 2017; Gershenson et al., 2017). Furthermore, data also show that when Black students, particularly Black boys, are exposed to at least one Black male teacher in elementary school (3rd through 5th grade), it enhances the prospect of high school completion, post-secondary matriculation, and a reduction in exclusionary discipline practices (Gershenson et al., 2017).

Other scholars (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2016) contend that Black male educators bring with them a pedagogical approach that is culturally relevant, meaning they can tap into their cultural capital to support and affirm their minoritized students' cultural ways of knowing. Supporting and affirming students' cultural ways of knowing means that educators are building

on students' prior knowledge, experiences, and cultural frames of reference to help facilitate the learning process (Gay, 2018) thus enhancing the learning experiences of students of color. The ability to support and affirm students' cultural ways of knowing is significant because most teachers in U.S. public K-12 schools lack foundational cultural and historical understandings about the communities and the students they serve (Kinloch & Dixon, 2018). Provided the evidence, one must wonder if having at least one Black teacher can have positive and long-lasting effects on students in 3rd through 5th grade, what the impact would be on the academic, social-emotional, and life trajectories of students who are exposed to Black male educators at an earlier age, such as those in early childhood settings.

The notion or expectation that a child should grow up wanting to be something they rarely see is ironic. Most students, whether Black, White, or Brown, will go through their entire public schooling experience (K-12) without having ever been taught by a Black male educator (Lewis, 2006). In other words, if we want more Men of Color to consider careers in teaching, it is critically important that they are frequently exposed to other male teachers who look like them and are afforded ample opportunities to explore teaching as a viable career option at an early age (Bianco et al., 2011, p. 369). Fortunately, multiple efforts across the U.S. are underway to help increase the representation of Black male educators across the public PK-12 continuum, of which many have taken the form of grow-your-own initiatives, which are explored in the next section.

Grow Your Own: A Potential Pathway for Black Males Entering Early Childhood

According to Valenzuela (2017), grow your own (GYO) teacher programs are multifaceted and often designed to address a wide variety of issues such as "Teacher shortages, retention issues, and teacher diversity by engaging in a variety of strategies that aim to recruit teachers from local communities in hopes that the pool of candidates will increase the diversity

and will be more likely to stay teaching in the community (P. 1). Often, these programs generally encompass partnerships with colleges and universities, schools, and school districts where the parties enter into non-legally binding contracts (i.e., memoranda of understanding), and articulation agreements (Skinner, Garreton, & Schultz, 2011). Additionally, others (Tanner & Tanner, 1968; Albert Shanker Institute, 2015; Learning Policy Institute, 2016; Kretchmar & Zeichner, 2016) posit that GYO programs serve as critical alternate pathways into the teaching profession, especially for people from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and are seen by some (Irizarry, 2007; Skinner, Garreton, & Schultz, 2011) as racial and social justice initiatives committed to the development and elevation of teachers of color.

Because there is no one size fits all approach for GYO programs, it is typical to find multiple variations (Valenzuela, 2017; Gist, Bianco, & Lynn, 2019). For example, Gist, Bianco, and Lynn (2019) assert that GYO programs that specifically target racial minorities have cohesive structures that intentionally take into consideration the varied support structures (curriculum, coaching, mentorship, pedagogy, etc.) participants (i.e., aspiring teachers) need to be successful. Additionally, because this study focuses on Educators of Color, specifically Black male educators that were recruited from the local community to teach in local schools, I will reference two GYO recruitment models that correlate with the characteristics of the GYO program that recruited and hired the participants of this study for an academic year. First, a community driven model, which intentionally aims to recruit teachers from the local community (Gist, Bianco, & Lynn, 2019). The second is a pre-collegiate pipeline model which aims to increase the number of racial minorities in middle and high context to embark on a career in education (Abbate-Vaughn, 2007; Skinner et al., 2011). According to Murrell (2011) as cited by Gist (2019), the value in the recruitment of community teachers is that aside from being from

and of the community, these teachers are generally "distinguished by his or her commitment to operate the meso, micro, and macro levels of educational life to execute transformative work in local school communities in light of the unjust sociopolitical and historic treatment of communities of color in the United States" (p. 12).

When it comes to program design, these two particular models are generally rooted in social justice and equity (Skinner et al., 2011). Both employ multicultural and culturally relevant practices that aim to center, honor, and leverage the experiences, histories, and cultures of students throughout the teaching and learning process (Reyes & McNabb, 1998; Lau et al., 2007; Rogers-Ard et al., 2012). Gist, Bianco, and Lynn (2019) posit that the integration of these components is related to the systematic racial barriers and concerns that prospective Teachers of color in conventional teacher education programs have encountered as being needed in their programs. For example, in New York City, the Urban Community Teachers Project (UCTP), a campus-based initiative to increase the number of Black males teaching in urban classrooms, the men showed resistance and expressed concerns about the "race-blind" curriculum they were being taught (Pabon, Anderson, Kharem, 2011). Thus, indicating that intentionality around pedagogical and cultural components are not only relevant, but wanted by new Teachers of color entering the profession in all teacher training programs.

Unfortunately, when it concerns the number of students in high school interested in embarking on a career in education, the numbers are alarming. A 2015 report by American College Testing (ACT) showed that out of nearly 2 million high school graduates that completed the ACT, only 4% expressed interest in a career in teaching. Moreover, the data also showed that for the students that were interested in pursuing a teaching career, most of them were White and female, which directly correlates to the make-up of the current U.S. public K-12 teaching

workforce. Fortunately, a variety of GYO programs, and specifically ones designed to increase the number of male educators of color continue to play an essential role in the diversification of America's teaching workforce. For example, "Call Me Mister" (Mentors Instructing Students Toward Effective Role Models) is a nationally recognized program founded by Clemson University in 2000 in partnership with three private historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) but now spans over twenty host university partnerships throughout the United States (Jones, Winston, & Joseph, 2019). The program's objective is to increase the representation of Men of Color in K-8 elementary classrooms throughout the country (Jones, Winston, & Joseph, 2019). The men receive their development through undergraduate programs that include a variety of supports (individual development plans, ongoing professional development, mentorship, summer retreats, and field experiences) to help ensure their success (Jones & Jenkins, 2012; Jones, Winston, & Joseph, 2019).

Another example is Profound Gentlemen (PG), which recruits and places young Men of Color into small cohorts of educators (by region). The cohorts are led by "Impact Leaders" who act as life/career/professional coaches for the program participants. Program staff work with each participant on the creation of an "Impact Professional Development Plan" that illustrates the established goals for the program, the participants' education leadership pathway, and three primary focus areas (character development, content development, and community impact) selected by the participant. Over the course of a year, the program partners with various organizations to host professional development training, conferences, and retreats in furtherance of the goals outlined with each participant's professional development plan.

Despite the fact that GYO programs are seen by some as a tangible way to increase the diversity and shortage of Teachers of Color in the teaching workforce, recent scholarship on the

subject is scant (Valenzuela, 2017; Gist, Bianco, and Lynn, 2019). This makes it difficult to gauge their overall efficacy. However, the evidence that does exist concerning community-oriented programs that were previously discussed, shows that at the beginning stage, the attrition rate falls between 40-50% (Perona et al., 2015). Data also show that long-term funding for these particular kinds of GYO programs are typically a barrier and thus the diversification of funding streams is highly recommended (Gist, Bianco, and Lynn, 2019). Furthermore, if such GYO programs fail to be intentional and critical about the kinds of partnerships they develop with stakeholders to help place graduating participants of their programs, it will do very little to increase the number of teachers of color in the profession (Gist, Bianco, and Lynn, 2019).

The two theories that I employ in this study are critical race theory and hegemonic masculinity. I focus on CRT because of the counter narratives that CRT can provide against the dominant narratives of the education of Black males by interviewing Black male educators. The reason for including hegemonic masculinity is to address issues of gender. These theories are addressed in the following section.

Theoretical Framework I: Critical Race Theory

This study employs the use of critical race theory (CRT) and hegemonic masculinity theory (HMT) to examine how issues of race, racism, gender, masculinity, and identity can impact the decision-making and perceptions that Black males develop about public schools, the teaching profession, themselves, and most importantly, their decision to consider and possibly pursue ECE as a viable career option. Although rooted in Critical Legal Studies (CLS), CRT draws and acquires its versatility from other academic disciplines such as history, sociology, women and gender studies, and ethnic studies (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Its framework is built upon five fundamental tenets that include: 1.) Whiteness as property, 2.) Counter-storytelling, 3.)

Interest convergence, 4.) The critique of liberalism, and 5.) The permanence of racism; (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Delgado, 2012). The overarching premise of CRT is that racism is deeply rooted in every facet of American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998) and thus permeates throughout the nation's social, educational, political, and legal institutions (Delgado 1995). According to Delgado and Stefancic (2017), CRT as a critical framework can be a powerful tool because:

> (a) it challenges the traditional paradigms, texts, and related discourse on race, gender, and class; (b) it focuses and examines the effect of race and racism from the perspective and experiences of women and men of color; and (c) it provides a guide to transform those oppressive social conditions in which women and men of color find themselves (p. 123)

In the context of education, CRT allows us to center race and further our understanding of how it operates in schools and school systems (Ladson Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), and how it works to uphold and preserve the subjugation of People of Color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Given that the lived experiences, stories, and perceptions of the research participants are essential to answering the research questions, the research will use CRT's counter-narrative element to accentuate the experiences and perceptions of the "voiceless" (i.e., African American male research participants). According to Solorzano and Yosso (2002) and Delgado (2012), the value of counter-narratives is that it allows the voices, stories, and experiences of the unheard to be heard, devoid of dominant deficit culture narratives. Thus, because Black males are rarely found teaching in ECE settings, their stories resulting from their experiences working in ECE classrooms stand to disrupt and challenge dominant cultural stereotypes and adverse narratives concerning how Black men behave, where Black males teach,

who they teach, and why they teach. Voices and dialogues pertaining to the historically marginalized have been largely disregarded and reframed by the larger dominant cultural group (Manglitz, Guy, & Hunn, 2006). Thus, counter-storytelling gives credence to the discourses of the dominated (Lopez, 2001).

Furthermore, because African American males have been relegated to the fringes of the American public-school system, their marginalization in U.S. public schools go beyond academics and thus, have large social implications (Howard, 2013) as previously discussed. For many critical race theorists, the academic experiences of Black male students in U.S. public schools is indicative of the systematic racism that has been ingrained in American society (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado, 1995). Thus, when we think about Black men caring for and teaching young children, for some, such an idea may be difficult for some to imagine given adverse cultural conditioning around who Black men are. Howard (2013) posits that "Frequently labeled as problems, prone to violence, invoking fear in many, and deemed as undesirable in certain circles, the view of Black males is diverse and extreme on many levels (p. 55). Therefore, the use of CRT is even more critical because it accounts for the divergent ways in which Black men, and other raced persons experience racism in American Society (Bryan, 2018).

Because CRT is not just concerned with race and racism but considers the intersectionality of one's identity, CRT could play an essential role in addressing both the racial and gender imbalances in ECE settings. For example, organizations that are interested in recruiting more Men of Color into ECE, CRT could help provide insight into the varying factors that discourage Black males from seeing ECE as a viable career option. Moreover, although intersectionality will not be used as a theoretical framework for this study, its relevance to CRT

and this study are essential. For example, the use of intersectionality allows the researcher to consider other aspects that comprise the identity of the marginalized/voiceless (i.e., research participants) such as race, gender, class, sexual orientation, etc. (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic; 2017); and how their intersectionality will play out in an ECE setting.

Theoretical Framework II: Hegemonic Masculinity

Because Black males are not monolithic, the same is true of their masculinity, which is multifaceted (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). According to Cooper (2006), Black males experience masculinity differently as a result of their intersectionality (race, age, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status etc.). W.E.B. Du Bois referred to this as double consciousness in his 1903 publication of "The Souls of Black Folk." The connection between double consciousness and masculinity is also complex and multifaceted. At its core, double consciousness refers to the psychological experience of African Americans, which encompasses their self-perception and the societal expectations placed upon them (Du Bois, 1903). Within this framework, I use the concepts of race and gender to help explain how Black men experience double consciousness.

For example, in the context of education, Black males may face stereotypes and prejudices linked to both their race and gender and thus may be burdened with expectations of hypermasculinity, such as being strong, aggressive, and dominant. These expectations and characterizations then translate into roles within schools that typecast Black males surrogate father figures and disciplinaries previously mentioned (see page 18). These stereotypes can exert pressure on Black men to conform to societal ideas of what it means to be a "real man," even though these expectations may be contradictory or unattainable. In navigating double-consciousness, Black men must handle not only the racialized gaze but also the lens through

which masculinity is understood in society, resulting in a heightened consciousness about how they are perceived by others. Double consciousness highlights the effects of racism and oppression on African Americans, as they are forced to see themselves through the lens of White culture and constantly justify their own existence in a society that often devalues them.

To help center our understanding of masculinity, this study employs Connell's (1995) hegemonic masculinity theory (HMT). According to Connell (1995), hegemonic masculinity encompasses "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy" (p. 77). Thus, hegemonic masculinity is predicated on the notion that maleness reigns supreme in society, and to maintain it, the subjugation or domination of women is required (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Mankowski & Maton, 2010). At its core, hegemonic masculinity is a dominant form of masculinity that sets expectations for men to conform to certain prescribed behaviors (i.e., gender roles) and attributes that perpetuate male superiority through the belittling of femininity (Donaldson, 1993; Malamuth, 1991), and the avoidance of traits associated with femininity (Murnen et al., 2002).

Connell's (2005) reexamination of the theory transcended the initial intent of the original theory, which set out to explain the dominance men have over women, now includes sexual orientation, race, and social class. Connell (2005) contends that the masculinity of Black males is generally perceived as a danger to the dominant White cultures. This sentiment aligns with Collins (2006) assertion that Black males vacillate in their quest to attain masculinity within the parameters kept and established by dominant White men, while also rejecting repackaged forms of Black masculinity presented by that same group.

There is evidence to suggest that as young Black males develop their masculine identities, aggression appears to be an essential factor because, from their perspective, aggression

gives the appearance of a "strong man," which in turn elevates their social standing (Banjoko, 2011). Because the historical narrative of Black masculinity is rooted in oppression and slavery, Black males' masculinity has been historically characterized as hostile, out of control, rebellious, and having a high degree of sexual compulsivity (Hutchinson, 1994). It is important to note that, thus far, throughout this dissertation, I have provided evidence showing that some of the same characterizations are used by educators in public schools when describing Black boys' behavior. Taken together, these theories will anchor the study methodologically and will help to frame the analysis.

The literature review and the study's' theoretical framework highlight how the intersections of race, power, privilege, and hegemonic masculinity shape and influence how Black males make decisions regarding whether to pursue or not pursue teaching careers in early childhood education (ECE). The historical exclusion and subjugation of Blacks in U.S. society, the bastardization of the teaching profession, and racial wage disparities within the early childhood ecosystem underscore the endemic nature of racism in American society (i.e., White supremacy) and illustrate how stereotypes and the mistreatment of Blacks have helped contribute to the paucity of Black male educators we see across the PK-12 continuum today.

Bureaucratic policies and practices at various levels of government and institutions, such as colleges and universities, have contributed to the perpetuation of inequalities, notably evident in the stark racial disparities between predominantly White teachers and racially diverse students who constitute a majority of the K-12 student population in the United States. Viewed through a Critical Race Theory (CRT) perspective, racism is ingrained and persistent within these systems. The overrepresentation of White educators not only signifies a standard that favors Whites in the realm of public education but also reflects how Whiteness functions as a form of valuable

property, entitling individuals to privileges and power. This reinforcement of racial hierarchies further exacerbates existing disparities. When Black children are consistently met with a lack of representation among their teachers, they may struggle to envision themselves pursuing careers in education due to the absence of relatable role models. While diverse factors shape Black males' decision to either pursue or not pursue early childhood education as a viable career option, it is important to understand how Black male educators make meaning of those factors. Listening to their counter narratives and the nuances of their decision-making processes will provide a greater understanding of the complexity of the factors that shape their decision-making. Stakeholders (i.e., colleges and universities, schools, school districts, etc.) will be better positioned to plan more effectively when developing policies, practices, programs, and strategies aimed at facilitating Black males' entry into teaching careers in ECE and across other areas of the PK-12 continuum.

Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction

This investigation uses a qualitative research design (phenomenology) to examine and better understand the decision-making process of eight African American males, their experiences teaching in a GYO program, and the factors that influenced their decision-making concerning whether to pursue or not pursue early childhood education (ECE) as a viable long-term career option. In this chapter, a rationale for selecting a phenomenological approach is provided, along with a detailed overview of the methodological approach, the study's context, sampling, site selection, data collection, and data analysis procedures.

The following qualitative research questions guided the research design:

1. How do Black male youth participating in a Grow Your Own (GYO) teacher pipeline program describe their decision-making processes concerning a long-term career in early childhood education?
2. How do the participants in the study describe their experiences teaching in the GYO program?
3. How do they describe the influences on their decision to either pursue or not pursue ECE as a viable long-term career option?

Rationale & Overview of A Phenomenological Research Design

In choosing a research design, I concluded that a phenomenological approach was most appropriate because of its capacity to illuminate the personal meanings of the lived experiences of Black males teaching in ECE classrooms. While ethnography was considered and could be used to uncover common cultural patterns, it was ruled out as culture was not the central focus of this investigation. I also explored a case study approach but ultimately settled on phenomenology to delve deeper into the participants' lived experiences with greater emphasis. Per Creswell and Cresswell (2018), phenomenological research is a qualitative research methodology that focuses on exploring and portraying participants' lived experiences in relation to a specific phenomenon. Data collection in phenomenology can take many forms, including interviews, observations, diaries, and protocol writing (Beck, 2021; Van Manen, 1990).

Along with semi-structured interviews, I added circle maps or concept maps to the data collection process. Concept maps in combination with semi-structured interviews allowed for a greater depth of sharing in addition to focusing deeply on the various influences that led to participants' decision making. Concept maps in combination with interview methods are regarded as being able to provide a deeper understanding of participants' perspectives that the

use of interviews alone might not be able to provide (Banks, 2018; Crilly, Blackwell and Clarkson, 2006). Further, it may provide a more credible view of participants' perspectives (Scherp, 2013). A third data collection tool was a focus group. I incorporated a focus group to foster dialogue and facilitate a collective exploration of participants' perspectives to enhance my understanding of participants' shared experiences and peer influences and potentially uncover new insights not captured in individual interviews (Robinson, 2020).

Data gathering for this study was informed by the two theoretical frameworks explained in the previous chapter, i.e. Critical Race Theory and Hegemonic Masculinity. I was interested in gathering and obtaining data that focuses on the counter-stories rooted in CRT (i.e., the untold stories and experiences of marginalized people of color), in addition to how masculinity and identity (hegemonic masculinity) influences participants' decision-making. Since my study is primarily phenomenological, I concluded that the use of additional lenses to inform experiential data from phenomenology need to align with the underlying frameworks. I also carefully considered the intersection of phenomenology with my theoretical frameworks. While CRT delves into how race and racism influence societal structures and personal experiences, both CRT and phenomenology emphasize the importance of understanding individuals' lived experiences, narratives, and viewpoints shaped by various factors. In relation to hegemonic masculinity, the alignment with phenomenology provides a lens to explore how individuals navigate gender roles, reflecting on subjective experiences of adhering to or resisting hegemonic masculinity.

Credited as the father of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl introduced this methodological approach at the beginning of the twentieth century (Moran, 2000; Guignon, 2006). According to Husserl (1983), the foundation of phenomenology is the essence of the

phenomenon itself. This study focuses on the meaning of the experience as the participant experiences it. It allows that no experience is uninterpretable. This means that as the researcher reflects on the lived experiences (i.e., given descriptions), he/she "must aim for discursive language and sensitive interpretive devices that make phenomenological analysis, explication, and description possible and intelligible" (Van Manen, 2014, p. 26). As previously noted, scant literature on the subject has failed to adequately examine and document the lived experiences of Black males teaching in ECE classrooms. Thus, instead of assuming that Black male educators across the the public PK-12 continuum all have the same experiences, regardless of grade level, context, or other variables, we must do what West (2005) suggested, which is to resist the familiar "homogenizing impulse" that presumes that all Black folk are the same, devoid of individual and unique experiences.

According to van Manen (1990), phenomenological research encompasses six phases that are pertinent to discovering lived descriptions of participants.

1) Using a phenomenon of genuine interest and committing oneself to investigate the experience
2) Investigating the experience as it was lived, rather than as we theorize it
3) Taking time to reflect upon the critical themes that describe the phenomenon
4) Articulate the phenomenon by writing and rewriting
5) Ensuring that one has a close pedagogical relationship to the phenomenon
6) Establishing a balance between focusing on the specific elements of the research context

Study's Context

This study spans two urban emergent U.S. cities; both represent where participants lived and worked while participating in The Young Black Male Teacher Project (TYBMTP). I employ Milner's (2012a) conceptual framework of "urban" (i.e., urban emergent, urban intensive, and urban characteristic) to help anchor our setting and the use of the term urban in the context of this study. Urban emergent reflects school contexts situated within mid-sized cities with less than a million people Milner (2012a), such as Detroit, Cincinnati, and St. Louis. In comparison, urban intensive is reflective of school contexts within larger metropolitan cities with more than a million people (Milner, 2012a), such as New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago. Urban intensive spaces are also known for their density and other critical factors that define them (i.e., housing, transportation, poverty, etc.), factors that, often, are directly linked to the schools that exist within them (Milner, 2012a). Milner's third and final urban conceptual frame (urban characteristic) is reflective of neither dense schools (large) nor mid-sized (Milner, 2012a). Therefore, they could be rural or suburban and face similar challenges prevalent in urban emergent and urban intensive cities (Milner, 2012a), such as teacher poverty, high unemployment, and high crime rates.

In the context of this study, the first urban emergent city is situated in the Midwest with fewer than 600,000 people (United States Census, 2021). The city has a documented and troubled history of racial segregation, including a reputation for having one of the highest percentages of Black-White segregation in the country (Nelson, 2015; Brookings Institute, 2018), and described as "the archetype of modern-day metropolitan racial apartheid and inequality" (Levine, 2020, p. 4). Over the decades, the city has been plagued with racial and social inequality issues. For example, it ranks as one of the country's largest metropolitan areas

with the highest rates of Black infant mortality, Black incarceration, Black teen pregnancy, and low homeownership for African Americans.

The second urban emergent city is densely populated for its size with nearly 700,000 residents (United States Census, 2021), and is located in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. However, the city has undergone a drastic shift in its racial and socioeconomic composition over the past few decades, where African Americans were once the dominant racial group (Summers, 2020). Moreover, similar to its Midwestern counterpart, this region also has a well-documented history of racial segregation and institutional racism, reinforced primarily through governmental policies and practices like redlining (King et al., 2020). Based on research by King et al., (2020) as well as Summers (2020), the city is widely recognized as one of the most heavily gentrified regions in the United States. Since 2000, there has been a notable increase in cultural and physical displacement among Black residents in this urban area (Summers, 2020). Additionally, evidence suggests that racial gaps concerning life expectancy for Blacks were some of the worst in the nation in that Blacks were projected to live 12-17 years less than their White peers (Summers, 2020).

My analysis of both urban emergent cities provides a small but significant insight into the sociohistorical, sociocultural, and socio-economic challenges facing them and the residents who reside within them. The decision to highlight these issues is not an attempt to overemphasize deficit paradigms that are too often associated with urban spaces and places. Instead, it attempts to call attention to social, historical, cultural, and economic forces that have and continue to shape many urban U.S. cities and the schools that operate within them. And, as Milner (2012a) suggests, social inequalities prevalent in cities will undoubtedly find their way into schools and

school systems. In other words, what happens outside of the school will ultimately find its way inside the school.

Researcher's Positionality

According to Scharp and Thomas (2019), when undertaking crucial and necessary social science research, researchers must be willing to take the opportunity to consider and assess their own experiences and positions and how they might influence their perceptions of others' lived experiences. With that in mind, I had to consider the fact that I hold multiple positionalities. First, I am a Black male educator (university lecturer) interested in recruiting other Black males to embark on teaching careers in public education, specifically in the public PK-12 arena. Secondly, my work outside of academia in the nonprofit sector partially focuses on the development of targeted initiatives that enable young Men of Color, ages 18-24 years old, to explore teaching careers in public PK-12 education, which allows me to stay rooted and engaged in the fight for equity and representation; ensuring that all students, especially Black and Brown students have an opportunity to be taught by a Black male educator. Additionally, given my past position as former Program Manager of The Young Black Male Teacher Project (TYBMTP) from 2018-2020, I am uniquely familiar with TYBMTP's program model and some of the research participants who directly reported to me during my 2018-2020 tenure.

