Afro-Caribbean Women Teachers Recruited for U.S. Urban Schools: A Narrative Analysis of Experience, Change, and Perception

by

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Dedication

To the Caribbean women in my life:

Mom, Grandma, Auntie Diana, Antoinette, and all my teachers at St. John’s Elementary School
Curriculum Vitae

The author was born in Brooklyn, New York on September 25, 1979. She attended State University of New York College at Old Westbury from 1997 to 2000 and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in American Studies. She then attended St. Bonaventure University from 2000 to 2001 with a Masters of Arts in Teaching, Secondary Social Studies. She also received New York State provisional certification in Social Studies. Makini began graduate studies at the University of Rochester in 2002 in the Teaching, Curriculum, and Change Department at the Warner School of Education and Human Development. She pursued her research on the experiences of Afro-Caribbean international women teachers under the direction of Professor Abraham DeLeon.
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Abstract

Current initiatives to recruit international teachers are on the rise. Although international teachers have always played a part in educating American students, their presence in U.S. schools have increased over the past few years as a result of overseas recruitment programs (Francis, 2005; Hutchinson, 2007). This increase in the recruitment of international teachers has prompted scholars to undertake studies that investigate expatriate teachers’ acculturation patterns (Lee, 2006), philosophies, experiences, and classroom practices outside their native countries (Henry, 1996; Callender, 1997; Francis, 2005; Gilpin, 2003), and the extent to which they meet the needs of culturally diverse student bodies (Thiessen, Bascia, Goodson, 1996). Although there are recent gains in this research, other areas remain unexplored.

This study fills the void in the literature by exploring the experiences of Caribbean women teachers who are recruited to teach in a mid sized Southern city. Narrative methods (Clandinin and Connelly, 1995; Siedman, 2006) were used to analyze four Barbadian women teachers’ perspectives on their: initial experiences and challenges; teaching philosophies and approaches to teaching American students; and successful transition into Louisville, Kentucky’s public schools after five years of teaching. In an age where school districts across the nation seek educators from overseas to address the well-documented teacher shortage (Kirchenheim & Richardson, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 1999; Hutchinson, 2001), this study has implications for helping future international teacher candidates transition into U.S. public schools. It also provides a space to learn from the wealth of knowledge that these teachers bring to the American school context.
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Chapter 1: Statement of the Problem

Currently, New York, Illinois, Georgia, Texas, and California, are among the leading states that are employing expatriate teachers in large numbers (Francis, 2005; Hutchison, 2001; Manswell-Butty, 2003). Citing the critical need to hire 50,000 certified teachers within a three year span, the New York City Public School District, for instance, has recruited nearly 1500 teachers from Australia, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Canada, Italy, Spain, and Barbados in the 2001-02 school year alone (Francis, 2005). Although international teachers have always played a part in educating American students, their presence in urban schools have increased over the past few years as a result of these recruitment programs (Francis, 2005; Hutchinson, 2007). To date, it is estimated that nearly 10,000 international teachers work in public schools across the country (Hutchinson, 2007). This appears to be significant in the literature because this growing trend of recruiting teachers from overseas has led to speculations about the effects such efforts will have on the quality of urban schools.

Some educational researchers argue that having international teachers will help to alleviate the teacher shortage (Darling-Hammond, 1999), reduce class sizes (Hutchison, 2001), and place experienced and qualified teachers in U.S. classrooms (Flores, Keehn, & Perez, 2002). Also, international teachers could potentially “diversify the teaching force” (Bascia, 1996 p. 2), and bring a wealth of knowledge from their own socio-cultural locations that can improve the quality of education American students receive (Ross, 2003). Others, like community activists, suggest that international minority teachers, particularly from the Caribbean, provide models
of Black achievement for Black students and they can identify with the increasing number of Caribbean immigrant students in public schools today (Green Evans, 2005; Baker, 2002; English, 2001; Goffe, 2001). Although there are benefits to having international teachers, current recruitment initiatives overlook potential concerns.

First, there is the assumption that international teachers can be easily transplanted from one foreign country to the next (Peeler & Jane, 2005) and have (or come to the United States with) the necessary skills to effectively teach students from dissimilar cultural backgrounds (McAllister, 2002 p.14). Moreover, because the literature offers little data on the experiences of newly recruited international teachers (Francis, 2005; Manswell-Butty, 2003; Ross, 2003), few assertions can be made regarding their successes in U.S. urban schools, the perspectives that guide their practice, or the ways they interact with American students.

Therefore, to address this current gap in the literature, this study critically examines the narratives of Afro-Caribbean women international teachers who have been recruited to teach in public schools in Louisville, Kentucky. As one of the largest subsets of international teachers recruited (Francis, 2005), Afro-Caribbean women teachers’ narratives provide a window into their experiences in the classroom, and the meanings they make of their practice while teaching in the U.S. for the first time. Teachers’ narratives also attest to the political nature of teaching and give insight into teachers’ personal values, morals, and beliefs. Particularly for this study, Afro-Caribbean women teachers’ narratives provide an understanding of how larger educational policies (such as international teacher recruitment) carry over into the classroom and impact the lives of teachers and students.
The Literature Gap

Currently, African American, Latino/a, and Asian students constitute 40 percent of the nationwide total public school enrollment (Warren, 2002). In addition to the changing racial demographics evidenced in the public school population, students in urban schools are also diverse in terms of their religious identities, ability, languages, and economic status (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Oakes and Lipton, 1999). Additionally, they bring into the classroom a diverse range of experiences related to challenges and difficulties they encounter in their home life (Ladson-Billings, 2001). However, while it is evident that students today come from diverse backgrounds, few teachers in urban schools come adequately prepared to teach in these settings (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Irvine2003).

This reality subsequently raises concerns about today’s efforts of placing international teachers in some of the country’s neediest urban schools (Francis, 2005). For instance, do international teachers take into account the beliefs and assumptions they hold about teaching racial minority students in U.S. urban settings? Have international teachers adopted the dominant discourses about “urban” as a place to be feared or the deficit model many teachers have about urban students and their families? Do they endeavor to develop cross-cultural relationships that value and affirm students’ cultural identities and social norms? And, in what ways do they acknowledge and recognize the structural systems of oppression that affect the education of students daily in urban schools? Attention to these questions can
provide insight on how international teachers approach teaching this significant (and growing) subset of the U.S. student population.

However, few studies provide insight on international teachers’ experiences and pedagogical practices in U.S. public schools. From the studies that do exist, we learn that international teachers experience a great deal of culture shock in their initial years of teaching, as well as encounter frustration, discouragement, and overall difficulty adjusting to their work environments (Manswell-Butty, 2003; Hutchinson, 2007; Francis, 2005;). Below, I briefly examine the challenges international teachers encounter in suburban and urban schools in order to highlight how studying Afro-Caribbean women teachers can provide significant insight into the experience(s) that these particular women face teaching in urban schools.

*International Teachers in U.S. Schools*

While it is expected that new teachers in the profession (even those born and raised in the U.S.) face challenges in their first years of teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2001), these challenges are compounded for international teachers entering a new country, school, and culture (Hutchinson, 2007 p. 369). For instance, in Hutchinson’s (2007) study of four teachers from Great Britain, Ghana, and Germany, most noted the differences in students’ manners to those held by children in their home countries. American students, from their observations, preferred having less formal relationships with teachers as opposed to honoring a hierarchical adult/child relationship. This informal relationship, where students “talked back”, or out right challenged their authority, were viewed by teachers as disrespectful; this was cited as attributing to the difficulties international teachers encountered with students (Hutchinson, 2006).
While the challenges teachers encounter with students reappear throughout the literature, it appears that those who accept positions in urban schools experience greater difficulty.

Citing student behavior and classroom management as two major obstacles in urban classrooms, international teachers in Manswell-Butty’s (2003) study noted that their students seemed “angry” and were outright “disrespectful”. Additionally, many teachers felt frustrated and ineffective due to student disruptive behavior. Francis (2005) also found that Jamaican international teachers in NYC public schools felt that student behavior made classroom management a difficult process, and they saw themselves “baby-sitting” rather than meeting students’ academic learning needs. The difficulties these teachers faced also led them to view some American students as lazy, unmotivated, and lacking the “willpower” to succeed academically (Gilpin, 2003; Francis, 2005).

Although it should be expected that foreign teachers undergo difficulties in their initial years of teaching, the literature demonstrates this to be problematic for three key reasons. First, it appears that international teachers receive little or minimal training on how to teach American students before the school year begins. Respondents in Manswell Butty’s (2003) study, for instance, admitted that the training they received in their home countries did not prepare them for the challenges they encountered while teaching in the U.S. Similarly, Hutchinson (2006) found that teachers held preconceived notions of what teaching would be like in America and later found these perceptions to be false. Other teachers compared American students to children from their home countries and noted how the cultural differences present
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in both societies made their initial years of teaching in the U.S. difficult (Elbaz-Luwishch, 2004; Wang, 2002). Kofi, an international teacher from Ghana states:

The respect for elders goes right through our school systems, but here, it’s a very different culture, so many of our kids feel they can do anything they want, and tell you anything they want. They don’t even have to listen to you, so that makes it difficult initially (Hutchinson, 2006, p.80).

In this light, international teachers with inadequate preparation on how to teach and interact with American students might find themselves experiencing the most difficulty. Consequently, their own feelings of failure can cause them to leave the classroom – thus causing them to contribute to the high turnover and revolving door of inexperienced teachers in urban schools (Ladson-Billings, 2001).

Second, teachers who are unprepared for work in urban schools may also hold stereotypical views of racial minority students. Sleeter’s (2001) review of the literature on pre-service White teachers illustrates this point. Her findings revealed that teachers attributed students’ low academic achievement to what they perceived to be a lack of parental support systems, self motivation, and discipline, and neglected to see how their negative perceptions or lack of professional training contributed to students’ academic “failure”. Although Sleeter’s study focuses on White American teachers’ preconceived notions, recent studies on international teachers have also found that teachers viewed students in urban schools as lazy and unmotivated to learn. Additionally, recent international teachers placed the blame on students (and
their parents) rather than larger social structures that sustain substandard and unequal schools for minority students (Francis, 2005; Manswell-Butty, 2003; Gilpin, 2003).

Finally, international teachers with little cross cultural understanding of American student culture, behavior, and resistance to poor school systems (Fordham, 1996) can lead to a myriad of conflicts in the classroom (Irvine, 2003). Cultural discontinuity theorists, for instance, assert that many children of color perform poorly in schools because their teachers do not identify with and disregard the cultural frames of reference from which they come (Boykin & Allen, 1992; King, 1991; Ogbu, 1982). This lack of cultural synchronization between teachers and students can result in conflicting cultural experiences in the classroom, where miscommunication, confrontation, hostility, and alienation between teachers and students occur (Irvine, 2003). As such, teachers with inadequate teacher preparation might lack an understanding of how to build on students’ cultural backgrounds and strengths as a means to help students obtain academic success. In this light, additional research is needed to understand, in greater depth, what classroom conflicts exist and the ways in which international teachers (over time) work to develop cross-cultural relationships with American minority students (Hutchinson, 2001; Francis, 2005).

More research is needed to understand the preparation international teachers receive before coming to the U.S., as well as how their prior experiences teaching in their home countries influences their teaching philosophies, expectations of, and interactions with American students. Additionally, even less is known about the experiences of Afro-Caribbean women who make up a significant portion of the population of teachers recruited. More specifically, their voices and perspectives are
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subsumed into the larger body of research on international teachers’ perspectives. This provides little understanding of how their prior teaching experiences (in the Caribbean), and the ways their new experiences as an immigrant, racial minority woman living in the United States for the first time, influences their pedagogical approaches. Examining their perspectives and including their voices in educational scholarship moves Afro-Caribbean women from the margins where they were silenced, to the center of research where they can be acknowledged and better understood.

In sum, this lack of research into the lives of international teachers here in the United States has led me to devise research questions about the experiences of Afro-Caribbean women teachers and their interactions with students in American schools.

Scope of Study

In this study, explores the experiences of newly recruited Afro-Caribbean women teachers who have accepted teaching positions in U.S. public schools. I am interested in their narratives, their experiences-- particularly those encountered in their initial years of teaching in the U.S. With this focus, the following overarching research question and sub-question have guided this study:

1) What are the classroom experiences of Afro-Caribbean women teachers who have been recruited to teach in U.S. urban schools?

• How do they perceive their prior training and teaching experiences as preparing them for their current teaching positions in the U.S.?

Although each teacher tells complex and even conflicting stories, collectively their perspectives provide insight on the experience of this subset of international teachers.
This research also has implications for informing international teacher induction programs whose purpose is to prepare teachers to navigate through their initial years of teaching in the U.S.

Theoretical Framework Overview

This study uses Womanism (Cannon, 1995; Brock, 2005; Henry, 1998; Walker, 1983) and immigrant incorporation theories (Ogbu, 1991; Portes & Zhou, 2005; Rogers, 2001; Waters, 2001) to inform my understanding of Afro-Caribbean women teachers who reside in the United States. From these theories, I generate new insights regarding their experiences and pedagogical connections. Specifically, Womanist theory helps to provide the context for understanding the unique, yet shared experiences related to being Black and female in the United States. This theory takes the ordinary and taken-for-granted knowledge of Black women and fuses them together to create a new consciousness that rearticulates and theorizes black women's standpoint (Hill-Collins, 2000). Central to this theory are the ways racism, classism, and sexism creates interlocking experiences that shape their lives, viewpoints, and wisdom in unique ways (Thorton-Dill, 1979; Higginbotham, 1992; Hill-Collins, 2000).

Alice Walker (1983) is often credited with coining the term “womanism”. In her attempt to distinguish Black women's lived experiences and points of view from White feminists, the term derived from Black women who described young girls as acting womanish before reaching adulthood. According to Walker (1983), Womanists are courageous and willful, committed to the survival and wholeness of
an entire people, both male and female, and represent the heterogeneous mixture of Black women.

In a number of ways, Womanism and Black feminist theory (a more recognized theory) are theoretical and epistemological sisters (Hill, 2003). Both acknowledge that Black women have unique experiences related to being Black and female, and contend that as a collective group, their shared experiences and social positions generate unique standpoints that enable them to understand the world and their place in it. Although Black feminist theories and Womanism are grounded in similar theoretical suppositions, Womanism appears to reflect a wide diversity of women's black culture and thought, not just African American women (Hill, 2003). This point comes through clearly in Walker’s analogy of Black women which she sees as representing “the flower garden of the race” (p. xi). Understanding the various ethnic differences among Black women fits this study because it pays attention to the heterogeneity among Black women, and leaves room for understanding the differing standpoints and experiences of Black female immigrants for whom the United States is a new experience.

Second, immigrant incorporation theories are used to explain the shared experiences of Afro-Caribbean immigrants who live in North America. Under the umbrella of what I call “immigrant incorporation theories”, theories of assimilation (Ogbru, 1991), segmented assimilation (Portes and Zhou, 2005), and ethnic identification (Rogers, 2001) explain the challenges Afro-Caribbean immigrants face as they assimilate into American society, the coping mechanisms used to respond to racial injustice, and the ways their ethnic identities make them culturally distinct them
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from their African American counterparts. Together, these theories provide an understanding of how their lives in the US combined with their distinct ethnic identities (as a West Indian) shapes their teaching approaches with American minority students.

Significance of the Study

This study is unique in that it looks at Afro-Caribbean international teachers who are new to teaching in U.S. public schools. These teachers’ stories are an important contribution to the educational literature because these teachers were recruited from their home countries to solve multiple pressing problems in U.S. urban and suburban schools today (i.e. overcrowded classes, high teacher turnover rate, and the pressing need for qualified teachers) (Hutchinson, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 1999). Yet little is known about how well these problems are being addressed by the recruitment and hiring of international teachers, or even how successful these teachers are in their classrooms.

Moreover, teachers’ perspectives provide an opportunity to examine their experiences in the classroom, and the meanings they make of their practice. In this study, teachers’ stories are used to address 1) the political nature of teaching, 2) offer insights on how teachers’ beliefs and experiences impacts their teaching, and 3) gauge the extent to which larger educational policies (such as international teacher recruitment) filters down into the classroom and impact the lives of teachers and students. Added together, the stories of Afro-Caribbean women teachers provide valuable insight on how to help international teacher recruits become effective multicultural educators who can be effective with students in the U.S. (Neito, 1999).
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

If African Americans have suffered from a kind of invisibility … and if the Black foreigner has been treated to a double invisibility… then the West Indian immigrant woman might be said to suffer from a triple invisibility as a Black, a foreigner, and a woman. She simply has not been seen, nor have her experiences been dealt with in any direct and substantial way in the social science literature.

- Marshall (1987 p.87)

Over twenty years have passed since Paule Marshall wrote these words in 1987, yet they continue to ring true today. Her term “invisible” comes from Ellison’s (1947) definition of a person who is unseen by society. Though not by their own accord, or by what Ellison calls a “biochemical accident of their epidermis” (p. 3), African Americans and immigrant groups of African ancestry are rendered invisible because of systemically racist practices that refuse to fully acknowledge Black existence, perspectives, and contributions. As a result, their “subjugated knowledges” and voices have been silenced and marginalized (Gilpin, 2003). West Indian women in particular, as noted by Marshall (1987), are triply invisible because their race, gender, and status as an immigrant minority marginalizes them in such a way that they are neither recognized nor heard.

In this chapter, I provide a framework for understanding the experiences of Afro-Caribbean immigrants, particularly those who are women, and the ways in
which they become racialized and invisible minorities in the context of the United States. This chapter is divided into three components to contextualize and unpack the complex and intricate experiences of Afro-Caribbean women more specifically. While reviewing the research, I have come to learn that no body of literature fully addresses the experiences of Afro-Caribbean women specifically. For this reason, my theory is interdisciplinary and provides an understanding of how their experiences as immigrant, Caribbean, minority, and woman can be best understood. I conclude this chapter by highlighting the gaps in the related research and the ways in which this proposed study can make promising steps to better understand Afro-Caribbean women teachers in U.S. urban schools.

Theories on Assimilation

Much of the literature on immigrants and immigrant minority groups addresses the ways these groups assimilate into American society (Lee, 2005). Assimilation theory, derived from the concept of America as the “melting pot”, has been used to describe the ways in which immigrant groups become a part of American society (Kelly & Schauffler, 1996). Early accounts of assimilation define it as “a process of interpretation and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments and attitudes of other persons and groups, and by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life” (Park & Burgess cited in Alba & Nee, 2005 p.36). As such, the theory is generally known for describing how immigrants blend into society and eventually adopt an Americanized (i.e. White and middle-class) identity. Essentially, assimilation,
through the melting pot metaphor, conveys the message that in the end there will be a homogenous society (Lee, 2005; Traore & Lukens, 2006).

Straight-line assimilation theory has been critiqued on the basis that European immigrants (i.e. Italians, Polish, Greeks, Russians, and Jews), often assimilate into the American White middle-class majority (Portes & Zhou, 1994; Rumbaut, 1996). Additionally, these early attempts failed to acknowledge the experiences of non-White immigrants whose patterns of incorporation into mainstream society were much different because of systemically racist practices and beliefs. Others posit that assimilation theory suggests a straight line of incorporation into society and describes assimilation as a one-way process -- where the majority culture is presumed to be homogenous and the immigrant group absorbs the language and mores of the host country and abandons its own culture (Alba & Nee, 2005). Others note that assimilation theory places ethnocentric demands on minority groups and regards immigrants as inferior individuals who need to shed their cultural traits in order to gain full acceptance into society (Kelly & Schauffler, 1996; Rumbaut, 1996; Zhou & Bankston, 1996).

These criticisms have led contemporary theorists to revisit aspects of assimilation theory. For instance, segmented assimilation, found in newer bodies of literature, posits that there are multiple pathways to assimilation -- not just one. Recent scholarship suggests divergent “tri-modal” (Suarez-Orozco, 2005) patterns of assimilation where some groups follow the traditional “straight-line” theory and become upwardly class mobile. Others experience downward mobility and assimilate into the lower class, while others selectively assimilate by maintaining their ethnic
identities and becoming upwardly mobile within established immigrant communities (Rumbaut, 1996; Portes & Zhou, 2005). For these scholars, only immigrants who are economically positioned in the middle class and are well educated can achieve full assimilation into the dominant society (Lee, 2005). Those of African descent, on the other hand, who are positioned in the working class, partially assimilate or selectively assimilate by acculturating some of the traits of the dominant society while still maintaining their ethnic identities. This can be evidenced in West Indian enclaves of New York City, where there are Caribbean restaurants, clothing stores, and flags from all over the Caribbean represented (Kasinitsz, 1992). From this standpoint, some theorists believe that segmented or selective assimilation is actually better for immigrants because they do not lose their ethnic identities by assimilating into the host society (Lacy, 2004).

