



## **Editor's Introduction: Raced Women in the Classroom**

**Theodora Regina Berry**, *University of Texas, San Antonio*

In Michele Foster's (1997) pivotal work *Black Teachers on Teaching*, she cites the following remark delivered in a lecture by Margaret Mead at Harvard University in 1950:

Teachers who are members of any group who are in a minority in their particular community will have to add in their own words that they are Negro teachers ... as the case may be, redefining themselves against an image of woman who for most of the country is white, middle-class, middle-aged, and of Protestant background (*p. xvi-xvii*).

In this 21<sup>st</sup> century, we can add prospective teachers, pre-service teachers, and teacher educators in the group of teachers Mead identifies in this comment. Additionally, we can add Latina, Asian (to include Southwest Asian and Near East Asian), Native American, and Pacific Islander to the then-Negro-now-Black/African American teachers Mead refers to as redefined social/racial groups of teachers against the backdrop of increasing numbers of White, middle class women in the profession.

Foster (1997) notes that, "in 1910, 76 percent of black teachers employed were women" (p. xvii). More recently, a November 2011 report by the Center for American Progress (CAP), states that only 17 percent of the members of the

profession are teachers of color. The report, an analysis of 2008 data from the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES), classifies teachers of color as anyone “who is not white, including African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans” (p .1). Further underscoring this ongoing racial divide and absence of teachers of color, another CAP report indicates that more than 40 percent of U.S. schools have no minority teachers (Bireda & Chait, 2011).

Research clearly indicates the disproportionality in diversity between students and teachers in the United States (Boser, 2011; Ingersoll, 2011). While much of this work address issues of teacher preparation, recruitment, and retention, scholarship regarding the lived experiences of women of color as prospective teachers, pre-service teachers, in-service teachers and teacher educators has received far less attention. Furthermore, the lived experiences of these women require additional attention through the lenses of frameworks that acknowledge and honor their multiple, intersecting identities in the context of their roles as educators.

To these ends, Galman and Mallozzi (2012) conducted an extensive review of empirical work on women and research on the elementary school teacher. However, upon employing what the authors designated as “complex exclusions”, research that “purported to address gender but made it secondary to, or completely subsumed by, a discussion of other factors, most frequently race and/or identity” (p. 259) was not considered in this work. Additionally, the authors found that the “intersectionality approach” was not suited for their work. While the authors acknowledge the value of “the whole is greater than the sum of a person’s social categories” (p. 261), they

believed this work often failed to center the analysis of gender of the women teachers.

However, later in this same article, Galman and Mallozzi (2012) verify that the use of such intersectionality can “explain individuals’ complicated, multitiered social identities and experiences” (p. 281). As a critical race feminist, I subscribe to the notion that such intersectionality can move into multi-dimensionality as these complex, intersecting identities can inform the ways in which women of color engage in praxis (e.g. teaching). Women of color from various walks of life have endured differing and numerous trials and tribulations in American society. Issues of race and gender have complicated our lives as “those identified as ‘people of color’ have been changed according to political circumstance” (Castenell & Pinar, 1993, p.3) by those identified as ‘white’ in American society. This was an attempt to place people of color “into monolithic, racialized categories” (p. 3) to perpetuate oppression, subdue and suppress conflict, and silence voices (e.g., Cooper, 1892; Varenne & McDermott, 1998; Weis & Fine, 1993; Woodson, 1933). The same holds true regarding the identity of womanhood. The white supremacist patriarchal thinking (hooks, 1994; 2001) often promoted in the United States leads both men and women to believe that “tending to the house and home, to the needs of children, as woman’s work” (hooks, 2001, p.129), “leads men to be ‘emotionally unavailable’ (p. 129) and “still encourages women and men to believe that paternal contribution to parenting is never as important as that of mothers” (p. 141).

Identity that is placed upon us tends to be static. However, identity is a gendered, racialized, and historical construct. It is constructed from what we know and what we don't know. It is constructed from our experiences through/in place and time. For women of color, these experiences are constructed as differences from a continually (and often implicit) set of dominant sociocultural norms and values, that we put in the hard work of negotiating only to be nonetheless placed on the periphery of society.

The scholarship of Ladson-Billings (1994), Dixson and Dingus (2007), and Dingus (2008) serves as a guide toward the further exploration and examination of such work. In her seminal work *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*, Ladson-Billings (1994) has, implicitly, placed the call for such work as she identifies the voices from which she wrote this book:

I have written this book with three voices: that of an African American scholar and researcher; that of an African American teacher; that of an African American woman, parent, and community member. Thus the book offers a mixture of scholarship and story --- of qualitative research and lived reality (p. x).

In response to this call, this issue focuses on the lived experiences of women of color as educators, primarily in higher education. The work included in this issue addresses the complex and intersecting identities of women of color as researchers and/or research participants and the ways in which their identities converge with teaching and/or learning endeavors. In keeping with the field of curriculum studies, classroom spaces are not necessarily traditional K-20 environments and are inclusive of

community environments and other places and spaces where understandings are generated, recalled, and exchanged.