Therefore, based on one of my positionalities as the former Program Manager of TBYTMP and my past professional relationship with some of the study's participants, it was clear that my role in this study was that of an "insider." According to Chavez (2008) "insiders"' are those that possess close personal or professional knowledge or experience within the group or community under study. Such individuals are generally considered knowledgeable about the specific context, culture, or social dynamics being investigated (Chavez, 2008). Chavez (2008)

also purports that it is equally important for researchers to reflect on their insider status and potential biases, ensuring that personal connections or relationships do not interfere with objectivity and rigor in data collection and analysis (Chavez, 2008).

However, despite my insider status, and in the spirit of objectivity and commitment to rigorous data collection and analysis, I used bracketing to ensure that my biases and assumptions were not projected onto the study's participants. Bracketing in qualitative research is one of many ways researchers can demonstrate the soundness of their data collection and analysis (Ahern, 1999; Carpenter, 2007). As such, bracketing also requires reflexivity, in that researchers must intentionally and temporarily suspend their biases, opinions, and assumptions during participant interactions while remaining open and receptive to participants' perspectives and lived experiences (Chan et al., 2013). Given how critical reflexivity is to the bracketing process, prior to data collection and analysis, I made general notes using a Microsoft Word document about what I expected to hear from research participants based on elements explored in the studies' literature review. This process aligns with Chan et al. (2013) suggestion that researchers document their preconceived notions so that they can revisit them in case issues of bias arise, once again safeguarding against my own biases.

Reflecting on other relevant aspects of my life in relation to this study, I can distinctly recall during my K-12 schooling experience, not having a single educator of color (male or female) modeling what it meant to be a Black educator, or the possibility of becoming one. Fortunately, the exposure to a Black male educator (university professor) during my junior year of undergraduate, and the passion he exuded for his job, his students, and his scholarship, produced an excitement in me that allowed me to see myself in him and the possibility of one day becoming a university educator myself.

Throughout this research project, from time to time, I would wonder what impact a Black male educator's presence, guidance, and knowledge would have had on me as an impressionable young Black male had I been exposed to at least one Black male educator earlier in my K-12 schooling experience. Additional details concerning TYBMTP are discussed in the proceeding section (Site Selection & Characteristics of The GYO Program). Keenly aware of the factors that influenced my own decision-making to become an educator has also played a critical role in the work that I continue to do as Chief Impact Officer for a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, creating targeted initiatives that enable young Men of Color (18-24) to explore teaching careers in public PK-12 education. When I consider my other role as a university lecturer at a predominantly White urban research institution in Wisconsin, the lack of Black male colleagues within my department and the college of education is palpable and disappointing. However, it serves as a reminder why the work I do is critically important.

Too often, society sees Black and Brown men as "problems" to be dealt with instead of opportunities to be nourished and engaged. My professional work in the nonprofit sector has shown me time and time again that when the brilliance and talents of Black and Brown males are nourished, they can address many of our nation's problems, including the enduring inequalities that persist in public education (PK-12). As a Black male educator, I understand firsthand the value and power of what it could mean for other students of color to have someone who looks like them and can relate to them on a cultural level teaching in their classrooms, which is why this study is critical. I, therefore, write this dissertation with the hope that data obtained from research will help others (i.e., education practitioners, policymakers, etc.) gain greater clarity around the diverse factors that encourage Men of Color, specifically Black males, to pursue

teaching careers across the public PK-12 continuum, with a particular emphasis on early childhood education.

Site Selection & Characteristics of the GYO Program

In qualitative studies, data is generally collected at the phenomena' location (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this study, research participants were recruited from a grow-your-own (GYO) teacher pipeline program titled "The Young Black Male Teacher Project" (pseudonym) or TYBMTP, formerly managed and led by the researcher himself. Housed within a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit headquartered in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, by the time this study commenced, TYBMTP existed in six different locations that span the Midwest, mid-Atlantic, and the south. TYBMTP recruits young Men of Color, ages 18-24, to spend an academic year at a school, working alongside a lead or licensed certified teacher in PreK-3 and PreK-4 classrooms providing early literacy instruction to students in early childhood classrooms.

The selection of TYBMTP was based on the researchers' strong familiarity with program design and convenient access to the program's graduating participants. Additionally, as part of the de-identification process, I employ the term "Scholar" (pseudonym) to substitute for the men's official job title during their tenure in TYBMTP. Furthermore, to avoid conflicts of interest, only participants who completed their 10-month obligation to TYBMTP and thus were no longer under the program's employ were eligible to participate in this study. Given the program's intentional and explicit decision to focus on the recruitment of young Men of Color, from and of the community, the 501(c)(3) status of the organization that developed and implemented TYBMTP, coupled with its partnerships with other community-based organizations, makes the orientation of this GYO program community-based and community led.

Criteria for acceptance into the program is multifaceted. For example, in addition to committing themselves to the 10-month duration of the program, Scholars had to: a.) submit a formal online application signifying their interest in the program, b.) complete a screening and an in-depth interview process in which they'd be asked to respond to a series of interview questions, and then participate in literacy exercises to help simulate the kind of work they would be expected to perform inside of an actual ECE classroom, c.) pass a state Department of Justice caregiver background check, in addition to an FBI, and national sex offender background check., d.) commit to working alongside a single licensed or lead certified teacher at either a community-based center or a Title-I public school, e.) provide PreK-3 and PreK-4 students with daily early literacy intervention instruction with the goal of setting them up for academic success before their matriculation into kindergarten, f.) agree to work a set schedule determined by the program's administrative team (5-days a week at 25-hour per week at an hourly rate of $15 an hour), agree to attend and participate in all of the programs' required trainings, and h.) participate in professional coaching, observations, and feedback from the programs' ECE Specialist, Program Manager, special guests, and other program staff.

TYBMTP recruited Scholars from various sources, some of which included high schools, community-based centers, word of mouth via school counselors, principals, teachers, mentors, and recruitment flyers posted at various businesses and locations throughout respective cities and communities. An internal data system (Salesforce) that tracked recruitment efforts, specifically how applicants heard about the program, revealed that face-to-face information sessions were the most fruitful forms for recruitment and accounted for approximately 70 percent of the applicants. All Scholars were employed part-time, working no more than 25-hours a week. A typical work

schedule for Scholars generally started at 8:00 am and concluded at 1:30 pm, which included 15 minutes for lunch, and 15-minutes for prep time.

To ensure that Scholars had structure to their day and were able to execute their daily responsibilities set forth by TYBMTP, the Early Literacy Specialist developed and provided each Scholar with an activity schedule spanning the five-day work week. Each activity schedule was created by securing a copy of their lead teacher's master activity schedule. From there, the program's Early Literacy Specialist who's partially responsible for the men's training and development reviewed each of the lead teacher's master activity schedule and then integrated activities to be executed by the Scholar into the schedule.

In addition to an hourly wage, other benefits for participation in TYBMTP included a $120 monthly transportation and communication stipend, a $5,000 education award, ongoing professional development, higher education application assistance, mentoring from current and veteran male educators of color, and bi-weekly affinity group meetings. The bi-weekly affinity group meetings were included in the program design to help create a sense of community and Fellowship. This ensured that the Scholars had a supportive space to share amongst one another the successes and unique challenges they faced as Men of Color teaching an early childhood education (ECE) context. Figure 2 is an example of a mock daily activity schedule that a Scholar would follow.

Figure 2

Mrs. Milly's Daily Activity Schedule

	Activity	Scholar Expectations
8:00	Student Arrival	• Greet students • Begin sign-in by helping students write their names using the sign-in script
8:15	Breakfast	Engage students in conversation: • What are you having for breakfast? • How does it taste? Is it crunchy/soft? Is it sweet/sour?
9:00	Gross Motor/Movement	• Assist Lead Teacher with gross motor skills activity
9:30	Small Group Stations	• Engage students in conversations at various small group stations (i..e, art and crafts, building blocks, etc.)
9:45	Large Group	• Lead a high quality read-aloud
10:00	Literacy Intervention	• Conduct 10-minute literacy intervention sessions with 3 students on your assigned caseload (10 minutes per students)
10:30	Lunch	Lead line-up transition song • Scholar's choice Engage Students In Conversation: • What are you having for lunch? • How does it taste? What color is it? What does it smell like?
11:00	Recess	• Lead transition song to playground for recess
11:20	Bathroom Break/Nap Time	• Assist Lead Teacher and students with prepping cots • Prep for upcoming activities and afternoon snack
12:00	Short Story Time	• Assist Lead Teacher with waking children up for short-story time • Children will remain on their cots during short-story
12:15	Snack Time	• Assist Lead Teacher with snack distribution
12:30	Snack/Bathroom/Reading	• Conclude day

Professional Development of TYBMTP Scholars

Throughout the 10-month length of The Young Black Male Teacher Project (TYBMTP), Scholars received well over 120-hours of intense training/professional development using a

researched based early literacy framework called “The First Five” (pseudonym). Working with children from 3-5 years of age in PreK settings, The First Five framework provided Scholars with critical foundational skills needed to teach and develop young children, focused on five critical areas that included compassion, positive reinforcement, teaching, acquisition of skills and knowledge, and self-esteem. As a reminder, the use of the term Scholar in the context of this investigation is a pseudonym for the Fellow's official job title during their participation in TYBMTP. Equally important to note is that TYBMTP is not a conventional teacher certification or alternative teacher licensure program, but a teacher exposure initiative developed and led by a nonprofit. Additionally, despite being referred to as "teachers" and "educators" by the researcher throughout the study for their contributions to the program, it is important to note that Scholars were not accredited as licensed teachers. Therefore, terms like pre-service and in-service are not used in this study to describe them. Figure 3 reflects the five-core training and development areas using The First Five curriculum framework.

Figure 3

Compassion. Engaging in active listening, attentiveness, and questioning so that they are attuned to children's needs, views, and feelings.
Positive Reinforcement. Building children's social and emotional growth through positive affirmations and nonverbal actions to foster a positive environment for learning.
Teaching. Instruction that focuses on five critical early literacy areas (vocabulary and meaning, alphabetic knowledge, book and print rules, phonological awareness and memory, and conversation, comprehension, and oral language).

Acquisition of Skills & Knowledge. Employing hands-on multifaceted, and multi-sensory approach (i.e., visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, etc.) to engage students with diverse learning styles.
Self-esteem. Engaging in daily interactions that show them what encouragement looks and feels like, what it means to share and care for others, how to solve problems, and how to believe in oneself.

Population Selection

To ensure that participants were appropriate candidates for the study, participants had to meet the following eligibility criteria: 1.) Identify racially as Black (i.e., African American), 2.) Have completed The Young Black Male Teacher Project (TYBMTP), and 3.) Be willing to provide a thorough account of their lived experiences and perspectives concerning their time in the TYBMTP and the factors that influenced their decision to pursue or not pursue ECE as a viable career option. Given my status as a former program manager of TYBMTP, my intimate knowledge of TYBMTP, and my past professional relationship with some participants, I decided to use a purposive sampling approach. According to Spradley (1979), in purposeful sampling, individuals are willing participants, and have strong familiarity with the subject matter being investigated. Moreover, selection of research participants is intentional (Tongco, 2007) and thus the researcher determines what segment of the population is best suited to provide information that will address the research question (s) based on their knowledge and lived experiences (Bernard, 2002; Yin, 2009). Because of my familiarity and relationship with former participants of TYBMTP, I drafted a list of ten prospective participants I knew would meet the study's eligibility criteria. In addition to the first and last names, the list also contained their contact

information (email addresses and phone numbers). Once the list was complete, I sent a Research Recruitment Invitation Notification to each prospective participant via email (see appendix A).

The Research Recruitment Invitation Notification informed the prospective participants why they were being contacted, the nature and objectives of the study, the time commitment associated with the study, the significance of their participation, and instructions on what to do next if they were interested in participating. And, although the study only consists of eight participants, the researcher opted to recruit 10 (two alternates) after considering the possibility that some of the identified participants could opt not to respond to the recruitment invitation, along with the possibility that participants could drop out of the study at a later time. Once prospective participants responded to the email expressing interest in participating in the study, they each received an Informed Consent for Research Participation approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee (UWM), which reviews and approves all research of human subjects at UWM (see appendix B). Each consent form was sent securely using a software system (DocuSign), which allows individuals and companies to send agreements electronically to be reviewed and signed by recipients.

Once recruited, the study consisted of eight men, all identified as Black (African American), all completed TYBMTP, were willing to provide thorough accounts of their experiences teaching in the TYBMTP and the factors that influenced their decision-making regarding a career in ECE. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), the sample size in a qualitative study depends on the qualitative design that the researcher hopes to employ (grounded theory, phenomenology, ethnography, etc.). For example, a sample size for a phenomenological study is usually between 3-10 participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Figure 4 provides a breakdown of the demographics concerning each research participant.

Figure 4

Pseudonym	Gender	Race	TYBMTP Region
Jared	Male	Black	Mid-Atlantic
Khalil	Male	Black	Mid-Atlantic
Brian	Male	Black	Mid-Atlantic
Morgan	Male	Black	Mid-Atlantic
Isiah	Male	Black	Midwest
Brenton	Male	Black	Midwest
Casey	Male	Black	Midwest
Aaron	Male	Black	Midwest

Data Collection

Data collection for this study occurred over a ten-day period (December 19, 2021 - December 28, 2021) and included three types of data collection (one-on-one semi-structured interviews, concept maps, and a focus group). All interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim by a transcription service. All participants received a prepaid twenty-five-dollar Visa gift card for their time and participation. For confidentiality, each participant's name was de-identified and replaced with a pseudonym/alias. Additionally, due to the ongoing global pandemic, all data collection processes were conducted virtually via Zoom.

Interviews

To start, part I of the interview process began with semi-structured interviews (see appendix C). This phenomenological study centralized interviews. Thus, the interview played a critical role in capturing detailed data concerning the unique experiences and stories of Black

males teaching in ECE while also strengthening our understanding of how masculinity and identity shape Black males' decision-making. To obtain a detailed description of the lived experience, van Manen (1990) suggests that researchers instruct participants to do the following before beginning the interview process:

1.	Be specific and avoid generalizations when explaining your experience.
2.	Provide a description of your feelings during the experience.
3.	Think of a particular example of the experience.
4.	Consider how your body felt, what you heard, and smelled during the experience.
5.	Refrain from using convoluted language when describing your experience.

According to Stewart et al., (2008), interviews should include key questions designed to probe critical areas of the phenomenon while also allowing the interviewer or interviewee the autonomy to deviate, if necessary, to explore a response in more detail. Beck (2021), purports that in-depth interviews are a hallmark for those undertaking an interpretative phenomenological method. Also, unlike structured interviews, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to ascertain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences (Stewart, Treasure, and Chadwick, 2008). This is often achieved through follow-up questions, which aim to clarify the research participants' statements. Beck (2021) suggests the following when developing questions for semi-structured interviews:

Formulating Questions in Semi-structured Interviews

a. Identify the key areas you wish to address with your participants.
b. Think about the specific topics you want to explore during the interview.
c. Organize and structure the questions in a logical order, considering the sensitivity of certain areas and gradually introducing them if needed.
d. Ensure that your questions are open-ended and cover a wide range of topics.
e. Seek feedback from another researcher or a potential participant on your list of research questions.

According to Breen (2006), determining the number of interviews to conduct depends on the point at which the researcher reaches theoretical saturation during the thematic analysis process and ends when the researcher concludes that additional data is unlikely to reveal new thematic elements. Based on all of the above, Part I (semi-structured interviews) consisted of interview questions designed to acquire the participants' rich descriptions of their experiences teaching in TYBMTP. Semi-structured interview questions consisted of the following:

Semi-structured Interview Questions
1. Tell me about yourself (first and last name, racial identification, where you grew up, and what you currently do employment wise).
2. Tell me how you came to participate in The Young Black Male Teacher Project (TYBMTP).

3. Before joining the GYO program, what were your views of the teaching profession?

a. Follow up – to what extent were these views influential in your joining GYO?

4. Walk me through a typical day at your school.

a. Follow up - What aspects of the job did you look forward to the most? What made it exciting?

b. What aspects of the job did you find least exciting and why?

5. Tell me about the male teachers at your school and then tell me about the Black male teachers at your school.

a. How did having such few men affect you? – your interactions with each other?

b. It is possible you guys grew closer because of this?

6. As a gendered minority within your school, what pressure (s) did you experience?

a. How did this pressure impact your behavior or cause you to act in a certain way around your colleagues (i.e., other teachers) and your students?

b. How did being a gendered minority within your school affect your overall experiences teaching young children?

7. Since you were in a small group of Black males, how did you support each other in teaching?

   a. How do you think your students viewed you?

   b. How do you think your colleagues (i.e., other teachers) viewed you?

   c. How do you think the parents of your students viewed you?

8. While teaching, were you able to identify with your students (culturally, racially, linguistically, etc.)? If so, how and if not, why not?

   a. How did it influence your relationship with the students?

   b. How did it impact your approach to providing instruction?

9. How do you think your presence as a Black male educator affected your students (socially, emotionally, academically, etc.)?

   a. How do you think it affected your colleagues (i.e., other teachers)

   b. How do you think it affected the parents of your students?

   c. How do you think it affected you?

10. Describe one of the most memorable moments while teaching in TYBMTP.

   a. Explain why this particular event is the most memorable.

11. Describe one of the most challenging moments you had teaching in TYBMTP.

   a. Explain why this particular event was the most challenging.

12. Walk me through your thinking process regarding how you decided on whether to pursue ECE as a viable long-term career option or pursue a different professional trajectory.

Concept Maps

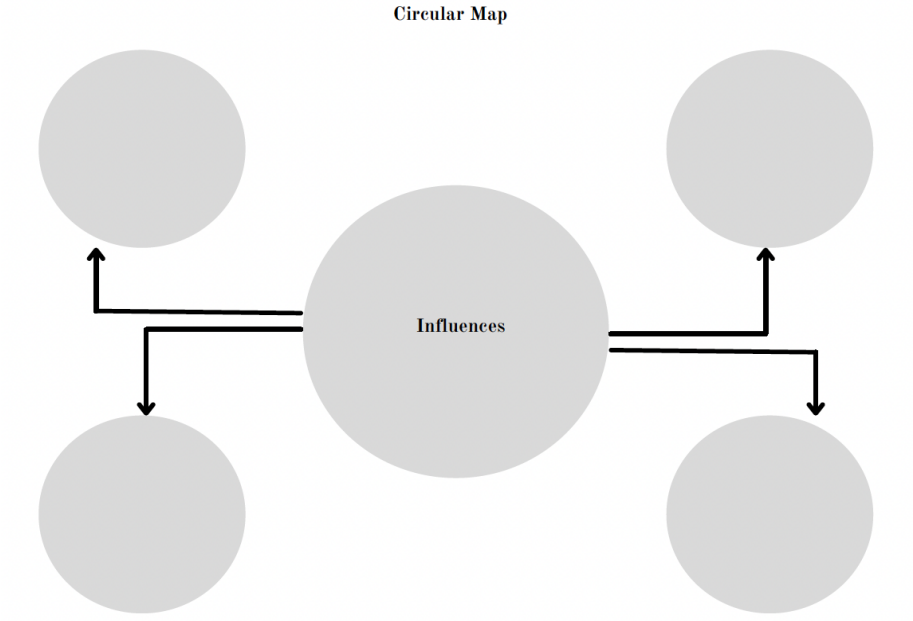
Part II of the interview process built upon the semi-structured interviews in part I by employing the use of a concept map, also known as a circle map (see figure 5 and appendix C). The goal was to allow each participant the opportunity to identify and share the most critical factors they believed shaped their decision-making regarding their desire to pursue or not pursue ECE as a viable long-term career option post their participation in The Young Black Male Teacher Project (TYBMTP). According to Daley (2004) and Novak (1998), concept maps are beneficial for qualitative research data collection. Daley (2004) also posits that "maps help researchers maintain the meaning of the interview within the data analysis. Often when looking at an interview transcript, the richness of the participants' meaning can be lost" (p. 196). The center of the circle map contained the word "influences" surrounded by four empty circles. Participants then were instructed to take four minutes (one minute per circle) to fill in the four empty circles with a single word (negative or positive) representative of the most pressing factors that influenced their decision-making regarding whether to pursue a career ECE post their participation in TYBMTP.

In phenomenology, clarifying the phenomenon that is being examined is an essential step (Bevan, 2014) and thus, the concept map helped make clear the influences that shaped each participants' decision-making around whether to pursue or not pursue ECE as a career. After the participant completed the circle map, I (the researcher) used the remainder of the interview to

examine the participant's responses, supported by probing questions to better understand how each participant decided on the four factors/influences they placed on their circle maps.

- Describe how factor #1 shaped your decision-making concerning whether to pursue or not pursue ECE as a viable long-term career option.
- Describe how factor #2 shaped your decision-making concerning whether to pursue or not pursue ECE as a viable long-term career option.
- Describe how factor #3 shaped your decision-making concerning whether to pursue or not pursue ECE as a viable long-term career option.
- Describe how factor #4 shaped your decision-making concerning whether to pursue or not pursue ECE as a viable long-term career option.

Figure 5



Focus Group

Part III of the interview process consisted of a focus group (see appendix E for protocol). According to Gibbs (1997), focus groups are organized, used to engage multiple participants around a particular subject/topic, critical for obtaining divergent perspectives, and allows the researcher to acquire "insights into people's shared understandings of everyday life and the ways in which individuals are influenced by others in a group situation" (p. 1). Typically, the composition of a focus group consists of six to ten participants, all of whom have common characteristics relevant to the phenomena being examined (Powell & Single, 1996; MacIntosh 1993), and can last anywhere from 60-120-minutes (Gibbs, 1997). In this study, the duration of the focus group was 60-minutes. Additionally, as previously noted, the location and data collection (semi-structured interviews, concept/circle maps, and focus group) for this investigation were conducted virtually via Zoom for safety precautions due to the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic. According to Powell and Single (1996) and Gibbs (1997), the location of focus groups can vary, but neutral locations are recommended so that participants feel comfortable to share their feelings openly and honestly.

Much like the semi-structured interviews employed in Part I of the interview process, the researcher re-employed van Manen's (1990) interview ground rules at the beginning of the focus group to ensure that participants understand what to expect and to encourage the free flow of ideas, experiences, and perspectives. Thus, the researcher encouraged participants to do the following when engaged in group dialogue: a.) Be specific and avoid generalizations when explaining your experience; b.) Provide a description of your feelings during the experience; c.) Think of a particular example of the experience, d.) Consider how your body felt, what you

heard, and smelled during the experience, and e.) Refrain from using convoluted language when describing your experience.

Finally, given that focus groups are designed to draw a wide variety of views and feelings from participants within the context of the group, some of which may be sensitive (Powell & Single, 1996), I introduced Glenn Singleton's four agreements for engaging in courageous conversations that included a.) Stay engaged, b.) Experience discomfort, c.) Expect and accept non-closure, and d.) Speak your truth. Interview questions for focus group consisted of the following:

Focus Group Interview Questions
1. Let's start with going around the circle and introducing yourselves (first and last name). a. Also state the year you participated in The Young Black Male Teacher Project (TYBMTP). b. Whether you're still working in early childhood education and if so, where, and if not, where are you working now?
2. Explain some of the initial factors that cemented your decision to join TYBMTP to teach young students in an ECE setting?
3. Now that you've had some time away from TYBMTP, talk to me about your experiences. a. What aspects of the TYBMTP program do you miss the most? b. What aspects of TYBMTP do you miss the least?

4. Discuss your views (with each other) on early childhood education (ECE) when you first started TYBMTP compared to now?

   a. Have your views evolved or remained the same? If so, how, and why?

5. Give me an insight into what you guys thought of yourselves as Men of Color teaching in an ECE context?

   a. Did you guys see yourselves as valuable assets to your students? Why or why not?

   b. Did you guys see yourselves as valuable assets to the school itself? Why or why not?

   c. Did you guys see yourselves as valuable assets to the communities in which you taught?