Race Matters: Becoming Racial Immigrant Minorities

According to Lee (2005), non-White immigrants “undergo a process of racialization and become racialized. That is, they become racial minorities” (p.3). This occurs because immigrants enter into a society where race and racism permeate the social fabric of American society (Lee, 2005; West, 2000; Scheurich & Young, 1997). She adds that because race structures the experiences, opportunities, and identities of American people, non-White immigrants who come to the U.S. are also placed into categories based on skin color which forms the basis for the social construction of “race” (Lee, 2005). In the case of Black Caribbean immigrants, their apparent African ancestry causes dominant society to identify them as “Black”, thus subsuming them and native-born African Americans into one monolithic racial
category as modern racist ideologies does not differentiate between ethnic categories found in communities of color (Rogers, 2001; Vickerman, 2001).

Kasinitz (1992) also finds that their new encounter with “Blackness” in America causes Afro-Caribbean immigrants to experience lives similar to those of African Americans that consequently causes them to “join the ranks of America’s most consistently oppressed group” (p.32). Residential segregation adds credence to this postulation as many Afro-Caribbean immigrants move (and assimilate) into predominantly Black urban areas (Waters, 2001). Their exposure to inner city neighborhoods affected by high crime, inferior schools, and high unemployment shapes their daily realities (Waters, 2001; Lee, 2005; Portes & Zhou, 2005).

According to Lee (2005), immigrants are placed in racial categories because race in America is most often constructed on a White/Black binary. Immigrants who fall in between this binary, like Mexicans and Asians, are racialized based on their economic standing. Therefore, if they are poor they are viewed as being more “black-like”, and if they are wealthy or part of the middle class they are more “White-like” or what Lee (2005) calls “honorary Whites” (p.5). In other words, Caucasians/Whites feel “they are like ‘us’ but utterly are not ‘us’ ” (Lee, 1999 p. 183). In this vein, immigrants who enter into the U.S. quickly learn what Blackness and Whiteness means, and learn to reject Blackness based on racist social constructions. For instance, Lee (2005) argues that notions of Whiteness are constructed as good, civilized, intelligent, etc., where as definitions of Blackness are constructed as poor, uncivilized, welfare dependent etc. In fact, scholars have found
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this to be the case when interviewing Afro-Caribbean immigrants in New York (Bobb & Clarke, 2001; Vickerman, 2001; Rogers, 2001).

A recurring theme in the literature on Afro-Caribbean immigrants speaks to the ways individuals choose to be identified as a separate ethnic group (Rogers, 2001; Waters, 2001; Vickerman, 2001). In part, the desire to be identified as Caribbean, rather than “Black”, suggests that the latter term holds negative connotations related to African Americans, resulting in tensions between the two groups (Waters, 1996). Others have found that West Indian immigrants even go so far as to express their distinct ethnic identity to others (such as White employers) in order to emphasize that (unlike African Americans) they are dependable, reliable, and hard working (Waters, 2001; Rogers, 2006; Marshall, 1987). Not only do these views cause them to assert their ethnic identity at the expense of African Americans, it also reinforces the stereotypical images of African Americans as lazy and unmotivated (Foner, 2001).

In sum, segmented assimilation theories shed light on how immigrant groups assimilate into mainstream society. Additionally, they also enable researchers to explain how structural factors such as skin color (race) and socioeconomic status become barriers for some groups while allowing others access to mainstream society. However, these theories also present some limitations. First, they characterize Black racial identities as a liability (Lacy, 2004) and negatively portray poor people of color rather than empower those who live on the fringes of society. Second, these theories endorse a “blame the victim” ideology in which poverty, racial difficulties, and injustice are imputed to people of color rather than the structures of society. As such, the stigmatizing of people who live in inner-city urban areas devalues the knowledge
and wisdom that exists in these communities and subsequently ignores how marginalized groups use this collective knowledge to resist and survive their oppressive realities (hooks, 1984).

In the following section, these concerns will be addressed in the discussion on Womanism. Womanist theory, like segmented assimilation theory, explicates the experiences of minority groups—particularly Black women. In addition, Womanist Theory adds another layer to the context of understanding Afro-Caribbean women by examining how being Black and female in the United States produces a particular experience, wisdom, and understanding unique to Black women (Walker, 1983; Henry, 1998; Beauboeuf–Lafontant, 2002; Collins, 2000; Foster, 1993b).

Womanist Theory: Sisters in the Struggle

Writing over a century ago, Mary Church Terrell noted that “not only are colored women… handicapped on account of their sex, but they are almost everywhere baffled and mocked because of their race. Not only because they are women, but because they are colored women” (Terrell, 1904, cited in King, 1988 p. 42). Terrell recognized that being a Black woman had double consequences and serious social implications. Today, contemporary scholars concur with Terrell’s stance and add that an understanding of Black women’s lives requires an examination of their multiple (and simultaneous) encounters with race, gender, and class oppression (King, 1988; Higginbotham, 1992).

Gender is neither absent nor isolated from the experiences and opportunities of Afro-Caribbean women residing in the U.S. (Bryce-Laporte, 1981). For this
reason, their social invisibility is compounded by the fact that many accept menial and low-wage jobs. While some Caribbean women find professional positions as teachers, doctors, and lawyers (Alfred, 2003), a vast majority find work in the lower sector of the job market (Henry, 1998; Kasintiz, 1992). Such is the case can be seen with many Afro-Caribbean women immigrants, including my grandmother, who find jobs primarily as domestic attendants (or do “sleep in” work), despite the professional positions they held in their home countries. Also known as the “Caribbean domestic scheme”, in which Afro-Caribbean women cook, clean, and care for elderly and wealthy Whites (Henry, 1998 p. 73), such positioning in low paying jobs like these clearly illustrates not only the invisibility and marginality of Afro-Caribbean women in the U.S. social order but also how U.S. labor markets are fashioned by gender and segregated by race (Brewer, 1993; Henry, 1998; Collins, 2000, Dill, 1979).

For Black women in the United States, their positioning in lower economic classes demonstrates the ways in which class intersects with gender and race to form a triply oppressive reality (Dill, 1979; Higginbotham, 1992). Even professional Black women, such as those in academia, feel the “chill in the air” (Turner & Myers, 2000 p.83) and the pressure of these simultaneous oppressions. Often serving as one of few faculty of color in predominantly White college institutions, a Black woman may encounter subtle racism or sexism in the gestures, tones, and attitudes of her colleagues (Samuel & Wane, 2005). Therefore, while class and educational status vary, producing differing oppressive realities for women of color in general and for Black women in particular, their experiences give rise to a collective wisdom for understanding, surviving, and hopefully surmounting these oppressions.
Adopting a Womanist framework

Some authors argue that Womanism is a “celebratory” theory that simply notes the differences among women, rather than critically discussing power and hegemony relations (Henry, 2005), others fold both theoretical frameworks under the term Womanism (Brock, 2005; Henry, 2005). I, on the other hand, side with authors such as Hudson-Weems (1989) and Garth (1995) who advocate for a term that divorces itself from traditional White feminist theories. These scholars posit that simply adding “Black” to the term “feminism” inadequately reflects the distinct cultural and historical realities rooted in Black women’s culture and experience. They go so far as to rename Black feminism “Africana Womanism”, for they believe it is a truer expression of the experiences and standpoints of Africana women across the diaspora (Hudson-Weems, 1989; Garth, 1995).

While the debate over terminology may be endless and futile, Hill-Collins (1996) reminds scholars of the critical and overarching need for theory on Black women to 1) originate from their diverse and dynamic standpoints and 2) articulate their self-defined stances, self-determination, struggles, and political perspectives. In this light, a Womanist framework can be adequately used to understand Black women’s lives, standpoints, and wisdom gained through their experiences (Henry, 1996; Brock, 2005).

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1994), for instance, calls Black women’s wisdom “epistemological privilege of the oppressed,” for this knowledge contains a “suspicious wisdom” that enables them to recognize, teach, and survive White hegemony. She notes:
There is the idea that this suspicion is passed down from the ancestors who teach the next generation the subtle dangers—through act and deed—who instruct their offspring in how to walk through treacherous mine fields, who show them “jungle posture.” There is the idea that this suspicion is healthy, necessary for survival and that it can coexist with creativity—that even in creativity and expression one must always be watchful, clear-headed, not “act the fool.” And finally, there is the idea that African American women have this deep, instinctive suspicion down to a science. We use it subtly, deftly, wisely. If we didn’t know how to use it, we would be destroyed. Some of us have begun to give it high status by labeling it a privilege, the epistemological privilege of the oppressed (pp. 59-60).

Viewing a Black woman’s knowledge as an epistemological privilege edifies her agency and empowerment, and tells us much about how she uses both to sustain her existence and others in the community. Recognizing this wisdom is also helpful in understanding how this perspective extends into the classroom when teaching Black students.

Andrea Collins, a third-grade teacher in Dixson’s (2003) study, reveals how this wisdom, gained through her personal experience, is used to push students to overcome the challenges present in their lives. A snippet in her narrative transcript reveals how she was told she would not succeed in school due to skipping classes and failing tests. She notes,
I had to like pull it together. But, had I not had the foundation laid early on, I wouldn’t have been able to have known HOW to come back. So, I think that, my practical and life experience bring A LOT to this. Cause when they say ‘oh Miss Collins, I can’t’, You know what? They told me I couldn’t do it either. Guess what? From the time I came back to school… I was on the Dean’s list every, EVERY semester… When I was… teaching middle school kids, I tell them, ‘look, I know, I know how it is. I’ve been there. I’ve gone through it. I have failed.’ Okay? BUT, I have also been successful through my failures, so I am telling you now, ‘let’s do this!’ (p. 229)

Her epistemological privilege of oppression (being told school is not for her) provides her with the lens with which to understand how and why Black students are not encouraged to pursue academic excellence. Furthermore, her insights are useful beyond teaching students “not to act the fool”; it infuses her teachings, encouraging the success and survival for students as well as that of the entire Black community (Foster, 1993b).

Womanist scholars articulate the collective experiences of Black women and explain how knowledge derives from their positions as a marginalized group (hooks, 1984; Walker, 1983; Henry, 1998; Beauboeuf–Lafontant, 2002). In addition, these scholars see agency in Black women’s positions by the ways they seek to empower themselves and others. However, as feminist theories evolve, more feminist scholars of color (in addition to myself) have chosen to identify with Walker's Womanism, as a term and paradigm, (Hill, 2003; Henry, 2005; Brock, 2005). These authors assert that
adopting the term Womanism encompasses the diversity among Black women in a more holistic manner, thus accounting for their ethnic distinctions and complex identities (Taylor, 1998a, 1998b).

However, there are limitations to Womanist theory. For one, Womanism provides a limited analysis of who Afro-Caribbean women immigrants are as a group separate from African American women. Although scholars are beginning to articulate Third World, Chicana, and Afrocentric frameworks (Henry, 2005), the field still lacks a clear understanding of how Afro-Caribbean women, as a distinct group, interpret their multiple identities and realities while living in America. Articulating their histories, cultural norms, values, and experiences with immigration not only will advance scholarship on an “African Caribbean feminist standpoint” but also promises to illuminate the ways in which these standpoints inform their teaching philosophies and interactions with American minority students.

In the next section, I begin to tease out the differences between Afro-Caribbean immigrants and African Americans. It is important to make these distinctions, because there is a long-standing tendency in the United States to view the Black population as a homogeneous group. The literature, like society, has largely failed to acknowledge intragroup differences, thus disregarding the cultural norms, practices, and ethnic distinctiveness of Afro-Caribbean immigrants (Rogers, 2001; Vickerman, 2001). Also, lumping minority groups into one larger group also reflects the systemically racist view that skin color, instead of distinct cultural differences, makes up group identity rather than a litany of other cultural identities, such as language, practice, or beliefs. As a consequence, their culturally distinct
perspectives, contributions, and interpretations of being a racial minority remain invisible due to their ascribed racial identities (Waters, 1996; Rogers, 2001).

Distinguishing Afro-Caribbean Immigrants

John Ogbu (1990, 1991) has made significant contributions in the field by highlighting the cultural distinctions between West Indian immigrants and African Americans. He argues persuasively that voluntary immigrants (who come of their own free will to the United States), as opposed to native-born minorities (who were brought to America through slavery or conquest and whom Ogbu terms “caste like minorities”), have unique cultural understandings that shape their incorporation into society (Ogbu, 1990, 1991).

One example given in the sociological literature points to the different ways African American and Afro-Caribbean immigrants interpret their experiences with racism. Afro-Caribbean immigrants, on the one hand, have been noted to ignore, avoid, and even overlook instances where racism was evident in their daily experiences. A respondent in Bobb and Clarke’s (2001) study notes:

You may realize my personality as a jovial one, so maybe they used to give me a racist remark and maybe I used to just overlook it and say that’s stupid. But when you just come to the United States and because your [sic] not accustomed to racism, your [sic] not sensitive to it. Yet after [some time] you become sensitive to racism. I mean, I start knowing what is a racist remark, but when I just came, I didn’t know. I thought they were just making a joke or something (p. 225).
Since Afro-Caribbean immigrants come from small countries where Blacks are in the majority, many are often shocked or surprised when racist behavior is directed towards them (Vickerman, 2001). Furthermore, since voluntary immigrants come to the United States with expectations of improving their living situations, Afro-Caribbean migrants in particular often choose not to allow these instances to interfere with their dreams of attaining success. One respondent in Bobb and Clarke’s (2001) study noted that racism was something she had to learn to accept if she wanted to remain employed. For her, “You got to swallow your teeth and take it. … After a while you learn to rise above it, like water off a duck’s back” (p. 226). Ogbu (1990) and Kasinitz (1992) note, however, that this perspective stems from an ideology of getting ahead and “making it” in American society. Therefore, racism and other forms of discrimination, while seen as hindrances, are obstacles that can be overcome by attaining advanced levels of education and hard work and ignores the systemic nature of racism and how it is inscribed into social beliefs, ideologies, and institutions (Bobb & Clarke, 2001).

Newly immigrated Afro-Caribbeans also attribute the discrimination they encounter to their being “foreigners” or “strangers” who are not entitled to the same treatment as Whites or even native-born Blacks (Ogbu, 1991). One respondent in Rogers’s (2001) study notes:

We are concerned about racism. But basically we don’t walk around with a chip on our shoulders like African Americans, although, like you said, we experience a lot of racial prejudice.
America owes African Americans something … more opportunity. We feel less owed. (p.178)

Revealed in these observations are coping mechanisms used by immigrants to respond to instances of injustice. Some see themselves as temporary sojourners, with the goal of earning enough money to one day return home and live comfortably (Rogers, 2001). A woman participant in Rogers’ study notes:

I go back to the psychological and emotional ties to the Caribbean. People feel that, “I have an option, I have an option. If things don’t work here for me, I’ll work, make some money, and go back home. If I don’t get respect, or I meet prejudice, I can always pack my bags and go home, where at least people will respect me [there]. (Rogers, 2001 p.184)

This exit option, or myth of returning home (Ogbu, 1991), helps them to see their struggles as temporary and, in many ways, allows them to distance themselves from or avoid the harsh realities of American racism (Rogers, 2001, 2006). While trajectory studies show that Afro-Caribbean immigrants develop a more sophisticated understanding of racial structures in America, and come to see their plight as similar to African Americans, Vickerman (2001) notes that this consciousness can take years to develop.

African Americans, on the other hand, have differing understandings of racism and respond to these injustices in different ways (Waters, 2001). Ogbu (1991) notes that while involuntary immigrants wish to succeed, many realize that education and hard work are not enough to overcome racial barriers and unequal
social structures. Centuries of enslavement, followed by years of *de facto* and *de jure* segregation and discrimination frames a different political consciousness for them than it does for West Indian immigrants. Furthermore, since African Americans (and even second generation immigrants) see no justification for unequal treatment, and have no “exit option” or home country to move back to, many collectively speak out against oppression, engage in resistant behavior, and create alternate languages, practices, and cultural norms to help them maintain their existence in America (Ogbu, 1990; Fordham, 1996). Although these developed attitudes, languages, and behaviors are stigmatized and devalued by dominant society, altering or absorbing another cultural identity in order to assimilate into mainstream society would be seen as diminishing their existence, and an act of self-alienation and a denigration to the “Black self” (Fordham, 1993, 1996).

**Literature Review: A Womanist Tradition of Teaching**

The historical tradition of Black women teachers chronicles their long legacies of determination and commitment. Seeing themselves as “mothers of the world” (Harley, 1982), many believed it was their higher calling and social obligation to improve the social conditions of the Black community (Downs, 2003). Female educators like Fanny Jackson Choppin, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Charlett Hawkins Brown are examples of late nineteenth and early twentieth century activists, who dedicated their lives to educating Black children and adults (Perkins, 1982, 1993; Irvine & Hill, 1990). Jackson Choppin for example, believed it was her duty and special honor to get an education and “teach her people” (Perkins, 1982). McLeod
Bethune and Hawkins Brown are models of Black women who opened schools in their communities. These educators are particularly well known for their determination in keeping their schools afloat despite the fiscal challenges that threatened its existence (Irvine & Hill, 1990; Downs, 2003). However, what is largely missing in this historical tradition are the narratives of dedicated immigrant Caribbean women teachers who also made long lasting impressions on the lives of students in the United States.

The scant historical attention, in part, could be attributed to the seemingly low percentages of Caribbean teachers in public schools. From the early 1930’s to 1960’s, a majority of Caribbean immigrants to the US found employment as nurses aids, domestic cleaners, and office clerks (Kasinitz, 1992), and faced difficulty finding professional teaching jobs (Phillion, 2005). Others who received teaching positions opted to teach in small West Indian private schools. Small schools in West Indian enclaves like St. John’s Elementary in Brooklyn, (where I attended school), and St. Marks Academy, in Crown Heights Brooklyn, are two examples of schools that were run and predominantly instructed by West Indian teachers. School advertisement s publicized by St. Marks Elementary school, for instance, serves as a perfect example. According to Kasinitz (1992), school administrators sent notices assuring parents that their children would be instructed like those back home in the West Indies, with a “strictly West Indian” teaching staff (p.74). However, despite the scant research attention to Caribbean teachers in public or private schools, Henry (1996) and Callendar (1997) were the first to publish studies on their professional
teaching identities and the ways they advance empowering schooling experiences for students of color.

Annette Henry’s (1996) well cited ethnographic study of five Afro Caribbean women teachers’ in a Canadian urban elementary school identifies the similarities between African American women teachers in the US and Caribbean women teachers in Canada (Ladson-Billings & Henry, 1990). Labeling Caribbean women teachers philosophies and classroom practices as Afrocentric and womanist, Henry found that “their consciousness, personal life experiences, and sociopolitical understandings of Canadian society” informed liberating pedagogies for students (Henry, 1996a p.401). From a theoretical standpoint, these womanist lenses illustrate the maternal lens that drives their activism in the classroom as well as the larger community (Henry, 1992, 1996).

Viv, a participant in this study, who immigrated to Canada in the early 1960’s, for instance, nurtured new arrivals from the Caribbean into the African Caribbean community in Canada. She notes, “We were like the mothers” she says. “We took them, get them into the community, advise them… we made a point when new people arrived at University to receive them, guide them and invite them home (Henry, 1992 p. 396)”. Her experiences as a mother and immigrant to Canada provided her with the lens to the see the importance of mentoring, leading, and advising recent Caribbean immigrant families about life in a foreign country. These womanist beliefs of communal responsibility and family ethos also can be seen in their classrooms.

All five women who immigrated to Canada from the Caribbean expressed a sense of urgency to improve the educational experiences of their Afro-Canadian
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students, and actively sought to create caring learning communities in their classrooms and neighboring school communities (Henry, 1996b). Teachers referred to students as “our children”, “my kids”, “our Black kids”, and advocated on students behalf in school board meetings.

The larger body of research on Black women teachers shows clearly that this maternal lens is what shapes their practice, and how this influences their professional roles beyond “teacher”, to one as “other mother”. Foster’s (1993) study, recounts Black teachers experiences teaching in the segregated South, attesting to the ways they acted as surrogate mothers, aunts, and grandmothers -- all indicating the sense of motherly responsibility towards the social, educational and emotional development of their students. Case (1997) also refers to these teachers as community othermothers and historicizes their practices within slave traditions where elder Black women assumed the maternal responsibility of all in the community. In this light, Loder’s (2005) study of African American women principals, is another example of how Black women educators assume “maternal authority” over all in the community. Dr. Lowe, a participant in the study notes: “I treat [my parents] as if they’re my children. And I talk to them like I would my own child. So I mother the parents, as well as the children” (Loder, 2005 p.312). These women principals extended their roles as community othermothers to include students in their schools as well as to the young parents in the school community, and used their positions to provide advice and assistance to those in need.