The scholars included in this work represent multiple racial/ethnic identities and work in a variety of educational sub-fields (science education, special education, mathematics education, literacy, hip hop education, etc.) as well as from a variety of positionalities. All aspects of the work they have chosen to pursue, including their scholarship, is not without risks. As a critical race feminist who subscribes to and engages in a multiplicative praxis (Wing, 1997), I fully understand both the risks and the power of engaging in work that makes a deliberate, explicit choice to move away from centralizing White, male, Christian, hetero-normative ways of knowing and being. As an outgrowth of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Critical Race Feminism (CRF) is a feminist perspective of critical race theory. As an outgrowth of critical legal studies and critical race theory, CRF acknowledges, accepts and addresses my Black experiences as different from those of my brothers (critical race theory) and my womanhood as different from those of my sisters (feminist theory); it “addresses the intersections of race and gender...in doing so, critical race feminists place women of color in the center, rather than the margins, of the discussion...” (Berry, 2015, p. 428). CRF focuses on the issues of power, oppression and conflict centralized in feminist theory. It also leans on many of the tenets and elements central to critical race theory. Anti-essentialism/intersectionality, normalization and ordinariness of race and racism, and the unique voice of color through counter-storytelling are key elements in CRF. In addition, CRF addresses the complexities of race and gender

with notions of multidimensionality. Finally, CRF values both abstract theorizing and practice. As such, critical race feminists engage in a multiplicative praxis, one that honors and centers all that we are with all that we know in all that we do for ourselves, for one another as women of color, and for others.

The body of work that appears in this issue of the journal carries the spirit of critical race feminist praxis, a multiplicative praxis wedded to our raced and gendered identities in classroom spaces. And, in centering such identities, this scholarship exhibits courage and bravery.

Nancy López, Jozi DeLeon, Glenabah Martinez, Kiran Katira, and Norma A. Valenzuela position their work centered on a particular question: How can women of color, insurgent scholar activists advance the inclusion of diversity, equity and inclusion courses in university curriculum? Using auto-ethnography and counter-storytelling, these authors present data that informs regarding the necessity to decide what is important to know, knowledge most worth knowing, based on the lived experiences of those least likely to be heard. Given the significance of this question in relationship to the work presented in this issue, we begin the issue with this article.

Stephanie P. Jones, Kristen Duncan, LaToya Johnson and Cynthia B. Dillard frame the lived experiences of Black women teacher educators through Black feminisms and critical race feminism. Using the fairy tale Cinderella as the backdrop of their counterstory, they push back against the “common trope in Black women’s narratives: That is, the idea that despite numerous and continuous obstacles, there is “good luck,” favor, and love as our redemption song”(Jones, et. al). Instead, much of

the focus of this work rests on the necessity of the work of three Black women as Cinderellas. LaGuana Gray provides the “horror stories” of a Black woman academic as a junior faculty member in the academy. Without a fairy godmother, Gray enacts and articulates the necessity to keep things “close to the chest”.

Ana Antunes’ work uses critical race feminism (CRF) to address the intersections of race and religion for (mostly) Black Muslim girls in the classroom. Antunes brings voice to the silencing of this phenomenon in schools and in the scholarship of CRF.

In *When Whiteness Attacks: How This Pinay Defends Racially Just Teacher Education*, Cheryl Matias shares the ways in which a female Professor of Color engages with and resists emotionality of Whiteness. Embedded in this work are the heart-wrenching, brutally negative emails Matias received in response to her scholarship. Matias effectively analyzes retorts to her work in racial justice, inside and outside the teacher education classroom and offers five challenges for teacher education.

This issue closes with a living representation of a collective work. M. Francyne Huckaby artfully and skillfully creates a film that depicts the scholarship of Black women framed by the seminal works of significant Black women scholars. The film is a living representation of the edited volume *Race, Gender, and Curriculum Theorizing: Working in Womanish Ways* edited by Denise Taliaferro Baszile, Kirsten T. Edwards, and Nichole A. Guillory.

Raced women are in the classroom. We teach in the classroom. We learn in the classroom. We research in the classroom. Our presence matters and adds depth

to the educational experiences through knowledges and insights that cannot be offered similarly by any other. Our unique voice of color, our unique positionality warrants and demands recognition, acknowledgment, and attention.

## References

- Berry, T.R. (2015). Me and Bill: Connecting Black curriculum orientations to critical race feminism. *Educational Studies*, 5(5), 423-433.
- Bireda, S. & Chait, R. (2011). *Increasing teacher diversity*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.
- Boser, U. (2011). *Teacher diversity matters*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.
- Castenell, L.A. & Pinar, W.F. (Eds.)(1993). *Understanding curriculum s racial text: Representations of identity and difference in education*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Cooper, A. J. (1892). *A voice from the south (by a Black woman from the south)*. Xenia, OH: Aldine.
- Foster, M. (1997). *Black teachers on teaching*. New York: The New Press.
- Galman, S.C. & Mallozzi, C.A. (2012). *She's not there: Women and gender as disappearing foci in U.S. research on the elementary school teacher*. Review of Educational Research, 82(3), 243-295.
- Ingersoll, R. & May, H. (2011). *Recruitment, retention and the minority teacher shortage*. Retrieved from <http://www.gse.upenn.edu/content/minority-teacher-recruitment-fact-or-fiction>
- hooks, b. (2001). *Salvation: Black people and love*. New York: William Morrow.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.

- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass.
- Varenne, H., & McDermott, R. (1998). *Successful failure: The schools America builds*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Weis, L., & Fine, M. (1993). *Beyond silenced voices: Class, race, and gender in United States schools*. Albany, NY: State University of New York.
- Wing, A.K. (1997). Brief reflections toward a multiplicative theory and praxis of being. In A.K. Wing (Ed.). *Critical Race Feminism: A Reader* (pp. 27-34). New York: New York University Press.
- Woodson, C. G. (1933). *Mis-education of the Negro*. N. P.