6. Talk to me about how you think your students viewed your presence in their classrooms and what you think it meant to them?

7. Describe to me what your students meant to you?

   a. How did they make you feel?

   b. What did it mean to you to be personally and partially responsible for their academic, social, and emotional development?

8. Men, and Men of Color are rarely seen teaching in ECE settings. Given that, did you ever wonder what your female colleagues thought about you working with young children?

a. Did you ever wonder what the parents of your students thought about you working with their children?

b. Did you think about how they should have viewed you (as an empowering presence perhaps)?

9. While teaching in TYBMTP, did any of you find the experience empowering? If so, what aspects were empowering? If not, why not?

a. Did you think the experience was empowering for students or parents?

10. Explain some of the factors that cemented your decision to either stay teaching in ECE post TYBMTP, or your decision to leave.

11. For the men that have stayed in the profession and see teaching as a viable career option, explain the process for making that decision.

a. From your experience, what do you need to succeed as male educators of color in ECE? – Resources, support structures, administrator support, mentors, parental support etc?

b. If not, describe what support (s) you think would be beneficial to your success as a male ECE educator?

c. If not, describe what support (s) you think would be beneficial to your success as a male ECE educator?

2. As a group, share with me your thoughts around what can be done to recruit, attract, and retain more Men of Color in ECE?

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis in qualitative research is about making sense of the phenomena, which means closely examining the data to identify commonalities, differences, and critical insights (Raskind et al., 2019). Within this process, the researcher is tasked with generating rich descriptions and interpretations that capture the nuances and complexities of the research topic to help gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena (Raskind et al., 2019). Leveraging my theoretical frameworks (Critical Race Theory {CRT} and Hegemonic Masculinity), I analyzed and manually coded data paying close attention to stories and experiences related to individual racism, institutional and systemic racism, counter-narratives/stories, gender norms, and gender identity that would help me better understand and provide additional insight into the factors that encourage or discourage Black males from pursuing teaching careers in early childhood education. Figure (insert figure number) illustrates the data analysis process in this study, which included: a.) iterative reviews of the raw data to ensure clarity and accuracy, b.) clustering c.) coding, and d.) identification of themes/thematic categories. According to Patton (1987), utilizing this data analysis approach facilitates the emergence of coherent and significant themes and patterns. Moreover, acknowledging that researchers typically choose coding methods according to their requirements, the manual coding approach I utilized provided the flexibility and autonomy required for a comprehensive coding process.

Since qualitative research relies heavily on the researcher's subjective judgments, reflexivity must be a critical part of the research journey (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). Thus, it is essential for those conducting scholarly investigations to be mindful of how their personal experiences, beliefs, and biases can influence every stage of the research process, including data analysis (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). As such, before commencing with data analysis, I engaged in

reflexivity, which consisted of a review of my reflective notes, where I previously documented things said or mentioned by participants throughout the interview process that surprised me, along with notes I made about things I expected to hear from participants (assumptions and pre-existing notions) based on topics explored in the literature review concerning the recruitment of Black males as public K-12 teachers. The reflexivity process enabled me to check my pre-existing notions and assumptions before beginning my analysis of the data, ensuring it did not adversely impact my review.

Step I - Iterative Review of Data

Consisted of multiple reviews of the raw data (semi-structured interviews, focus group, circle maps, and audio recordings), which strengthens rigor and accuracy (Curtin & Fossey, 2007; Stahl & King, 2020). The first review focused on audio-recordings, listening to understand better participants' experiences, which Hycner (1985) refers to as listening to obtain a "sense of the whole." The second review of the raw data focused on transcripts, specifically textual accuracy of the transcripts, which involved going through each transcript and audio recording to ensure participants' words during the interview recordings corresponded with the text on the transcript. I manually documented my thoughts through margin notes, where I made annotations next to specific sections of the raw data regarding my initial observations, questions, and reflections I had.

My questions helped to ground my own thinking in terms of linking the data to the research questions and to the phenomenological frameworks as well as to the CRT and hegemonic masculinity frameworks. In addition, I wrote reflective memos about particular sets of data asking myself reflective questions. For example, in the case of the two participants who had different experiences from the others, I was attempting to see the whole picture through a

series of prompts and questions for myself. These included - what is the participant's one big message? What is the participant saying that is different from other participants? How is this person's experience similar or different? To what degree is race or gender implicated in the narrative of this participant? Does it resonate with the voices of other participants? The third review of the raw data focused on the thoroughness/completeness of participants' circle maps, ensuring that all circle map elements were complete.

Step II - Clustering, Coding, & Thematic Assignments (Round I)

I commenced my initial round of clustering, coding, and thematic assignments, focusing on participants' circle maps using an in-vivo coding process whereby the codes are derived directly from the participants' own words or language to maintain the authenticity and richness of the data (Rogers, 2018). In qualitative research, a "code" is "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 4). Codes are then used to identify key concepts, themes, or ideas within the data and serve as a tool for analyzing and interpreting the qualitative material, which allows researchers to discover themes or patterns that help make sense of the data collected (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019; Rogers, 2018; Salada, 2016).

A data collection tool, circle maps employed in this study, required each participant to identify four critical factors that shaped their decision to either pursue or not pursue early childhood education as a viable career option post-The Young Black Male Teacher Project (TYBMTP). As previously noted, (see page 69), Daley (2004) reminds us that qualitative investigations often employ circle maps to visually capture and explore individual perspectives, experiences, and emotions related to a specific topic or phenomenon under investigation.

Given that data extracted from the circle maps represented the key factors that influenced participants decisioning concerning whether to either pursue or not pursue ECE as a viable career option post-TYBMTP, I concluded that the data could be used to establish initial codes. As such, I segregated the circle maps into two groups (Group A and Group B): those who opted to pursue teaching careers in early childhood education (ECE) post-TYBMTP (Group A) and those who did not (Group B). Next, I created two tables using Microsoft Excel and began extracting the words that appeared on all eight circle maps, thirty-two in total, and placing them into their respective tables. Once completed, I reviewed and manually sorted the data in each table in Microsoft Excel, looking for the frequency of recurring words and notating how often similar or identical words appeared.

Starting with Table One (Group A), I clustered all identical or similar words together and then proceeded to Table Two (Group B), doing the same thing. The clustering of data allows the researcher to group information into similar groups of meaning to help identify unique themes (Creswell, 1998; Hycner, 1999; King, 1994; Moustakas, 1994). After clustering, reviewing, and analyzing the data extracted from the circle maps, I reduced the thirty-two codes down to fifteen. The fifteen codes were as follows: pay, career, barriers, resistance, cumbersome, struggle, oppressive, relationships, students, bonds, life, responsibilities, family, growth, and costs.

After clustering all identical or similar words in Table One (Group A) and Table Two (Group B), to recenter my understanding of the meaning associated with the words (data) collected from participants' circle maps, I commenced in-vivo coding or codes that are emergent from each participant's semi-structured interview transcript and audio recording. For example, when analyzing the data from circle maps for patterns concerning Group B, reflective of two out of eight participants, specifically those who opted not to pursue teaching careers in ECE post-

TYBMTP, the word "pay" was one of the four words that appeared on their circle maps. A review of the data (transcripts and audio recordings) revealed that for participants in Group B, the meaning behind the word "pay" was rooted in concern. They shared that ECE teachers are not paid well and, therefore, served as one of many deterrents in their decision to pursue career options outside of ECE and teaching in general. Keeping with this example and characteristics that govern in-vivo coding, I coded pay as "terrible pay," using language taken directly from the participant, placed a memo/note next to it titled "participant's associated meaning," again using language taken directly from the participant, and concluded by assigning an appropriate theme developed by me (the researcher) that captured the essence of the participants' meaning or experience. Simply put, a theme refers to a concept that emerges from the data and provides insight into the research topic (Beck, 2021; Bradley et al., 2007), and without it, the phenomenon would be less meaningful. Figure 6 illustrates an example of the in-vivo coding and thematic assignment process.

Figure 6

Participants' Circle Map Word	In-vivo Code	Participants' Associated Meaning	Assigned Theme
Pay	"Pay is terrible"	"The work is great, but the pay is terrible"	Poor Compensation
Pay	"Decent pay"	"At the end of the day, a job with decent pay was my priority."	Poor compensation
Steps	"All the steps involved turned me off"	"When I started learning about all the steps involved in becoming a certified teacher outside of completing the degree, it was a turnoff for me."	Burdensome Pathway to Teaching
Cumbersome	"Process to become a teacher is cumbersome"	"I just feel like the process to become a licensed teacher is just cumbersome for no reason."	Burdensome Pathway to Teaching

Step III - Clustering, Coding, & Thematic Assignments (Round II)

Step three involved a second round of clustering, coding, and thematic assignments, focusing on participants' semi-structured interview transcripts and the study's focus group transcript. Starting with semi-structured interviews, I manually went through each transcript, one by one, line by line, analyzing the text, accentuating relevant excerpts with highlighters, and assigning each selected excerpt a code, using both existing codes and creating new codes. I then returned to the previous data and compared the in-vivo codes established in step two and combined the two sets of codes to come up with twelve codes that appeared repeatedly (pay, career, barriers, resistance, cumbersome, struggle, oppressive, relationships, students, bonds, life, and growth). Figure 7 illustrates the established twelve codes.

Figure 7

Pay	Career	Barriers	Resistance
Cumbersome	Struggle	Oppressive	Relationships
Students	Bonds	Life	Growth

Once I analyzed and coded all the data for the study's semi-structured interviews, I transitioned to the focus group transcript and repeated the same process. I wrote on the margins of the hard copies of data and then entered the relevant excerpts and their assigned codes into the Excel spreadsheet. All excerpts were chosen based on their relevance to the phenomenon under investigation. To reiterate, the codes derived from circle maps and semi-structured interviews in step two and step three were merged and utilized due to their relevance to the factors influencing participants' decisions on pursuing early childhood education as a potential career path post-TYBMTP. These codes were selected based on their alignment with participants' lived experiences. After merging all the codes from all the data sets, a final count of ten main codes

remained. These were pay, career, barriers, resistance, cumbersome, struggle, oppressive, relationships, students, and bonds. Codes were taken directly from participants and remained rooted in the data (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). The text analysis of the semi-structured interviews informed my focus group analysis because the repetitiveness of the analysis process allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of the data, uncover new insights, patterns, and relationships that were not immediately apparent when I began my analysis of the semi-structured interviews. In addition, I looked for shared understandings among the participants and their peer influences. The text analysis allowed me to compare the individual participants' views with the focus group to see how the focus group interviews enhanced the individual interviews.

Next, I segregated the interview transcripts into three categories (Group A, Group B, and Group C): those who opted to pursue teaching careers in early childhood education (ECE) post-TYBMTP (Group A), those who opted to pursue careers outside of ECE post-TYBMTP (Group B) and focus group interview (Group C). Next, I created three tables, table one (Group A), table two (Group B), and table three (Group C), using Microsoft Excel. After creating the tables, I began extracting the selected excerpts and their associated codes, placing them into their respective tables. Once completed, I sorted the data for patterns in each table, looking for the frequency of recurring codes and ensuring they were appropriate matches to their associated excerpts. Starting with Table One Group A, I clustered all identical excerpts and codes and repeated the same process for Group B and Group C. After I reviewed each table for thoroughness and accuracy, I assigned themes using the same themes established in the initial stage of the coding process. By looking across the data (semi-structured interviews, circle maps, and the focus group interview), I was able to determine the themes that were directly relevant to my research questions. During this process, I also wrote several reflective notes to myself to help

me understand how the codes fit together under themes. These themes led to this study's findings. Figure 8 are some examples of the selected excerpts taken directly from participants, their associated codes, and assigned themes.

Figure 8

Selected Excerpt	Associated Code	Theme
I just said I gotta stay in it for the kids because I know this is going to have an impact on them in the long run.	Students	Pedagogical Relations with Students
I just didn't expect I would build such a strong bond with them, which for me did affect what I was going to do after TYBMTP, which was to go after teaching long-term.	Bonds	Pedagogical Relations with Students
Honestly Mr. Lewis (researcher), if it weren't for TYBMTP, I wouldn't be here talking with you today.	Career	Career Exposure
Yeah, that's what I'm talking about. Just seeing the growth of the kids brought home the importance of the job and the program because before this program, I never heard of any program recruiting men that look like me to go teach little kids.	Career	Career Exposure
You know people aren't expecting us to be in these classrooms, especially White people. That's one of the reasons we did TYBMTP, so that more men that look like me could start going into the profession, so that they could see more male teachers that look like me.	Resistance	Counter-narrative
I figured that the best way to affect change and change minds is to be part of the solution, and for me that meant staying in the classroom. By staying in the classroom, it's gonna change what people think and expect of us.	Resistance	Counter-narrative

Step IV - Data Analysis Summary

After conducting extensive data analysis through various methods such as repeated reviews of the raw data, coding, clustering, and thematic analysis, I identified five prominent themes. These themes include pedagogical relations with students, career exposure, teaching as a counter-narrative, burdensome pathway to teaching, and poor compensation. In the subsequent section of this investigation (Chapter IV: Research Findings), these themes are explained in further detail. It is important to note that all themes are derived from data taken from participants and thus reflect their lived experiences. Moreover, the findings contribute to existing knowledge and understanding of the recruitment of Black males as teachers in ECE.

Ethical Considerations

Regardless of the kind of research (qualitative or quantitative), ethical considerations must be at the forefront of each research project and reflected throughout the research process (Orb, Eisenhauer, Wynaden, 2001; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It is therefore the job of the researcher to establish ethical standards as a way to help safeguard and protect the welfare of participants throughout the course of a research study (Connelly, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The 1979 Belmont Report (Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research) outlines three fundamental ethical principles that should guide research involving human subjects: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Respect for persons relates to the autonomy and dignity of individuals, requiring informed consent and protecting against coercion or manipulation (United States National Commission for Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research 1978). Beneficence suggests that researchers should aim to obtain the maximum benefits while also minimizing harm, thus ensuring the well-being of participants (United States National Commission for Protection of Human Subjects of

Biomedical and Behavioral Research 1978). Lastly, justice emphasizes fairness in distributing research burdens and benefits, mitigating, or eliminating exploitation, and ensuring equitable access to participation (United States National Commission for Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research 1978). All three principles serve as an ethical framework designed to protect the rights and welfare of humans in research contexts.

In this investigation, all three principals were adhered to. First, before the study commenced, I ensured my study received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee's (UWM) Institutional Review Board. Concerning respect for persons, all participants received, reviewed, and signed an Informed Consent for Research Participation. The Informed Consent for Research Participation made clear that participation was entirely voluntary, the purpose of the study, the expectations associated with one's participation, and the fact that participants could remove themselves from the study if and when they saw fit. About beneficence, participants were made aware of potential benefits, risks, and information concerning participants' rights, complaints, or problems. In the spirit of beneficence, I protected participants' rights and privacy through de-identification via the use of pseudonyms, whereby I removed direct and indirect identifiers (i.e., name, address, employer, city, etc.) that could lead to the identification of research participants, and also de-identified the name of the grow-your-own (GYO) program known in this study as The Young Black Male Teacher Project (TYBMTP) from which participants were recruited as another way to help safeguard their identities.

According to Pascale et al. (2022), it is standard practice for researchers to protect participants' identities in social science studies in exchange for participation and ascertaining information relevant to the investigation. In relation, Creswell and Poth (2016) suggest that participants must be made aware of the potential risks and potential benefits that may arise from

the study. Although my study had minimal risks, such as other participants potentially sharing peer responses with non-participants, or a potential breach of confidentiality such as data being seen by an unauthorized person (s), all participants were informed via the Informed Consent for Research Participation how the researcher would address such issues should they arise. Additionally, given that this study employed the use of a focus group as one of three data collection approaches, I had to consider the pros and cons associated with its use, specifically as it pertains to confidentiality because focus groups generally offer limited confidentiality because participants, at least in this study, could see and hear one another and despite an agreement to the contrary, could discuss the issues outside of the focus group and inadvertently mention the names of peers. Sims and Waterfeld (2019) assert that confidentiality and anonymity can potentially serve as problems because in focus groups, the researcher has little control over what participants say and do outside of a controlled research setting.

Yet, despite potential risks, the focus group used in this study fostered an environment that allowed for richer dialogue among participants based on shared experiences free of judgment and repercussions, resulting in more honest and authentic responses, which in turn enhanced the quality and richness of the data collected. Concerning the third principle, justice, outlined in the 1979 Belmont Report, participants in this study were given equal access to the interview process (semi-structured interviews, circle maps, and focus groups), where they were encouraged to speak freely and openly about their lived experiences concerning the phenomenon being investigated. Moreover, each participant was equally compensated for their time via a twenty-five-dollar Visa prepaid gift card. To mitigate or eliminate the possibility of exploitation, only participants who completed TYBMTP and thus were no longer under the employment of the TYBMTP were recruited for this study.

Credibility & Trustworthiness

Ensuring credibility and trustworthiness is essential in qualitative research (Stahl & King, 2020). Both notions are intertwined in that credibility refers to the trustworthiness and believability of the data and findings. It is established through techniques such as triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement to ensure the accuracy and validity of the research process (Curtin & Fossey, 2007; Stahl & King, 2020).

Trustworthiness refers to the degree to which the findings of a study honestly reflect the lived experiences of those involved in the phenomenon (Curtin & Fossey, 2007; Stahl & King, 2020). Various strategies can be employed to establish credibility and trustworthiness (Creswell & Cresswell, 2018; Hadi & Closs, 2015; Stahl & King, 2020). According to Hadi & Closs (2015), researchers should use at least two or more strategies to help strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of their study. Leveraging Hadi and Closs's (2015) suggestion, I employed three strategies (triangulation, reflexivity/bracketing, and member checking) to enhance credibility and trustworthiness in my study. First, triangulation was achieved by incorporating multiple methods of data collection (semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and circle maps) to help validate the findings. In qualitative research, triangulation is predicated on the use of multiple data sources, methods, or researchers to confirm or corroborate findings (Creswell & Cresswell, 2018; Hadi & Closs, 2015; Stahl & King, 2020). It enhances the credibility of the research by reducing bias and providing a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Secondly, as previously explained (see page 75), I used reflexivity via bracketing as a tool to document, check, and reflect on my emotions, thoughts, feelings, preconceived notions, and biases to ensure it did not adversely impact data collection and ultimately, my interpretation

of the research findings once I arrived at that stage. Third, I also used member checking, also known as respondent validation by which researchers involve participants in the analysis phase by sharing interpretations of data for validation or correction purposes (Hadi & Closs, 2015). Participants can then confirm whether the researcher's interpretation aligns with their views or lived experiences (Hadi & Closs, 2015). Member checking in this investigation was achieved by pausing throughout various portions of the interview process (semi-structured interviews and focus groups) to ask clarifying questions to ensure I had a thorough and clear understanding of participants' meanings and experiences. Combined, triangulation, reflexivity/bracketing, and member checking allowed me to cross-check my findings, making for a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the investigated phenomenon.

Confirmability

Confirmability is equally crucial to credibility and trustworthiness, which refers to the extent to which the findings of a study can be confirmed or verified by others (Elo et al., 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Furthermore, it ensures that the interpretations and conclusions drawn from the data are rooted in data and not adversely shaped by the researcher's assumptions, biases, or preconceived notions. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) purport that confirmability in qualitative studies can be achieved by

1. Providing sufficient evidence to support the study's claims,
2. Making clear the accuracy of the results by making clear one's methods and approaches to conducting the study,
3. Sharing one's positionality, biases, and preconceived notions, and
4. Prioritizing and valuing the experiences and perspectives shared by the study participants rather than solely relying on one's viewpoints.

All four elements of confirmability articulated by Merriam and Tisdell (2015) were taken into consideration in this investigation by stating one's positionality, the study's data collection and analysis process, member checking, the researcher's reflexivity, and triangulation.

Chapter IV: Research Findings

To reiterate, the study participants were sourced from the same grow-your-own (GYO) teacher pipeline program, "The Young Black Male Teacher Project" (TYBMTP), led by the researcher. The participants aged ranged from 18 to 21 at the time of their involvement in TYBMTP, with six out of eight continuing to serve in early childhood education roles post-TYBMTP. All participants met the study's criteria by identifying as racially Black, specifically African American, successfully completing TYBMTP, and expressing willingness to share detailed insights into their lived experiences participating and teaching in the program. An in-depth analysis concerning the primary and sub-research questions: How do Black male youth participating in a Grow Your Own (GYO) program describe their process of making decisions concerning a long-term career in early childhood education (ECE)? What are their experiences teaching in the GYO program, and how do they describe the influences on their decision to either pursue or not pursue ECE as a viable career option revealed multiple things. Data revealed that participants' decision-making was primarily influenced by their experiences teaching in the GYO program (The Young Black Male Teacher Project), perceptions held about the ECE workforce and the teaching profession as a whole, and future career, and economic goals.

The data analysis process revealed five prominent themes, of which three: pedagogical relations with students, career exposure, and teaching as a counter-narrative were associated with six of the eight participants who decided to pursue ECE as a viable career option. In contrast, the remaining two themes: burdensome pathway to teaching and poor compensation, were associated with the remaining participants (two) who opted not to pursue ECE as a viable career option.

During the investigation, I learned that six of the eight participants were still working in ECE classrooms as either certified teachers, paraprofessionals, assistants, or lead teachers at both public schools and community–based childcare centers. The findings are discussed in two parts. Part I highlights the recurring themes that influenced most participants (6 out of 8) to pursue ECE as a viable long-term viable career option. Part II discusses the recurring themes that influenced the remaining two participants to pursue other career opportunities outside of ECE and the field of education in general.

Part I. Early Childhood Education (ECE) As a Viable Long-term Career Option

Thematic Category# 1: Pedagogical Relations with Students.

When considering early childhood education (ECE) as a viable long-term career option, six out of eight participants were convinced that the unique relationships they built with students were one of four critical factors that influenced their decision to remain in ECE post their residency in The Young Black Male Teacher Project (TYBMTP). When sharing and describing the unique relationships they built with students during the interview process, participants cited repeated occurrences of affirmation, love, praise, and validation they received from students. Thus, the first thematic category (pedagogical relations with students) highlights relevant excerpts from interviews with three participants, Jared, Khalil, and Brian. While all six participants emphasized pedagogical relations, the three individuals I am highlighting exemplify the varied types of relationships they cultivated and nurtured with their students. In each excerpt, a different way in which pedagogical relationships were built is highlighted. This includes the impact the relationships had on the participants. While all three discussed the importance of building trust and getting to know students, the ways in which each of them discussed what they did and how they built relationships vary.

The power of affirmation. Jared, a recruit from the Mid-Atlantic region of TYBMTP, was twenty-one years old when he joined the program after being encouraged by a mentor to apply. Jared had no prior experience working with or teaching children before participating in TYBMTP. Below are excerpts from his interview, with interpretations and explanations, followed by an analysis. He shared the following:

> I mean man, when you have kids loving on you, telling you how you make them smile, how they look up to you, and how they like working with you, it really gets to you. And me personally, I'm generally not the most emotional person, so hearing that from students for almost a year, made me a little more sensitive, and it also made me realize that I did in fact belong in this space, which definitely made it difficult for me to not want to come back. So, when I was thinking about what I was going to do after TYBMTP was done, I just said I gotta stay in it for the kids because I know this is going to have an impact on them in the long run.

Here, Jared discussed how his relationship and interactions with the students had an emotional impact on him, despite not considering himself an emotional person. He realized that he had a place with the kids and that his presence as a Black ECE teacher was important for them. The continuous affirmations from students helped him feel a sense of belonging in the ECE classroom, making him believe that staying in the classroom and pursuing a teaching career in ECE post-TYBMTP could have positive long term positive implications on the lives of future students. Jared goes on to explain how he built relationships with students and established trust with them over time.

> It definitely wasn't right away. I had to work with them for a while before that happened. You gotta build up trust with them first. For the first few weeks they were kinda sizing me up like who is this guy, and some of them didn't even wanna work with me at first. But once you start getting to know them one on one basis, and just interacting with them more and more, their guards go down and you start to connect with them on a different level you know; like they trust you more.