The maternal themes that emerge from the narratives of Afro-American and Caribbean women teachers, however, should not be mistaken for patriarchal notions
of women as “nurturing”, “domestic”, or “maternally weak” (Case, 1997). On the contrary, they enact politically charged agendas that nurture critical thinking, and opposition to the social structure. These politically charged agendas can be seen in the ways teachers talk candidly to students about racism, sexism, drugs, gang violence, and poverty. These kinds of discussions are also similar to how they advise their own children. Cherlyn Thomas, an African American teacher in Mitchell’s (1998) study discusses the candid ways she talks to students:

In my last homeroom, I had 23 or 24 kids. Many of them were on drugs. They would come in and crash on you. They didn’t have the energy for anything. They’d tell you they were smoking [marijuana]. They said it feels good, that they can forget everything. I’d say to them, “boy, stop smoking that nasty weed – [you’re going to] get your brain all mixed up.”… I used to talk to them about it. I told them how dangerous and addicting it can be.

(p.110)

This quote illustrates the ethic of care that teachers bring to their profession, and the ways emancipatory classroom practice challenges the “air of hopelessness” that permeate students’ communities (Case, 1997 p.31). Moreover, these teachers believe that teaching is more than academics. It also entails a political agenda that challenges the school curriculum as well. Andrea Collins, an African American teacher in Disxon’s (2003) study, talks about the ways she presents issues of racial and gender oppression in US history. She notes:
And, you know, when I teach, you know, Social Studies in class, and talk about you know, the Declaration of Independence and all that stuff. Look, it wasn’t written for us. I tell my kids that. My White kids, it was you little White girls— it wasn’t written for you either.

You know, we talk about those things. And, I put on the board, it was for White, male property owners. And so, if you didn’t own property, and you were White, it wasn’t written for you either… I try to keep it very real from a um, varied perspective … (p. 229).

Both quotes show the political agendas that undergird Black teachers’ practice and the ways they integrate the school curriculum with politically charged lessons for student survival in a race and gender conscious society (Beauchout-Lafontant, 2002). Callender’s (1997), observations of Caribbean teachers in Great Britain shows similar trends and notes that these political lessons are examples of their version of a ‘hidden curriculum for it enacts a double agenda that helps students succeed academically and socially in a racist society.

Another example of their political teaching can be found in the ways teachers incorporate and affirm students’ cultural backgrounds. Callender’s (1997) study of six Afro-Caribbean educators in two Great Britain multi-ethnic schools documents how teachers used culturally congruent methods of communication and classroom management strategies to integrate British Black students’ home cultural backgrounds into the curriculum. They employed call and response, signifying, proverbs, and repetition as effective and empowering ways of reaching students. Callender concludes that these classroom methods are empowering pedagogical practices
because they validate diverse students’ languages, cultural values and experiences as it relates to their learning.

US scholars including Ladson-Billings (1994), see value in culturally relevant pedagogies. She argues:

[it] empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural references to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. These cultural references are not merely vehicles for bridging or explaining the dominant culture; they are aspects of the curriculum in their own right (p.18).

Agreeing with Ladson-Billings (1994), Gay (1988) writes that culturally relevant teaching methods affirm students’ cultural backgrounds and stimulate learning through cultural frames of reference for Black students as mainstream schooling has done for Euro-American students. Additionally, she argues that such practices create a school culture that is in sync with students’ home culture. Other scholars favoring this method hypothesize that such teaching methods draw on students’ cultural strengths and improve their academic status because it allows them to acquire new knowledge through their own experiences (Neito,1999; Howard, 2001; Stanford, 1997). Although not all Black women teachers enact culturally or politically relevant practices, similar practices can be seen in South African (Gaitskell, 2004), Haitian (Fradd & Lee, 1999), and British Black teachers’ (Callender, 1995) pedagogies.

Research on Black teachers offers theoretical insight into Caribbean women teachers’ political practices. From this body of research, one gathers that like their African American counterparts, their Womanist lessons are intrinsically tied to their
“feminine sense of connectedness to the world”, understanding of, and extended kin relationships with students and their communities (Foster, 1993a, 1990). Additionally, this literature brings to the forefront in forceful ways how Black women across the Diaspora impart similar empowering pedagogies to Black students.

Despite these initial gains in our understanding of Caribbean teachers, Henry (1997) and Callender’s (1998) research has limitations. First, both studies were conducted outside the US, and examine participants living in British (Callender), and Canadian (Henry) communities. Their observation of teachers in multiethnic schools with a predominantly Black students, are different in cultural contexts, school settings, and student cultural norms from those in urban schools in the United States. A subsequent study will be needed to make evident the similarities and differences between these diverse school settings. Secondly, Callendar (1998) and Henry (1997) use homogenizing language that subsumes Caribbean and African American teachers under one category -- “Black teachers”. Their assumptions suggest a unified pedagogy among Black teachers and provide little analysis of the possible differences. While some theories explain why Caribbean immigrants over time identify with Black Americans, a progressive understanding is needed in order to understand how their separate histories, and ethnic identities and cultural differences shape their distinct practices.

Unraveling Cultural Differences

Gilpin (2002) and Francis (2005) examine Caribbean immigrant teachers’ in the US. They identify the cultural differences and ideologies that exist between African American and Afro-Caribbean immigrants and note the dilemmas that arise
when teachers and students come from different cultural backgrounds, yet who are from the same race.

Gilpin’s (2002) narrative inquiry of three women teachers from Dominica and St. Lucia (in a rural setting) is a major contribution to the literature on Black women teachers’ diverging teaching perspectives. Gilpin (2002) notes that their wisdom and understanding of teaching Black students were shaped by their socialization in the Caribbean. Like their African American counterparts, teachers from the Caribbean utilize culturally relevant teaching methods, have high academic expectations of students, and endeavor to develop students’ sense of self worth. On the other hand, they diverge from their African American counterparts by way of their post-colonial Caribbean values, norms, and experiences. For example, their definitions of a “good student” emphasized notions of meritocracy (hard work equals success) and individual responsibility, and viewed students as lazy and unmotivated to learn. For these reasons, the immigrant teachers in Gilpin’s study seemed culturally and ideologically disconnected from their U.S. students.

Similarly, Francis’ (2005) mixed method study of recent migrant Jamaican teachers in New York City Public schools adds to our knowledge of expatriate teachers’ view of American students. A majority of the teachers in Francis’ study saw the importance of affirming students’ racial and cultural identities as an effective means to deliver school curriculum. Additionally, many noted that structural racism and the city’s bureaucratic political school composition often worked to hinder students’ academic performance. Francis’ participants did not see students as intrinsically motivated or determined to succeed academically. When they compared
teaching in NYC to teaching in the Caribbean, many saw U.S. students as disrespectful, unmotivated, and resistant to learn. Some even viewed teaching in U.S. urban schools as “baby sitting”, rather than meeting students’ learning needs.

These findings are problematic. While they adequately locate the reasons for student failure within racist bureaucratic structures, they simultaneously blame students for lack of motivation to learn. Leading multicultural scholars note that teachers with limited cross cultural understanding will often locate the reasons for student low academic achievement within parental support systems, motivation, and discipline-- or lack thereof (Irvine, 2003; Tompkins, 2002). These studies suggest that migrant teachers as a group may have difficulty acknowledging how institutional structures contribute to student academic “failure”. Additionally, they seem to over simplify the process through which schools “privilege certain students, certain knowledge, certain ways of being—at the expense of other students, other knowledge, other ways of being in the world” (Tompkins, 2002, p.408).

Francis and Gilpin (2002) both write about the ways teachers’ deeply rooted Caribbean educational philosophies of intrinsic academic achievement, and one’s sheer determination to succeed impacts their impressions of and interactions with American minority students. They point to teachers’ assumptions, and their expectations of how students should behave and learn. These factors create ethnic (and invisible) barriers. These scholars also go against the current grain of research that portrays Black teachers as only being effective with Black students (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Foster, 1993b; Gordon, 2000), and additionally highlight the challenges confronting them. Furthermore, they advance our understanding of how
teachers, who are of the same race as their students, can be at social and cultural odds with them.

Gilpin (2002) and Francis’ (2005) studies, however, have methodological limitations. Gilpin (2002) for instance, provides no indication of what rural setting teachers worked in or the percentage of ethnic minorities in their schools. Additionally, she relies solely on teacher’s interviews, and neglects to triangulate this data with parental observations, or feedback from administrators. The inclusion of such information should help us understand these teachers better, and how they are viewed by others in their communities. Francis’ (2005) limitations centers around the methods used for data collection, and her narrow population focus. For one, her method for gathering teachers’ responses through questionnaire surveys, were seen as personally intrusive. While this method of using surveys yielded a large return rate, the perceived intrusiveness of surveys may have caused participants to curtail their responses, thus possibly skewing data results. In addition, Francis’ study only investigates Jamaican teachers’ perceptions of racial dynamics in the US, and their comparative views of US and Jamaican school structures, and thus excluding the perspectives of other Caribbean immigrants.

In the following section, I present a brief review of the research on international teachers abroad. This perspective is needed because they highlight the challenges international teachers encountered in their new teaching communities.
Research on International and Immigrant Minority Teachers

There is limited research on immigrant teachers in the US (Hutchinson, 2001; Flores, et. al. 2002). Literature on expatriate teachers in Israel (Elbaz-Luwishch, 2004; Sabar, 2004), Australia (Cruickshank, 2004; Peeler & Jane, 2005), the Netherlands (Ecke, 2005), and Canada (Basica, 1996), has shed light on the commonalities and challenges among these teachers and those in American schools. Elbaz-Luwishch (2004) has written an exemplary narrative analysis of seven immigrant women teachers in Israel originally from the US, UK, South America, Eastern and Western Europe, and Scandinavia. Her study describes the ways in which these teachers negotiated a sense of “place” in their new settings, and found that in this negotiation period, participants felt like “outsiders”, “strangers”, or “fakes” (a feeling of incompetence to teach, although veteran educators in their home countries). Scores of them believed that adapting and learning the codes of behavior as an uphill battle of conflicting cultural values and ideologies. Wang’s (2002) study is important in that it discusses the cultural dissonance eight Chinese teachers experienced in Canada. Participants reported that during their adjustment phase, feelings of anxiety, tension, and uncertainty arose. Some concluded that the contrasting ideologies and teaching methodologies valued in Canadian schools also complicated their transitions. These studies are important because they focus on the challenges of cultural negotiation, how one might feel as an outsider, and the methods teachers use to cope in their new teaching environments.
Phillion and He’s (2001) research goes beyond the assumptions and assertions found in studies already presented. They label it a moment where teachers are “trapped in-between” two cultural landscapes that shifts and shapes their teaching identities in a multiplicity of ways. These shifting teacher-identities are most evident in the research on immigrant minority teachers, (i.e. those who are “visibly non-White”). Attention is drawn to the ways race, ethnicity, and language shape the experiences of immigrant teachers in North America. Phillion’s (2005) study of five immigrant minority women teachers in Canada from Somalia, India, and Jamaica, reveals that teachers faced systemic, social, and overall general obstacles. And, like other immigrant teachers, they felt socially isolated and alienated in their schools. Unlike their white immigrant counterparts, many felt constantly reminded of their “immigrant status” and for the first time were judged, criticized, and in some cases denied employment based on their accents or perceived lack of fluency in English (Phillion, 2005). In sum, Phillion’s (2005) study argues persuasively that race, ethnicity, and language further complicates the cultural negotiation challenge.

Bascia’s (1996) narrative analysis of three male and three female teachers from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Guyana and St. Thomas concludes that they found a critical negotiation challenge. They were reminded of being different from the “white Canadian majority” even after many years of living in Canada (Bascia, 1996 p. 156). Fong Mei notes, “[When] I went to the gas station, [the attendant] would say “Welcome to Canada.” He just automatically assumed I was a non-Canadian…Why would they think you are Canadian, you don’t even look like a Canadian. I think a lot of people still have that concept of what a Canadian should look like” (p.156).
Adam, a Black man from the Caribbean expressed similar feelings, saying, “I feel
[safe] here but I don’t feel like a Canadian because people won’t let me” (Bascia,
p.157). As a result, Basica notes that their “outsider” treatment and constant
reminders of their ethnic differences served as lenses through which they understood
the systemic realities minority students endure in North American schools. Simon, a
Caribbean teacher participant, who “still thinks in patois”, and mentally translates his
thoughts when speaking standard English, noted that his reasons for teaching ESL
came when he realized that ESL students lacked caring teachers who were sensitive
to their linguistic needs and challenges. His empathy, rooted in common experience
and understanding of bilingualism, shaped his advocacy for students in his school.

Bascia’s research adds a new dimension to our understanding of immigrant
teachers in that it highlights the emancipatory motivations that undergird their
approaches to teaching. Although similar to the advocacy roles Black teachers
assume for minority students, immigrant teachers’ activism is limited due to their
perceptions of being an outsider. For these and other reasons, a majority of them were
fearful of being “shit disturbers” (Bascia, 1996) or challenging the schools’ day to
day rituals.

In sum, research on immigrant teachers reflects similar sentiments (Ecke,
2005). Their experiences and treatment as newcomers have contributed to the
importance the pace on assisting disadvantaged and minority students of color
(Bascia, 1996; Phillion & He, 2001; Flores, 2002). Scholars argue for an increase in
the presence of immigrant minority teachers in bilingual and densely populated
multicultural schools, since these teachers recognize the importance of creating
equitable learning environments that are culturally congruent to students’ cultural and linguistic needs (Bascia, 1996; Florez, et al., 2002; Fee, 2006).

The research on immigrant teachers sheds light on the ways these teachers negotiate multiple cultural and ideological landscapes. Elbaz-Luwishch (2004) describes phase transition a period where teachers “hold on and hold together” the present and past, while all along comparing and contrasting the old and new school structures, codes of behavior, and students. This body of research however, provides little analysis on Afro-Caribbean teachers’ particular challenges and frustrations. Instead, it subsumes their experiences under the larger scope of “immigrant minority teachers”. Phillion’s study of Chinese, Indian, Caribbean immigrants, de-emphasizes the role of race, and racism in the experiences of Black immigrants living in a White majority culture. Looking at Afro-Caribbean teachers as a unique group will provide a fuller understanding of how their culturally influenced philosophies shaped in the Caribbean and in the US, impact their teaching in US urban settings and with minority students.

Summary

Afro-Caribbean teachers often are not viewed in educational research projects as being distinct from African American and other international teachers. While the literature does acknowledge commonalities shared by these teachers, it fails to point out their uniqueness. Thus, important questions are left unanswered. For example: What life experiences and philosophies shape Afro-Caribbean teachers’ classroom practices? And, how have their prior teaching experiences prepared them for teaching in U.S. urban schools? Given the lack of research in this area, this study proposes to
build on the studies reviewed in this chapter by including teachers’ narratives about their experiences as international teachers in U.S. urban schools. In the next chapter, I discuss what methodology and accompanying research method I will use to undertake this study.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This is how you grow okra—far from the house, because okra tree harbors red ants; when you grow dasheen, make sure it gets plenty of water or else it makes your throat itch when you are eating it; this is how you sweep a corner; this is how you sweep a whole house;... this is how you smile to someone you don’t like too much; this is how you set the table for tea; this is how you set the table for dinner;... this is how to behave in the presence of men who don’t know you very well, and this way they won’t recognize immediately the slut I have warned you against becoming; be sure to wash every day, even if it is with your own spit; don’t squat down to play marbles—you are not a boy, you know; don’t pick people’s flowers—you might catch something...

-Kincade (1994 p. 307)

In the above quote, Jamaica Kincade (1994) recites the things her mother taught and warned about while growing up in the Caribbean. This quote illustrates the kind of cultural wisdom that gets passed down from each generation to the next, and the distinctive epistemologies and theories of knowledge that are produced in particular cultural communities (Scheurich and Young, 1997; Collins, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2000). In order for researchers to arrive at an understanding of these culturally produced epistemologies, one must employ culturally congruent methods that interpret individuals’ realities in the ways that are valued by and resonate with those being studied (Scheurich and Young, 1997).
According to Ladson-Billings (2000), an epistemology is a “system of knowing” that is intimately tied to our world views (p. 257). The conditions under which people live, and the knowledge we gain from our experiences also shape how we view and understand the world around us. This postulation holds true for understanding the epistemologies produced in ethnic communities, as well as when identifying and locating the epistemological position researchers bring to their study. Because each research design is linked to a particular ontology (our understanding of the nature of the world) and a particular epistemology (the manner in which we come to know the world), many scholars have found traditional Eurocentric epistemologies and research methods to be inappropriate for studying ethnic groups outside the dominant culture (Scheurich and Young, 1997). Some note that Eurocentric approaches are racially biased, distort interpretations of minority cultural groups, and value differing ideologies and concepts of legitimated truth norms (Scheurich and Young, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Others further argue that Eurocentric epistemologies can conflict with the knowledges produced in subordinate cultures and can be harmful when studying the experiences of marginalized groups in the United States. For instance, a researcher using a Eurocentric (or even a White feminist) lens may misinterpret Kincade’s mother’s teachings (i.e. setting the table or not squatting while playing marbles) as sexist rather than “instinctive suspicions” or teachings of survival that Black women use to help young girls navigate within Caribbean societies (Lightfoot, 1994 p.60).

For this reason, I argue in this chapter for a race based and culturally congruent research methodology that lends itself to a better understanding of the
Afro-Caribbean Woman Teachers

experiences and perspectives of individuals outside the dominant culture. In particular, I provide a theoretical rationale and methodological approach that is grounded in a Womanist epistemological framework. I argue that its conceptual framework is most appropriate for understanding the experiences and perspectives of Afro-Caribbean women teachers in this study.

A Womanist Perspective

In the previous chapter, I discussed how Womanism theorizes from the cultural, historical, and political positioning of Black women -- whereby exposing the epistemological wisdom that grows out of their experiences as a marginalized group (Henry, 1996; Brock, 2005). A Womanist perspective builds on this theoretical framework and provides a methodological approach for understanding the complex nature of Black women’s realities (Sheared, 2006). Born in direct response to the exclusion of their voices in dominant research methodologies, a Womanist perspective takes into account how their intersecting identities shape a collective and particular epistemological wisdom unique to women of color (Bernal, 1998; Sheared, 2006; Collins, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Central to this position is the notion that women lead different lives than men and that “Black womanhood” (including motherhood), sexuality, and the matrix of race, class, and gender, impact their lives and opportunities in unique ways (Bernal, 1998; Phillips, 2006; Collins, 1991).

A Womanist perspective also places Black women at the center of the research study and allows them to speak from their own life stories (Bernal, 1998). In stark contrast to traditional Eurocentric methods which has historically defined and
objectified other cultures from distant and biased perspectives (Ladson-Billings, 2000), a Womanist research agenda examines the realities of Black women from their own perspectives and asks distinct research questions that uncovers the multiple ways they understand and interpret their realities. For example, a study on Afro-Caribbean women in the United States might look to understand their experiences with immigration and migration. Such an inquiry might ask: What are the perspectives of Afro-Caribbean women, and in what ways has this experience impacted their lives? The researcher might also use focus group interviews (Brock, 2005), individual interviews (Henry, 1998; Gilpin, 2003), or mixed method approaches that use questionnaires and follow-up interviews (Francis, 2005) to ensure that knowledge is generated from Black women themselves.

In addition, research from a Womanist perspective values the knowledge produced by Black women and incorporates Patricia Hill Collins’ (1991) Afrocentric feminist epistemology. Collins’ (1991) four contours for this epistemology are: (a) concrete experiences as a criterion of meaning, (b) the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, (c) an ethic of care, and (d) an ethic of personal accountability. In the section below, I describe how this proposed study interweaves narrative inquiry, a Womanist perspective, and Collins’ Afrocentric feminist epistemology to better understand the experiences of Afro-Caribbean women international teachers in U.S. urban school settings.

**Narrative Inquiry: A Womanist Perspective**

Narrative inquiry refers to an umbrella of methods within qualitative research that uses stories to describe human meanings of the world around them.
Afro-Caribbean Woman Teachers (Polkinghorne, 1995). Narrative methods such as oral histories, life histories, and ‘testimonios’ are essential to qualitative research because it transmits cultural ways of knowing, events, and stories of personal experiences (Beverley, 2000). Particularly for ethnic minority groups, this method pays attention to the ways they interpret and give meaning to their experiences and uncovers the culturally specific ways of knowing shared with members within their communities. Specifically for this research study, narrative inquiry will carry with it a political agenda that advances a Womanist and an Afrocentric feminist perspective.

**Concrete Knowledge as Criteria for Meaning**

This first tenet of Collins’ Afrocentric feminist epistemological framework suggests that people who have lived through experiences with which they claim to be experts are more believable and credible than those who have only read about such experiences.

My use of narrative methods places Afro-Caribbean women at the center of the research and seeks an understanding of their experiences from their perspectives. Narrative methods from this stance enables me to explore their beliefs in education, how this shapes their teaching pedagogy, and the ways in which they negotiate a position for themselves in their schools (Henry, 1998; Gilpin, 2003). Probing further, narrative methods will be used to enact deep Afro-feminist sentiments that are politically charged and geared towards hearing the voices of Black teachers who are often marginalized in educational research (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Henry, 1998).
The Use of Dialogue in Assessing Knowledge Claims

Collins (1991) denotes that dialogue is important between researcher and participant because it promotes a connectedness between both individuals. Dialogue, however, should be distinguished from ‘talk’ in an interview where the interviewer follows a strict protocol of questions, keeps a safe distance from the subject, and tries his or her best not to show emotion or bias (Oakley, 1981). In this study, dialogue from a Womanist standpoint will diverge from these traditional methods, and instead work to promote a sense of community and connectedness between myself and participants involved in the research (Hill-Collins, 1990; Brock, 2005).

An Ethic of Care

Collins notes that an ethic of care has three interrelated components which acknowledge individual uniqueness, emotion, and empathy during dialogue.

In this study narrative inquiry invokes more than just a research method. It is also a place where I as the researcher, can partake in the story through a rich exchange of dialogue, feelings, and emotions. In the quote below, Lawrence-Lightfoot (1994) reflects on her emotions and the simultaneous roles she plays as a researcher utilizing narrative methods. She notes:

As I listen to these extraordinary women and men tell their life stories, I play many roles. I am a mirror that reflects back their pain, their fears, and their victories. I am also the inquirer who asks the sometimes difficult questions, who searches for evidence and patterns. I am the companion in the journey, bringing my own story to the encounter, making possible an interpretive collaboration. I am
the audience who listens, laughs, weeps and applauds…

Occasionally, I am a therapist who offers catharsis, support, and challenge, and who keeps track of emotional minefields…

Throughout, I must also play stage manager, coordinating the intersection of three plays – the storyteller’s, the narrator’s, and the reader’s… (p.12).

In this case it can be seen that narrative methods allows for a rich exchange of feeling and emotion where the researcher can be personally invested and involved during data collection. In this light, the researcher is not regarded as an “invisible, anonymous voice of authority”, but rather as a caring individual with invested interest for those involved in the study (Harding, 1989 p.9).

An Ethic of Personal Accountability

In this last dimension of Collins’ Afrocentric feminist epistemology, she notes that individuals who convey their thoughts through dialogue should be held accountable for what they believe. This principle enables researchers to trust that an individual’s expressed knowledge claims are connected to their core values, character, and ethics.

Narrative methods embrace this standpoint and add that individuals’ perspectives are not only valuable, but are legitimate and accountable sources for theorizing alternative ways of understanding the meaning of larger social phenomena (Harding, 1987; Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, 1996). Feminist scholars also add that this knowledge is credible for helping participants better understand themselves, and
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their positioning in larger society as well as for helping others learn from the perspectives shared.

In this research study, all four epistemological tenets work to validate black women’s knowledge claims. As Collins (1990/2000) states, in this alternative epistemology, values lie at the heart of the knowledge validation process such that inquiry always has an ethical aim. Moreover, when these four dimensions become politicized and attached to a social justice project, they can form a framework for feminist thought and practice (p. 266).

Narrative inquiry in this light will advance a political agenda because it affords space for the researcher to connect, relate to, and build relationships with teachers on deeper levels while understanding their experiences as Afro-Caribbean international teachers.

The International Teacher Recruitment Initiative

The teachers in this study all participated in the International Teacher Recruitment Initiative program in Louisville, Kentucky. The program’s goals were aimed to diversify the teaching staff and match the growing diverse student population in the Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville. The program also sought to fill the need for teachers in critical shortage areas such as math, science, special education, and ESL. In addition, the district also sought for middle school teachers who would teach in all content areas. In an interview with the head of the International Teacher Recruitment Initiative, I was also told that teachers were
specifically recruited from Barbados because of their commitment to education and their stern discipline.

The International Teacher Recruitment Initiative began in the 2002-2003 academic school year, and ended four years later in 2006. Figure 1.1 shows the number of teachers who came through the program and are still teaching in Kentucky. This large disparity between the teachers who came and those who left resulted after their three-year work permits were expired. The tightening governmental restrictions on visas issued after 9/11 caused many teachers who were on work permits to return to Barbados with no granted extensions once their three-year contract expired.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Teachers Recruited</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Still Here</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002-2003</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1.1 Teachers who were recruited and remained in the U.S.

Methods

The participants for this study were recruited through culturally appropriate measures termed “community nomination” by Michelle Foster (1997). Their names were originally located through an individual who was interviewed in a newspaper article on the recruitment efforts in Kentucky. From this contact, I was given the name of one of someone whose wife was recruited through the program. From this contact, who eventually became a participant in this study, she then gave me the names of three other teachers, who also later agreed to participate in the study. Pseudonyms were provided to protect teacher’s identities.
The Participants

Jill is in her mid fifties, and began teaching in Louisville in 2005. She currently teaches Art and humanities for grades k-5, and has over thirty years of teaching experience in Barbados. She received a Bachelors degree from a university in Barbados, and received a Masters degree in Art Education from a university in Boston in the 1970’s. Jill had some experience teaching in Boston during completing her Masters, before returning to Barbados to teach as an elementary school art teacher.

Paula is in her forties and has been teaching for over 15 years. In Barbados, she taught History and Religion, and received a Bachelors and Masters degree from a university in Barbados. She began teaching in Louisville in 2004, and at the time of our interview, taught 8th grade Social Studies.

Dr. Best is in her mid fifties and has been teaching for over 30 years. She began teaching in Kentucky in 2004, and teaches 7th grade English and Language Arts. She currently holds a Ph.D. from the University of London in Education, four Masters Degrees in the areas of counseling, teaching, English, and Management Studies, and a certificate in criminology.

Mary is in her sixties and has been teaching for over twenty-five years. She began teaching in Kentucky in 2004, and teaches 6th grade English and Language Arts. She received a Bachelors degree from a university in the West Indies, and a Masters of Arts Degree in teaching, with a concentration in History and Secondary English and Humanities from a university in New York. While living in Kentucky, Mary returned to school and received a second master’s degree in school counseling,
and is now a certified school counselor for K-12 schools. She also has credits towards a PhD in teaching and Curriculum and is considering completing the requirements for the degree.

Three of the teachers in this study, Paula, Mary, and Dr. Best, all teach at the same middle school. Jill is the only teacher that teaches in elementary school at a different location.

Data Collection

Data was gathered through in-depth narrative interviews and classroom observations. These methods used in educational research, helps researchers understand the “constructed nature of teaching” at deeper depths (Gilpin, p.80). In Gilpin (2003) and Foster’s (1997) studies, stories provided a window into teachers’ experiences in the classroom, and the meanings they made of their practice. In these studies, teachers’ stories were used to understand the political nature of teaching and provide insight on their personal values, morals, and beliefs (Goodson, 1998). In addition, these methods have been used to understand the social construction of schooling (Goodson, 1998), what practices work best with minority students (Ladson-Billings, 1994), and what knowledge is essential about teaching (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Classroom observation and teacher narratives together provide adequate insight on how to improve schools (Goodson, 1998; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

For this study, I meet with teachers at minimum four times. I first contacted Paula and Jill, by telephone, as they were the first to agree to participate in the study. In these phone discussions, I introduced myself and the purpose and goals for the
study. I then arraigned a time when to meet them in person in Kentucky. While in Kentucky, I provided teachers with a little more background about myself, the graduate program I attend, and my purpose for conducting the study. I used this initial meeting to only establish a connection and relationship with teachers before beginning data collection. I returned to Kentucky one month later for interviews and classroom observations. In these interviews, I also asked teachers to provide me with names of other teachers who were recruited to teach in Kentucky. Paula then provided me with two contacts, Mary and Dr. Best. For these teachers, I went to their classrooms while they were on break, and introduced myself and the purpose for my study. Upon consent, I then asked when I could observe their classroom, and hold our first semi structured interview.

All teachers were interviewed a total of three times. The first round of interviews occurred in their classrooms at the end of the school day. I then returned to their classroom and observed for 1-2 full school days depending on each teacher’s schedule and availability. I then conducted the second round of interviews with teachers in their classrooms, a day or two later. After a week of interviews and classroom observations, I returned to Rochester to analyze this data. Two-three months later, the third round of interviews was conducted over the phone.

In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were used as the primary method for data collection. This concept of in depth interviews borrows from the phenomenological tradition of interviewing where the primary concern is to learn directly from individuals, how they make meaning of their lives as they know it (Seidman, 2006). For this study, I
asked open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview format. All interviews were digitally recorded, uploaded onto the computer, and transcribed into word files.

I used Seidman’s (2006) three-tier approach to structure each interview, which involved three interviews with each participant. All teachers were asked the same initial questions, but follow-up questions, depending on their responses were different. However, I used a guideline (see Appendix A, B, and C) to provide direction and a focus for the purpose of each interview. It also ensured that all teachers provide answers to the research questions that guided this study (Siedman, 2006). Each interview ranged from 60 to 90 minutes.

The first interview centered on what Siedman (2006) calls a “focused life history” (p. 11). Teachers were asked to talk about their life experiences up until the point of coming to the United States to teach. These questions asked teachers to talk about their previous teaching experiences in their home countries (including student racial and ethnic background, school climate, and interactions with students) and the perceptions they held about teaching in the United States. After learning about where teachers came from and their motivations for teaching abroad, I then asked a series of questions about the formal recruitment process and the ways they felt prepared to teach in Kentucky. Appendix A provides details of the questions that were asked.

The second interview asked teachers to talk about their experiences living in Louisville, and the details of their classroom experiences. Siedman (2006) calls this the “details of the experience” interview (p. 12), as teachers were asked about their experiences living in the United States including the neighborhood they now live in,
interesting cultural behaviors observed, and support groups and friends that have helped them to negotiate living in their new environments.

In addition, teachers were also asked to talk about their daily classroom activities and interactions with students, beginning with their initial experiences as a first year international teacher. They were probed, when needed to give examples of moments that stood out the most in their early years of teaching in the U.S., the challenges they faced in this first year, and how they felt these challenges impacted their teaching practices. They also asked to talk about their interactions with students, the teaching approaches they have learned and adapted, and the attitudes, and skills they believe an effective teacher needs in order to be successful in their teaching environment. Appendix B provides the kinds of questions asked in this interview.

The third interview asked participants to reflect on the meaning of their experiences while teaching in the United States, and the practical and philosophical approaches that have come to inform their teaching. In addition, teachers also asked to elaborate more questions that arose in their first and second interviews that I needed clarification on, as well as to talk about how their experiences gained from teaching in the United States has impacted the ways they approach teaching students in their classrooms. Appendix C provides the guiding the questions asked in this final interview.

*Classroom Observations & Fieldnotes*

Participant observation enables the researcher to become immersed in and experience the daily realities of participants in the study (Emerson et. al., 2001).
Along with participant observation are the researcher’s written accounts of the events observed in the field. In these instances, fieldnotes are reconstructed incidents written into narratives that portray the meanings researchers make of their experiences. According to Emerson et.al. (2001), fieldnotes are “a form of representation, that is, a way of reducing just observed events, persons, and places into written accounts” (p. 353). In this study, classroom observations and fieldnotes served three main purposes.

First, in-class observations provided me with the context with which to address the research question: What are the classroom experiences of Afro-Caribbean women teachers who teach in urban schools? According to Clandinin and Connelly (1996, 1995), since teachers’ narratives are impacted by the contexts of their school environments, having direct contact with the school environment allowed me to have a better understanding of the school context, history, student demographic, and the overall “feel” of the school environment that affects how teachers make meaning of their classroom experiences.

In addition, understanding the school environment helped to better inform my analysis on the meanings they made of their in-class experiences. The in-class observations also allowed me to observe the teachers approaches to teaching, the topics they raised in class, and their overall interactions with their students. These observations also helped to inform the kinds of questions I asked at the end of the school day about their particular practice.

All fieldnotes where handwritten in a spiral notebook, then entered into my lap top computer at the end of the day. Since it is impossible to write every detail of
my experience in these teachers’ classrooms, my fieldnotes were selective.

Therefore, I focused on:

- **Physical make up of the classroom, school building, and neighborhood:** I made note of where is the teacher’s desk was located, how the chairs in the room were positioned, and the print materials on the wall. I also made note of the racial and gender make up of the class and school, such as posters and signs in the hallways, lighting in the hallways, and the presence of students and administrators in the hall ways (Clandinin and Connelly, 1996, 1995).

- **Interactions between teachers and students:** While in the classroom, I also look for the ways in which each teacher greeted the class when they entered the room, and how they begin the class period and lesson for the day. I will also observed how teachers answered student’s questions, and engaged students in the lesson (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Henry, 1998; Callender, 1997; Howard, 2003; Hope, 2005).

- **Stories teachers tell in class:** I also observed and made not of how teachers used metaphors, moral teachings, and life stories to convey content knowledge in their daily teachings, as these also provided a window into understanding the meanings they bring to teaching their content area (Dixson, 2003; Foster, 1997).

**Data Analysis**

This section provides a detailed account of how I analyzed teacher’s narrative texts. According to Cortazzi (1993), narratives do not simply communicate a list of
events, but rather reveal the attitude of the individual and informs the listener of how to interpret the meaning of the story. However, these meanings are often embedded within the narrative, and require the researcher to conduct a content analysis – whereby dividing the narrative text into smaller subtexts and sub stories -- and evaluate (through a coding process) the structural components of the narrative.

Liblich et.al.’s (1998) content analysis approach suggests separating texts into smaller units of content to help sort and categorize long narrative transcripts. This method best fits this study due to the nature and structure of the interviews I will be conducting. For instance, in one interview session, teachers were asked to talk about a series of events ranging from their experiences as teachers in the Caribbean, to their initial experiences in the U.S., to their perspectives on teaching in American urban classrooms. In these instances, the content analysis method allowed me to separate the narrative into smaller sub-texts or sub-stories as they arose in each narrative transcript.

My detailed method of analysis is outlined below. Each step provides an account of how I analyzed each teacher’s narrative text.

*Step One: Define and Sort Material into Content Categories*

Each teacher’s interview was coded separately using “principle sentences” that highlighted a new or distinct idea or memory (Lieblich, et. al. 1998 p.115). Each principle sentence was coded with a term that was close to what the sentence is about. These codes were then categorized by topic and defined based on the content in the category. All codes in each category were noted for frequency and significance.
Categories were also created for each teacher’s narrative to help capture the unique topics brought up by each individual.

**Step Two: Selection of the Subtext**

Based on the codes taken from each interview, I then reread each transcript and separated the text using broad categorical topics (i.e. teachers initial experiences in the classroom; interactions with students; teacher’s perceptions of job preparation etc.). These sections of narrative subtext were then placed in a separate word file with a corresponding category title for each teacher based on all three interviews. The original interview transcripts remained in tact so that I was able to reference it when needed.

**Step Three: Evaluate Individual Narratives**

Because each teachers’ narrative told its own story, I analyzed each text separately, noting (1) what teachers talked about the most, (2) the events that occurred during their teaching experiences, (3) their perceptions and meanings they make of their experiences as teachers in this new setting, and (4) how they specifically addressed situations that arose during their teaching careers in the U.S. At this stage, I also began to compare the similarities in topics discussed by all teachers, and the differences among them.

**Writing Teachers’ Narratives**

The final narrative write up was informed by my analysis of teachers’ narratives and my observations in their classrooms. For Clandinin and Connelly (1990), this final process becomes complex because the final (written) narrative will consist of a reconstructed and reinterpreted text of teachers’ spoken accounts.
However, to complete this task, Clandinin and Connely (1990) identify two methods to structuring and writing teachers’ narratives. This structure entails the *scene* and the *plot*. The scene provides the context, setting, and place of the story. The scene would also include a description of the “unseen”, such as character descriptions and personalities, and the “seen” which are found in the physical setting of the school, classroom, neighborhood etc. The scene documented in the final text was informed by my interactions with teachers, their body language, and ways they mentally reenacted a particular memory. Some of my better understandings of their personalities and approaches to teaching often occurred when the tape recorder was turned off (i.e. during dinner or lunch, or driving to and from school in the mornings and evenings). These seen and unseen interactions with teachers helped to provide a better context for who they were as individuals and the underlying meanings behind their teaching.

Second, the plot consisted of the most prominent themes that emerged through teacher’s interviews (Cortazzi, 2001). Because many individuals tell disjointed stories, the final plot consisted of what Clandinin and Connely (1990) call “annals and chronicles”. Annals are a record of events that are remembered and described but have no apparent connection between events. Chronicles, on the other hand, may have an apparent connection between events but the meanings may be unstated (Clandinin and Connoley, 1990). Therefore, the final written narrative took into account the ways teachers told full narratives (which would included the events, time place, and meanings gained from the experience), chronicles (which provided were chronological events linked together with no stated meaning), and annals (which were
stories that had no apparent chronological order or meaning). In the end, I did my best to write a narrative that closely reflected teachers’ perceptions with my own interpretation of their stories. Peshkin (1985) shares this similar sentiment and writes:

> When I describe what I have seen, my results invite other researchers to look where I did and see what I saw. My ideas are candidates for others to entertain, not necessarily as truth, let alone Truth, but as positions about the nature and meaning of a phenomenon that may fit their sensibility and shape their thinking about their own inquiries” (p 280).

In this spirit, the narratives that I wrote invite readers to explore, as I have, the lives of Afro-Caribbean women teachers, their perceptions, and daily living experiences in the United States.

**Identifying Myself as Researcher**

In this section, I identify myself as a researcher and provide a personal testament for exploring this topic. According to Bernal (1998), one’s personal experience represents a very important rational and background for why we choose to conduct a particular study. In addition, our personal histories, invested interest, racial, and cultural backgrounds play an intricate role in the analytical process (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Bernal, 1998). To deny one’s cultural and historical background is to ignore the potential bias, privilege or contradictory identities we as researchers have and ignores the multiple lenses that influence the research (Villenas, 1996). Moreover, a key element to Womanist theory addresses the ways
in which our personal locations (as female scholars of color) shape our work and positioning as researchers (Sheared, 2006). Below is my story of how I entered the research project and its linkages to my personal history.

*My personal story and linkage to the topic*

My decision to conduct this study grew out of my own experiences attending a private Christian k-12 school run by West Indian women teachers in Brooklyn New York. I went to St. John’s Elementary School from the fourth grade to the eighth grade (with one year in between attending public school). Three of my four teachers were women, (and if including my sister’s teachers, seven of eight were Caribbean women). Most of the teachers in the school were Jamaican but some also came from Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada, and St. Lucia. The school was opened by Mrs. Ellis, a teacher from Jamaica, who saw the need to create a school that upheld Christian values, academics, and discipline in a small setting.

I can remember the iron gated entrance to the school building, the narrow blue-green hallway walls, and an iron staircase that spiraled from the 5th floor down to the play ground that also partly functioned as a parking lot behind the school building. I remember the elderly women in the office who were all Caribbean, who knew my family, and warmly reminded us when tuition was due. There was prayer and devotion every morning before school began and a formal assembly on Wednesdays where the entire school gathered together to hear selected faculty provide us with the moral lesson of the week. As a student, I never felt like a racial or ethnic minority since all of my classmates were either African American or from Caribbean background. Because of these features, St. Johns Elementary created a
school environment that fostered community and family in a space that made me feel safe, protected and loved by all who were there.

My teachers, however, made the greatest lasting impression on me. I remember the poem we learned in the 4th and 8th grade that stated with the line, “I owe no apology for my Black skin, I am what I am” by Andrew McCarter. This poem resides with me to this day, and has guided my work, even as a doctoral student. I remember the personal stories my teachers shared of themselves growing up in the Caribbean, the ways they “code switched” and spoke in patois (English-Creole vernacular) when they were upset, or just in casual conversation, and the close contact they had with my mother, especially in times when I was overly social with peers during class.