Jared explained that it takes time and effort to gain the trust of the students he worked with. In the beginning, they were skeptical of him, and some did not want to engage with him. However, as Jared spent more time with them individually and interacted with them regularly, their barriers came down and a deeper connection formed. This led to increased trust from the students towards Jared. Jared then explained how positive affirmations helped him strengthen his relationship with students. He states:

> Yeah, for me, I always made it a point to give positive affirmations to my students. Whether it was working with them one on one or in small groups, I made sure affirmations were part of my everyday approach to working with them. Learning how to give positive affirmations to students was part of the training we got with TYBMTP. But yeah, for me, it's about recognizing or acknowledging things students, and just making them feel good about themselves. Whether it be something as simple as, "Hey Coby, I like that new t-shirt you are wearing, it's really cool," just simple stuff like.

Jared mentioned that he and his colleagues received training on delivering positive affirmations to students through the TYBMTP. He believed the training was critical because it gave him the skills to recognize and acknowledge students, making them feel good about

themselves through simple compliments or praising something specific, such as a new t-shirt. Jared provided additional context about the value of student affirmations and how he evolved to understand their relevance and impact.

> I would say that when I initially started giving affirmations, I really didn't recognize the importance of it, but over time I could see that kids were responding to it in a positive way. It was like it was building their confidence and self-esteem, especially during reading time or when I was helping them write their names and stuff. So, when I saw how they were responding to it, and how important it was for them to hear it come from me, I knew it was something I just needed to do often. And it finally made sense on why the program trained us on the importance of giving positive affirmations to students.

Jared initially didn't see the importance of giving affirmations to students, but over time he noticed that they responded positively to it. He saw that it boosted their confidence and self-esteem, especially during tasks like reading or writing. Realizing how important it was for the students to hear affirmations from him, Jared made a decision to do it more often. He understood why the program trained them on the significance of positive affirmations for students. He shared other actions that he carried out to build positive relationships with the students. These included getting to know each of their personalities, their tastes and interests at a personal level. In his words:

> It basically boils down to getting to know who they are as individuals. For example, on Mondays, I would always check-in with students to see how their weekends went, what they did and stuff like that; just little stuff. Then, as I started to work with them more and more, I would ask other questions like what's your favorite color, or what's your favorite

food, what's your favorite book, basically stuff you'd ask any other person or kid as you're getting to know them. So, the more I worked with them, I got a better understanding of who they were and their personalities started to come out more, plus they were able to get to know me more too because as I asked more and more questions of them, they would turn around and ask me stuff too.

Getting to know the students individually, their tastes, their preferences and their hobbies all helped the students to know Jared better and for Jared to know each student well. In turn, students felt they were seen and heard by Jared and expressed their own views by declaring him their favorite teacher. Jared was moved and surprised by the affirmations they began to receive in turn from students. He said:

> That's when I started getting all the affirmations and praise from them, like "Mr. Jared I love," "Mr. Jared we miss you," Mr. Jared you're my favorite teacher," and stuff like that. So it went both ways, which is the great thing. At first it was mostly me just giving positive affirmations, but like I said, once we got to know each other and they started trusting me, that's when they started giving me positive affirmations. After a while the appreciation they have for you starts to get to you emotionally, and that's something I just didn't anticipate before I started TYBMTP. I just didn't expect I would build such a strong bond with them, which for me did affect what I was going to do after TYBMTP, which was to go after teaching long-term.

Jared's experience underscores how important relationship-building with his students was in his development as a participant in TYBMTP. Getting to know his students, one-on-one or through small group work, was critical as it aided Jared in building trust and respect with them

and weighed heavily on his decision-making regarding whether he would pursue a career in early childhood education (ECE) post-TYBMTP. Additionally, Jared's decision to get to know his students as individuals with unique personalities and his perpetual affirmations resulted in it being reciprocated by his students. In other words, the students began mirroring back to Jared the positive affirmations he had given them all along. Interestingly, Jared shared that despite being trained by TYBMTP to give affirmations to students, he initially failed to recognize its importance. However, once he saw its positive effect on students' confidence and self-esteem, he finally understood how critical affirmations are in a child's social and emotional development, showcasing his own evolution as a participant in TYBMTP.

Jared's recollection of his training while participating in the TYBMTP makes clear that the program, specifically the professional development component, was pivotal in his ability to build relationships with his students. The pedagogical relationships Jared established were largely facilitated by the ongoing affirmations he delivered to students on a daily basis, which in turn support students' social-emotional growth. Research shows that teachers cite strong bonds and positive relationships with students as critical factors for remaining in the profession (Hargreaves, 1998; O'Connor, 2008). This is further supported by Hargreaves's (2000) study of sixty teachers, who consistently cited positive relationships with students as an essential factor concerning their joy in the profession and their decision to continue teaching.

Jared's statement, "So, when I was thinking about what I was going to do after TYBMTPwas done, I just said I gotta stay in it for the kids because I know this is going to have an impact on them in the long run," suggests that Jared recognized the long-term impact his presence and pedagogical practices could potentially have on students over time. Furthermore, Jared also points out how impactful the affirmation from students had on him emotionally.

Admitting that he’s normally not an emotional person, he was nevertheless moved and made more sensitive by this student’s affirmations based on his presence in their school lives. Thus, he concluded that it was critical and necessary for him to stay in the field of ECE as a contributor to students' social and academic trajectories.

The next excerpt is from Khalil, who also highlighted the importance of building trust and relationships with students.

The value of understanding who your students are as individuals. Khalil, a recruit from TYBMTP's Mid-Atlantic region, was eighteen when he joined TYBMTP. Khalil was referred to the program by his high school's assistant principal, who had functioned as a mentor to Khalil, thinking he would be an excellent fit for the program. And while not a requirement of the program, much like his peer Jared, Khalil had no experience working with or teaching children before joining TYBMTP. During his interview, Khalil spoke of a unique relationship he developed with one of his students, Maverick (pseudonym), a five-year-old Black male student who was perceived as "problematic" by his primary teacher, Mrs. Johnson (pseudonym), a White woman, because of his behavioral issues. The following selected excerpts from Khalil's interview are much longer than the last one to illustrate how Khalil’s relationship building skills helped him cultivate and solidify trust with his student Maverick. Furthermore, Khalil's excerpt also demonstrates what can occur when teachers take the time to understand who their students are as individuals. He shared the following:

When I tell you this kid was a handful at first, I am not joking. He didn't want to listen, sit still, or do anything the lead teacher asked him. So, I told Mrs. Johnson (pseudonym) that I wanted to make Maverick, the student, a personal project.

On hearing Khalil's description of wanting to take on Maverick as a personal project, I inquired further, asking him to elaborate on the term "personal project." Specifically, I asked Khalil if he could reflect on the potential implications of his characterization of Maverick as a "project," particularly in light of the adverse stereotypes that so often frame Black males, including Black boys, as problems or social deviants that must be dealt with. The resulting narrative from Khalil was a thoughtful reflection around how certain characterizations, even those that may be well-intentioned, can perpetuate stereotypes or narratives that frame Black boys in an unfavorable light. Khalil started with saying that he had used the term unconsciously and had not put much thought into it, but then went on to explain what he had meant. In his words:

> Oh wow, nah, I did even think about that. But, now that you mention it, in hindsight the word "project" probably wasn't the best choice of words." But my intention was good, you feel me? I just wanted to see if Mrs. Johnson would let me mentor him to see if I could provide him with some structure and guidance so that he wouldn't keep getting into trouble and leading to all those time outs and loss of free time and recess.

Khalil's choice of words was significant. He wanted to mentor Maverick. Mentoring has moved away from traditional, narrow and formal mentoring to informal mentoring relationships where the intent is to provide support and guidance that will allow the mentee to flourish (Mullen, 2017). Khalil explained his motivations and intentions around his desire to mentor Maverick by saying that he was reminded of himself as a young boy when he looked at Maverick. Like Maverick, Khalil too had got into trouble as a young boy and had been labeled. In his words:

> I did it because Maverick reminded me a lot of myself when I was his age, which got me in trouble. So, I didn't want people labeling him as a bad kid like they did me and miss out on all the fun stuff the other kids were able to do. Mrs. Johnson was cool with the idea. She said she'd appreciate anything I could do to help because "time-outs" and loss of recess or playtime for Maverick wasn't doing anything. So, the following day I started spending a lot more time with him, you know? Sitting with him during mealtime, playing with him during recess, and working with him during our one-on-one interventions, where he started to open up a lot.

Khalil wanted to help Maverick because he saw similarities between them and didn't want him to be labeled as a bad kid like he was. Mrs. Johnson was supportive of Khalil's involvement and recognized that traditional disciplinary measures were not effective for Maverick. Khalil started spending more time with Maverick, participating in activities together, and providing individual support. This increased interaction allowed Maverick to open up and make progress. Khalil spent a lot of time with Maverick that allowed Maverick to feel supported and in turn allowed Khalil to keep a watchful eye on the student. He also found that Maverick opened up to him slowly as he spent more and more time with him. This became evident as he shared his interests with Khalil. As Khalil went on to describe Maverick's comfort level with him, he also mentioned that listening on the part of Khalil, according to Maverick was one of the main qualities that allowed for that opening up to take place. Listening demonstrated Khalil's interest in Maverick and translated into initiating a change in his behavior albeit in small ways. In Khalil's words:

> His willingness and excitement to work and play with me, him talking about things he liked, legos and basketball. I guess you could say he got comfortable with me, that he trusted me. I remember asking Maverick why he listened to me and not Mrs. Johnson, and he said because I'm nice and that I listen to him. So, in my mind, I was like, oh, him acting out and not following directions was his way of getting Mrs. Johnson to focus on him. So, as I started to provide more guidance as I worked with him, he stuck to me like glue. He was always looking for me, asking when we were going to read together, wanting to play with me at recess, and just happy to see me overall. When I would have to miss a day of work for training or because I was sick, the next time I saw him, he was not shy about letting me know I missed work. I was like, wow, this kid is bugging. But I made it my mission every time I saw and worked with him to check-in and ask how he was feeling, how things were going at home, what he ate for dinner the night before, that kind of stuff, you know, just to get to know him more.

Khalil formed a strong bond with Maverick by spending time with him and showing genuine interest in his life. Maverick began to trust Khalil and see him as someone who listened to him and cared about him. Khalil noticed that Maverick's disruptive behavior was a way for him to seek attention. As Khalil provided guidance and support, Maverick became more attached to him, always seeking his presence and expressing his disappointment when Khalil wasn't there. Khalil made it a priority to check in on Maverick regularly, asking about his well-being and getting to know him on a deeper level. This led to Maverick changing his orientation towards learning and school in small ways. Khalil too became attached to Maverick and found it difficult to disappoint him. As Khalil described it:

> Now, don’t get me wrong, he didn’t all of a sudden just change overnight, and every once in a while, he would still act out, especially when I wasn’t around. But overall, after I started working with him, his whole approach to school changed because you could gradually see he actually was excited to learn and wanted to be at school. During our last intervention at the end of the school year, I asked Maverick if he was excited about kindergarten, and he said yes, and then asked if I was going to be his teacher again because he liked reading and singing songs with me. Of course, I knew I wasn't going to be his teacher again, but at that moment, I didn't realize how hard it would be to tell him I wouldn't be his teacher again. So, I lied and said yeah. Now, I know I was wrong, but at that moment, that messed me up because I wasn't expecting to get emotional, plus I didn't want him to get upset.

Khalil worked with Maverick, and although he didn't change overnight, his behavior gradually improved. Maverick started to enjoy learning and became excited to go to school. During their last intervention, Maverick expressed his desire for Khalil to be his teacher again because he enjoyed their activities together. Not wanting to upset Maverick, Khalil lied and said he would be his teacher again, causing him to feel emotional and conflicted. Khalil’s decision to not hurt Maverick also created an ethical dilemma for him since he lied to him. Getting close to Maverick and seeing him beginning to flourish made him avoid the hard reality that he would not be his teacher in kindergarten. He wanted to avoid disappointing him and was concerned of the effect this news might have on him in the short term. Khalil realized that his own desire to not disappoint Maverick led to that impulsive response that he would remain his teacher. He had to face his lie later in the year when he came face to face with Maverick again. As Khalil explained:

> When the new school year started and I returned to work as an Assistant Teacher for Little Giants Early Learning Center (pseudonym), I ran into Maverick on the first day and he immediately gave me a big hug and said I lied to him about being his teacher again. Man, that cracked me up. I couldn't help but laugh, but then I apologized and told him that I didn't want him to be mad at me. We did our little handshake and I sent him on his way. Looking back, me building that relationship with Maverick, like him trusting me, and telling me that he loves reading and singing songs with me, really made me feel like I belonged in the classroom and made me see that I could actually work in education.

Khalil's encounter with Maverick on the first day led to an immediate bond and discussion over the lie that Khalil had told. Maverick hugged him enthusiastically and called him on his lie about being his teacher again. Khalil quickly apologized and reassured Maverick that he didn't want him to be upset with him. They shared a handshake before parting ways. Khalil and Maverick's discussion leads one to realize some of the key components of trust building between teachers and students. By telling a small lie to prevent Maverick from being hurt, Khalil risked the bond that he had built up. By apologizing, however, he repaired the trust and they parted as friends. Reflecting on their relationship, Khalil realized that the bond he had formed with Maverick and his love for reading and singing songs made him feel like he belonged in the classroom and gave him the confidence to pursue a teaching career in ECE post-TYBMTP.

Khalil's experience illustrates the importance and power of what can occur when educators make intentional decisions to acquaint themselves with the socio-emotional needs of their students, especially Black boys who can easily find themselves on the school to prison-pipeline trajectory that was discussed earlier in this study (see literature review). The pedagogical relationship Khalil built with his student is reflected in scholarly research, which has

shown that Black teachers generally have higher expectations of Black students compared to their White counterparts (Cherng & Halpin, 2016), which, again, is reflected in Khalil's decision to see beyond Maverick's adverse behavior. Instead of seeing Maverick as a problem, Khalil saw Maverick as an opportunity that needed investment, nurturing, and understanding. Studies continue to cite Teachers of color as having positive impacts on students of color's social-emotional and academic growth (Bristol & Fernandez, 2019; Gershenson et al., 2017; Hundley, 1965).

Not only was Khalil able to recognize, relate to, and understand Maverick's plight, but his decision to mentor Maverick was primarily driven by his desire to protect Maverick from being labeled as a "problem" and disciplinarian practices that he himself was subjected to as a child, resulting in the loss of classroom privileges (i.e., recess, center time, etc.). Recognizing the importance of play in a child's development, Khalil believed that his mentorship and guidance could play a role in restoring the play privileges Maverick would consistently lose due to his adverse behavior, as perceived by the Lead Teacher. Research shows that play is critical to a child's physical, social-emotional, academic, and cognitive development (Bergen, 2002; Bruce et al., 2017).

One could also argue that Khalil's pedagogical relationship with Maverick was a form of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) on display. Using Ladson-Billings's (2009) conceptual framework of CRP, culturally relevant teachers are those who possess the ability or characteristics that enable them to see students, particularly Black students, as assets with great potential who are capable of success while also honoring their lived experiences, differences, and cultural ways of knowing to teach and build supportive learning environments. Others (Cherng &

Halpin, 2016) argue that due to Black teachers' heightened level of multicultural awareness, they are better positioned to tend to the evolving needs of Black students inside the classroom.

Ultimately, it turns out that Khalil's "project" was a personal commitment to the student that transcended his role as teacher and included mentor and friend, rooted in resilience and motivation.

The value of identity building. Brian, a recruit from the Midwest region, was nineteen years old when he was recruited and accepted into TYBMTP. However, unlike his peers (Khalil and Jared), Brian entered the program with some informal teaching experience, having tutored students in math and reading in his church's after-school program. Brian's introduction to TYBMTP was facilitated by a school counselor who shared the opportunity via a program pamphlet from the school's district office. Brian's story highlights the significance of identity building, specifically the importance of seeing someone who looks like you and, ultimately, children being able to see themselves as future educators due to their interactions and relationships with people who look like them. Furthermore, Brian's interview also introduces consideration around how students influence the social and professional trajectories of their teachers. It invites further exploration into how student behavior, attitudes, and engagement may shape a teacher's experiences, well-being, career choices, or professional growth in ways that are yet to be fully understood or explored in depth. Brian shared the following:

I don't know if you ever worked with four- and five-year-old students Mr. Lewis, but they are brutally honest, and most of the time they will let you know if they are not feeling you or don't want to work with you. But for some reason, all the kids wanted to work with me. I swear I was like the cool teacher. You know when we had to take

> students who were on our caseload out of the classroom to conduct one-on-one interventions or sign-ins because they needed extra support with their reading and writing? Students that weren't even on my caseload would get upset because they weren't able to do interventions and sign-ins with me. So, it was difficult trying to explain to the students that weren't on my caseload what the interventions and sign-ins were about, and why it wasn't necessary for me to work with them one-on-one. After a while I think they got it and finally understood because they stopped asking.

To help anchor the readers' understanding of what Brian meant by sign-ins and interventions, additional context is needed. For example, interventions refer to literacy strategies that Brian and his colleagues (other TYBMTP participants) were trained on as part of their professional development in the program. The interventions were multi-faceted, could last between 5-10 minutes per student, and focused on helping students listen, recognize, and manipulate the divergent sounds in everyday language, known as phonological awareness (Gillon, 2005). For example, the "sign-ins" Brian mentioned were an intervention focused on print awareness, contextual print recognition, and alphabet knowledge, wherein students would learn how to write, sound out, and read their names.

The prior excerpts highlight Brian's ability to establish a strong connection with his young students. The fact that multiple children expressed interest in working with him shows a strong level of trust and rapport had been established, mainly through everyday interactions and personalized interventions. Moreover, Brian's ability to cultivate and solidify students' trust suggests that critical teaching qualities such as clear communication skills, creating a positive classroom atmosphere, and being attentive to students' needs are essential to fostering teacher-

student solid relationships. Brian reflected further on his impression that students were eager to work with him. As he expressed it:

> I just think it's the way I move, like my energy you know? You know I'm always smiling, good energy, and just overall a nice person, so I just think they were able to pick up on that you know?" I remember one situation a few days before Christmas break. I was working with one of my favorite students, her name is Shantel (pseudonym), who just loved working with me. As I was wrapping up one of our interventions, I just started to ask her what she was going to do over Christmas break. She said play with her toys, open presents, eat cake, and play school with her brother. I said play school with your brother?! She said yup, because she likes school and wants to be a teacher like me. I was like wow, okay, okay, I got you.

The prior excerpt from Brian is unique in that Brian saw himself as the "cool teacher," someone that students enjoyed being around based on his persona within the classroom. However, from an outside perspective, the persistent requests from various students (boys and girls) to work with Brian suggest that his students saw him as much more than the "cool teacher." Instead, they saw him as a role model, someone they could see themselves in, and someone essential to their social and academic development. From a critical race theory (CRT) perspective, Brian's narrative counters the dominant stereotypical narratives that exist across the public PK-12 continuum concerning the role of Black male educators. For example, as mentioned in both the literature review and chapter five of this investigation, Black male educators are often typecast as disciplinarians and father figures for Black children (Milner & Howard, 2004; King, 1993). Fortunately, Brian's narrative illustrates that Black male educators are much more than disciplinarians and father figures. CRT reminds us that counter-

stories/narratives are critical to bucking majoritarian narratives/stories because they are often rooted in assumptions and suppress the lived experiences and voices of the unheard (Delgado, 1989; Delgado, 1991; Manglitz et al., 2006). When asked what the student shared with him and what it meant to him, Brian responded:

> For me, that meant a lot, it really did. Because here I was, nineteen years old, still figuring out life, not a licensed teacher, working with these professional grown-ups, and here's this kid telling me that they want to be like me when they grow up. That's what really made me realize the impact I could have on kids. I mean there's nothing better than being able to see someone you've worked with grow and now they're looking up to you as a positive figure as something they want to be. Now that's dope!

Whether he realized it or not, identity building was at the core of Brian's pedagogical relationship with his student Shantel. Her impact on him helped him see his impact on her and, ultimately, the impact that teachers can have on students. Shantel's desire to become an educator is evidence of how impactful role modeling and mirroring are in children's development and future perspectives of themselves.

Combined, all three narratives (Brian, Jared, and Khalil), demonstrate just how impactful pedagogical relations with students can be on one's decision-making. So much so, that each of the men were able to see themselves as influential and necessary figures that were needed in ECE classrooms. Over the years, various studies (Farmer, 2018; Holzberger et al., 2019; Jackson, 2018; Roorda et al., 2011) have explored the degree to which teachers impact student achievement, but few have explored the degree to which students impact the social and professional trajectories of their teachers. Moreover, in all three narratives, we see just how

influential and impactful students can be when educators are making professional/career-oriented decisions that will also affect them socially. Given that all three of the men were under the age of twenty-one at the time of their participation in TYBMTP, one can imagine the responsibility they might have felt with regard to the impact they might have on their young students. Also, it gives their lives a sense of purpose and meaning to make such a prominent difference in the lives of children they were working with.

In Brian's case, his African American female student (Shantel) shared that she wanted to be a teacher like him. Brian shared that this revelation, coupled with his general responsibilities as a Scholar in TYBMTP placed a lot of pressure on him because he knew the expectations of him were high, and that he did not want to fail his students or the program. Thus, reaffirming one of the many reasons why racial minority educators are so needed across the public PK-12 continuum.

Thematic Category# 2: Career Exposure

Data showed that the career exposure aspect of The Young Black Male Teacher Project (TYBMTP), played a significant role in the men's decision to pursue early childhood education (ECE) as a viable career option post-TYBMTP. All six men suggested that prior to being exposed to TYBMTP, becoming a public-school teacher was not a consideration but that exposure through TYBMTP afforded them the opportunity to explore teaching as a potential career and helped set their expectations about what it takes to become a teacher. Collectively, their accounts suggest that GYO programs such as TYBMTP might be a valuable tool in recruiting other Black males into ECE and across other areas of the public PK-12 continuum. Intrigued by their responses, I sought to acquire additional insight from participants as to how TYBMTP played a role in their decision to pursue ECE as a viable career option, and why they

did not see the teaching profession as a potential career option prior to their participation in TYBMTP. While all six thought they may not have considered teaching had it not been for exposure to TYBMTP, the following excerpts from Morgan, Isiah, and Brenton represent why the participants had never considered teaching before TYBMTP.

The thought never crossed my mind. Morgan, a nineteen-year-old recruit from the Mid-Atlantic region of TYBMTP, saw himself as a highly determined and thoughtful individual. He was referred to the program by a friend who had already been accepted into TYBMTP. However, prior to his introduction to TYBMTP, the idea of teaching never even crossed his mind. In part this was due to how he perceived teachers and the ways in which they devalued their jobs. Morgan explained:

> Honestly Mr. Lewis (researcher), if it weren't for TYBMTP, I wouldn't be here talking with you today. During my senior year of high school, I was just focused on graduating and then just taking a year to chill and figure things out before I headed to college to do business administration. I had always wanted to own my own business and start a clothing line, so that was my primary focus. Teaching never crossed my mind, mainly because growing up I didn't feel like most teachers liked their jobs. I mean some did, but I just got the impression that most didn't. Over time you see all the things they say or the way they would act. Saying stuff like this job ain't worth it, or I don't make enough money to deal with this stuff, or just how they don't take the time to even get to know you. Once you see it over and over again, it kinda sticks with you.

Morgan explained that it was in middle school that he had started noticing the way in which teachers seemed unhappy with their jobs for several reasons. In high school he noticed the

tendency for teachers to be unhappy with their careers even more. And yet, as became clear, this did not discourage him from considering teaching as a viable career. Despite these negative impressions of teaching, Morgan shared that it was the way in which he was recruited that really drew him into teaching. The program and its messaging stood out to him and he realized that Teachers of Color were being recruited. As he explained:

> I guess I would say that it was the message of the program that stood out to me, in that it focused on getting Men of Color to look at becoming teachers more seriously. So, when the program broke down to me why Men of Color are important to the teaching profession and the benefits students get from it, that's what made me look past those negative experiences and how I felt about teachers in general. I'm not gonna say I forgot those experiences, but I was able to put them aside and focus on the mission of the program.

Morgan's account thus far leads to an important question: what impact do negative attitudes and behaviors by school teachers have on students' views of teachers and the teaching profession? For Morgan, over the years, the negative behavior and attitudes displayed by former teachers, specifically the negative comments teachers would make about their discontent with teaching, occurred so frequently that he concluded that most teachers did not enjoy their jobs. Morgan's sentiment suggests that when students do not see their teachers displaying behaviors and using language that suggests that they enjoy what they do, which includes working with students, such behavior could be a turnoff and serve as a deterrent for prospective students who may have considered pursuing teaching as a profession.