When I asked my sister (now twenty-four and a lawyer) what she remembered most from St. John’s Elementary, she noted our hideous green uniforms and the strictness of teachers. In her words, “they didn’t play!”. This too brought back memories as it made me think of the scolding I received on days when I did not do homework. My mother entered the discussion and noted that although our teachers were strict, they held high expectations for us and never accepted excuses for students’ lack of academic success. My sister’s memories also brought to mind the ways teachers instructed us to behave on the street. They believed that we were representatives of the school body and should carry ourselves with respect and dignity. I must admit that these were teachings we did not fully understand as children, but now looking back, the uniforms made us stand out. It showed the community around us that we were a part of a family and unique school body. Our
small Caribbean-staffed elementary school is now closed for reasons I am not sure of, but the memories were long lasting and left me with more questions than I had answers.

Now as a doctoral student, my recent intellectual experiences have brought a sharper focus to my understanding of and appreciation for my elementary teachers. On the one hand their teachings reflected findings in the literature on African American teachers. In my view, they were “star teachers” (Haberman, 1995) and were effective and successful at what they did in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1994). They built instructional lessons from our cultural frames of reference (Howard, 2001), held high expectations for students, understood our cultural backgrounds, and used a political lens to motivate us (as Black Caribbean Americans) to succeed academically (Henry, 1998). Although there were similarities in the literature, my experiences showed that there was a missing perspective, another voice, and a slightly different approach to teaching racial minority students that existed even among Black teachers. My experience and the muted voices of my teachers, in retrospect, has led me to explore the similarities and ethnically informed differences that are shared by teachers who have left their home countries and now teach racial minority students in the United States.

My personal history and positioning as a second generation Afro-Caribbean woman provides me with a cultural lens to understand the narratives of Afro-Caribbean women teachers from an insider’s perspective (Bernal, 1998). Womanist theory, in particular also aids in problematizing the location from which I enter the research and allows for my positioning and the perspectives of teachers to be heard.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

“Oh Girl, You Steppin Out!”: Barbadian Women Teachers Speak on Their Experiences Teaching in Kentucky Public Schools

Jill, one of the teachers in this study, noted that if a Barbadian says “oh girl, you steppin out”, it should be taken as a compliment to mean you are nicely dressed. Stepping out also has a second meaning that relates to one’s journey stepping out from the familiar, and into the world of unknown territory. The Barbadian women in this study were “steppin out”, with stylish clothing, garb, and hairdo -- since after all, they are Black women, but also because they dared to venture and try something new, and live and teach in a place, Louisville, Kentucky, that many Barbadian immigrants have heard little, if at all anything about. Only until now, have their stories been documented in the academic arena. These stories are both conflict with students values, as well as they are politically relevant and uplifting; Their language harsh, while simultaneously caring and sensitive as they described teaching and interacting with American students.

The narratives below are my attempt to best understand the complexities of these four women’s life stories moving from their hometown in Barbados, to living and teaching in Louisville, Kentucky. This chapter also provides a narrative discussion of each teacher while gaining a better understanding of the guiding the research questions: 1) what are Afro-Caribbean teachers’ classroom experiences, and 2) how do they perceive their prior teaching and training as preparing them for teaching in their Kentucky schools. The subsequent chapter will provide a discussion
and cross narrative analysis as well as provide implications for this and further research.

\textit{Jill}
\textit{“I tell my students, art solves all problems.}
\textit{There are no problems in art.}
\textit{If you make a mistake, just cover it up and make a new design…”}

Jill was born in Barbados in the late 1950’s. She is married with no children and has been teaching for 30 years. She received a scholarship from the Ministry of Education to attend a university in Boston where she received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. She also holds a Masters Degree in Education and has been teaching in Kentucky for 5 years as an art and humanities teacher for grades k-5.

Jill is also an artist who specializes in fiber art, batik, and tie-dyeing on large pieces of fabric (usually on nine or ten feet pieces of cloth). Fiber art is a textile craft that includes weaving, knitting, and papermaking; and Batik is a complicated process that uses wax to create eclectic patterns on various sizes of cloth. In describing what the Batik process is like, Jill pointed to one of her works in a photo and explained:

This is batik where you draw it using wax. This [piece] was white fabric. I then made up this design and drew it onto the white cloth. Then, I melted candles and painted in those areas. Then, I did the fabric like this \textit{(showing me the way she folded the cloth)}, and put it in red dye. When it was dry I washed it, and then covered this area that I had drawn over in red wax, and covered the white area in [white] wax, and dyed in the black areas.
While living in Barbados, Jill traveled to various countries to display her art and won many awards for her creativity and originality. One of her most prized accomplishments occurred when Princess Ann of England visited one of her exhibitions and fell in love with a tie-dyed piece on display, which she bought on the spot.

The piece that she [Princess Ann] bought, a friend of mine wanted [before I put it on display]. She said it was too colorful and didn’t want it, so I had it, and so when Princess Ann came, she said ‘ooh’ and bought it. It’s a good thing the girl didn’t want it. There’s never a bad happening….

_Jill, the Artist and Educator_

In addition to being a well-recognized artist, Jill remembers her life in Barbados as a time being immersed into the “art world” as an artist, teacher, and teacher educator. She taught art education at the Teacher’s College in the evenings, and taught at the primary school during the day. She was also recognized by her colleagues for using art as a tool to help lower-achieving students understand various content areas in the curriculum. Starting out as an elementary school teacher in Barbados, she talks about the ways she used art to help students succeed.

I didn’t [just] teach art then, I taught everything. I taught English, math, social studies, I taught everything, but what I did because I had an art background, I used art for mathematics to teach addition. They had to draw, like if they were using chairs and tables, etc or how many pairs of feet and so on, they had to draw it, I made them draw it and work the sum. And that visual helped them. So when the kids started to succeed they kept me in that
area working with them, so I did that for a number of years and I really enjoyed it.

As a result of her success, she was promoted to being the sole art teacher in her school. With this promotion, she was allowed to take time off from school and travel the country to curate museum exhibitions and display art pieces from her own and students’ artwork. Before leaving Barbados, Jill was a highly esteemed educator and was firmly rooted and respected in the art community as well.

Jill came at a cross road, and was faced with the decision to leave Barbados if she wanted to be reunited with her American husband who lived in the United States. They had lived apart for four years since their marriage and saw each other only on school holidays. Like many Caribbean professional women who choose to leave their lives and careers back home in pursuit of a new life in America (Henry, 1998), Jill too was faced with the decision to leave her career behind to sustain the bonds of her family.

Leaving Barbados: A More Bitter Than Sweet Experience

The Kentuckian recruitment efforts in Barbados offered Jill the opportunity to be reunited with her husband. However, this opportunity to teach in the U.S. did not bring much excitement. Her experiences teaching high school Art in the Boston public schools in the 1970’s left her feeling uneasy about the prospect of returning to the States as a teacher:

I was away for that summer (with my husband), and when I came back, I heard all of these people were going overseas to teach and I said oh there, I don’t really want to teach overseas because when I did my teaching in Boston,
when I did my training I didn’t like the kids, the kids were rough and for me as a Barbadian, I thought they were really difficult so I said I would never want to teach in America cause I couldn’t deal with the behavior, but I know I had to leave and since, John was there, so I said, look I’ll try it.

While relocating to the States allowed Jill to maintain her professional position as a teacher, her prior experiences teaching in the Boston public schools made her dislike teaching in the U.S. She taught art at the high school level and viewed the students as rude and disrespectful. Although Judy had sixteen years of teaching experience before teaching in Boston, student behavior and classroom management presented challenges she was unaccustomed to. Moreover, these early teaching experiences left Jill feeling that teaching in Kentucky would present similar unmanageable challenges.

In addition, moving to the U.S. also meant leaving her teaching career, beloved students, and established life as an artist behind. She noted:

I wasn’t excited [to come to the U.S.] because I liked my job, I liked what I was doing and I just think that I did it because it was necessary, but I wasn’t like in the seventh heaven or anything, I just did it because I had to, you know, but it was just being practical. I was in the art field at home, I was one of the major persons in art there so you know I had to leave that, and then I had left and loved my kids at home. So it was kind of bittersweet.

Jill joins the host of Caribbean women who leave their families and careers back home to come to the U.S. While many Caribbean women often settle for jobs in the domestic labor force (Henry, 1998), Jill was fortunate to remain in the teaching profession. However, in her view, teaching in the U.S. did not come with the same
luxuries as teaching in the Caribbean. In fact, she had to work harder, was stressed more, and disliked teaching, what she considered, unruly children.

Jill’s reflections of her life and career back home came with much nostalgia as she described the Barbadian teaching atmosphere. Nostalgia, according to Lasch (1991), is different from memory because nostalgia idealizes and romanticizes the past. Embittered experiences in the present also fuels people’s nostalgic reflections (Goodson, Moore, et.al., 2006). In much of Jill’s accounts of her experiences in Barbados, nostalgia can be evidenced in the ways she compared teaching in Barbados to teaching in the U.S. Fueling her nostalgia was also her longing to return to the life and career she once had as a respected artist and educator. In the narrative below, her nostalgia is most evident as she describes teaching at Erdiston primary school where students were remembered as respectful, self-motivated, and enjoyed learning. Moving from this “idealized” school environment to the “less desired” setting in the U.S. created much tension and stress for Jill in her early years of teaching in Kentucky.

*Teaching at Erdiston Primary School: The Stark Contrast to Teaching in the U.S.*

Before teaching in Louisville, Jill taught at Erdiston Primary School for a total of 30 years. Erdiston is considered to be one of the top three schools in Barbados and is well known and respected for its excellence in education. Only the top ranked students who scored 90 percent or better on placement exams were allowed to attend. In addition, Erdiston’s location also adds to the school’s reputation for excellence. It is located in a historic village surrounded by large plantations. The village is
considered by natives to be an “exclusive area” where wealthy families like the British Ambassador, and Governor General of Barbados reside.

One notable difference between teaching in the U.S. and teaching in Barbados, was the fact that even through the school was elite institution and located in an exclusive area, both poor and wealthy students attended. Judy noted:

There were some who were well to do, but its funny, down the hill in the back area were where the poor people lived. They walked up the hill to school, so it was a mix of those who were well to do and drove in cars, and the kids in the neighborhood who walked to school. You had two different social levels there.

In Jill’s recollections, the two social levels did not present a class division between students, or students and teachers. In her view, the students interacted and played with each other regardless of their race or class.

At least at elementary, because its all Black, it’s a Black school so the kids get along more. I think we only have like one white child in the whole school, but and it was usually somebody from the Embassy who sent their child there because it was near the Embassy, but it was all, everybody was Black, so they all played together.

Teaching in Barbados presented a stark contrast to teaching in the U.S. for two main reasons. First, Erdiston students reflected very little racial diversity since “all of the students were black”. This lack of diversity provided Jill with few opportunities to teach and learn from a broad racial mixture of students. Leaving this environment to teaching in Kentucky where students represented a broad mixture of students (i.e.}
black, white, Asian, Muslim, and refugee students from Sudan) created a cultural leap that caused potential problems in the beginning of her career in the states, particularly as it related to student behavior in the classroom.

For instance, Jill expected children in American schools to behave like the children in Barbados. She remembered minimal student misbehavior and Erdiston students as being respectful and enjoying having her as their teacher.

In high school you would get the rude kid, you know, but see, you don’t get that level of the misbehavior or the drama. I didn’t get it there. So that was a culture shock coming in and seeing the kids so rude and so disrespectful to you. It really was a shock…. And they (the students at Erdiston) help you with things, they see you come into school, they come and take your bag from you. They love to have you in the classroom… so it was a different kind of social atmosphere from here.

Erdiston’s teaching environment was a stark contrast to teaching in Kentucky where students threw paint across the floor, spoke loudly in class, and openly resisted her instructions. These behaviors were rarely (if at all ever) encountered, and students who misbehaved were corrected with corporal punishment. She noted:

[The] classroom environment is more manageable [at Erdiston], where here you’ve got to manage the classroom… [At] home we spank the kids. Only if you spank a kid so bad that you mark the skin would you get in trouble, but you know, you’re allowed to … you [can] take more charge with your class. Here a parent can complain and get you out of a job. That is not the same at home. So you are more in control of your class at home and its manageable.
As a classroom management and behavioral tool, teachers (at the elementary level) in Barbados were permitted to spank students who misbehaved. It was permissible by the school and embraced by the larger community. Moreover, outright disrespectful behavior, or student resistance to teachers (like she experienced in Boston and Kentucky), were behavior norms that was not apart of the social fabric of Barbadian school culture. In her U.S. classroom, Jill felt helpless with out the use of traditional methods she used back home to curb student unruly behavior.

In this example, we see how cultural conflict materializes in the classroom. Ullucci (2009) notes that while discipline complaints are often teachers’ main concerns in classroom, she notes that discipline issues often arise when cultural conflicts are present in the classroom. Jill’s unmet expectations for “acceptable” student behavior created tensions between her self and students. No longer did students take her bags as she walked into the school, or stood up when she entered the classroom, or worked quietly, as they did in Barbados. In addition, she felt ill prepared to handle student discipline occurrences without the use of traditional and behaviorist correction methods and as a result, student behavior became worse over the school year. Perhaps teaching in a broader diverse setting, would have helped her to understand diverse students behavior patterns, as well as learn a culturally relevant student management classroom techniques that can appeal to a broader, and more diverse student body.

Erdiston also presented a stark contrast to teaching in the U.S. because Jill remembers it as a place where students took responsibility for their own learning. Students at all grade levels were required to complete daily homework, conduct their
on research on the topic, and come to class with questions that arose from the assignment. This teaching approach placed students in the driver’s seat of their learning, and with the teacher as a facilitator to the learning process.

Well the kids in Barbados they take more responsibility for their learning. Here in America in teaching the kids, you’ve got to do a lot of preparation, and you’ve got to actually feed the kids the information and then extract it from them. In Barbados, the kids take more responsibility in that they have homework every night and they have to do it. When you’re introducing a subject, say like we’re looking at emancipation, the kids would have to go home and research it themselves. They would get homework to go home and [to research the topic], and then they come back and we pull out from them what they know-- and then we [would] teach them what they don’t know. That was the method we used at home. Let them tell you what they know and then you strengthen that and teach them new information. But here you’ve got to put everything in.

For Jill, the pedagogical advantage of teaching though reinforcement of the material students already knew garnered positive results. Students were more motivated to learn, and were actively engaged in the learning process. However, teaching at Erdiston presented a stark contrast to teaching in the U.S. because teaching in Kentucky required her to make a pedagogical shift (Hutchinson, 2006) and “put information in”. This shift in pedagogy also meant that she was responsible for all students’ learning and understanding of each topic presented in the curriculum- a shift she didn’t like making since she believed students should be pursuers of their own
learning. This belief system also has consequences on her perceptions of students as she, in the beginning of her career, viewed American students as lazy, and unmotivated to learn, rude, and disrespectful. Sleeter (2001) notes that teachers who hold these views of students often hold low expectations for student learning and don’t push them to perform their academic best. In the narrative below, Jill notes what her first year experiences where like teaching art at the high school level. It can be evidenced in the below narrative how the classroom was a site where two or more cultures collided, as Jill battled negotiating her own cultural expectations with student behavior norms.

*The Classroom: A Place Where Two (or more) Cultures Collided. First year Challenging Experiences*

In her first year of teaching, Jill encountered many classroom challenges with respect to student behavior. She was assigned to teach art at the high school level, but felt that the students didn’t respect her because she was replacing a beloved teacher that retired that year.

When I came, I went to high school first, and it was awful. The kids were … it was mainly a white school and there were Black too but the kids were so crude and then when I came in, they didn’t like me at all. So at one point, I couldn’t deal with the behavior because the kids were so rough. I mean that was a shock and the kids would throw tantrums and throw crayons bout the place, … it was rough I tell you. Some of the kids, the kids were like special ed kids and I didn’t know how to deal with them because I’d never had difficult behavior like that. I taught adult teachers but I’d never had people who are young adults and so the
crude, who did not know how to discipline themselves. So I mean it really was rough. I mean I used to live to get out of the classroom every day, I really was, I thought I would have had to leave because I could not deal with the kids.

This first year experience caused Jill to rethink if coming to the U.S. was the best decision after all. It was also during this first year that a student broke her glasses while they were lying on her desk. Although she asked the class to confess about the incident, no one stood up or took responsibility.

Jill attributed student behavior, particularly in her special education classes, as students’ resistance against her, and her inability to fill the shoes of a beloved art teacher. However, she was unable to see how her challenges are apart of a larger problem rooted in the politics and historical legacy of homogeneous grouping in U.S. schools. Research, for instance, has long shown that students placed (or tracked) in special education classes are typically sorted by a language “proficiency”, academic “ability”, and or learning and behavioral “disabilities” (Oakes and Lipton, 2003). In addition, while advocates of homogeneous grouping suggest that special education classes separate students based on ability for better instruction, it is rarely stated that poorly behaved students (even those without a documented disability) who are also typically from lower economic backgrounds, and underrepresented minority groups are also placed in these classes. Moreover, these students quickly come to learn that they are sorted based on “ability” deficiencies and begin to accept
and associate special education labels with that of personal worth, and low self-concept, thus attributing to poor classroom behavior.

However, Jill’s U.S. orientation training neglected to provide her with a historical and contextual understanding of homogenous student grouping in U.S. schools. As a result, she blamed her self and the students for what she was experiencing in the classroom. Her relief came at the end of the year when she was allowed to change schools and teach at the elementary grade level the following year. Now at the elementary level for the past four years, Jill has found teaching the younger students to be a lot more manageable.

**Learned Approaches to Teaching American Students**

When asked to talk about her teaching approach at the elementary level, Jill began with her belief that all students were artists. She believes that if you think you make a mistake in art, you can cover it up and make a new design. In this process, the student-artist may find that the second construction can result in an enhanced end product. This teaching approach also helps to boost students’ self-confidence and belief in their artistic abilities. Judy remembers one kindergarten student in particular took well to her approach and believed he was a better artist than she was. She noted:

When I started to teach art, I told all of them they were artists. Everyone was an artist. What I got [from this] was that they started telling me they were better artists than I was --and especially the kindergarten kids who really believed that they were better artists than I. One student here [in Kentucky], he’s not a rude child, he’s very practical, and once he came back into school, it was last year September, and he was walking with me and talking to me,
and I said you’re growing really tall, you’re almost as tall as I am, and he said, ‘and I am a better artist than you are too’ (laugh). I laughed, he wasn’t rude, he just said it practically you know (laugh).

Although Jill was surprised to hear her student “practically” say he was a better artist than she was, she also realized that her approach was successful in demystifying students’ conceptions of what is “art” and who can be an artist -- since creativity has no boundaries, or “right” or “wrong” answers.

However, in this same vein, Judy also believes that while it is her responsibility to bring out the best in students’ strengths, gifts, and abilities, she feels she must do so by giving students subtle hints of encouragement along the way.

Well here don’t push them too much, you encourage them then you go slowly with them. [At] home (in Barbados) you can push, you know. You can push them more at home, but here you’ve got to pace everything out in smaller chunks, make sure they understand and encourage in a subtle way, not openly but give subtle encouragement. Keep them knowing that they can do it. I use some words all the time I like, I’m trying to get it into them, you cannot mess up with in art, if you make a mistake you cover it and it looks better. So that’s what I say all the time, when they think they’ve made a mistake and they want a new paper, I tell them you don’t mess with art, if you make a mistake, that’s the time you cover it and you get a better design. So you can easily be an artist because you don’t mess up in art…So that’s what I’ve been telling the kids here.
Jill stands at a conflicted place in terms of student encouragement. On the one hand, she instills in students that they are all artists, and not to limit themselves with where they can go with their art, however, on the other, she has found that if she gave her students too much praise on their work, that they would give up and not work as hard to succeed their best. Operating from a challenging position, she finds subtle ways of encouraging students in ways that still helps them to work harder. She stated:

I find here, you have to be careful because when you encourage them (the students) and tell them how good they are they become more rude and disrespectful (laugh), so you’ve got to be careful in building confidence or over confidence here. You’ve got to do it, but in a kind of subtle way. At home you can tell a kid, you know you’re really good at that and you can do this and so on, but here you’ve got to tell a child try harder you’ll get it done well ... because if you tell them that you’re good they start being disrespectful and feeling that you’re not good.

In some ways, Jill operates from a conflicted position of tension, where on the one hand she encourages students to do well, but on the other, she holds back praise with the fear that students will give up working on their assignments, and find their accomplishment as an opportunity to talk and disrupt the class. While Jill realizes that student encouragement is important, she also has come to learn that she must “switch cultures” and realize that American students’ behavior’s, attitudes, and belief systems are vastly different that those of students in Barbados. Therefore, while students “back home” would push harder with much encouragement, she has found
that students in Kentucky need continual nudges along the way to keep them working and performing their academic best.

   Jill has also come to learn that teaching in Kentucky is a very different place culturally, and historically than teaching in Barbados, and has learned multiple ways of being adaptive and flexible within its context:

   Well you have to be first realize they are not Barbadians and switch cultures and learn what is accepted in the American culture so it can work for you. Because if you come here bringing these same idea that they’re the same kind of kids the shock will kill you (laugh). When I was coming the education officer he said don’t expect the kids to say yes ma’am and no ma’am or agree with you. It’s a totally different kind of child, and I realized he was true. So you’ve got to look at the child and the society ... its an American culture, a super power, so the kids will be more outgoing and more aware of what’s going on and so you’ve got to be, you’ve got to have that ahead of you knowing okay you’ve got to be different from in the Caribbean where the kids were, they might not agree with you but they wouldn’t tell you it out right, they would just say I don’t agree with that under their breath, or tell a child or you know from how you see them react you don’t ... but here if they don’t agree with you they tell you it straight away and embarrass you in front of everybody. So you got to deal with that, in other words don’t take it as embarrassment, just take it as they’re opinion. You know you’ve got a switch and see, you’ve got to switch so you can understand the environment you’re working in and be creative with it.
Although Jill continues to face behavior challenges, she has also come to enjoy teaching at the elementary level. She has even found her experiences teaching in the U.S. as contributing to her being a better educator because she now has an extensive tool box of strategies to use when teaching, and controlling behavior. She has also come to learn that with patience, and better understanding of students’ cultural and local histories, that she can push them (with subtle encouragement) to be great artists.

*Paula*

“*You have to be tough, you have to be firm, and all of that, you still have to let them know that you care about them.*”

Paula is in her forties and married with one daughter. She was raised by her grandmother in a small village in Barbados, and considers herself a deeply spiritual Christian. She first started out in the banking field, and did this for eleven years. After completing her degree in history from a university in the West Indies, she had a difficult time finding work in the banking field, and as a result, applied to be a history teacher. She has since been teaching for thirteen years.

Although Paula never considered teaching in the U.S., she decided to attend an informational session Kentuckian recruiters were holding on the University of West Indies college campus. After her interview, she was surprised to hear that she had been chosen to teach in Kentucky. Hearing this news brought on much anxiety as she re-examined the idea if moving to the U.S. and uprooting her family. She often described this time in her life as a period where she and her husband “moved purely
by their faith in God”, since they were unsure if moving was the right decision. She noted:

I honestly believe that this whole move was for me and my family, [but] it wasn’t anything that we had planned for years. It wasn’t anything we thought about doing. There was not even an inkling of any plans that we ever had. It just happened. So based on that decision that I made when he [the interviewer] told me that he was offering me a job, everything was framed around that job offer. And then when that happened, then we had to start thinking about is this really happening? It was, it just seemed unreal because, as I said, it wasn’t in our plans, so… we are Christians, and we believe that that was what God wanted for us to be happening at the time. So to be honest everything that we did there afterwards, I guess it was through faith… So we prayed about it and we realized coming here would have been a good opportunity for our daughter, and I guess it would be a good opportunity for us as well.

With daily prayer and spiritual insight, Paula and her husband agreed that moving was apart of God’s plan in their lives, and so they heeded to the call, and moved to Kentucky. Black women’s spirituality and belief in God is a largely neglected area in the Womanist research, particularly as it relates to Caribbean women. For Paula, her faith in God provided the strength and courage she needed to venture to Kentucky, a place she knew very little about, with her family.

Paula’s story fills the void in the literature on why educated and well-established professionals leave their home countries to move to the U.S. Paula, unlike many immigrants, did not leave Barbados in search of a better life in the U.S.
In fact, her and her husband anguished the decision and weighed the options of leaving their relatives, friends, and careers, to move to an unknown place, which would require them to rebuild the life that they already had in Barbados. Her ultimate decision came with her trust and faith in God, as well as the opportunity it presented their daughter to attend secondary school, and even college in the U.S.

**Teaching at Alison School in Barbados and Playing a Pastoral Role in the Lives of her Students**

Paula taught religion and history at Alison School in Barbados to students between the ages of eleven and seventeen years old (or what would be considered 6th through 12th grade in the U.S.) for eight years before moving to the U.S. in 2004. The school was located in a rural area with a student population of 600-700 from a mixture of socioeconomic backgrounds. She noted:

[Alison] is a rural school. It is in the country. And, when I say country, I mean country. We had at our school, how many students? I think it was probably 600-700 and something students. Our students came from all over. There were some from near St. Paul, which is where the school is located. There were some who came from the town areas. They came from all over the island because in Barbados, it really depends on the zone that you live in, and that is where you go to school, and the school that your parents applied for you to go based on our standardized tests. So our students mostly came from working class homes, middle class backgrounds, lower middle class, upper middle class, [and] middle middle class.
Paula’s school was ranked as a middle range high school in the country and the student demographic was mixed with respect to socio-economic status.

While teaching at Alison school, Paula viewed herself as more than a teacher, but one who also played a Pastoral role in the lives of her students. She noted:

Well at home, I think a lot of us knew that our role was not only teacher, but that we also played pastoral roles to our students. If they (the students) had problems then they would come to us and talk to us about them. Well, not to all of us, but some students really, if you developed a good relationship [with them], they would come and talk to you about their home. [So we were] not only in the teacher role, but also the pastoral role. We looked after our kids if there was a problem, we contacted parents and parents called us. If we saw things at school that we needed to inform them about, or if we saw changes in students’ behavior, or if we saw anything happening we would contact parents and talk with them about it.

For Paula, being in a pastoral role meant taking on the responsibility as a care-giver to her students. She noted:

The role of caregiver is where you look after the students, where you give them advise, where if they are sick you help them. If they need money for something you give it to them, if you have it, and they repay you. It’s the role of a caregiver… For instance, I had a student who wore contacts, and one day her contacts went somewhere in her eyes and she came to me to help her get it out. So you know, she was in our staff room and we were sitting there trying to find the contacts in her eye. That’s an example [of] one. Another one, my
students, and some teachers did this as well, I took my students on a picnic, and I invited them to my house, so they came. On two occasions they came to my house, and you know, I cooked and they brought food and we relaxed. Once, one of my students broke her leg, and I took her to school everyday and took her back home in the evenings, and took her down to her classroom and made sure that she was comfortable. It was more like a parent child, parent daughter or son relationship that we had.

At the Alison School, Paula saw herself as more than an instructor in the classroom, and saw her role as a pastor and caregiver to her students in the absence of their parents. Her views on teaching reflect a Womanist ethic of care tradition, that attributes the ways in which black women educators “embrace the maternal” in their teaching practices (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005; Cozart and Gordon, 2006). As noted in the literature, Womanist educators build rich relationships with students, treat all students as their own, and share responsibilities with family members to ensure the academic success of students (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005). Paula’s caring Womanist pedagogy also intersects with her own spiritual and religious beliefs. Her pastoral role in the classroom can be seen in comparison to a pastor of a church who teaches, lectures, and administers guidance and support to the physical and spiritual needs to his/her congregation. Paula, similarly taught religion classes and sought to ensure that her students’ spiritual, social, and academic needs were met.
Teaching in Kentucky: First Year Encounters and Unmet Expectations

Paula has now been teaching in Kentucky for 6 years as an 8th grade social studies teacher. Leaving the Alison school to teach in Kentucky was difficult at first, and was met with many challenges Paula did not expect to encounter. She also knew very little about the school district before arriving, and had unanswered questions about the basic functioning of U.S. schools. She noted:

I went on line to see what Jefferson County was. I could not really understand the system. I even had to learn the grading system because when you hear about sixth grade, I couldn’t, I had to figure out what sixth grade was. What age group that was. Because at home we have first form, second form, third from, and fourth form and so on. So even that was something that I didn’t know about. Um, county? I couldn’t figure out what a county was and if it was a school, then I had to go on line to see what Jefferson county was. It was a whole new thing. I didn’t know anything.

After arriving in the U.S. and going through a month long orientation program, Paula had a better sense of what to expect in her new teaching placement, but was still shocked to find her teaching days tiring and draining. While reflecting on the differences between teaching in Barbados to teaching in Kentucky, Paula commented on the extent to her tiring days, and the toll standing all day played on the soles of her feet:

[When I first started] I was really tired. At home I wore shoes ‘this’ high to school, cause you know I’m walking from the staff room you’re walking to the class you can sit and you can teach you don’t have to walk around and
look at anybody because they do what they’re supposed to. You can turn your back on them, and they still do what they’re supposed to. You can walk out of there and go back to the staff room because you forgot something and tell them sit down and work, and when you come back they’re sitting down and they’re working and they give you something at the end of class. So you can wear heels. But here it was really, I mean the soles of my feet were so, so, so sore and I was so tired … So that first week, that first month was really, really tiring. I had to throw away the shoes I had and go and buy a pair of flat shoes.

For Paula, teaching back home did not require much walking or supervising students’ behavior. She sat at her desk, taught the lesson (if she chose to), and gave instructions to students from afar. Kentucky’s new teaching environment was not only shockingly different, but also physically and mentally draining.

Escorting students around the building when they were not in her class also added to the tiresome days Paula experienced in her first year of teaching. Although she remembered discussing this rule in orientation training, she didn’t understand the extent to what was required since she was not used to escorting students in Barbados. While talking about the differences of teaching in Barbados to teaching in the U.S., she added:

It was just so many things that were different. And then escorting, you have to take the children here, and you have to take them there. You have to escort them to the bathroom, you walk with them to the classroom, you walk with them everywhere, they can’t go in the hall without getting a hall pass. And
there was just so many things that we never had to do at home. So for us it was really different.

Paula’s experiences are reflected in the literature on immigrant teachers’ first year encounters in U.S. schools (Manswell-Butty, 2003; Hutchinson, 2006). International teachers learn from early on that being effective in these new environments requires a steep learning curve that they must be committed to make. Moreover, Hutchinson (2006) noted that international teachers who see themselves as active learners, and are willing to make the pedagogical and cultural shift to teaching in U.S. schools find themselves being more productive in their new environments. Paula, in many ways, was committed to making this shift.

*Learning on the Job: Teaching American Students*

Paula noted that her teaching and learning experiences in Kentucky has helped her to become a better educator. For one, she noted that developing lesson plans has helped to structure her time and objectives for each class, where in Barbados these were used minimally. She noted that without a lesson plan, she would be unable to best meet students’ needs. She noted:

> I have learned the value of lesson plans. I have learned that really and truly, if you want a successful class you must have a lesson plan. Even if you don’t use it, you must know what you’re teaching them, the purpose, [and] the objective you want to achieve so that you can evaluate whether or not you’re achieving your objective. If you need to re-teach them, you should know that
too, how to re-teach them or what areas they’re falling in and you know, things like that.

Paula has found that lesson plans not only structure her class time, but also works as an evaluative tool to help measure student learning. Since teaching in Kentucky, she has been open and willing to utilize different strategies to help her be a better educator, and as a result has found successes in her classroom. Hutchinson (2006) confirms this belief and noted that the international teachers in his study also were willing to adopt new pedagogical practices to meet students’ learning needs, and also found success in their international teaching placements.

In another area, Paula has found that teaching in Kentucky as given her the exposure to teaching students with diverse special needs. Now she feels competent creating lesson plans that incorporate students’ strengths, interests, and special needs. She noted:

Now I’m more conscious of diversity, and I find ways to get through to the [inclusion] students. At home those students fall through the cracks because at home they don’t have the training that the teachers here get. Here there is ESS and ECE, where the special ed children have their own classes. They don’t have anything like that at home. Everybody in the same class, so if you’re slow, well you better find a way to get fast because nobody is waiting back for you, and furthermore if the children know you’re slow they’re going to call you ‘bapsy’. So you (the student) try to, either give a lot of trouble in class and get lashes all the time or you’re (the student is) going to buckle down and do your work. Most of them give trouble and get lashes, so I have learned to
cater to the diverse needs of children. Because before, I wasn’t really conscious of it. It wasn’t a big thing for me.

Paula noted that teaching in Kentucky has allowed her to better understand, and incorporate, the special needs of her inclusion students into the curriculum. She commented that in Barbados, these students often fell through the cracks and did not receive specialized instruction since teachers were often not trained in this area. Her experiences teaching in Kentucky has provided her with a tool kit of resources that she can use to appeal to students’ diverse learning needs.

In addition to identifying new teaching practices, Paula has learned to have a balance of being firm while showing students that she cares about their well being. She noted:

You have to be tough, you have to be firm, and all of that you still have to let them know that you care about them. That if you are not, they will walk over you, and they will make you break down, tears in front of them. If you allow them to get the better of you. So teaching here is tougher than it is at home because at home our students are trained differently from the students here.

Although Paula noted the differences in respect shown by Barbadian and American students, has made a conscious effort to exhibit patience with unruly students without yelling or losing her temper, as she might have done in her early years of teaching in Kentucky.

*Teaching Politically Through the Eyes of an Immigrant*
In her six-year journey, Paula feels confident in her approaches to teaching and has incorporated this into her teaching philosophy. She noted:

My philosophy is that every student can learn, it’s just that I need to always find a way to get through to them because they don’t all learn the same way, and I think that has been what I’ve been trying to do to understand where they come from and what makes them tick, why do they do the things they do, and how can I help them to relate what I’m teaching them based on their experiences.

In addition to teaching students through their own experiences, Paula has also found that her positioning as a Barbadian woman exposes students to an alternative perspective that other teachers, and the social studies curriculum, does not offer. She shares her experiences in the classroom and exposes students to the injustices people of color, and immigrants who speak with an accent encounter from members in their Kentuckian community. This perspective, she believes, helps immigrant students identify and label what they experience in their day-to-day lives, and helps white students understand the injustices their classmates encounter.

Being of a different ethnicity, I can teach them through the eyes of an immigrant because I’m not an American. I can talk to them about my experiences, I can talk to them about things that people have said to me at the supermarket, or when I talk to them and the way they look at me, or [what] people may say to me because my accent is different. When I first came here they would say to me do you speak English, which is something that my Mexican students and my other students, I have students from Africa, from
different parts, they can relate to that because they feel it too. The people say the same thing to them, so therefore they can relate a lot to what I’m saying pertaining to being an immigrant… So therefore I have the unique opportunity to teach my children to see the other side and to view things from the other side and to see another perspective that they never thought about before.

For Paula, teaching from an immigrant’s perspective helps white and American students understand the ways immigrants who speak with accents are treated unfairly, and informs students on ways to break the cycles of racist and stereotypical behaviors. She believes that since this perspective is rarely taught by other teachers or covered in the textbook, her positioning as a Barbadian allows her to provide this political clarity to her students. She commented:

I find that generally our students don’t see it from the other side because I don’t think its part from the other perspective, but as an immigrant, I think that I’m able to give them that unique perspective that’s not in the book because the books are written by Americans. Its not inside a textbook, its not something that they will necessarily hear about, so its something they need to be considering.

Paula also uses her outsider’s perspective to help students understand current events, America’s foreign relations, and how others view Americans around the world. She brings these perspectives to the social studies curriculum to help students understand U.S. involvement in the Iraq war today. She noted:

From our (American’s) perspective they’re going to help [but] from the Iraqi’s perspective [they may be asking] what are they doing? Helping make things
better, or maybe you don’t live in the country, you don’t know if things are better, you only see what’s on TV. Are they getting food, do they have water, what is life really like for the people there. So being a non-American I think it helps me to bring the other side to them. I really don’t think about it, but its something that needs to be thought about because we’re all a part of the world, we all need people to know how we feel and to see things from our side… So being a non-American I think it helps me to bring the other side to them. I really don’t think about it, but its something that needs to be thought about because we’re all a part of the world, we all need people to know how we feel and to see things from our side.

Paula uses her perspective as an immigrant to help students understand that there are multiple views to understanding current events. Moreover, she believes that some teachers and textbooks only provide one side of the story, since presumably, they are of American background. For these reasons, she has seen her cultural background, and her positioning as an outsider as advantageous in helping students speak from a more informed position on current events and other topics discussed in class.

Paula’s teaching practices can be mirrored in the political clarity that Womanist educators exemplify. She realizes that effective teaching must step outside the boundaries of the social studies curriculum in order to help be better informed about the world around them. As noted in the literature, the political clarity noted in Womanist educators’ teachings are informed by their positioning as subjugated “others” in society. Paula, like the teachers in the literature, uses her understandings of social and racial injustice, informed by her own experiences, to help students
question, critique, knowledge needed to fight racism and other forms of domination in society (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002), a political clarity that is also noted in African American teachers practices.

**Dr. Marva Best**

“In order for your people to survive and still be around in 2008, there had to be a strength of character among your people, and therefore you have to find that strength in yourself.”

Dr. Best has been teaching for over 30 years. She currently teaches 7th grade Language Arts and Humanities, and has been teaching in the U.S. through the recruitment program for six years. Dr. Best currently holds a Ph.D. from the University of London in Education, four Masters Degrees in the areas of counseling, teaching, English, and Management Studies, and a certificate in criminology.

Dr. Best came from humble beginnings in a small village in Barbados, and learned from an early age that life had limitless possibilities for succeeding. Her parents taught her the importance of staying in school and receiving the highest level of education, since this was the only way up and out of poverty. These early teachings also allowed her to see that she could do anything, go anywhere, and accomplish anything she wanted. She noted:

[In Barbados] everybody had to go to school because school is free. You have to go to elementary (because) it’s free and compulsory. High school and university is free, so you [learned] from way down as a toddler [that] there’s no limit to where you can go. Color was irrelevant [and] money was
irrelevant. You could go to the highest and you also knew that because you’re a member of the common wealth you can then study in any country. So (if) it’s London, Hong Kong, Australia, (or) Canada, you can get a commonwealth scholarship and go to any of those places. So growing up poor, black, female, did not make a difference. And, if they knew you were intelligent you (would) get pushed. Somebody would give you extra lessons. And at home, we have a culture of lessons. Every kid, if you can afford the few cents, (would) go to lessons. If you can’t afford it then they say okay you’re a bright kid you come. So that’s the academic and cultural element.

In her home village, children were encouraged to not only stay in school, but also go abroad and attain the highest level of learning possible. These cultural and parental teachings set the stage for her a long tradition of academic excellence and advise she took throughout her advanced schooling.

Her belief in the importance of education is also the reason she decided to come to Kentucky to teach. She wanted her two daughters to have access to an American college education, which she believed held one of the highest standards of learning for students. She commented:

My children [were the reason I came]. Cause I have my children here with me and the opportunities here would obviously be more than at home. You (Americans) have a larger community. At home we have a quarter a million people, so my country could fit in Louisville probably about twice or three times. So a quarter million people …and so the opportunities (are much more). And my children came here with the mindset that they’re world
citizens. So we are Barbadian yes but as citizens of the world we can go anywhere and do whatever. So they came here and they did well, so both of them are in college. My daughter, she just got accepted to the University of Louisville. She’s going to do social work. My son he’s on a track towards Engineering and recently he said he might change to architecture. He said that’s it. So that’s what was the final decision maker for me to come here.

Teaching in Kentucky therefore offered Dr. Best with many options and prospects for educational advancement and professional development for herself and her children. Although she came to the U.S. with two Master’s degrees, while teaching and living in Kentucky, she took advantage of the opportunity, offered by the school district, to continue in her deeply engrained passion for knowledge. She went back to school and received two Masters degrees to help her better understand American school structures, pedagogical theories, and school politics. Coming to the U.S. also presented her with another learning opportunity to do teach a diverse group of students on a different setting.

Dr. Bests’ beliefs in the promise of an education can sometimes fuel and her frustration with American students whom, she believes, do not take advantage of the schooling opportunities they have presented to them. These beliefs are noted most when she discusses students’ acceptance with lower grades, or their perceived lack of motivation in class. However, her notable success over the years helps her to see her value in the American classroom, and as she sees noticeable changes in students’ behaviors and perceptions about schooling.
Teaching at Haniston College in Barbados

Before coming to teach in the U.S., Dr. Best taught English and Humanities at Haniston College in Barbados for eight years. Haniston College is a co-educational high school that has a student demographic of 845 students ranging in ages of 11 through 16 years old (where middle school and high school are combined). Haniston is one of the Top four schools in Barbados. The school campus is comprised of multiple low-rise buildings, a gym, tennis court, and an outdoor track. The school also produces some of the best athletes and prominent government officials in the country of Barbados.

For Dr. Best, the standard of teaching at Haniston was at the highest level in the country. She noted that working with Haniston students allowed her to challenge them in diverse literary texts such as Shakespeare, poetry, and narrative writing. In addition, students were expected to be proficient in grammar, active research, and critical thinking. At the end of five years, students also had the option to continue on for an additional two years to earn college credits in a particular content area – similar to a community college setting.