In a qualitative research investigation by Graham and Erwin (2011) that examined the perceptions of high academic achieving African American males about teachers and the teaching profession, most participants associated teaching and the teaching profession with negative connotations. When researchers asked participants to select words to characterize a classroom teacher, out of 476 words, 281 (59%) were negative and included things such as "sarcastic or smart mouth, mean or hateful, disciplinarian, and racist" (Graham & Erwin, 2011, p. 406). Although such evidence does not reflect the sentiment of all students, the evidence does suggest that some Black males have unfavorable views of teachers. Furthermore, in addition to negative perceptions of teachers, research also suggests that teachers' adverse behavior and attitudes can negatively impact students' social-emotional and academic growth/learning outcomes (Kahveci, 2023; Youn, 2015). When Morgan was asked what compelled him to take a chance on participating in TYBMTP, he shared:

> I feel like the program gave me a chance to see what it's like on the other side, the teaching side, versus the student side. You know what I mean? So, being in TYBMTP gives you a chance to see what teachers go through and it's a lot. But it also made me realize how important good teaching is and the difference it can make. So, I definitely give credit to the program for helping me get to where I am today in my career as I continue to progress in what I'm doing now as an assistant teacher.

From Morgan's account, the career exposure component of TYBMTP was critical in facilitating his entry into the teaching profession. The program allowed him to see teaching from a teacher's perspective rather than a student's perspective, which allowed him to see the importance of good teaching and the impact a good teacher could have on one's life trajectory. Morgan's account, supported by scholarly evidence (Graham & Erwin, 2011), suggests that the

behavior of teachers can negatively impact how students perceive teachers and the teaching profession as a whole. We must also consider that the adverse behavior of teachers in the presence of students could deter students in other ways in the classroom from learning. For example, suppose a teacher repeatedly makes disparaging statements about their job. In that case, students may internalize their remarks and begin to think they are the problem, which could negatively impact student motivation, engagement, persistence, and reluctance to seek academic support from the teacher. Ultimately, the effect is that disgruntled teachers will not inspire anyone to embark on a career in education. And, although Morgan was able to look past his adverse experiences and perceptions of public-school teachers, other Black males with similar experiences may not be willing to do so.

Never heard of no program recruiting men that look like me to teach little kids. Similar to Morgan, Isaiah, a twenty-year-old who fancies himself as a "wise guy," evolves in his appreciation of the significance of education, the crucial impact teachers have on their students, and the potential of programs like TYBMTP to draw more men of color into the early childhood education (ECE) field. Isaiah explains:

> I'm not gonna lie, initially, it was the money that attracted me into the program. Plus, in my mind, I thought it would be fun to work with little kids. But after a few weeks into it, that's when it hit me; like this is serious business. Not to mention all the training the program put us through, I was like, man, this is ridiculous! So I actually didn't even like it at first, but eventually, after a while, I started to really understand why we had to do everything we were trained to do. Like when you start to see your students write their full names on their own for the first time, or read a sentence without your help, it does something to you in that you know you played a role in that child's development.

> Just seeing the growth of the kids brought home the importance of the job and the program because before this program, I never heard of any program recruiting men that look like me to go teach little kids. Even growing up I never had a Black teacher, male or female, so my evolution into liking the work was both the kids and the program cause without the program I wouldn't be working with kids today. I remember being in high school, especially my senior year, and the focus of the teachers was just getting us to graduate. That's what I remembered. There wasn't much focus on your career aspirations or nothing like that.

Witnessing the growth of his students highlighted the significance of his role as a teacher and the impact of the program. Prior to joining, he had not encountered any initiative recruiting Black men like him for teaching positions. Growing up without ever having a Black teacher, male or female, Isaiah's appreciation for his work was influenced by both the children and the program itself. He recalled how high school teachers primarily emphasized graduation rather than discussing career goals, leading him to value the support and opportunities afforded to him by TYBMTP. Isaiah elaborated that in order to encourage more Black men to consider teaching careers in early childhood education, they simply need support in envisioning themselves as educators in those environments. In his words:

> I think getting more men interested in this kind of work, especially guys who look like me and who didn't have a fully realized career plan beforehand but were open to different possibilities, is a good approach to getting other young guys to see that hey, you might not have considered it, but teaching is something you can do if you give it a chance.

For many Black males, one of the many barriers is what some (Brown & Butty, 1999; Chapman, 2020; Stohr et al., 2018), refer to as the "leaky pipeline" is the lack of early exposure teacher exploration programs through apprenticeships, internships, and job training initiatives at the secondary education level. Isiah's statement, "I never heard of no program recruiting men that looked like me to go teach little kids," makes clear that no opportunity was available to him to explore teaching as a viable career option during middle or high school, which is also why he never envisioned himself as a teacher. Moreover, in addition to a lack of programs, Isaiah's statement also suggests insufficient dissemination of any information or active recruitment of programs similar to TYBMTP. Furthermore, Isaiah's account also speaks to the idea that we cannot expect Black males to aspire to be something they cannot see or have little or no exposure to. In Isiah's case, the absence of Black educators throughout his secondary education schooling impacted his ability to envision himself as a teacher. In Isaiah's narrative, it was the program and the recruitment that led him to even consider taking on a job teaching, calling attention to the significance of such targeted programs that recruit Black men to the teaching profession.

I'm grateful for the program because it helped me get to where I am today. Like Isaiah, Brenton too found that the program played a key role in helping him visualize himself as a teacher. Knowing that he wanted to do something with youth but not necessarily be a teacher, Brenton, a nineteen-year-old recruit from the Midwest, shares that TYBMTP played a critical role in his envisioning himself as an educator and his decision to pursue teaching as a career path. He shared the following:

I had always wanted to work with kids, so when I learned about The Young Black Male Teacher Project (TYBMTP), I was excited, but mostly at the idea of being able to mentor them. I wasn't really focused on the teaching part too much, mainly because it's not

> something I grew up envisioning myself doing, you know what I mean? Like, I had one Black teacher, Mrs. Ross, in the 5th grade and that was it. I never had a male teacher of color, or anybody saying I should go into teaching. But once we got more into the training with TYBMTP, working in the classroom, and being around other teachers in the building, that's when I started to get a better feel for teaching and taking what I was doing more seriously. But I can say that the program helped me get my foot in the door because like I said, initially I was just interested in mentoring kids, not teaching, but I'm grateful for the program because it helped me get to where I am today.

Brenton was interested and excited about mentoring children and, like other participants in this study, could not initially envision himself as a teacher. He reflected on his experience with The Young Black Male Teacher Project (TYBMTP) and how it influenced his career. Although he initially wanted to work with kids in a mentoring capacity rather than a teaching capacity, as he engaged in training, worked in the classroom, and interacted with other teachers through TYBMTP, Brenton developed a better understanding of teaching and began taking it more seriously. Moreover, despite being aware of the fact that TYBMTP was not a mentorship program and that the program was about exposing young men of color to careers in teaching so that they would be encouraged to pursue teaching as a viable career option to help increase the representation of men in early childhood education, Brenton did not see mentoring as separate from teaching. Brenton asserted that,"in my mind, part of being a good teacher means that you are a good mentor too." Brenton goes on to explain what mentoring meant to him, which involved getting to know the students and developing a trusting relationship with them. He saw mentoring as more than teaching which he referred to as providing instruction and as being a critical part of being an educator. He said:

> For me, mentorship as a teacher means that I am taking the time to get to know my students, I listen to them, I'm tapped into their needs, and I understand who they are as an individual. So, mentoring for me is all about making those connections, so that when I give advice to students, they'll be more likely to take that advice because they see me as someone they can trust versus somebody who's just there to provide instruction. Does that make sense? It kinda goes back to what I was just saying before; that mentoring helps you get to know students on a deeper level, which means you're more tapped into their needs. When I was little, I was part of Big Brothers Big Sisters. I had a mentor in that program, which was cool because I had a great relationship with my Big Brother. It was kinda like having a family member watch your back and help you navigate stuff. I still have a relationship with him today.

Like the other participants in the program, Brenton too had had no Black male teachers, and only one Black female teacher throughout his schooling. It was only during the interview that he reflected on this and realized that he had taken it for granted that it was normal to not see Black teachers at school. He had normalized their absence. Brenton draws on his personal experience of being a mentee in the Big Brothers Big Sisters program to illustrate the impact of mentorship. He describes his relationship with his Big Brother as being like having a family member who supports and guides him through various challenges. This positive experience has continued into adulthood, as Brenton still maintains a relationship with his mentor today. The prior excerpt highlights the importance of building strong relationships with students through mentorship in order to effectively guide and support them. By emphasizing the value of trust and

connection, Brenton suggests that mentoring goes beyond mere instruction and can have a lasting impact on student development. In his words:

> Honestly, I guess I had got used to not seeing teachers that looked like me, it was just normal, and I didn't really think about it that much. But now that I work in education, it's kinda wild to think about the fact that I went through all those years of school not really seeing Black teachers except Ms. Ross, even though my neighborhood at the time was mostly Black.

He also shared that while he didn't have anyone encouraging him to consider a career in teaching, and that the role TYBMTP played in his seriously considering a teaching career was significant. He said:

> Yeah, TYBMTP definitely provided that opportunity to continue working in the field. So, I'm grateful for the program because it helped me get to where I am today because before I finished TYBMTP, the program and my placement site was already helping me take the steps to become an assistant teacher. So, I already had a job at the school before I even finished TYBMTP.

From Brenton's narrative, it was clear that he found mentoring to be a key aspect of personal growth, something he had found value in as a former participant of the Big Brothers program. And although TYBMTP was not a mentoring program, Brenton felt that mentoring was and should be an integral part of teachers' mandate. All three accounts (Brenton, Morgan, and Isiah) suggest that GYO programs such as TYBMTP can be vital career exposure opportunities for young men of color and thus help facilitate their introduction to careers they probably would not be exposed to, in this case public school teaching. Moreover, their stories also highlight the

profound inability of adult figures in public K-12 settings to imagine young men of color as potential future educators, which is likely why none of the men were exposed to programs like TYBMTP, nor were they encouraged by adults in these settings to consider the idea of teaching as a viable career option during their public K-12 schooling. All three of the men purport that the career exposure aspect of TYBMTP is largely responsible for their initial interest in education and its positive impact on their professional trajectories as they continue their educational journeys.

Thematic Category# 3: Teaching as a Counter-Narrative

Keenly aware of the negative stereotypes that plague Black males and the need for more Black male educators across the public PK-12 continuum, especially in ECE, six out of eight of the men in this study viewed their decision to pursue ECE as a viable career option as a symbolic stance; in essence a metaphorical “Fuck You” to those that didn’t believe that they could or would pursue ECE as a career. As Harper and Davis III (2012) note, "the images created of Black men in our society often confine them to environments shaped by drugs, crime, athletics, and academic failure" (p. 103). Probing questions from the researcher to understand why participants felt their decision to pursue ECE as a viable career option was a symbolic stance revealed that the men felt that 1.) Pursuing a career in ECE would demonstrate that Black men can and do pursue careers in ECE, 2.) Their success as emerging Black male educators would serve as a counter-narrative (i.e, an opposing narrative) to dominant deficit paradigms that so often focus on the hopelessness and underachievement of Black males. As previously discussed in chapter two of this investigation, counter-narratives are stories and experiences of the voiceless and stand in opposition to prevailing dominant narratives or beliefs (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). And finally, 3.) Remaining in the classroom would demonstrate to their majority

Black and Brown students that they are committed to ensuring that future students would not be robbed of the opportunity to be taught by a Black male educator. The selected interview excerpts are exemplars of two out of the six participants, providing additional insight into thematic category three.

Pardon my language, Mr. L but a "a fuck you" to the system. Khalil did not hesitate to use forceful language to express his point. He shared that, "aside from the love I developed for my students, and the support I got from The Young Black Male Teacher Project (TYBMTP), part **of my** decision to keep going with this "teaching thing" was my way of saying fuck you to the system." Khalil further elaborated on his stance by explaining what he meant by "fuck you to the system." In his words:

> Yeah, when I say system, I'm talking about the institutionalized racism that's rooted in society in general, and how that affects Black people and Black men. For example, all the stereotypes that exist about Black men, none of them are good. I feel like society has conditioned people, especially White people to be afraid of Black people, and especially Black men. So, when I showed up in that school as the only Black male teacher figure, surrounded by mostly White teachers, over time they start to see that me being there is really making a difference, that's where the fuck you comes in for me because I don't think they had any real expectation that I could have a positive impact on students. Working in an early childhood classroom is typically not something that's gonna come to mind when you think about Black men and where they work, right? So, for me it's both of those things. Fuck you because I can and I am making a difference in the community, and although society don't expect me to be here in this classroom, I'm here because I belong here.

Khalil's sense that he belonged in the classroom and that his peers and supervising teachers at the school needed to see him succeed is an important point. His decision to persist came from a need to show people at one level what he was capable of, and how he could impact the children he was teaching. He too raised the issue that his own past experiences at school impacted how he felt about entering the classroom again. His past negative experiences with teachers and the lack of rapport and trust with them affected his entry into the school as a teacher in a way that made him more determined to succeed. In his declaration that one would not think to imagine a Black male early childhood educator, he drew attention to the gendered nature of early childhood education. Although he and other participants did not consider gender to be an overt factor in their decision-making process, the counter narrative that he wove in seeing himself as a Black male educator where one would least expect to see him, is indicative of not just race but also gender. Despite his not mentioning gender, it is hard not to consider gender in this regard. In addition, Khalil went on to discuss the impact of having teachers who did not believe in Black students or when they did not hold students to a high standard. He shared his personal experiences and how they affected him. As he explained:

> That's what I felt in the beginning when I first started at the school, and that was just based on personal experiences and interactions with teachers in my past, like high school and stuff. Not to paint all teachers in a bad light, because not all teachers are bad, but when I was in high school, I just felt that most teachers didn't expect much from Black students at all. It was kinda like they were okay with us students just doing the bare minimum and that was enough. At the time you don't think much about it because you're a kid, you're just like cool, if this is good enough for them it's good enough for me. But

> when I think back on it, I realize that's because they had low expectations of us. It was kinda like an unspoken agreement. If you don't expect much of me, I won't expect much from you, you know what I mean? But yeah, that's why I felt that way. Plus, just being a young guy with no college degree and having never taught, I just felt they were gonna be laser focused on me like, what does this kid think he is about to really do?

The "unspoken agreement" and low expectations from teachers Khalil speaks of are unfortunate but nothing new. Not only have several studies (Gershenson & Papageorge, 2018; Malone et al., 2023; Henfield & Washington, 2012) shown that teacher expectations matter and can impact things such as academic outcomes and student motivation and persistence, but they have also shown that White teachers often have lower expectations of Black students. The assumptions Khalil made about teachers at the school where he worked during the TYBMTP were based on prior negative experiences with teachers while in high school. As a result, Khalil assumed that the teachers he would be working alongside with would have very little faith in his ability to positively impact students. Thus, his feelings were a continuation of his own negative experiences with teachers, specifically the low expectations White teachers had of Black students while in high school.

As he suggests, the degree of harm done through low expectations cannot be realized by students at the time because, despite any friction with teachers, it was understood or taken for granted that teachers had the last say in terms of what was academically sufficient or "good enough." Teacher expectations often dictated how much students would push themselves. As he puts it, as a kid, "You are just like cool; if this is good enough for them, it is good enough for me." Looking back on it made him realize the importance of high teacher expectations and their

impact on students and their academic achievement. His nervousness when he started in the classroom was carried over from his high school experiences.

When asked to explain what he meant by society not expecting much from him, he responded with the following:

> Now Mr. Lewis, you know exactly what I mean. You know people aren't expecting us to be in these classrooms, especially White people. That's one of the reasons we did TYBMTP, so that more men that look like me could start going into the profession, so that they could see more male teachers that look like me. But yeah. It goes back to what I was saying about stereotypes and Black men and the racism that's rooted in society. When people think about young little kids in PreK schools and who's teaching them, I guarantee you they're not going to be thinking about someone that looks like me. It's probably going to be someone who's female and probably White. And the reason they're not going to think about me is because of the negative stereotypes that exist in society about Black men in general. We don't exist in these schools as it is, so it makes sense for them to not be thinking about someone that looks like me to be teaching their child. Yet, here I am.

Here Khalil suggests that his participation in TYBMTP could serve as an example to others and, thus encourage other young Black males to consider exploring teaching as a viable career option. Khalil also talks about the impact of negative societal stereotypes that exist about Black males but suggests that his presence and the presence of other Black males functioning as educators is all the more important because they could help combat adverse stereotypes. Khalil's excerpt underscores what Ladson-Billings (2011) refers to as a dueling and often contradictory

and confusing relationship society has with Black men, a relationship in which they are despised in some contexts and worshiped in others. Ladson-Billings (2011) goes on to state that:

> When we look at the 'hate' aspect of this dichotomy, we see African American males as 'problems' that our society must find ways to eradicate. We regularly determine them to be the root cause of most problems in schools and society. We seemto hate their dress, their language, and their effect. We hate that they challenge authority and command so much social power. We seem convinced that if they wouldn't act so… 'Black,' they would not be problems. While society apparently loves them in narrow niches and specific slots – music, basketball, football, track – we seem less comfortable with them than in places like the National Honor Society, the debate team, or the computer club. When Black men do show up in these places, we consider them oddities and exceptions (p. 9).

What Khalil described directly echoes these views by Ladson-Billings. One way to counter these stereotypes would be to introduce more Black teachers into schools and help them persist so that their presence is not an oddity but becomes normalized. Given that data (Cormier et al., 2022; Lindsay & Hart, 2017) continues to show that Black male educators benefit all students, especially Black students, it is crucial for schools and school districts to deliberately cultivate environments that support and nurture their growth once they enter the teaching profession. Fortunately, in Khalil's case, he received the support that enabled him to see himself functioning as a future teacher post-TYBMTP. He shared the following about the support he received from other teachers he worked alongside during TYBMTP:

> My Lead Teacher and Assistant Teacher were just super cool. They always offered advice on how I could improve things like interacting with students, changing up my

> transition songs, involving me in the planning meetings, and just talking to me about things I could do to prepare for a teaching career once the GYO program was over. The advice was definitely helpful because when the program finally was over, I felt prepared for what was next because I had people already helping me make moves to work at the school.

Khalil shares that one of the supportive and positive elements of TYBMTP came directly from teachers he worked alongside daily. The real-time coaching, ongoing feedback, administrative planning, and professional advice from seasoned professional educators were instrumental in helping him prepare for what was next, which, in his case, was an assistant teacher position at the school he was placed at during TYBMTP. His experience also suggests that the teachers at his school were uniquely attuned to the support they felt he needed while on the job and to help further facilitate Khalil's entry into the teaching profession post-TYBMTP. The following section provides another unique counter-narrative from one of the participants (Morgan), who believes that the presence of Black male educators in ECE classrooms will change "how they think about us."

It's gonna change how they think about us. Morgan, a Mid-Atlantic recruit of TYBMTP who was previously introduced, shared that "to see real change we gotta be on the inside." Like Khalil, Morgan too believed that it was important to be present at schools to counter the stereotypes and create changes that are positive both for Black students and ultimately for society. His use of the term 'solution' is in part a reference to being seen stereotypically as a 'problem.' He, like the other participants in the study, felt that the presence of Black teachers went beyond a personal career choice. In some respects, as a Black male teacher, he was influencing how future Black teachers could become part of the profession. By pointing out how early expectations from teachers in schools affect Black students, he also explains indirectly how those low expectations hinder students and reinforce negative expectations and close career paths for Black children. The surprise that he describes from his peers who did not expect young Black men to be interested in teaching stems in part from the stereotypes that get reinforced over time of Black students in schools. He goes on to explain the following:

I figured that the best way to affect change and change minds is to be part of the solution, and for me that meant staying in the classroom. By staying in the classroom, it's gonna change what people think and expect of us. By "us" I mean Black men. I think part of the problem is that most people don't think Black men are even interested in becoming teachers, especially not - no early childhood teacher teaching four-, five-, and six-year-old kids. I used to hear people at my placement site school say all the time how they were surprised that a young Black man like me was interested in teaching, and that they thought it was great and wished that more Black men would want to teach. So, by teaching in these classrooms and being on the inside, we are starting to change how

> people see Black men in general, especially how they can be valuable in these classrooms. The who and they are anybody that didn't believe Black men could or even wanted to teach little kids. It's almost like we were counted out before we even got to show what we could do in these classrooms. I just think the public at large always has this bad image of Black men, like we some sort of problem, and they rarely show us doing something good on TV unless it's sports or music, so when I'm teaching, I think it blows people minds, because they're like here's this successful young Black man doing something I wouldn't normally think he'd even wanna do.

From Morgan's perspective, addressing adverse stereotypes and the disappearing Black male teacher narrative in public education is something that can be addressed on multiple fronts and controlled by Black males themselves. For example, Morgan suggests that by increasing the number of Black male educators in spaces where they are rarely seen and thus not expected to be, such as in early childhood classrooms, people will slowly dispense with the notion that Black males are not interested in teaching in early childhood education (ECE). Moreover, he asserts that when Black males are finally well represented in ECE, they will be seen as normalized fixtures within the ECE workforce, much like their female counterparts who currently make up most of the ECE teaching workforce. Finally, Morgan believes that through increased representation, society will have no choice but to see Black male educators as assets that bring diversity and unique pedagogical practices to schools, communities, and, most importantly, students. Remaining in the classroom for Morgan was both a way to affect change from within and as a way to control his own narrative.

Morgan repeatedly pointed out that people were surprised at seeing him at school, teaching. And this was at a school whose racial makeup was mostly Black. Black parents were

also surprised to see him at the school although they were also happy about his presence and over time, became used to it. He discussed the surprise that he saw from several groups of people when they saw a Black man teaching:

> Yeah, I'm talking about the teachers, assistant teachers, food aides, and just the staff in general, and even the parents would say how they were surprised. But after a while they get used to seeing you, so them being surprised was mostly in the beginning. Since the racial makeup of the school is mostly Black, even Black parents - I would say were surprised, definitely surprised. But they were also happy too. I mean I never personally felt any negativity from the parents. I'm basically just saying that when Black men are successful in other areas of life that have nothing to do with sports and stuff, it makes a statement in that it gives society a better feel for all the other careers that Black men work in. And because I don't fit into that stereotype, I feel like that's why people are so surprised to see me in the classroom.

Morgan suggests that his and other Black males like him success in a non-stereotypical career challenges societal expectations, helps showcase the diverse range of careers that Black men can excel in, and highlights the significance of representation in education. Morgan expresses the importance of breaking stereotypes and expanding the perception of career possibilities for Black men. By being a successful teacher, Morgan challenges preconceived notions and demonstrates that Black men can be found in various professional roles. Morgan's observation also emphasizes the positive reception he received from parents, indicating an appreciation for diversity among students and families within the school community. The positive response from parents may reflect an understanding of diversity's value to education.

Morgan went on to explain that despite his determination to counter these stereotypes and expectations from society, they nevertheless took their toll on him and made him feel less than confident and powerful. Yet, he found ways to deal with those feelings and his own determination and persistence helped him to find the strength to counter those barriers, not only for the sake of his own personal career, but also to pave the way for others. In some respects, although he did not articulate it in this way, his narrative pointed to this responsibility as being significant and a blessing since his presence as a teacher was so meaningful in different ways. As he pointed out:

> It kinda makes you feel a little powerless, but like I said before, now that I'm on the inside, I control my own destiny. I kinda like it when people are shocked at seeing me in the classroom because it basically challenges them to think differently about what they think I'm supposed to be doing.

Not only does Morgan's narrative demonstrate that Black men are not monolithic, but it also requires us to consider the unique perspectives and lived experiences that shape the decision-making of Black males in general. For Morgan, his decision to pursue ECE as a viable career option was driven by symbolism and a desire to change stereotypical majoritarian narratives about Black men, particularly concerning the kinds of careers/jobs Black men are expected to pursue (i.e., sports, music, entertainment, etc.). Furthermore, Morgan's narrative implies that monolithic assumptions about Black men, particularly their career aspirations, can themselves be barriers to recruiting Black men into the ECE workforce. In other words, if society cannot envision Black men caring for and tending to young children's social-emotional and educational needs, those in charge of recruiting educators won't be able to see it either. Overall,

Morgan's narrative suggests that to truly see Black men and all their possibilities, society must abandon its racist monolithic assumptions and begin to see Black men as diverse individuals with diverse career and life aspirations. From Morgan's perspective, his success as an emerging Black male educator and his symbolic presence in the classroom forces the public to reconsider their majoritarian adverse narratives about Black men in general, especially the role of Black men in an ECE context.