Although Haniston College was one of the top schools in the country, students from all socio economic backgrounds were in attendance. Unlike schools in the U.S. where class status is largely mirrored in the school demographic, Dr. Best, like the other teachers in this study, did not experience a class differentiation in the student population. She noted:

No, those kids come from a whole cross range across the country. At home you are, you are promoted based on your knowledge and not your class, or
color, [or] anything like that. So you would have children who are dirt poor but who were intelligent and they can actually get into the school, and so its not based on your income level or anything. Of course those people who are sons of doctors and lawyers and so on, their parents might be able to offer them private lessons. In our country, because you have this exam at age 9, a lot of students go to private lessons when they’re 7 or 8 to prepare them for the exam, cause you have to have a very good grammar background, you have to be able to write well. And our kids write essays, so a good 2 page essay you have to master the structure of essay writing introduction, development, conclusion, the whole, things they do here in high school you have to be trained to do in elementary at home.

Dr. Best added:

The class would only come into it if your parents could afford to give you lessons, and a lot of the schools the teachers would stay on after school and offer lessons to whoever want lessons. So again, if you’re a poor person a teacher might stay on and give you lessons just because. If you pass at a higher school then she is known as the teacher who produces excellent students. So she benefits from your success.

According to Dr. Best, students at any socio economic status can attend the best school and move out of poverty or lower class status. This reality lies in stark contrast to social status and student access to wealthier schools in the U.S. Therefore, Dr. Best came with the belief that meritocracy and individual hard work will allow all students (regardless of racial background) to succeed in America, as they did no
Barbados. However, Ogbu (1990) and Kasinitz (1992) noted that this belief in meritocracy (hard work equals success) often causes some Caribbean immigrants, when they first live in the U.S., to dismiss instances of race discrimination. This poses a potential problems for international teachers’, like Dr. Best, to see how the glass ceiling, particularly in urban schools, can prevent many poor and underrepresented minority students from attaining academic success (Irvine, 2003).

Culture of Respect at Haniston College

In our interviews, Dr. Best talked about Barbadian culture and the ways respect is valued and intricately woven into the norms and culture of Haniston College. In most instances, students adhere to these cultural values and show respect to both faculty and staff members. It was also these values of respect that she expected American students to elicit towards their teachers. She noted:

**Dr. Best:** So at home it’s like that, you have that level of respect, and you have respect for education, for your teachers. In our building, if the maid sees you doing something and she says you better stop, you stop. Even at that level where the kids … at that level you have kids who’s parents are doctors, lawyers and university professors and the maid tells you stop, you stop.

**MB:** You don’t look at them like you’re the maid.

**Dr. Best:** No. You would dare not, oh the teachers would run all over you. You don’t do that. Whenever we’ve gone off on trips, the maid goes with us, because she becomes everybody’s friend. We have carpenters at school, we have grounds men at school and you do not pass those guys and not say good
morning. Its unheard of. You pass a guy clipping the fence you say good
morning. You might not know his name, but you say good morning. So
that’s the kind of, you know, society we come from, and then you come here
and they’ll pass the principal and they tell her, ‘you can’t tell me what to do’,
and they will just be in her face, and [you’ll] say what manner of beasts are
these?

Because respect was engrained in the fabric of Barbadian society and culture, Dr.
Best found it shocking to witness students’ aggressive behavior towards adults,
teachers, and administrators in the school.

Although Haniston, was an elite school with minimal behavior management
concerns, Dr. Best noted that her experiences with students in other schools were
similar in terms of the ways student showed respect for their teachers.

Okay, I taught not only at Haniston College but I taught at three other schools
that were lower down in terms of academic achievement, alright, and at those
schools you know that those students might not qualify to go to get
scholarships, but at the same expectation for mastering certain things are
known. At those schools you will have behavior problems, you may have
kids who fight, you know, on the playground and so on. But what you did not
get were students who would be deliberately oppositional in your face and
rude, so that’s the kind of ... the culture is different. The culture was different
from that point of view. You go in the classroom and you can actually ... I
can leave my class and go to the restroom and come back and know that
they’re working on what I left them working on. Here you can’t do that. Here
it’s a cultural supervision and it is that if you are not in front of a class, if you leave the children somehow just go wild, and something is going to happen if you are not there. So it’s the certain amount of personal responsibility that I find that our children [in Barbados] might have that these here don’t have, and I don’t know if that might have to do with the fact that some of our schools you can still use corporal punishment.

Respect was engrained in the fabric of society culture and one that was expected of children. Although teachers in Barbados used corporal punishment as a tool for behavior management, Dr. Best points to the cultural differences that can be seen in both societies, and the ways in which American schools have an embedded a culture of supervision, which distrusts students autonomy, which simultaneously augments student misbehavior. In her view, constant supervision of students will lead them to misbehave when they feel no one is watching them, but if given more trust and autonomy, students might maintain better classroom order. Dr. Best’s views are in line with Ukucci (2009) who also calls for classroom management techniques that do not try to “control” or subordinate students. For Ukucci (2009), teachers who build democratic classrooms provide a space and learning atmosphere for students to comport themselves and develop better judgment with regard to their own discipline. This also provides students with a better understanding of how they should conduct themselves in a public sphere even when there are no supervising adults around.

Teaching in the U.S.: “It Was Like a Shock”
Before coming to teach in Kentucky, Dr. Best knew very little about the school district. She was told in her interview that students had full Internet access in the school, supplemental learning materials, and an adjacent community library. With these school resources, she came with the expectation that student in-class discussions would be similar to her experiences teaching and interacting with university level students. She was surprised, and disappointed to find that her expectations were not met.

They [Kentuckian recruiters] said ‘oh our kids are different’, and so you’re thinking okay this is America, they have access to everything so these kids are going to be … I was just thinking about the kids [who receive grades] from 80 to 100 [percent] at home and said okay, I’m going to have to be ready, and I’m coming here from the university because I taught university at home, so I’m going to have to be ahead of these kids and look forward to the challenge, you know, of exploring knowledge and doing research and all that. Ha ha ha … they won.

Liz came with the expectation that teaching in her language arts classroom would entail doing research, and engaging in challenging and intellectual discussions. It was difficult for her at first to understand how students with ample academic resources were reading below their grade level and lagging academically behind Caribbean students who had fewer resources. Moreover, this made her believe that American students and their parent’s did not work hard enough to take advantage of the resources available in the school. Her experiences with student misbehavior also led
her to blame student underachievement on their lack of motivation, and their personal unwillingness to excel academically (Irvine, 2003).

Moreover, Dr. Best’s first encounter with students’ behavior also lead her to view American students negatively, as their behaviors were in direct contrast to those students at Haniston College. She did not expect to encounter loud outbursts of talking in class, or direct oppositional resistance to her authority as their teacher. She noted:

The first day that I went back home I was tired in every cell of my body. You know back to my hotel cause we stayed at Extended Stay for about 3 months or 2 months. I had never been so tired because I had to stand all day, talk all day and you had to say the same over and over, it was amazing because I had never seen children so out of order, so it was like a mental drain, a physical drain, psychological drain and I was wondering what have I got myself into. And then it was like a shock, like this is America, what’s wrong with these kids. I mean … what’s going on here, this is not the America I expected to come in … so that was the shock.

Dr. Best’s encounters reflects similar responses to other Caribbean international teachers who saw American student behavior as shocking when they initially stated teaching in the U.S. (Hutchinson, 2006; Manswell-Butty, 2003). Added to this, Dr. Best was frustrated to learn that her orientation training was not helpful in preparing her for gaining control of her classroom. In fact, she even wondered if the orientation trainers had previous experiences teaching in her school, since the teaching
methodologies and approaches they suggested did not work. She then realized that if she had to change her approach if she wanted to gain control of her classroom. She noted:

by day two I said you know what, I have to be in charge, so I just decided I will be in charge, and they were a bit surprised, you know, like we had these big tough guys … so you just say you need to sit down, so here people tend not to raise their voice and not to be very firm and say could you sit please, could you do and that wasn’t working, so I just had to be the one in charge. So by the end of that first week they knew that I wasn’t playing and things adjusted. So that’s how it has been, firm hand, tough love, up front

Dr. Best realized that in order to survive her first year of teaching, she had to be firm, and provide students with clear classroom behavior expectations. She also learned that in addition to teaching the Language arts curriculum, that students also needed to understand the social consequences of their behavior. As noted by Ullucci (2009), such teachings provide students with long-term benefits of helping them understand how to exercise better-informed behavior decisions in class and in their own social lives.

*Successful Teaching Means Teaching Holistically*

Over her six year teaching tenure in Kentucky, Dr. Best came to learn that successful teaching in U.S. classrooms had to be holistic, incorporating the standard curriculum, and the social consequences of student behavior. In her view, only teaching the language arts curriculum would be irrelevant if certain foundational
aspects of students’ beliefs systems needed to be challenged. For instance, she incorporates teaching about stereotypes to help students develop self-confidence and positive self-images. She noted:

I can show them what a stereotype is and I can challenge it every day, and I think as a Black person that is my duty. I’ve taken that as my duty, because I cannot teach these kids self-respect, and self-efficacy, and self-confidence [without teaching about stereotypes]. If the self that they have is a demeaning self, a class clown concept, [or] ‘I’m only good with a basketball’, [or] ‘I am supposed to be the perpetual joker’, you know, if they live up to everything that the stereotype says, it doesn’t make sense teaching them anything. So I have to show them that this is not what you are. In order for your people to survive and still be around in 2008, there had to be a strength of character among your people and therefore you have to find that strength in yourself. So you can be a more than the basketballer, if you want to be a basketballer you still need to know that if you smash your knee there should be something else you can do…

In her discussions with students, she makes it her duty to tell them that there are multiple roads to success, and that being a playing basketball is not their only option. In addition, she helps students analyze the “class clown” or perpetual joker concept, and how these behaviors reinforce stereotypical images of students, particularly from racial minority backgrounds.

Dr. Best is not afraid to address stereotypes with her students and views explicit discussions around social race perceptions as beneficial to helping students
attain the power and recognition needed to alter and challenge these larger societal views. She said:

Yeah because we’ve have those discussions. I think they need to know, and I’ve dealt with stereotyping and in one class, I gave them an example, I said, ‘if I had landed here as a soul looking for a body and I saw an African American body, a European body, and lets say a Chinese body, and I wanted a body that would have a high chance of being successful, on a scale of zero to 10 which body would probably land me in jail … and they said the African American 9 out of 10. I said which body would probably land me in college, and they said the Chinese body.’ So you see, if you have that mindset, then I guess you figure you don’t have a chance. So I was showing them that this was stereotype, it doesn’t have to be that way and that they have the power to change it. So its important…

In these examples of stereotyping, she helps students move and transcend negative societal images and replace these with positive self-images around academic success. She commented:

I have kids who would say, ‘a D is a pass? I’ll take a D.’ I’m saying so why not push for more? I’m saying so when you go to a restaurant and the restaurant got a D, would you go there? [They would say], ‘No way’, so [I would say] ‘okay’. If the doctor who has your mom already cut open on the table and he’s about to do surgery and you realize that somehow he got a D on all of his exams, and he copied [from his classmates], would you be glad to let your mom be his patient? [They would say], ‘no way, you’re gross Dr. Best’.
So I tell them you’d take a D in school because you think it’s easy, but you will not want to accept D service in a restaurant, and “D” doctor or dentist. So therefore you need to set your sights a bit higher. So I find all sorts of examples to show them that taking the easiest way out is not necessarily the best thing for them, and I’m getting through, I’m getting through.

Dr. Best has found that students have been receptive to her teaching, and has come to find changes in their behavior and attitude towards learning.

Dr. Best saw her Circle of Power group as a place where she has seen the most growth in students’ attitudes and behaviors. The group meets once a week for one hour during the school day, and address topics related to adolescent development like friendship and peer pressure, sex and sexual orientation, hygiene, and anger management. Her students, themselves, also commented on the changes in their behavior as a result of her group. She noted:

When I talk to that CPR group and I see that there are changes happening and I ask kids well have your parents noticed it?, [they say] ‘yeah my mom is noticing that I’m more cooperative. I don’t talk back to my mom as I used to and she noticed it and she commented on it.’ So I’m getting those kind of comments, then I know I’m making a difference and I’m willing to give more, to find out ways I can impact more students…

Dr. Best’s teaching approach moves beyond the language arts curriculum to helping students accept responsibility for their behavior. For her, the small nudges of change in students behavior helps her to see the impact she is making in her students’ lives and provides fuel she needs to continue teaching in the U.S.
Her teaching approach is also in line with the Womanist political clarity noted in black women teachers’ practices (Henry, 1998). Although she still sees students’ learning as a self-motivated activity, she also has come to learn how larger societal structures and images influence students’ perceptions of themselves. For these reasons, she uses her classroom as a platform to address controversial topics to help students understand the larger social significance and consequences to their misbehavior. From this perspective, her teaching incorporates an ethic of risk, most noted in Womanist teachings, that works to ensure change in her students’ lives (Henry, 1998; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002).

Mary

“Basically I think any time you’re going to teach somebody something you have to pretty much give them the respect and provide the atmosphere that is conducive to learning, cause fear is not going to allow them to learn or trust you.”

Mary is in her late 50’s and has been teaching for a total of twenty-six years. She grew up in a small town in Barbados, and always wanted to be in the field of education. In talking about her background growing up, Mary noted:

I grew up in what would be considered the suburbs and my family had like a small farm, but my dad was very industrious. He was smart and bright, had his own business. He had a building company, yet he ran the farm and he had other vehicles that he could loan out or rent out, but his dad had died early so he didn’t have a long formal education, and because of that, his [my father’s] goal was that all of his kids would have the best education that they could
have. So before me, I had siblings, a brother and a sister who had really done well at school, and they had Masters degrees and worked in education and in nursing. So when I graduated high school, I really wanted to be a school counselor, then I researched the possibilities in doing it in my area I would have had to go to England to get the training and at that point in time I wasn’t ready to go out on my own and do it so I remember I took a job as a teacher and then my brother and sister said to me, you got to go ahead and study because with a few certificates you’re not going to be able to do much and that’s when I went and I did my Bachelors.

Like Dr. Best, Mary has an extensive educational portfolio. She received a Bachelors degree from a university in the West Indies and was awarded a scholarship from the Ministry of Education in Barbados to attend graduate school in New York. In 1970, Mary graduated with a Masters of Arts in Teaching with a concentration in History and Secondary English and Humanities. While living in Kentucky, Mary returned to school and received a second master’s degree in school counseling, and is now a certified school counselor for K-12 schools. Since completing this degree, she decided to continue her education by enrolling in a doctoral program. She is nearly complete with the coursework required in the program and is currently considering continuing on to write and defend her dissertation proposal.

*Working with the Girl Scouts Association: Laying the Foundation for Diversity Training For Teaching in the U.S.*

In addition to her educational accomplishments and over twenty-five years of teaching experience, Mary worked for over 15 years chief officer in the Girl Scouts Association in Barbados. Through the Girl Scouts Association, she traveled to
various countries in Europe, and parts of the United States to teach topics on life and survival skills like swimming, cooking, building fires, health, and hygiene. She believes this experience gave her the exposure and training she needed to interact with students from diverse ethnic, language, and cultural backgrounds. She noted:

Girl Scouts is like a voluntary organization that I worked with and what we did was we trained girls in life skills so you did camping, and hiking. And because it’s a worldwide movement I used to travel to train girls all over. I’ve gone to Mexico, Argentina, [Paris, England], and different parts of the United States. And what [this experience] does is it allows you to mix with people of different cultures and languages…. So all that exposure was really good for me because I had seen different cultures, [and] a whole variety of people and places, you know. [So] that kind of broadened my horizons a lot, made me very open to the acceptance of different people and living in different places.

Mary applied for the teaching position in Kentucky knowing that these Girl Scouting experiences would be helpful in interacting with and understanding students’ cultural differences in Kentucky. In addition, she saw teaching in Kentucky as a new opportunity and awarding challenge to teach in a new setting. It also offered the opportunity for her daughters, who had just graduated high school, to go to an American university, like she had.

Coming From a Culture of Service: Teaching at Frank Anthony Foundation School in Barbados

Mary taught guidance counseling and English literature at the Frank Anthony Foundation School in Barbados for ten years before moving to the U.S. in 2004. She
taught grade levels 6th -12th (U.S. equivalent), and was the 6th grade leader for the school. The school has 700 students in attendance and is located in the eastern side of the country. When describing what teaching at this school was like, Mary remembered the ways the schooling environment was conducive to student learning, and where parents and community members supported students and staff. She noted:

Well the environment at home was warm and very conducive to learning because of support from parents, administration, government, [and] community. It was like the whole village around the child, so there was cooperation on every end and because of that, students knew that they were required to give up their best, otherwise the consequences would be coming not only from the school or the teacher, but from parents and from community—since people inquired from the students as to how they were doing. And, there were incentives and rewards from the community and the church, you know, and government for people who excel. Because of that education was placed on such a high pedestal that everybody wanted to perform.

According to Mary, students at Frank Anthony School were encouraged and supported by the community. This communal environment also contributed to students’ own motivational levels for success because the community held high expectations for students, believed in their success, and worked with them to ensure that their academic needs were met.

Mary calls teaching in Barbados contributing to a culture of service, where teachers, including her, were willing to work beyond school hours to help students pass school wide assessments. She noted:
The other thing is that [in Barbados], we give so many of our services for free, because it would be nothing for us to stay back after school, or have a kid who is behind for free [lessons], or to come back during Easter holiday to help with school based assessments. [In Barbados], the system is set up for you to help them [the students] to achieve, you know, it was just such a giving culture and service profession. So coming here, I mean it was hard not to do the same, you know, even though this culture is different and so on, the expectations are still high for students achievement because you want them to do the best they can.

It was ‘normal’ for Mary and her colleagues to go to school during the holiday break to offer extra help to those students in need. This culture of service where teachers worked with students to succeed has also contributed to the socio-economic mixture of students who attended Frank Anthony School.

Although Frank Anthony School was ranked among the top secondary schools in the country, Mary, as with the other teachers in this study, did not witness socio-economic class divisions among the students who were in attendance. She noted:

Well the kids are a whole wide spectrum, you had kids who were rich and kids who were very poor because again it did not depend on where you live, or it did not depend on your socio economic background, it was your performance in school. Actually, the test was mandatory. Everybody took the test at that age and according to your performance, you would be able to choose the school. [So], everybody had a chance to go to the top school, cause the schools at the top were open to everybody.
Because of the socioeconomic heterogeneous mixture of students, students from all income brackets were granted access to the schools of their choice. According to Mary, teachers’ participation in Barbados Culture of Service helped to level the playing field so students from across the country could attend the top schools.

Mary also brought this culture of service to her teaching position in Kentucky. Currently, she is often one of the first teachers to arrive at the Middle School at 6:30am, and one of the last teachers to leave the building, sometimes, well after 5:00. She has come to find however, that some of her colleagues Kentucky don’t share her commitment to student success and learning. She noted:

I always remember the first year I worked here one of my supervisors would always say to me, ‘I notice you approach the job like you expect the kids to do well, like you expect them to come around you and work with you, you know, its as almost as if you are so confident that they can do it and they’re going to do it with you.’ And I guess that is ... I think that that might be because of my background and my culture because of where I grew up...

Mary’s dedication to students mirrors a Womanist caring tradition of teaching. She cares about the educational advancement of all students and continues to devote, what she considers, free time to ensure student success.

_Teaching in the U.S. and Encountering Unmet Expectations_

Mary has been teaching six years as a 6th grade English and Language Arts teacher in the Louisville public schools. However, before coming to Kentucky, Mary also had three years teaching experience in the public schools in Upstate New York,
while completing her Masters Degree in the 1970’s. She knew from these early experiences that American schools had a wide variety of recourses for teachers, and student learning. Moreover, she was excited to learn that the middle school she would be teaching in had a computer lab, a public library attached, Internet access, and various up-to-date technology that would be assessable in her class. Excited by the available teacher resources, Mary came to the U.S. with the expectation that American students would enjoy school, be eager to learn, and have higher reading and literacy levels than students in Barbados who had fewer resources. She soon came to realize that the students in her class did not meet her expectations:

Well when I came to Louisville I knew from my experience in New York that there were many more resources because when I compare our kids back home the resources we have to work with and the results we get, we are really way down on resources compared to the students here. So I was excited to be able to have the technology, the easy access to a variety of books and other tools that would be in the classroom, and I fully expected to have a lot more buy in than we get. I guess I was expecting the same response to teachers that we have at home, you know, where the job is respected and the kids are eager to learn, but it is here in varying degrees.