Part II. ECE As a Non-Viable Career Option

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, after completing The Young Black Male Teacher Project (TYBMTP), most participants (6 out of 8) concluded that they were able to see themselves functioning as educators (teachers) and thus decided to pursue teaching careers in early childhood education (ECE). However, part two of this chapter will now explore the recurring themes that influenced the decision-making of the remaining two participants who did not see themselves functioning as educators at the end of TYBMTP and subsequently decided to pursue other career options outside of ECE and the field of education in general. An analysis of the data revealed two prominent themes (burdensome pathway to teaching and poor compensation) at the heart of their decision-making. The selected interview excerpts elucidate each thematic category.

Thematic Category# 4: Burdensome Pathway to Teaching.

Casey, a Midwest recruit of the TYBMTP, was eighteen going on nineteen years old when he joined the program and was recruited via an information session held at his former high school. Casey shared that, "I loved my time in TYBMTP, but once I really understood all the stuff you gotta go through to become a certified teacher, I knew it wasn't gonna work for me." Casey went on to state that:

> I just feel like the process to become a licensed teacher is just cumbersome for no reason. I loved my time in TYBMTP, but once I really understood all the stuff you gotta go through to become a certified teacher, I knew it wasn't gonna work for me. I understand the fact that we gotta make sure teachers have the right skills to be effective in the classroom, but I just feel like it's overdone.

In the prior excerpt, Casey expresses frustration with the process of becoming a licensed teacher, describing it as "cumbersome for no reason". He indicated that he enjoyed his time in the TYBMTP program but found the requirements to become a certified teacher overwhelming. Casey acknowledges the importance of ensuring teachers have the necessary skills but believes that the process is excessive. Overall, Casey's perspective suggests dissatisfaction with the extensive requirements for teacher certification. He went on to provide additional context regarding his dissatisfaction. He explained that in his view, a degree should count enough so that he would not have to take a standardized test. He also wondered why, if the test was so important, that prospective teachers failed the test so often. He questioned why the schools that one receives the degree from could not be trusted to determine whether or not a teacher had the requisite knowledge to teach. The high stakes of passing the test meant that in the event of failure, the degree ceased to be of use. He was convinced that there was an attempt to keep teachers of color out of the teaching profession by creating these barriers that seemed so difficult to overcome. Speaking strongly about the issue, he said:

> My thing is, if standardized tests are supposed to capture how much you know about the subject you're gonna be teaching, why aren't the schools that we're graduating from responsible for making that determination versus some company you gotta go pay extra

> money to? Then, you're left with a degree you can't really use. I think somebody has to know that this process makes no sense and makes people not wanna become a teacher. I'm not trying to speak for everyone, but I bet I'm not the only one thinking this. I'm not necessarily saying that it's all about race, but I think the fact that most teachers are White isn't an accident. I think all these steps and processes are just one of the issues in a larger set of issues that make Black people not want to become teachers. And let's be clear, just because you can pass a standardized test for teachers, doesn't mean you're gonna be a good teacher. Growing up, I had a lot of teachers that passed that test but were terrible at their jobs. That's why I'm saying that there shouldn't be this huge emphasis on this test because it doesn't necessarily mean you're gonna be a good teacher.

Casey continued to critique the process of becoming a certified teacher, which he saw as unnecessarily burdensome and a deterrent for himself and prospective teachers. Casey also suggested that the process may be one of many reasons why there is a lack of diversity among teachers in public education, particularly highlighting the racial disparity where most teachers are White. He believed barriers such as expensive tests and complex processes aid in discouraging Black people from pursuing teaching careers. The frustration expressed by Casey regarding the institutional and bureaucratic processes and policies that govern who gets to become a public-school teacher and who does not was palpable. While Casey understood and appreciated that teachers must be trained adequately to teach children, he also believed that multifaceted requirements (basic skills tests, course work, subject matter exams, degree completion, student teaching, etc.) needed to become a certified teacher were burdensome, discouraging, and may serve as a deterrent for other Black males who may be considering a teaching career in public education. In Casey's case, the multifaceted steps from student to

certified teacher were one factor that deterred him from a teaching career in early childhood education (ECE). Additionally, he also raised questions about racial disparities in test results. He wondered if there might be a specific reason why these tests presented such challenges for Black individuals to pass them successfully. As he put it, "if they know people are struggling to pass it and that Black people are struggling with it the most, why not come up with a new process that would make it so people have a real chance to pass it?"

The sentiments expressed by Casey are shared by others (Angrist & Guryan, 2008; Bailou, 1997) who argue that highly skilled prospective educators are being kept out of the classrooms because they do not have the time nor the resources to complete degrees and other credentialing processes required to become a certified teacher. Nearly 70 years ago, Friedman and Kuznets (1954) argued that mandatory credentialing processes would create unnecessary barriers and ignore other pertinent qualifications and characteristics that an exam cannot capture. In Casey's view, the process of becoming a certified teacher was cumbersome but admitted that if the process were less cumbersome, he might have been more likely to have pursued a career in teaching. In his words, Casey stated:

> "Probably more likely because once I finished TYBMTP, I was still kinda interested in teaching, but again, thinking about all the stuff you gotta go through, I decided to go a different direction. "

Casey believed that the lack of racial diversity among teachers is a deliberate issue and a part of a larger set of problems that discourage Black individuals from pursuing a career in teaching. He shared that he became aware of Black people struggling to pass basic skills exams via an article he read, highlighting racial disparities in teacher qualification. He purports that if Black people are being kept from becoming teachers based on the inability to pass an exam,

despite all other achievements, something is wrong with the system, specifically the value placed on standardized exams for teachers.

Earlier he had said that he was probably not the only one thinking this, suggesting that others may share the same sentiments. He went on to mention that similar concerns regarding the process of becoming a certified teacher were voiced by others, sharing that, "I know of a few people that did TYBMTP that mentioned some of the same concerns and decided to go in a different direction like I did, but mostly their concerns were about the money. Mine is the time it takes and the money."

Casey currently was a truck driver, and explained why a truck driving career was more appealing than a teaching career for him. For Casey, it was the money and the amount of time it took to get his commercial driver's license (CDL) that led to his decision. Although being a truck driver was not really something he had imagined himself doing, he had a friend who was making a decent living from doing it and that encouraged him to try. At the same time, family pressures to provide financially for a baby on the way required that he make a decision that would allow him to get trained quickly and make the money he needed. He compared the time for training and the money he received with what he would have received as a teacher.

> For the CDL and everything you gotta do, it only took me about six weeks with the classes and drive time. Plus, once I was done, I basically already had a job waiting for me because my friend who was already doing it got me an interview with the company he works for, and the starting pay was a little over $20 dollars, almost $21. Now if I had continued with the teaching thing in early childhood, I knew I wasn't gonna be making anywhere near $20 dollars; more like $12-13 dollars and you can't take care of no family with that.

Casey's choice underlines the significance of practical considerations such as training time and potential income in leading individuals to explore unexpected or unplanned careers. Aside from what Casey described as cumbersome steps to becoming a teacher, the need for immediate financial support played a significant role in directing him towards truck driving, despite it not being an initial career aspiration.

The time you gotta invest and the little money you get once you're done was a deal breaker for me. Aaron, Casey's former cohort colleague, was nineteen when he joined TYBMTP. Much like Casey, Aaron shared similar sentiments concerning his rationale for not pursuing a teaching career in early childhood education (ECE) post-TYBMTP. He shared that, "the time you gotta invest and the little money you get once you're done was a deal breaker for me." Aaron went on to expand on what he meant by "the time you gotta invest" before explaining about the money aspect. He thought that investing the amount of time and money in terms of college education, further training and then passing an exam would need to yield some certainty and what he called a "return of investment" in terms of financial security. He said:

I just mean that it takes a lot more than just finishing your college degree. There are more steps beyond that to be a certified teacher, which is what I would have pursued if I had done it. And I think we can all agree that we don't just want any ole body teaching, so the training and the classes are definitely needed to make sure teachers are prepared. But on the flip side, at least for me, when I started learning about all the steps involved in becoming a certified teacher outside of completing the degree, it was a turnoff for me. I know that depending on the college you go to, you may have to take a test before you can

> even apply to a teaching program. Then, once you're in you gotta do your general degree requirements, program requirements, an internship or something, take more tests, go on interviews, and whatever else you gotta do. That's a lotta time you're spending just on school, which is great if you can do it, but at the time, I was helping my mom pay the bills, so I needed a job, or a school program that was gonna help me get a good paying job sooner rather than later. So that's one of the reasons I said it was a deal breaker.

Like Casey, Aaron makes clear that financial considerations were top of mind when determining whether he would pursue a teaching career in ECE post-TYBMTP. He also seems to adopt a pragmatic approach to career decision-making, specifically in relation to becoming a teacher. He likened his decision to an investment, where he said he weighed the potential benefits against the costs involved. He shared that once he did his due diligence (research) and assessed his personal and financial circumstance, he concluded the time and money that would be invested in pursuing a teaching career ultimately would not yield the return he would want. Such revelation highlights Aaron's awareness of the significant commitments necessary for entering this profession. This analysis on the part of Aaron suggests that he approaches career decisions from a practical standpoint by evaluating potential outcomes alongside associated investments. He considers factors such as time commitment and education requirements while taking into account insights from those involved in the field. As a result, he concluded a teaching career in ECE was not in the cards.

Since Aaron thought the steps or the process of becoming a teacher were too lengthy and that they may have discouraged him from pursuing ECE or teaching in general as a viable career option, he also talked about what should happen to make the process of becoming a teacher less difficult and more attractive to other young men like himself. He suggested that if there had

been a better balance in going through all that schooling and then being asked to jump through a whole bunch of other steps to use your degree, he might have gone through with being a teacher. He thought it would have been a lot more appealing if the process had been streamlined. However, Aaron also shared that he considered the possibility of securing employment that would allow him to meet his immediate financial obligations while also pursuing a 4-year degree but rejected the idea because of the demands of his financial circumstances. He stated:

> I had so many bills coming in at the time that my primary focus after TYBMTP ended was just getting a decent paying job where I could work a lot of hours; I really didn't care what it was to be honest. Plus, I know in education that in order to get paid a decent amount, you either gotta have a college degree or a lot of teaching experience under your belt, and at the time, I didn't have either. That goes back to all that time and training I was saying you gotta invest.

This suggests Aaron's decision-making was driven by immediate financial needs rather than long-term career goals or personal fulfillment. He prioritized practicality, opting for a well-paying job to meet his immediate financial obligations. After finishing TYBMTP, the specific nature of a job was not his primary concern; the pay mattered the most. Aaron briefly considered securing employment that would allow him to meet his immediate financial obligations while also pursuing a 4-year degree. Still, he ultimately dismissed it as he believed it would be overwhelming for him to do both. This highlights Aaron's self-awareness regarding balancing work and school commitments effectively. Aaron understood and acknowledged that to make a wage that would have been acceptable to him in education once he finished TYBMTP, he needed a college degree and teaching experience, both of which require investing time and effort, as mentioned previously.

Collectively, Casey and Aaron's experiences and perspectives on the varied processes involved in becoming a certified teacher suggests that at minimum, some of the processes, especially required basic skills exams such as the Praxis should not serve as gatekeeper for entry into the teaching profession. Their perspectives also make one consider whether all steps to becoming a certified teacher are necessary and how many other prospective Black male educators have been discouraged from pursuing teaching careers in public education (PK-12) due to the elaborate steps and standardized certification exams.

Mounting data continues to show that the teaching profession is in trouble as fewer people are getting teaching degrees (Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Irvine, 1988; Schaeffer, 2020). Data shows a variety of issues have contributed to the disinterest in teaching as a profession, from concerns regarding poor compensation (Allegretto, 2022; Kaiser et al., 2022; Whitebook et al., 2018), burnout and stress (Diliberti, 2021), to political influences impacting what teachers can and cannot teach. Many of these issues were reflected in a 2022 survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago, which showed that fewer than one in five Americans would encourage youth to pursue a teaching career in K-12 education referencing a toxic work environment, poor compensation, and inadequate resources needed to be successful on the job. The lived experiences of Casey and Aaron also conjures up a prior issue explored in the literature review (chapter two) of this study which is the deliberate and systematic pushing out of Black educators in public K-12 schools after the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision.

Other scholars (Andrews et al., 2019; Irvine, 1988; Madkins, 2011; Nettles et al., 2011) contend that the institutionalization of teacher competency tests and licensure exams has and continues to aid in the dwindling presence of Educators of Color, with a disproportionate impact

on Blacks. Irvine (1988) referred to the institutionalization of competency exams as "the greatest threat to the survival of black teachers" (p. 505). Sometimes referred to as professional readiness exams, the negative impact these exams have had on Educators of Color goes back decades (Haney et al., 1987) and serves as the precursor to the teacher competency and licensure exams we see today (Andrews et al., 2019). In addition to a burdensome career pathway, when probing the experiences of Aaron and Casey, poor compensation was also a consistent theme. Both provided candid feedback concerning why poor compensation in ECE is problematic and ultimately served as another critical deterrent and their decision not to pursue a teaching career in early childhood education.

Thematic Category# 5: Poor Compensation

According to McDonald et al., (2018), a highly skilled, talented, and engaged ECE workforce is critical to improving the social and academic trajectories of all children. Others (Trawick-Smith, 2014; Woolfolk & Perry, 2012) posit that the first five years of a child's life are the most pivotal as it helps lay the foundation for how children think, their behavior, linguistic development, fine motor skills, and social-emotional well-being. And because the development of critical foundational skills for children does not happen alone, it is equally important to note that ECE teachers are instrumental in facilitating the learning of those skills. However, despite the vital role ECE teachers play in children's development, data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) shows glaring disparities in pay across the ECE workforce (see graph or appendix). For example, the median national hourly wage for childcare workers (ages 0-3) was $13.22 an hour or $27,490 annually, typically requiring a high school diploma or equivalent (BLS, 2021). Data concerning preschool teachers (ages 3-5) showed that the median national hourly wage was $14.52 an hour or $30,210 annually, typically requiring an associate degree

(BLS, 2021), while the median national hourly wage for kindergarten and elementary teachers (ages 6-9) was $29.50 an hour or $61,350 annually, typically requiring a bachelor's degree (BLS, 2021). While the value of ECE teachers cannot be overstated, how we as a society compensate these essential workers especially those working with children before kindergarten (childcare and preschool) suggest that we are okay with paying them starvation wages averaging less than $30,000 a year.

Therefore, as we consider the disparities in pay across the ECE continuum, we must also consider the factors that have facilitated pay inequities, some of which include but are not limited to educational attainment, years of experience, geographical location, public policy, types of funding (local, state, federal, private), availability of funding, and the type of provider be it home-based, community-based, public school, etc. (Whitebook et al., 2018). Additionally, while data suggests that educational attainment can enhance an ECE teacher's earning potential, especially those with a bachelor's degree, "unfortunately, a bachelor's degree in early childhood education has the dubious distinction of having the lowest lifetime earnings projection of all college majors (Whitebook et al., 2018, p.36), and nearly half of all childcare workers receive some form of public assistance (Whitebook et al., 2014). Consequently, these factors directly impact retention and recruitment, two issues that are commonly cited by ECE providers as two of their biggest barriers (Kaiser et al., 2022). The final thematic category of chapter four, "Poor Compensation," suggests that low pay and bleak career prospects can, in fact, be a deterrent for young Black males considering ECE as a viable career option.

Data for this theme came from the focus group data, specifically excerpts from two of the eight participants (Casey and Aaron) who opted not to pursue ECE as a viable career option post-TYBMTP. It became evident in the focus group that both men's lived experiences and

perspectives mirrored one another so much that it added depth and additional context to these findings and the overall study. Moreover, their congruent experiences and perspectives morphed into an exciting dynamic, which made the focus group interactive and engaging. Common in qualitative research, focus groups typically include people with unique characteristics assembled to explore a specific topic (s) (Krueger & Casey, 2000), where individuals may comment on, expand upon, disagree, or share the opinions of others within the group (Hollander, 2004). Both of them raised the issue of making enough money to live independently or provide for a family on the meager earnings from ECE or being a teacher's aide. Both confirmed that their reasons for moving away from teaching as a viable career came from their immediate family circumstances that required them to make a livable wage. Even though they thought that being a teacher was a great aspiration, they could not have managed financially. Aaron shared why he took a job at Target:

> At the end of the day, a job with decent pay was my priority, and working as an assistant teacher in early childhood with only a year's worth of experience under my belt making $10, 11, 12 dollars an hour wasn't gonna cut it. The idea of being a teacher is great, but when you have real-life situations facing you like I had at the time (a bunch of bills), I had to get a job that was gonna pay me more than just $12 dollars an hour, which is what I would have been making as an assistant or an aide had I taken the job at Little Sprouts Community School (pseudonym). I was able to get a full-time job at Target Warehouse making almost $17 an hour.

On a similar note, Casey too shared how difficult it would be to live independently on the salary they paid an ECE for the work that was expected of them. Perhaps at one time "back in the day" one could have managed but paying rent on 12 dollars an hour was not an option unless one was a student and lived at home. But for a grown adult to manage on that would just not be possible. It was not just about teaching, as he pointed out. It was also about having relationships with children's parents and the nature of education as a profession. As an educator, one could not leave the job behind at a certain time. As he put it:

> If you're a high school student, sure, I can see them getting by on $12 dollars an hour because they're still living at home.But a grown ass adult out here living life?! Ain't no way you can get by on $12 dollars. Teaching is good work, but it's also a lotta work because you're not just dealing with the kids. You're dealing with their parents, other teachers, grandparents, the whole nine yards versus other jobs where you just go in, do your thing and leave at the end of the day. In education, you gotta wait for the parents to pick up the kids, worry about whether they got food to eat, clean clothes, whether they're being treated right, and stuff like that.

Casey's point about teaching going beyond the classroom and embracing other aspects of life resonated with Aaron who shared a story about how he too agreed with Casey. His story about a student illustrates several aspects of the teaching profession that are often invisible to the outside world. He shared:

> Casey makes a good point in that outside of the teaching aspect of the job, you're dealing with other stuff too. For example, I had this one student, I'm not gonna say her name, but she wore the same outfit to class at least three times a week and I could tell the clothes

> weren't being washed because you could visibly see stains on them. It bothered me so much that I went to my Lead Teacher and said yo, I'm not sure what's happening at home, but I know I'm not the only one who's noticed that she's always wearing the same clothes. She was like, yeah, I noticed and we're working to address the situation with her mom. Eventually, they were able to get the mom connected with some resources to address the problem, but man, for me, until the situation was addressed, I would literally just think about what the situation was like at home for her. Because if she didn't have access to clean clothes, in my mind, I'm thinking what else don't she have access to? With my job now, I don't have to deal with those kinds of situations, and I get paid more money.

Aaron's reflection goes beyond money and speaks to some of the stressful aspects of teaching, which seeps into his mind because he cares about the well-being of his students. He mentioned that efforts were made to connect the student's mother with resources to address the clean clothing problem, which indicates that there was recognition of potential underlying issues at home and an attempt by teachers and the school to address them. Aaron shares how deeply this situation affected them, stating that he would constantly think about what life might be like for the student at home until the issue was resolved. Furthermore, he contrasts his current job with his teaching experience by highlighting how his current line of work is devoid of these situations and offers better pay. This suggests that Aaron values employment that allows him to focus on the primary responsibilities of his job rather than having to navigate other complex challenges that sometimes come with being a public-school teacher.

Both were firm about their opinion that the current pay for ECE teachers did not account for the kinds of stressors they just mentioned. There was another consideration that they also

mentioned that was related. Both thought that they would have taken the jobs until another came along but that it would impact the children they left behind without a teacher and without continuity in their educational experiences. That was another reason why they thought it was important to compensate teachers fairly. While both agreed on these points, Aaron summed it up well when he said:

> Take all the things you gotta deal with in these classes, $12 an hour ain't gotta cut it. The pay gotta complement the work, and in early childhood I just don't see it, I just don't.You can't expect somebody to be a jack of all trades, and then pay them something that's not even gonna allow them to make ends meet. Now, would I take the job if I were desperate, sure. But that would probably only be until a better paying job came along. But I wouldn't want to do that because that would also suck for the kids, because some of them become attached to you. So, I would hate to take the job, but in the back of my mind I know that I'm gonna jump ship as soon as a better paying job comes along. So, the last thing I would wanna do is start the job, have the kids get attached to you and then just leave. I think it's important for them to have teachers that are gonna be there for the long-run. In my mind, you should wanna pay teachers what they're worth, because at the end of the day, if teachers feel like they're paid what they deserve then that's gonna keep them on the job much longer. I'm not gonna say that's true for all teachers, but I think a good paying job can help balance out the difficulties or the stress of a job versus one that is difficult and doesn't pay well.

In addition to poor compensation, Aaron and Casey call attention to how low wages can also adversely impact teachers' motivation and persistence, their decision to stay on the job long-

term, and the impact their exodus could have on developing children. Their concerns are supported by research, which shows that high teacher turnover can adversely impact student achievement (Ronfedldt et al., 2013; Grunewald et al., 2022) and that poor compensation among ECE educators can lead to economic insecurity, resulting in teacher disengagement with students (Grunewald et al., 2022). Such evidence underscores why poor compensation is a deterrent for some Black males when considering whether to pursue a teaching career in ECE and why competitive pay must be part of the calculus when considering the recruitment of Black male educators into the ECE workforce.

Summary

The lived experiences and stories collected during this phenomenological study answered the primary and sub-research questions: How do Black male youth participating in a Grow Your Own (GYO) teacher pipeline program describe their decision-making process concerning a long-term career in early childhood education (primary research question). How do they describe their experiences teaching in the GYO program (sub-research question#1), and how do they describe the influences on their decision to either pursue or not pursue ECE as a viable career option (sub-research question# 2)? Eight males between the ages of 20-24 participated in the study, all identified racially as Black, and each completed an academic school year with The Young Black Male Teacher Project (TYBMTP) prior to participating in this study. Through a comprehensive data collection process involving semi-structured interviews, concept maps, and a focus group, all data sources were carefully analyzed through iterative reviews of the data, clustering, coding, and the identification of themes/thematic categories. This rigorous analysis led to consolidating and synthesizing insights extracted from each data collection method, leading to a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study where five thematic

categories emerged: 1.) Pedagogical relations with students, 2.) Career exposure, 3.) Teaching as a counter-narrative, 4. Burdensome pathway to teaching, and 5.) Poor compensation.

Collectively, the thematic categories represent the most pressing factors that shaped participants' decision-making concerning whether to pursue or not pursue ECE as a long-term viable career option. Three thematic categories (pedagogical relations with students, career exposure, and teaching as a counter-narrative) were associated with six participants who opted to pursue ECE as a viable career option. Oppositely, the remaining themes (burdensome pathway to teaching and poor compensation) were associated with the remaining two participants who did not see ECE as a viable long-term career option. The data shows that the thematic categories are rooted in participants' lived experiences teaching in the GYO program (TYBMTP) and perceptions participants held about ECE, the teaching profession as a whole, future career, and economic goals. Chapter Five, the final chapter of this study, will provide a deeper analysis of the results, implications for practice, and recommendations for practitioners and policymakers.

Chapter V: Analysis and Synthesis

Summary of Findings

Data from this qualitative phenomenological study answered the primary and sub-research questions guiding the investigation. First, how do Black male youth participating in a Grow Your Own (GYO) teacher pipeline program describe their decision making concerning a long-term career in early childhood education (primary research question)? And, how do they describe their experiences teaching in the GYO program, and how do they describe the influences on their decision to either pursue or not pursue early childhood education (ECE) as a viable career option (sub-research questions)? The final chapter of this study provides an analysis and synthesis of the major findings. The findings contribute to existing scholarly literature concerning the recruitment of Black males as public PK-12 school teachers and expands our understanding of the factors that deter and encourage Black males to pursue ECE as a viable career option. The study ends with concluding remarks.

Data revealed that participants' decision-making was primarily driven by their experiences teaching in the GYO teacher pipeline program (The Young Black Male Teacher Project), their general perceptions about early childhood education (ECE) and the teaching profession, and future career and economic prospects. The investigation consisted of eight participants, all of whom completed a nine-month GYO teacher pipeline program known as The Young Black Male Teacher Project (TYBMTP), where the men (18-24 years old), known as Scholars worked alongside a veteran or lead certified teacher in pre-kindergarten classrooms at public and community-based schools providing literacy instruction to students between the ages of 3-5 years old. Study participants were recruited using a purposeful sampling approach, as it was determined that they were best suited to provide information relevant to the study. Four

participants resided in the midwestern region of the United States, while the remaining four resided in the Mid-Atlantic region.

The investigation uncovered five critical factors shaping Black males' decision to either pursue or not pursue ECE as a career. For most participants (6 out of 8), the three critical factors that shaped their decision to pursue ECE as a career included pedagogical relations with students, career exposure, and teaching as a counter-narrative. Oppositely, the remaining participants (2 out of 8), who opted not to pursue teaching careers in ECE, cited poor compensation and burdensome pathway to teaching as deterrents. As illustrated in the literature review of this study, factors impacting the recruitment of Black males as teachers into public K-12 settings are well documented in scholarly research.

An analysis of the data in this investigation also showed that factors impacting the recruitment of Black males into ECE sometimes aligned and sometimes diverged from repeated themes found in existing literature concerning the recruitment of Black males as public K-12 teachers. For example, the issue of low pay is commonly cited in the literature as one of the key factors that discourage Black males from pursuing public K-12 teaching careers in general. Similarly, the multifaceted processes that are often required to become a certified teacher and the problems that accompany them (i.e., degree completion requirements, passage of basic skills tests and content knowledge exams, etc.) are also cited in the research literature as adversely impacting teacher recruitment of public K-12 teachers across the board, thus impacting all teacher candidates, but especially teacher candidates of color (Andrews et al., 2019; Tobin, 2012).

Although low pay and burdensome (multifaceted) processes to becoming a certified teacher emerged as issues that deterred some participants from pursuing ECE as a viable career

option post-TYBMTP, the oversaturation of female educators across the PK-12 continuum was not cited as a deterrent. Instead, many participants felt supported and affirmed by their female peers, despite being the only male figure. So, gender issues were present but in a different way than expected. Moreover, the presence of these Black men in ECE classrooms not only challenges racial stereotypes but also challenges and counters hegemonic masculinity and the associated dominant socially constructed notions about the kinds of jobs men should have. Without the presence of males in classrooms, hegemonic masculinity could be reinforced, signaling to students that woman, not men, are the ideal nurturers, guardians, and teachers of children.

When asked what being the only male figure in his classroom was like, one participant stated, "It wasn't a big deal for me. I actually got a lot of positivity from female teachers and the parents of some students who would always tell me they enjoyed seeing a male teacher in the classroom." Another added, "Even though I knew I was one of three males in the entire school, it wasn't something I thought about all that much because I was mostly focused on the job and supporting the students. This suggests that these individuals were able to operate outside of the constraints of hegemonic masculinity and did not face significant challenges related to gender stereotypes. However, when considering how this relates to the "invisible tax" (covered in chapter two) experienced by Teachers of Color, it is important to recognize that while these participants may not have faced overt gender biases, Teachers of Color still experience systemic challenges and biases based on race.

Two other prevalent issues not prominent in this study but found in scholarly literature include the expectation that Black teachers (male and female) serve as "de facto" disciplinarians and surrogate mother and father figures, especially for Black and Brown students (Bristol &

Mentor, 2018; Sandles, 2018). For example, when Bristol and Mentor (2018) explored the school-based experiences of twenty-seven Black male teachers across fourteen schools in a single urban school district, they found that the Black male teachers in their study felt that their teaching colleagues and school administrators perceived them less as teaching professionals and more as disciplinarians who were more equipped to manage adverse student behavior, evidenced by their peers' repeated outreach for assistance related to student behavioral issues versus curriculum and instruction. At no point in this study did any participant assert that these two issues were concerns or factors that impacted their decision to pursue or not pursue ECE as a career option. However, although no such evidence concerning hegemonic masculinity, surrogate parental figures, and disciplinarians emerged in this study, given the prevalence of these issues in prior scholarly literature, we know these issues exist in other contexts and should therefore be kept in mind when developing policies and practices geared toward the recruitment and retention of Black male educators across the public PK-12 continuum. In Khalil's case, one of the study participants who chose to step into a mentoring role for his student Maverick, the school and his White colleagues did not require or prompt Khalil to take on this responsibility. Instead, it was solely Khalil's own decision, motivated by his desire to help Maverick succeed.

Because most participants shared that their decision-making was largely influenced by their experiences teaching in TYBMTP, a grow your own (GYO) teacher pipeline program designed to expose young men of color to teaching careers in ECE, data from this study supports the notion found in the literature (Tanner & Tanner, 1968; Albert et al., 2015; Learning Policy Institute, 2016; Kretchmar & Zeichner, 2016) that contends that GYO programs can serve as an alternate pathway into the teaching profession, and be one of many tools used to address the racial disparities that exist across the public PK-12 teaching workforce. However, although many

of the participants cited their experiences teaching in TYBMTP as a factor that influenced their decision to embark on a career in ECE, more research is needed to understand better how GYO programs such as TYBMTP, its supports, and partnerships helped facilitate entry into the teaching careers in ECE, in this case, Black males. Doing so would provide valuable insight for others who may want to duplicate or reference TYBMTP program model when designing their own GYO program, resulting in more valuable evidence around recruitment, retention, professional development, funding, communal partnerships, areas of growth, and much more.

Discussion and Implications

Career Exposure

As one of three factors identified as critical in shaping Black males' decision-making concerning whether to pursue or not pursue ECE as a long-term viable career option, the data suggests that career exposure is paramount. In other words, if Black men are not afforded opportunities to explore teaching as a viable career option, society cannot reasonably expect them to entertain the idea of becoming one. Additionally, data from the study also suggests that career exposure initiatives such as grow your own (GYO) teacher pipeline programs like The Young Black Male Teacher Project (TYBMTP) can play a critical role in both recruitment and helping Black males envision themselves functioning as educators, whether in ECE or the field of education more broadly. In addition to serving as a potential pathway into the teaching profession, GYO programs also serve as essential information centers where participants acquire critical information. Data collected from the study suggests that when career exposure initiatives (e.g., Call Me Mister, The He Is Me Institute, Male Teacher of Color Initiative, etc.) are intentional about arming participants, in this case, Black males, with critical information about teachers and the teaching profession, such as pay and the diverse factors that can impact their

compensation as future teachers, they are less likely to believe the stereotype that all public PK-12 teachers are poorly compensated.

For example, when interviewing participants (majority) that opted to pursue ECE as a career post-TYBMTP, an analysis of their interviews revealed that the topic of pay was often situated within a larger context of what the participants learned about becoming a teacher while participating in TYBMTP. Their experiences revealed that in addition to being exposed to what it took to become a teacher, TYBMTP also educated them about the potential earnings of teachers and the diverse factors that generally impact what a teacher is paid, such as years of experience, degree attainment, and the context in which one teaches. The fact that most of the participants in this study were not deterred by the prevailing stereotype that all teachers are poorly compensated is significant because the perception of low pay has been cited in the scholarly literature (Meidl, 2019; Daniels, 2010) as being one of many factors that deter Black males from considering teaching careers in public K-12 education. Moreover, it also reaffirms that Black males are not monolithic and, thus, are not all encouraged or discouraged by the same factors, particularly as it pertains to teacher compensation. As discussed in chapter four of this investigation, before participating in TYBMTP, most participants never considered teaching a potential career option, nor did they see a consistent representation of other Black male teachers during their elementary and secondary education experiences modeling what it was like to function as a Black male educator.

Pedagogical Relations with Students

In addition to Career Exposure, data showed that the relationships participants developed with students were equally important in their decision to pursue ECE as a viable career option post-TYBMTP. This is important because beyond building positive and meaningful relationships

with students, pedagogical relations with one's students also speak to something deeper, job satisfaction. And, when we consider the bastardization of today's teachers and the teaching profession as a whole, and the political forces that are dictating what teachers can teach, how they teach, to the decisions they make in their classrooms, job satisfaction is paramount for those considering careers in education and for those who are already teaching in the field. A wealth of literature (Betoret, 2006; Chang, 2009; Jepson & Forrest, 2006; Klassen & Chui, 2010; & Kyriacou, 2001) has shown that teacher-student relationships shape and impact teachers' job satisfaction, one of many key elements to retaining new and veteran teachers (Li et al., 2022), not just in ECE, but across the public PK-12 continuum.

The fact that the majority of the participants cited positive relationships with students as one of the critical factors that led to their decision to pursue ECE as a viable career option post-TYBMTP suggests that when it concerns Black males, schools, school districts, and policymakers must foster circumstances that help ensure Black males have opportunities to build positive and meaningful relationships with students. Research findings indicate that Teachers of Color, particularly Black males, may be deterred from pursuing a career in education due to negative encounters they had with teachers and the education system during their own schooling (Bianco et al., 2011; Graham & Erwin, 2011). Therefore, we must leverage the lived experiences of Black males to determine how their experiences can be used to recruit other Black male teachers into ECE classrooms and beyond. With enduring teacher shortages across the urban public PK-12 continuum, understanding the factors that could lead to the increased presence of Black male educators in ECE classrooms is essential.

Teaching as a Counter-Narrative

The challenges facing Black males are numerous and well-documented (Anderson, 2008; Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Ferguson, 2003; Harper, 2012; Jackson, 2007). However, as articulated in chapters two and four, their narratives are often rooted in stereotypes and racial bias (Polite & Davis, 1999; Saint-Aubin, 2007; Wilson et al., 2017). According to Howard (2013), a solution to combating adverse constructions of Blackness and Black males, in particular, is to position them as the authors of their own narratives, resulting in a paradigm shift devoid of narratives constructed and controlled by dominant groups that are not Black males.

Teaching as a Counter-Narrative highlights the challenges faced by some of the Black males in this investigation and society writ large, as well as the role of stereotypes and racial bias in shaping their narratives. It emphasizes the need for empowering Black males to be the authors of their own stories to combat negative constructions of Blackness perpetuated by dominant groups. This notion is connected to critical race theory (CRT), which focuses on how race intersects with other social categories like gender and class to shape life experiences. CRT critiques the ways in which power structures perpetuate racial inequalities and marginalized voices, such as those of Black males.

By positioning Black males as authors of their own narratives, Howard's (2013) proposed solution aligns with CRT principles by challenging dominant narratives that reinforce negative stereotypes and biases about Black individuals. CRT advocates for centering marginalized voices and perspectives to dismantle oppressive systems and promote social justice. In sum, "Teaching as a Counter-Narrative" underscores the importance of empowering individuals to reclaim their own narratives and challenge prevailing stereotypes through a CRT lens that emphasizes the intersectionality of race, gender, and power dynamics.

The presence of Black male educators in early childhood classrooms and other school settings is also instrumental in countering other tenets of CRT, such as the permanence of racism and Whiteness as property. One fundamental tenet of CRT is the notion that racism is deeply ingrained in societal structures and institutions, making it a persistent force that perpetuates racial inequalities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). By having Black male educators in schools, especially in positions that involve shaping the minds of young children, can interrupt the permanence of racism. Their presence can work towards dismantling racial barriers and creating more inclusive spaces where individuals from all backgrounds are valued and respected. This visibility of Black males as educators engaging with students, parents, and peers helps to humanize them in educational spaces, promoting empathy, understanding, and solidarity among students from various backgrounds.

Moreover, CRT also argues that Whiteness operates as a form of property, granting societal advantages and privileges to White individuals at the expense of marginalized groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The presence of Black male educators disrupts this paradigm by showcasing alternative forms of knowledge, authority, and leadership within educational settings. By occupying positions traditionally held by White individuals, Black males challenge the notion that Whiteness is an inherent form of property and demonstrate that diverse perspectives are essential for fostering inclusive learning environments.

In essence, the presence of Black male educators serves as a tangible manifestation of resistance against entrenched systems of racism and White privilege embedded in society. By embodying diversity, cultural competency, and equity in education settings, these educators contribute to advancing social justice goals central to CRT principles while nurturing a generation empowered to challenge discriminatory norms and build more inclusive communities.

Burdensome Pathway to Teaching

Having perceived the multipronged steps of becoming a certified teacher as burdensome, two of the eight participants in this study (Casey and Aaron) opted to forgo teaching careers in ECE post-TYBMTP. The concerns of these two men are not reflective of the majority in this study, however, to ignore their legitimate concerns and experiences, would also downplay the concerns of others who may share their sentiments. Understanding the root causes that encourage and discourage Black males from pursuing careers in ECE has policy implications that could impact recruitment and outreach, teacher preparation programs, certification policies, and much more. The experiences of the minority in this study, particularly as it pertains to burdensome pathways to teaching, suggest that when it comes to the preparation of teachers, which includes certification processes (i.e., basic skills and content knowledge specific exams), there needs to be a recalibration and an equilibrium between what is absolutely necessary to become an effective certified teacher, versus other requirements that are not necessary but driven by other factors. A recalibration means starting to pay attention to what is necessary to become an effective certified teacher as this study indicates, would be an emphasis on pedagogical relationships or interrupting practices of racism through encouraging children to see themselves in different spaces and careers by the presence and interaction with Black male educators. This would mean rethinking certification requirements that might lead to fewer Teachers of Color and only exacerbate the nation's existing racial incongruences between students and teachers across the K-12 continuum.

The notion of "other factors" is supported by Tobin (2012), who contends that teacher education in the United States generally operates under the bureaucratic power and control of governments (local, state, and federal) but that the pressure and demands placed upon teachers and the teaching profession also includes stakeholders outside of government (i.e., the general

public, private sector, etc.), "resulting in a system of teacher certification that reflects a patchwork of interests and power brokers" (p. 485), steeped in Whiteness. Once the primary drivers in setting national and local education policy around teacher preparation, in recent years, educators have been relegated to what amounts to metaphorical passengers in the ever-changing debates that drive education policy at all levels (Tobin, 2012). The larger question then becomes who is really in control of determining what is absolutely necessary to become a certified teacher versus a wish list of wants by various stakeholders. It is clear that multiple factors (contemporary and historical) continue to work in concert with one another, preventing both entry of prospective Educators of Color into the teaching profession and an exodus of Teachers of Color once they've entered the profession (Andrews et al., 2019).

Casey and Aaron's experiences suggest that policymakers and education practitioners must reimagine new policies and practices that reduce or eliminate unnecessary barriers for prospective educators seeking to enter the public PK-12 teaching profession. Such changes could include but are not limited to degree completion modifications and alternatives to licensure exams, especially for teacher candidates who performed well academically during their teacher preparation programs. There is evidence to suggest that some states have already started to do just that. For example, in 2021, California passed the TK-12 Education Trailer Bill (AB 130), creating a pathway for prospective teachers to demonstrate their professional competency in a manner that does not require licensure exams. The policy allows teacher candidates to use relevant college-level courses to show that they satisfy the California Basic Education Skills Test (CBEST) and the California Subject Examination for Teachers (CSET). The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) justified its decision by stating:

> These changes reflect the State's recognition that intentionally designed, performance-based measures are rigorous and valid alternatives to traditional paper and pencil or computer-based tests for determining one's readiness to enter teacher preparation. "This is a game changer for those who have dreamt of becoming a teacher only to find their paths blocked when they couldn't pass the Basic Skills or Subject Matter entrance exams. These tests are meant to accurately measure readiness to begin teacher preparation not to be a barrier that keeps potentially great teachers from learning to teach," said Mary Vixie Sandy, Executive Director of the Commission on Teacher Credentialing. "We are eager to move forward with this shift in State policy. As alternatives to high-stakes testing these measures will right-size the role of testing and allow a broader and more diverse array of people to make a career out of teaching."

While reducing and eliminating barriers that prevent access into the teaching profession is critical to the survival of the profession as a whole, poor compensation is another looming and enduring barrier that must be addressed, especially if the profession expects to attract new teachers and retain old ones. The researcher's interpretation of the final theme (Poor Compensation) is provided below.

Poor Compensation

Finally, as discussed in chapter four of this study, teacher compensation in the United States has and remains a long-standing issue, impacting recruitment and retention, resulting in high teacher attrition rates nationwide that disproportionately impact schools in high-poverty communities the most (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). And, although national teacher shortages existed long before the 2020 global pandemic, Cooper and Hickey (2022) found that the two sectors that suffered significant workforce losses since February 2020 were leisure and hospitality, and state

and local governments-with K-12 education being impacted the most. The reality is that fewer people across all races and genders are forging teaching careers in PK-12 education, fearing low pay, economic insecurity, and poor working conditions (Garcia & Weiss, Garcia & Weiss, 2019; 2020; Irvine, 1988; Schaeffer, 2020). Implications from data collected in this study, coupled with existing scholarly literature (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Meidl, 2019; Irvine, 1988; Schaeffer, 2020), suggest that low and stagnant teacher wages across the public PK-12 continuum, in addition to adverse perceptions about teacher compensation, go hand and glove and thus serve as one of many factors deterring Black males from pursuing careers in ECE.

Study Limitations

Most research studies have limitations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, one limitation is that all participants were recruited from a singular grow-your-own (GYO) teacher pipeline program (The Young Black Male Teacher Project). As a result, we do not know whether a GYO program with an identical mission would have yielded similar or divergent results. Therefore, what is true here may not be true in all cases. Another limitation is researcher bias. Given my positionality as the former program manager of The Young Black Male Teacher Project (TYBMTP) and my past direct supervision of four of the eight research participants, one must account for the possibility of researcher bias. According to Smith (2014), bias is present in all research designs, but identifying areas where bias does or could exist increases the credibility and reliability of the findings.

As such, I accounted for my bias by considering potential power dynamics associated with my former supervisorial role with TYBMTP, specifically how issues of power could impact participants' responses to interview questions. Therefore, I made it a requirement that all study participants be former participants of TYBMTP, meaning they were no longer employed by

TYBMTP and thus no longer under the supervision of the former program manager (i.e., the study's researcher). Furthermore, to ensure trustworthiness, during the interview process, participants were also advised via written form that participation in this investigation study would provide an opportunity for them to talk about their experiences. Their frank discussions would be a valuable contribution towards providing a better understanding of how GYO programs work and how they can be improved or changed using data gleaned from the accounts of participants' lived experiences teaching in early childhood education (ECE) classrooms during their participation with TYBMTP. Throughout the interview process, I periodically checked with participants to ensure they were comfortable throughout the interview process that allowed them to talk about their lived experiences.

Another limitation is the sample size. Although the sample size of a qualitative study generally depends on the research design and typically consists of 3-10 participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), a larger sample size could glean more data about Black males considering teaching careers in early childhood education (ECE). Thus, a larger sample size and a new research design (mixed or quantitative methods) could be generalized and potentially uncover additional factors not captured in this study that impact the decision-making of Black male youth (18-24) considering teaching careers in ECE. Yet, despite the small sample size, this study in keeping with qualitative methods, provided rich and robust descriptions of the phenomenon that can help us better understand the motivations for Black male educators to pursue or leave careers in early childhood.

Recommendations, Implications, and Conclusion

This investigation sought to understand better how Black male youth participating in a Grow Your Own (GYO) teacher pipeline program made decisions concerning a long-term career

in early childhood education (ECE), their experiences teaching in the GYO program, and how they described the influences on their decision to either pursue or not pursue ECE as a long-term viable career option. The study showed that participants' decision-making was heavily driven by their experiences teaching in the GYO teacher pipeline initiative (The Young Black Male Teacher Project), their general perceptions about early childhood education (ECE) and the teaching profession, and future career and economic prospects. The investigation also found that most of the Black males were compelled to continue pursuing teaching careers in ECE post-TYBMTP as a symbolic stance or counter-narrative against racist stereotypes and adverse societal narratives, coupled with their desire to ensure that future students would have access to Black male educators. Furthermore, the investigation also revealed that when intentional initiatives and the proper support mechanisms are employed, Black males can and do pursue teaching careers in ECE. However, historical and contemporary factors that prevent entry into the teaching profession for Black males are still at play. The following section offers recommendations on strategies or interventions education practitioners, schools and school districts, and policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels can employ to help facilitate the entry of more Black male teachers into ECE.

Expanding Grow Your Own (GYO) Career Exposure Initiatives

Two critical themes emerged concerning ways in which policymakers, schools and school districts, and education practitioners can work together to increase the presence of Black male educators in ECE: **a**.) Expanding career exposure initiatives (i.e., grow your own programs) and **b.**) Use public policy to reduce or eliminate barriers into the teaching profession. The overwhelming majority of participants in this study stated that The Young Black Male Teacher Project (TYBMTP) played a critical role in their decision to pursue ECE as a viable career

option. As one participant shared in Chapter IV, if you want to convince more Black males to explore teaching careers in early childhood education (ECE), more GYO programs are going to be needed. Moreover, as previously explained (p.49), GYO initiatives can and do take many forms depending on the mission, vision, target population, and other relevant variables, and is seen by some (Albert Shanker Institute, 2015; Gist, Bianco, & Lynn, 2019;Learning Policy Institute, 2016) as one way to combat teacher shortages and increase the racial and ethnic representation of educators of color across the public PK-12 continuum. Thus, Grow Your Own (GYO) initiatives can be one of many strategies employed to allow Black males to explore teaching careers in ECE and education more broadly.

Specific strategies could include, for example, some GYO programs to focus on exposure initiatives that give young men of color in middle and high school contexts an opportunity to participate in an apprenticeship-oriented GYO program model that allows them to explore what it is like to be a teacher for a specified period while they acquire real-world, hands-on experiences teaching and working with students in classrooms. In contrast, others may opt to focus on providing critical support services that help men of color already enrolled in teacher preparation programs graduate and pass required licensure exams. Call Me Mister, Brothers Empowered to Teach (BE2T), The Black Male Teaching Initiative (BMTI), and The He Is Me Institute are just a few examples of initiatives attempting to increase the number of male educators of color across the public K-12 continuum. Evidence from the study also suggests that when GYO initiatives intentionally foster opportunities that enable Black males to have hands-on, meaningful experiences supported by the appropriate support mechanisms while exploring a potential career pathway, in this case, ECE, they are more likely to pursue that pathway as a career.

Of the six participants who opted to pursue ECE as a viable career option, from the study, we learned that the relationships participants established with students were a significant factor in their decision to pursue ECE as a career post-TYBMTP, (see Chapter Four- pedagogical relations with students), citing a sense of belonging and purpose bigger than themselves. One participant shared this about his students, "they were able to help me see something in me that I didn't even see in myself, and that makes a difference; at least it did for me." What is clear is that if the nation's teacher pipeline and future teacher education workforce were solely placed on conventional teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities, the participants in this study would not have considered teaching as a career. On the other hand, if the recruitment and retention of Black male educators is solely the purview of Grow Your Own programs, the question arises, does that excuse mainstream Teacher Education programs from the responsibility of initiating and compelling changes that would in fact attract Black male educators? The answer might lie in a combination of approaches needed, from conventional teacher preparation programs to alternative certification pathways such as Teach For America, to GYOs and beyond, to address the nation's teacher shortage and, more specifically, the shortage of Black male educators across the public PK-12 continuum. Teacher Education programs may need to change and learn from GYO programs in order to recruit more Teachers of Color. Without the GYO career exposure initiative, in this case, TYBMTP, participants in this study would not have had the opportunity to build meaningful pedagogical relationships with students, which could have potentially discouraged them from pursuing a teaching career in ECE.

In order to expand such initiatives, it may be important to plant the seed early. Planting the seed early involves introducing Black males to public PK-12 teaching careers throughout various stages of their PK-12 schooling experiences, starting with early childhood education

(ECE). Given that children begin to conceptualize ideas about work and make assessments about occupations around the age of four (Trice & Rush, 1995), using GYO initiatives to expose them to teaching careers early in their development could leave a lasting effect that influences and stays with them up until college. According to Howard and Walsh (2011), "childhood ideas about work and occupations are the precursors to adolescent career development and later exploration of the world of work" (p. 257).

Others (Bryan, 2021) purport that the absence of Black male educators in early childhood education robs children of color, especially Black boys, of the opportunity to envision themselves in their Black male teachers and also prevents an opportunity to counter the permanence of racism. Unfortunately, GYO career exposure initiatives are not without barriers, and one critical barrier for many is funding (Gist et al., 2019). Without sustained funding to ensure that GYO programs can endure over time, their existence can be short-lived (Gist et al., 2019), which is why such initiatives will require diverse funding streams (local, state, federal, philanthropic, etc.) to begin, thrive, and endure over time. Failure to do so will contribute to existing leaks in the Black male teacher pipeline.

Use Public Policy to Reduce or Eliminate Barriers Into the Teaching Profession

Data from the investigation suggests that mitigating unnecessary barriers that prevent entry into the teaching profession via public policy at the local, state, federal, and institutional levels (i.e., colleges and universities) increases the likelihood that Black males will view the pathway into the teaching profession with less adversity. Using California as an example, and as previously discussed (see page 108), states have within their ability and authority to employ policies that can mitigate or eliminate barriers that can help make entry into the teaching profession more attractive to prospective teacher candidates such as the elimination of basic

skills tests. Public policy can also be used to address other critical matters that impact teacher recruitment and retention such as low wages, degree completion requirements, tuition, and much more. For example, the issue of poor compensation in public education is nothing new, but its impact cannot be understated as it plays a critical role in the retention and recruitment of teachers (Allegretto & Mishel, 2018; Kaiser et al., 2022) and further underscores why public policy must be used to address the issue.

Some study participants also cited external economic circumstances that influenced their decision to pursue career options outside ECE (see chapter four). One shared that the required time and resources one needs to devote to becoming a certified teacher can sometimes conflict with life circumstances such as the ability to work a full or part-time job to pay rent or other basic essentials needed to survive. Although public policy cannot and will not solve every problem teacher candidates face on their journeys to becoming certified teachers, this small but critical data point suggests that teacher preparation programs should, to some degree, be prepared to offer incentives (i.e., direct cash assistance, tuition waivers, university/college assistantships, etc.) that help teacher candidates navigate and address economic barriers that may dissuade them from pursuing a career in ECE; doing so could potentially help increase their motivation, persistence, and ultimately, their decision to enter the profession and their ability to complete a teacher preparation program. What is clear is that there is no singular or simple solution to increasing the presence of Black male teachers in ECE, or the parts of the public PK-12 continuum. However, there must be a collective, strategic, multifaceted, and innovative response from policymakers, schools and school districts and education practitioners from all levels (local, state, federal, and institutional) to address the Black male teacher shortage with the

seriousness it deserves. Failure to do so will almost certainly aid in the dwindling of Black male educators in public PK-12 settings.

Targeted and Intentional Recruitment: Moving Beyond the Stereotypes and Seeing Black Males as Potential Educators

In addition to expanding grow your own (GYO) career exposure initiatives and using public policy to reduce or eliminate barriers that prevent entry into the teaching profession, we must move beyond the stereotypes, recognize the brilliance of Black males and all of their possibilities, which includes seeing them as instructional practitioners, nurturers, and caregivers who are more than capable, ready, willing, and able to meet the immediate and emerging needs of young children in early childhood classrooms and beyond. In Chapter Four of this study (Teaching as a Counter-Narrative), we learned that most participants' decision to pursue early childhood education (ECE) as a viable career option post-TYBMTP was partially driven by their desire to combat adverse majoritarian narratives and deficit paradigms that more often than not focus on the hopelessness and underachievement Black males, rather than their potential, triumphs and successes. And despite the research that shows that all students, especially Black male students of color, benefit from having Black male educators, if society cannot envision Black men caring for and tending to the social-emotional and academic needs of young children, then we cannot possibly expect those responsible for the recruitment and placement of teachers to see it either.

Prospective Black male teacher candidates are everywhere, and how we see and recruit them matters. The statement from Brian and Williams (2017) emphasizes the need for more than just having male bodies present in classrooms; it also emphasizes the need to ensure that Black male teachers are valued and supported in their roles as educators. Thus, the mandate for teacher

education programs (conventional or alternative) includes but is not limited to strategically establishing and employing plans that identify specific places, partnerships, and networks to recruit and attract potential Black male teacher candidates. It also includes developing critical support systems (e.g., mentoring, affinity support groups, economic assistance, etc.) to address Black males' immediate and emergent needs, culturally responsive training that prepares them for diverse classroom environments, and more inclusive and supportive school culture. Overall, teacher education programs should aim to increase diversity among ECE teachers by actively recruiting and supporting Black male educators, recognizing the positive impact they can have on the educational experiences of children from diverse backgrounds.

Furthermore, we must stop pigeonholing Black male teachers. According to Brown (2009), Black male teachers are often viewed as 'pedagogical kinds,' or teachers who have the primary responsibilities of managing and being the 'ghost whisperer' to disruptive and unruly Black boys. Thus, rather than pigeonholing and stereotyping them as de facto disciplinarians, behavioral specialists, role models, and surrogate father figures, especially for students of color, they should also be seen for their knowledge and expertise in things such as curriculum and instruction in addition to their subject matter expertise in math, science, reading, social studies, English, and more. Furthermore, to be clear, the recommendation that we see Black males beyond role models and de facto surrogate father figures is in no way downplaying the fact that role models and surrogate parental figures have some degree of value to all students, not just those of color. However, it should not and cannot be the only way we see and view the roles of Black male teachers in public PK-12 settings. Failure to see Black males beyond stereotypical roles in schools could exacerbate disinterest in teaching and push existing Black male educators out of the profession.

Conclusion

Increasing the representation of Black male teachers in early childhood education (ECE) sounds great in theory but putting them on the pathway to becoming early childhood educators is another story. However, by examining how eight Black males participating in a grow your own (GYO) teacher pipeline program made decisions concerning a long-term career in early childhood education, their experiences teaching in the GYO program, and how they described the influences on their decision to either pursue or not pursue ECE as a viable long-term career option, we now know more about the factors (pedagogical relations with students, career exposure, and teaching as a counter-narrative) unexplored in existing scholarly literature that influences Black males to embark on teaching careers in ECE. The new findings will expand existing scholarly literature concerning the recruitment of Black males as teachers across the public PK-12 continuum, but specifically ECE.

As a result of this study, I discovered that three elements are critical in the recruitment of Black males as teachers in ECE. First, there must be targeted and intentional recruitment that sees Black males as more than de facto disciplinarians, behavioral specialists, and minority ghost whisperers. Instead, we must see them as education practitioners and content knowledge experts who will enter classrooms with rich and diverse lived experiences that can be leveraged to engage students in the learning process. Secondly, because data showed that majority of participants' decision to pursue teaching careers in ECE post The Young Black Male Teacher Project (TYBMTP) was significantly shaped by their experiences teaching and working in the GYO program, it is clear that there must be an expansion of similar grow-your-own (GYO) career exposure initiatives that allow Black males, and other men of color to 'test-pilot' a teaching career in public education; allowing them time to conclude whether being a public

school teacher is the right career path for them or not. Third, we need more innovative public policy that reduces or eliminates barriers that prevent entry into the teaching profession in the first place.

To maximize success, all three elements must operate in unison. Many community-based programs such as Brothers Empowered to Teach (BE2T), The Black Male Teaching Initiative (BMTI), The He Is Me Institute, the Center for Black Educator Development, etc.) have already begun the difficult work of bringing teachers of color, especially Black males back into the teaching workforce. However, because many community-based programs often serve as bridges or pathways into conventional teacher preparation programs, their grassroots work must be supported by philanthropy, state, local, and federal entities, including colleges and universities, who are mainly responsible for preparing the nation's public PK-12 teaching workforce. Such partnerships could help facilitate entry into the teaching profession, in addition to mitigating and eliminating barriers that could result in Black male teachers leaving teacher preparation programs or the teaching profession in general once they have entered.

Furthermore, as a Black male, the findings of my study also reaffirmed what I already knew about Black men, which is that we are not a monolith. In other words, despite having shared lived experiences, cultural backgrounds, and more, we are also guided, shaped, and influenced by a diverse range of factors (political, social, economic, etc.) that make us unique in our own right. Phenomenology allowed me to explore the subjective lived experiences of Black men deeply, allowing me to gain a more nuanced understanding of their individuality and complexity beyond stereotypical generalizations. As such, I now have a broader understanding of how divergent factors influence and shape Black males' decision-making concerning their interest or disinterest in teaching careers in ECE.

When I consider the fact that I went through my entire public K-12 schooling experience having never been taught by a Black educator (male or female), it reminds me of why it is critical to "center" the child in my work, which aims to increase the representation of Black male educators in early childhood education. For me, "centering" the child goes beyond prioritizing their academic needs; it also includes the benefits and value they could potentially extract from experiences and interactions with educators of similar racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, which could, in turn, help foster more inclusive and supportive learning environments that better cater to the needs of all children. Having extracted value from my experience being taught by my first Black male educator during undergrad encouraged me to pursue a teaching career in higher education. Overall, all students deserve the right to have a teaching workforce that is reflective of U.S. society.

The theoretical frameworks utilized in this research, including critical race theory and hegemonic masculinity, highlight historical issues such as racial wage gaps between Black and White individuals, discriminatory treatment of Black students in U.S. public schools from pre-kindergarten to 12th grade, deficit perspectives on students residing in urban areas, gender norms associated with toxic masculinity, and bureaucratic structures that sustain inequalities. These persistent challenges significantly influence Black males' decisions regarding their potential pursuit of teaching careers in ECE. Therefore, as policymakers, schools, school districts, and other stakeholders continue to explore and find innovative ways to increase the representation of Black males in ECE and across other portions of the public PK-12 continuum, former teacher, founder, and Chief Executive Officer Sharif El-Mekki (2023) of the Center for Black Educator

Development (CBED) reminds us, the young Black boys sitting in our classrooms today, are the same Black men who will lead our classrooms tomorrow.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Research Recruitment Invitation Notification

Dear {Insert Name of Identified Participant},

As a former participant of (The Young Black Male Teacher Project {TYBMTP}), I am writing to invite you to participate in my qualitative interview study. The study aims to examine the lived experiences and factors that shaped the decision-making processes of eight Black males concerning whether to pursue or not pursue early childhood education (ECE) as a viable long-term career option post-TYBMTP. As one of those males, I invite you to participate since your experiences are valuable to the study. The study's goal is to better understand Black males' lived experiences teaching in an ECE context and ascertain the extent to which race, racism, masculinity, and identity influenced participants' decision-making process. The study will consist of three parts:

- Semi-structured one-on-one interviews (30-60 minutes)
- Circle/Concept Maps – with follow-up questions (20-30 minutes)
- Focus Group (60-90 minutes)

The criteria of the study include a.) Completion of a GYO program (i.e., TYBMTP), b.) You were between the ages of 18-24 during your time in the GYO program, c.) You identify as a Black male (i.e., African American), and d.) A willingness to provide a thorough account of your experiences and perspectives concerning your time teaching in an ECE context while participating in the identified GYO program. For safety precautions, all interviews are conducted and recorded virtually via Zoom due to the ongoing global pandemic (COVID-19). Moreover, because the researcher recognizes that your time is valuable, each participant will receive a $25 prepaid visa card for their time.

Prospective participants should also note that this project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee's office of Institutional Review Board (IRB). The contact information for the IRB is as follows: phone (414) 662-3544 – Email: irbinfo@uwm.edu. Finally, if you conclude that you are eligible and would like to participate, please respond to this email expressing your intention to serve as a participant in the study. From there, the researcher (Calvin Lewis) will send you a separate follow-up email with a link where you'll select dates and times, you'd be able to participate in the one-on-one interviews and the focus group. Once dates and times are solidified, the researcher will send you a calendar invite, along with a Zoom link to participate in the study. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing back.

Sincerely,

Calvin Lewis, Urban Education Ph.D. Candidate
University of Wisconsin Milwaukee
Email: Lewis2@uwm.edu Phone: (262) 914-6662

Appendix B

UNIVERSITY of WISCONSIN
UWMILWAUKEE

Institutional Review Board

uwm.edu/irb
irbinfo@uwm.edu
414-662-3544

Date: December 1, 2021

To: Rajeswari Swaminathan
Dept: Urban Education
CC: Calvin Lewis - Co-Inv (Full Access w/Notify)

IRB #: 22.113
Title: Black Males Teaching Toddlers? An Examination of the Experiences and Decision-making Processes of Black Male Educators in Early Childhood Education

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Institutional Review Board has granted your protocol Exempt Status under Category 2 as governed by 45 CFR 46.104(d).

This exemption determination is valid for three years and will expire on **November 30, 2024**. Before the expiration date, you will receive an email explaining how to either keep the study open or close it. If the study is completed before the expiration date, you may notify the IRB by sending an email to irbinfo@uwm.edu.

Any proposed changes to the protocol must be reviewed by the IRB before implementation, unless the change is specifically necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

It is your responsibility to:

- promptly report unanticipated problems to the IRB
- maintain proper documentation of study records
- ensure that all study staff receive appropriate training as outlined in the protocol
- adhere to the policies and guidelines set forth by the IRB, UWM, and the UW System, and to all applicable state and federal laws

Contact the IRB office if you have any further questions. Thank you for your cooperation and best wishes for a successful project.

Study title	Black Males Teaching Toddlers? An Examination of the Experiences and Decision-making Processes of Black Male Educators in Early Childhood Education
Researcher[s]	Calvin Lewis, Ph.D. Candidate in Urban Education - School of Education

We're inviting you to participate in a research study. Participation is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate now, you can always change your mind later. There are no negative consequences, whatever you decide.

What is the purpose of this study?

This qualitative interview study examines the experiences and factors that shape the decision-making processes of eight Black males concerning whether to pursue or not pursue early childhood education (ECE) as a viable career option. The purpose and scholarly significance of this study is multifaceted. First, the study stands to provide a detailed insight into the lived experiences of eight Black males teaching in an ECE context, a context in which they are rarely seen functioning as educators and caregivers of young children. Secondly, the study stands to shed light on the most critical factors shaping Black males' decision-making, specifically around whether to pursue or not pursue ECE as a long-term viable career option. Finally, the study will allow us to better understand the factors that are adversely impacting the recruitment and retention of Black males into the ECE sector.

What will I do?

As a participant in thai study, you'll participate in the following:

- **Part I - Semi-structured Interviews (60 minutes):** Will consist of approximately 12 interview questions, accompanied by follow up questions to examine the rich descriptions of each participant's lived experiences teaching in the Grow Your Own (GYO) program.
- **Part II - Concept/Circle Maps (20 minutes):** Through the use of a concept map, participants will identify the top four pressing factors (negative or positive) that influenced their decision-making regarding whether to pursue a long-term career in early childhood education (ECE) post their residency in the GYO program.
- **Part III - Focus Group (60 minutes):** The final part of the study will consist of a focus group, which will include other participants of the study. Focus groups allow the researcher the ability to engage multiple participants around a particular subject/topic, which is critical for obtaining divergent perspectives, and allows the researcher to acquire insights into people's shared understandings of everyday life and the ways in which individuals are influenced by others in a group situation.

***** Due to the global pandemic, all interviews will be conducted virtually via Zoom.**

Risks

Possible risks	**How we're minimizing these risks**
Others in the focus group could share your responses.	The researcher will instruct all participants to keep everything said during the focus group confidential. However, we can't control what others say, so it is best not to share anything you don't want others to know.
Breach of confidentiality (your data being seen by someone who shouldn't have access to it)	• All identifying information is removed and replaced with a study ID (i.e. an alias/pseudonym) • The researcher will remove all identifiers after data collection, specifically, during the data analysis process.

There may be risks we don't know about yet. Throughout the study, we'll tell you if we learn anything that might affect your decision to participate.

Other Study Information

Possible benefits	It is possible that as a result of their participation in the study, the men may find comfort in hearing and learning about the lived experiences of their peers, resulting in a shared sense of communion.
Estimated number of participants	8
How long will it take?	2-hours and 20 minutes
Costs	None
Compensation	Participants of the study will receive a $25 prepaid visa gift card.
Future research	De-identified (all identifying information removed) data may be shared with other researchers and used in future studies. You will not be told specific details about these future research studies.
Recordings / Photographs	Because recordings are necessary for the study, all participants must consent to be recorded (audio & visual). The audio recordings will be sent to a transcription company and transcribed verbatim. If participants opt not to be recorded, they cannot participate in the study.
Removal from the study	If a participant is not able to commit to participating in all three components of the study (semi-structured interviews, concept maps, and focus group), the researcher will remove you from the study.

Funding source	Self-funded

Confidentiality and Data Security

The researcher will collect the following identifying information, which will help provide additional contextualization to the study and to help differentiate participants from one another.

- First and last name
- The academic school year you participated in the Grow Your Own program (i.e., Leading Men Fellowship)
- Your age
- Your residency (city and state) during your time in the GYO program
- Current occupation

Where will data be stored?	Data will be stored on the researcher's laptop, which is used solely for research. To access the data, a username and password will be required.
How long will it be kept?	The data will be kept for approximately 3-5 years.

Who can see my data?	**Why?**	**Type of data**
The researcher (s)	To conduct the study and analyze the data	Coded (names removed and labeled with a study ID).
The IRB (Institutional Review Board) at UWM The Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) or other federal agencies	To ensure we're following laws and ethical guidelines	Coded (names removed and labeled with a study ID).
Anyone (public)	If we share our findings in publications or presentations, our funding agency requires us to make our dataset public so other researchers can use it.	• De-identified (no names, birthdate, address, etc.) • If we quote you, we'll use a pseudonym (fake name)
Members of the researcher's dissertation committee.	Committee members may access and review research data to assist the researcher with his data analysis.	• De-identified (no names, birthdate, address, etc.) • If we quote you, we'll use a pseudonym (fake name)

Contact information:

For questions about the research	Calvin Lewis	Email: lewis2@uwm.edu Phone: (262) 914-6662
For questions about your rights as a research participant	IRB (Institutional Review Board; provides ethics oversight)	414-662-3544 / irbinfo@uwm.edu
For complaints or problems	Calvin Lewis	Phone: (262) 914-6662 lewis2@uwm.edu
	IRB	414-662-3544 / irbinfo@uwm.edu

Signatures

If you have had all your questions answered and would like to participate in this study, sign on the lines below. Remember, your participation is completely voluntary, and you're free to withdraw from the study at any time.

_____

Name of Participant (print)

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

Appendix C

Part I: Semi-structured Interview Protocol & Questions (60 minutes)

Interview Questions:

1. Tell me about yourself (first and last name, racial identification, where you grew up, and what you currently do employment wise).
2. Tell me how you came to participate in the GYO program?
3. Before joining the GYO program, what were your views of the teaching profession?
    a. Follow up – how were these views influential in your joining GYO?
4. When did you learn that your participation in the GYO program would require you to teach in an early childhood setting?
    a. Follow up - what was your initial reaction?
    b. How do you feel now?
5. Walk me through a typical day at your school.
    a. Follow up - What aspects of the job did you look forward to the most? What made it exciting? Can you give me an example?
    b. What aspects of the job did you find least exciting and why? Can you give me an example that would help me understand better?
6. What did it feel like seeing Black men in teaching positions at your school?
7. As a gendered minority within your school, how did that affect the way you interacted around your colleagues?
    a. How did that affect the way you interacted with students? Follow-up- did you feel any pressure to behave or act in a certain way when engaging with students or teachers?
    b. How did being a gendered minority within your school affect your overall experiences teaching young children?
8. How did seeing so few men of color in teaching positions in your school affect your own experiences of being a teacher?
9. While teaching, describe some of the barriers you encountered.

a. Can you give me an example of a barrier and how you responded to it.

10. How do you think your presence as a Black male teaching students' affects students?

a. How do you think it affects the parents of your students?
b. How do you think it affects other teachers?

11. How did you decide whether to embark on a long-term career in ECE, or pursue a different professional trajectory?

a. Can you lead me through your thinking process of how you chose?

12. What do you think influenced you to make the decision?

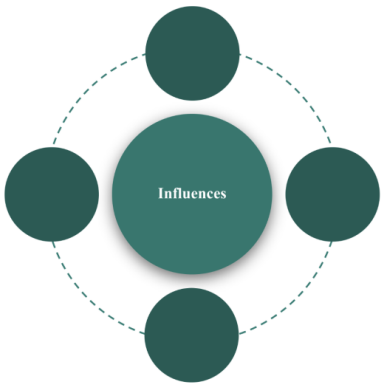
a. Did any aspect of your identity or how you see yourself influence your decision-making to pursue or not pursue ECE as a long-term viable career option, and how so?
b. How did the ways in which Black male teachers in ECE are seen influence your decision?

Appendix D

Part II: Circle Map Interview Protocol (20 minutes)

Procedural Steps:

- Provide the participant with a copy of the circle map
- Explain to the participant what the circle map is and why it is being used (i.e., it will help make clear the influences that shaped each participants' decision-making around whether to pursue or not pursue a long-term career in ECE.)
- Instruct the participant to take four minutes (one minute per circle) to fill in the four empty circles with a single word (negative or positive) representative of the most pressing factors that influenced their decision-making regarding whether to pursue a long-term career ECE post their residency in the GYO program.
- After the participant completes the circle map, the researcher will use the remainder of the interview to examine the participant's responses, supported by probing questions to better understand how each participant arrived at the four factors/influences they identified via their circle maps.



Follow-up Circle Map Interview Questions

The questions will be used to examine why participants selected the four influences that appear on their circle maps:

- Describe how influence#1 shaped your decision-making concerning whether to pursue or not pursue ECE as a viable long-term career option.
- Describe how influence#2 shaped your decision-making concerning whether to pursue or not pursue ECE as a viable long-term career option.
- Describe how influence#3 shaped your decision-making concerning whether to pursue or not pursue ECE as a viable long-term career option.
- Describe how influence#4 shaped your decision-making concerning whether to pursue or not pursue ECE as a viable long-term career option.

Appendix E

Part III: Focus Group Interview Questions (60 Minutes)

To obtain collective and divergent perspectives from research participants and given that some of the topics may venture into sensitive areas, the researcher will also employ Singleton's (2005) ground rules for engaging in courageous conversations. The ground rules are:

- Stay engaged
- Experience discomfort
- Expect and accept non-closure
- Speak your truth

Interview Questions:

1. Let's start with going around the circle and introducing yourselves (first and last name).
    a. Also state the year you participated in the GYO program.
    b. Whether you're still working in early childhood education and if so, where, and if not, where are you working now?
2. Explain some of the initial factors that cemented your decision to join the GYO program to teach young students in an ECE setting?
3. Now that you've had some time away from the GYO program, talk to me about your experiences.
    a. What aspects of the GYO program do you miss the most?
    b. What aspects of the GYO program do you miss the least?
4. Discuss your views (with each other) on ECE when you first started the GYO program compared to now?
    a. Have your views evolved or remained the same? If so, how, and why?
5. Give me an insight into what you guys thought of yourselves as men of color teaching in an ECE context?
    a. Did you guys see yourselves as valuable assets to your students? Why or why not?
    b. Did you guys see yourselves as valuable assets to the school itself? Why or why not?
    c. Did you guys see yourselves as valuable assets to the communities in which you taught?
6. Talk to me about how you think your students viewed your presence in their classrooms and what you think it meant to them?
7. Describe to me what your students meant to you?
    a. How did they make you feel?
    b. What did it mean to you to be personally and partially responsible for their academic, social, and emotional development?

8. Men, and men of color are rarely seen teaching in ECE settings. Given that, did you ever wonder what your female colleagues thought about you working with young children?

    a. Did you ever wonder what the parents of your students thought about you working with their children?
    b. Did you think about how they should have viewed you (as an empowering presence perhaps)?

9. While teaching in the GYO program, did any of you find the experience empowering? If so, what aspects were empowering? If not, why not?

    a. Did you think the experience was empowering for students or parents?

10. Explain some of the factors that cemented your decision to either stay teaching in ECE post the GYO residency, or your decision to leave.

11. For the men that have stayed in the profession and see teaching as a viable career option, explain the process for making that decision.

    a. From your experience, what do you need to succeed as male educators of color in ECE? – Resources, support structures, administrator support, mentors, parental support etc?
    b. If not, describe what support (s) you think would be beneficial to your success as a male ECE educator?

12. As a group, share with me your thoughts around what can be done to recruit, attract,

    and retain more men of color in ECE?