As a teacher in Barbados, Mary was accustomed to students who were eager and self motivated to learn. Moreover, she was unprepared to meet the behavior challenges she experienced in her Kentucky classroom. In describing her initial years teaching in Kentucky, she noted:
For one thing, the types of behaviors that we (herself and colleagues from Barbados) met were foreign to me. The kids that I had taught previously had a lot of respect for adults and authority, they were not so confrontational, and they were easier to motivate. [While teaching in the U.S.], I find you’ve got to really dig deep into the box and come up with things that will get the interest of these kids that will hold their attention. So that was one of the main things [I tried to do].

Learned Approaches to Teaching American Students

In the beginning of each school year, Sandra takes classroom time to learn what her students’ interests are. She provides them with a sheet that asks them questions about their interests, and things they would like to learn during the year. She uses students’ responses on the questionnaire to incorporate their interests into the lesson she is teaching. So far, she found this method to work well with her sixth graders.

When asked to talk about other teaching methods used in the classroom, Mary noted that building relationships with students was a critical component to establishing a learning conducive classroom environment. Once these relationships are built, she then works with students to establish boundaries and systems of rewards and consequences for unwanted classroom behavior. She noted:

Here and everywhere, my basic approach is to build relationships first, set up an environment that is conducive to learning, and then work a balance of expectations and consequences where kids feel safe and comfortable because
they know their parameters and my expectations, and basically together, we can work on these set of rules that they know and can follow. We then work on setting up consequences. And they know that if they go outside these boundaries then there will be these consequences. So basically I think any time you’re going to teach somebody something you have to pretty much give them the respect and provide the atmosphere that is conducive to learning cause fear is not going to allow them to learn or trust you. You have to have their trust, so that’s basically how I work.

Mary has come to find that when students are distrusting of her motives, they often cross the boundary lines of classroom behavior and will disrupt the class by speaking out of turn, or walking around the classroom. Therefore, she has come to learn that working with students to establish common classroom goals and standards of behavior helps to establish trust, and allows students to feel respected as learners and individuals in the classroom. She also has come to find that building trust with students allows her to motivate and push students to work at their highest potential for learning, and has found success in her approaches so far.

Coming from Barbados, where teachers and students showed mutual respect, but still something that was apart of the cultural fabric in Barbados, Mary realized that she needed to build a similar culture of respect in her classroom so to help students feel valued as individuals, and so that they would then exchange the same level of respect that she requires of them in the classroom. Although she still experiences behavior challenges, she uses her training as a school counselor to better understand students, and has come to realize that each school day and classroom
setting will vary according depending on the time of day, or medication students are they are on, or just normal adolescent mood changes.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

This study examined the narratives of four Barbadian women teachers who were recruited from their home countries, in Barbados, to teach in Louisville, Kentucky schools. Three of the four teachers taught in middle school, and one, Jill, taught elementary art and humanities for grades k-6. Paula, at the time of our interview, taught 8th grade Social Studies, Dr. Best, taught 7th grade English and Language arts, and Mary taught 6th grade English and Language Arts.

In this chapter, I discuss three prominent themes that emerged in all four teachers’ narratives: 1) Unmet expectations, 2) Learning on the job, and 3) Embodying a Womanist Pedagogical Tradition. The first finding contributes to the literature because it helps to unearth why international teachers experience challenges in their initial years of teaching. While many studies, including this one, points to culture shock as a contributing factor, it should also be noted that some international teachers also hold high expectations for what teaching in the U.S. might entail. The teachers in this study assumed that teaching in the U.S. would be similar to their experiences in the Caribbean. They later were “shocked” to learn that teaching in the U.S. was a much different experience to what they were accustomed to in Barbados.

Second, the teachers in this study viewed their experiences teaching in Kentucky as a learning experience, and one that required them to adopt new teaching practices in order to be successful in meeting their students’ learning needs. In fact, Paula and Mary saw teaching in Kentucky as helping them become better educators.
The last major finding centers upon pedagogical practices and similarities these teachers share with African American teachers. This seems to reflect the Womanist perspective, as they used an ethic of care to interact and build trusting relationships with their students (Ware, 2002; Irvine, 2002; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002). They also tried to employ holistic teaching practices that aimed to teach the “whole child”, and used their classrooms to speak out against stereotypes and the oppressive treatment of people and students of color (Howard, 2001).

This study is unique in that it fills the void in our understandings on the experiences of Caribbean women teachers recruited to teach in the South. Up until this point, the literature provided little representation on overseas recruitment initiatives, and in particular, the ways Barbadians negotiate their experiences teaching in Southern American schools. This study also speaks to the experiences of Caribbean women who teach outside a major metropolitan areas like New York City, or Miami Florida that have established West Indian communities. In fact, the women in this study were hired to help “diversify” the Kentuckian teaching staff, and as a result were the only Barbadian teachers in their schools, and among only a handful of black teachers in the entire school. There was no established Barbadian community in Louisville that they knew of, and had to lean on each other for support and guidance during their times of challenges. The women in this study have remained close friends since the beginning of their teaching careers in Louisville and frequent each other’s houses for birthdays and holidays, in an attempt to establish their own form of community.

*Unmet Expectations: This is Not the America I thought I’d Find*
A theme that cut across all teachers’ narratives was the reality that this was not the America they thought they’d find (Traore and Lukens, 2006). All four teachers knew very little about the schools they were teaching in before coming to teach in Kentucky and held preconceived expectations of what the experience would entail. From their narratives, we learn that teachers held prior perceptions with regard to 1) classroom behavior and student respect towards adults, and 2) notions of meritocracy and student responsibility for academic success.

**Behavior and Respect**

The teachers in this study did not expect to witness the kinds of behaviors they encountered in their American classrooms. In their initial years of teaching, they recalled enduring mentally and physically tiring days. They also noted that they were ill prepared to encounter and address the behaviors they saw in the classroom. Mary and Jill where the only teachers who had prior experiences teaching in the U.S., however, they too were not prepared for, what they considered to be, rude, disruptive, and disorderly behavior from children towards adults.

The teachers in this study came from schools where students said good morning when they entered the classroom, and did their work quietly when class assignments were given. In their view, Barbadian students did not walk around the classroom, fight in school, or spoke in class without the teacher’s permission. They also remember the Barbadian school climate fostering, what Dr. Best calls, “a culture of respect”, where children stood up when the teacher entered the classroom, and were respectful to all the adults in the school, (i.e. teachers, administrators, janitors, and grounds people).
In this culture of respect, teachers were held in high esteem, and regarded as “pillars of the community” (Francis, 2005 p.133). Mary also recalls working within a system that saw teachers apart of a village that surrounded the child. All adults who came in contact with children in this village were responsible for the care and well being of students. Thus, respect for elders was often revered and expected. As a contributors to this school culture, teachers expected American schools to uphold these same cultural values of respect.

The teachers in this study also came with postcolonial traditions of maintaining order in the classroom, which would have included hitting, yelling, or placing students at the front, or back of the classroom to stand. Their culture shock was compounded by the fact that they were no longer able to use behaviorist methods to address the severe behavior issues they met in their classrooms. Jill, in particular, began to distance herself from students until she was able to negotiate how to manage her classroom and interact with students. Initially, the teachers also came to see American schools as very “legalistic”, where they could not touch (including hitting or hugging) students, for the fear of getting fired. These instances of negotiating American schools also created tension for teachers as they struggled to find a “cultural medium” between their own norms and values, and that of the school.

**Meritocracy and Student Lack of Motivation for Learning**

The teachers in this study also did not expect to see, what they considered to be a lack of motivation from students towards learning. This expectation came from a few sources. First, they came with the notion that with hard work, anyone could attain success regardless of their race or class. In Caribbean societies, formal
education continues to remain one of the viable means for upward mobility and status (Francis, 2005, Gregory, 2003). Therefore, teachers believed that students who worked hard to attain academic success would have social opportunities regardless of their race or class status. This was also most evident in the schools they came from, as students from all social economic backgrounds, who devoted themselves to study, were able to attend the most elite schooling institutions in Barbados.

In addition, the teachers in this study saw themselves as apart of a “culture of service” that are committed to helping students succeed and become upwardly mobile. Although the literature is replete with the ways in which class inequality permeates the fabric of Caribbean society (Rogers, 2001; Kasinitz, 1992), the teachers in this study used their roles as educators to help students become academically successful and socially mobile in their classist society. They offered their time outside of the boundaries of normal school hours, and in return witnessed Caribbean students eagerness to receive their extra help. Coming from this context, the teachers expected to see this same enthusiasm for learning from American students, and were later shocked to see students’ unwillingness to put in the extra hours to understand difficult concepts.

Second, these teachers came with the notion that American schools were the best schools one could attend. For three of the four teachers in this study, this was one of their major determining factors for leaving Barbados. They wanted their children to gain access into American schools, which they believed, had advanced technology and resources that were not present in Barbadian schools. In this vein, Mary, Dr. Best, and Paula were surprised to learn that American students were not
motivated to learn even with their access to advanced resources and state of the art technology (i.e. library, Internet access, advanced multimedia resources etc). At the root of teachers’ understandings of meritocracy is their belief in individual responsibility. This idea is most glaring as teachers explained the differences between Barbadian students who studied and worked hard, and American students who held low motivational levels for completing in-class or homework assignments.

These teachers perceived views of America as a land of opportunity, and its schools as sites for upward social mobility were values and expectations rooted in their own cultural norms and understandings. However, they neglected to see how these values created tensions and cultural conflicts in the classroom, which in many respects, left teachers regarding American students as unmotivated and disorderly. Irvine (2003) noted that this “lack of cultural synchronization” between teachers and student cultural norms and beliefs often creates cultural clashes in the classroom, which as a result, can cause miscommunication, confrontation, hostility, and alienation between teachers and students. This was true for Jill as she began to distance herself from students in her initial years of teaching due to these stark cultural differences.

Summary and Implications

Implications for this research point to the ways in which international teachers are prepared for teaching in the U.S. Such training should include teachers’ self-awareness of cultural norms, their purposes for education, and their understandings of the relationship between culture and learning (King, 1994; Oakes and Lipton, 2003).
Particularly for Caribbean international teachers, their understandings of meritocracy and individual responsibility should be called into question as it relates to their own preconceived views of America. Caribbean scholars have long theorized that Caribbean immigrants often come with the perception of America as a land of opportunity (Rogers, 2001; Kasnitz, 1992). These scholars note that while Caribbean immigrants see, and even experience racism for themselves, they also believe that individual factors (i.e. self motivation) can overturn racial systemic injustices. Francis (2005) also made note of this in her study of Jamaican teachers recruited for New York City schools. Almost 80 percent of the teachers in this study noted that while they believe that racial barriers impede the progress of poor black students, they also felt that students could work harder to academically to overcome these racial barriers.

Therefore, preparation for Caribbean international teachers would entail a discussion on their own views of ‘success’, and the ways in which these views can be at odds with those students who resist schooling as the sole means for social and economic success (Ogbu, 1991; Francis, 2005). These training sessions would also include a discussion on the multiple ways American schooling institutions fail to meet the learning needs of poor and students of color. These discussions would shift the blame from perceived student deficiencies, to one on how larger school structures (including teachers, school environment, etc.) negatively affect student lives and learning contexts.

And lastly, international teachers should participate in practicum training sessions a semester, or year before they begin teaching in the U.S. This would allow them to observe the school environment, ask questions where needed, and observe the
behavior and learning patterns of students. This exposure at the onset of their teaching experience would also help unveil the mystery of what teaching in the U.S. would entail, and help provide a more realistic expectation of what the experience would involve.

Lessons Learned on the Job

Another prominent theme that arose in the data were the way teachers adjusted their teaching to meet the needs of students. Throughout their five years of teaching in Kentucky, they learned that they needed to make changes to their teaching practices in order to be effective in their teaching approaches. For instance, Mary noted:

Okay, the main skills I would say would be one, the ability to be adaptable, and the willingness to learn ... and you know the willingness to go beyond the call of duty in an effort to be successful because sometimes as I stay on here for an hour or two make getting things ready for the next day, grading papers and things like that, and I do that because I want when the students walk in that I’m ready. There are several people who don’t invest that time, but you’ve got to be willing to invest in yourself if you’re going to be successful.

According to Hutchinson and Jazzar (2007), international teachers who commit themselves to being active learners alongside their students are better committed to being successful in their new teaching placements. For the teachers in this study, they were committed to 1) learn how to manage student behavior, and 2) learn to employ diverse teaching techniques and strategies that appealed to the learners in their classrooms. In fact, three teachers, Jill, Paula, and Sandra noted that they were better educators as a result of this experience. While Dr. Best didn’t feel that teaching in
Kentucky has helped her to become a better educator, she noted that the experience required her to utilize more teaching strategies than she used in Barbados to better appeal to students’ learning needs.

Learning to deal with behavior

All four teachers in this study discussed the shock they encountered in American classrooms when they initially witnessed students misbehavior in class. For them, this was one of the major areas they needed to address if they wanted to maintain classroom environments that were conducive for learning.

Mary’s approach for behavior management focused on building relationships, and creating a classroom environment of mutual trust and respect. She noted that if students didn’t feel respected, then they would not reciprocate that respect. She also noted that students needed to have trust, as this too would undermine her efforts to building relationships in her classroom. Her belief in relationship building helps her to establish communal classroom goals, rules, and consequences for breaking those rules. Her classroom culture of trust and respect also sends the message that she cares about students and has their best learning interest at heart.

Building relationships has been documented widely in the research on successful teaching practices, particularly with students from racial minority backgrounds (Bondy and Ross, 2008; Ullucci, 2009; Foster, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Foster (1991) notes that teacher connectedness and care in the classroom helps teachers and students form meaningful bonds with each other. In addition, behavior management becomes easier to maintain as students become invested in these relationships, and self manage their behavior decisions. This connectedness also
allows for open dialogue where teachers can have open decisions on misbehavior and subsequent consequences, as Mary is able to do in her classroom.

Dr. Best and Paula noted that being strong disciplinarians helped them to maintain order and student behavior. Dr. Best noted that she was firm and assertive in her demands for student behavior, and tells students that she is “in charge”. Paula similarly noted that she was firm yet caring in her approach. She lets students know that she cares about them, but is unwilling to have students “walk all over her”, or “break down in tears” due to an unmanageable classroom. These teachers’ stern, yet caring and nurturing approach is in line with the literature on black teachers as “warm demanders” (Irvine, 2002; Bondy and Ross, 2008).

Irvine (2002) notes that warm demanders are “committed, respectful, dedicated, and competent educators who are not afraid, resentful, or hostile to their pupils” (p. 145). These teachers set up clear and consistent classroom expectations that combine a “no-nonsense and disciplined” attitude (Irvine and Frasier, 1998). These teachers also have high expectations for student learning and insist on students meeting those expectations (Bondy and Ross, 2008). The teachers in this study similarly see the importance of building relationships with students and use a stern, yet caring approach to establish acceptable classroom behavior and order.

Having a set lesson plan for each class has also helped Paula address behavior concerns in her classroom. She noted that the structured lesson provides students with a step-by-step plan for class activities and assignments. This explicit instructional approach also minimizes classroom behavior problems because it provides the “structured inquiry” students need to stay on task (Jones, et. al. 2009).
Learning to Employ Diverse Teaching Strategies

The teachers in this study also highlighted ways these teachers learned new and diverse teaching strategies to meet the needs of their students. For instance, Mary has learned the importance of incorporating students’ interests into the classroom curriculum. She learns about students’ interests and hobbies through a survey she issues at the beginning of the year, and takes this data, to make her lessons more appealing to students. As noted by Ladson Billings (1994), these approaches to student learning bridges the gap between the school environment and students’ home cultures. It allows students to have personal relevance to the lesson while using their own frame of reference to understand new knowledge presented in school curriculum (Ullucci, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Irvine, 2003). This approach to teaching also has proven to be effective with ethnically diverse students, as it drives their motivation for learning and allows them to choose academic success (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lewison, M., Leland, Harste, 2008).

Paula also noted that teaching in the U.S. has helped her to teach students with special learning needs. She admitted that special education students in Barbados often fell through the cracks and did not receive specialized instruction. Her experience in Kentucky, however, has provided her with the on-the-job training she needed to be effective in her inclusive classroom. Grant and Sleeter (1993) notes that effective multicultural educators are committed to meeting the needs of all students who are underserved in traditional classrooms, and provide a space for all students to equally learn and become contributing citizens to society. Teachers who are prepared for these classrooms acknowledge that students with exceptional needs 1)
require varied methods of instruction, 2) use assessment and observation to evaluate student learning, 3) teach new skills through students’ interests and cultural frames of reference, and 4) alter instruction when it fails to promote student learning (Heward, 2003). Paula, in her narrative noted that these were skills she learned as she became more confident teaching in her Kentuckian school setting.

Summary and Suggestions

The teachers in this study discussed the multiple ways they learned on the job while teaching in their schools in Kentucky. For instance, they learned to manage their classroom behaviors by 1) building trusting relationships with students, 2) balancing a stern yet caring approach, and 3) using structured lesson plans to set clear expectations for student learning and behavior. They also learned how to employ diverse teaching strategies by 1) incorporating students’ interests into the lesson plan, and 2) addressing the exceptional learning needs of students with disabilities.

These above findings indicate teachers’ professional growth and willingness to learn and adapt to the school culture, yet still highlights the struggles they encountered as they negotiated their teaching experiences in Kentucky. Thus, these findings point to prior training international teachers need to effectively teach in American classrooms. This training would provide teachers with the importance of teaching through students’ cultural frames of reference. The research on culturally relevant teaching, for instance, would be most useful in their training as it points to the effective ways teachers can empower racially diverse students to have a vested interest in the topic they are learning. Moreover, this approach moves beyond superficial celebrations of “heroes and holidays”, and employs a teaching agenda that
moves students from the margins where their cultures and interests are traditionally ignored and disvalued, to the center of curriculum where their cultural knowledges are validated and authenticated (Irvine, 2003; Nieto, 1999). In this vein, teachers would be offered with the multiple methods by which they can use students’ interests and knowledge to form the basis of inquiry. Particularly in the language arts curriculum, like Mary’s would include 1) using alternative literary texts that reflect the cultural backgrounds of the students, and 2) assigning writing projects that allow students to explore and question pressing problems in their communities or popular media.

In addition, training for international teachers should include strategies for teaching within inclusive classrooms. As noted by Paula, teachers in Barbados receive little training on how to use differentiated lessons that appeal to diverse learners. In this vein, teachers should be provided with prior training on what effective instruction looks like in a learning rich environment for students with exceptional needs. Moreover, these discussions would also include critical dialogue on the purpose of special education and the disproportionate representation of male students of color who are labeled as learning disabled (Shippen, Curtis, and Miller, 2009). Thus, this training would provide international teachers with a critical understanding of U.S. school structures in ways that they can best advocate for students.

Finally, in addition to critical multicultural training, international teachers should be provided with mentors and cohort support groups throughout the year (Hutchinson, 2006). These mentors would help with behavior strategies, curricular
materials, effective lesson plans, and ways to meet the diverse and special needs of students in their classrooms (Manswell-Butty, 2003). These mentors would also serve as trusted colleagues who are vested in teachers’ successful induction into teaching in the U.S. Their cohort groups would consist of administrators, senior teachers, and other international teachers, and serve the purpose of offering teachers feedback, guidance, and additional support on their pedagogical practices.

*Embodying a Womanist Pedagogical Tradition*

There is evidence that the teachers in this study display similar Womanist pedagogical approaches to African American women teachers (Henry, 2005; Gilpin, 2003; Callender, 1997). The teachers in this study display 1) an ethic of care that undergirds their philosophical approaches to teaching students, 2) use holistic teaching strategies that aim to teach the “whole” child, and 3) incorporates a political clarity of activism in their lessons.

*Ethics of Care*

According to Ware (2002), caring teachers 1) give time to students outside the classroom, 2) listen to student’s problems, 3) encourage students to grow personally, and 4) believes in students academic and personal success. Caring is also established when teachers feel a sense of responsibility for and connectedness to their students (Foster, 1991). Collins (1991) notes that this ethic of caring is central to black women’s professional lives as it suggests that “personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy, are central to the knowledge validation process” (p. 219).
In this vein, the teachers in this study see the importance of building caring relationships with students. For instance, Paula and Dr. Best noted that although they were stern disciplinarians, students would resist their intentions if they did not first establish caring and trusting relationships. These teachers also used an ethic of care to demand more than the minimum from students.

An ethic of care pedagogy is also evident in Mary and Jill’s approach to teaching. Their care and determination for student learning is evident in the long hours they dedicate for lesson planning. They both see the importance of staying beyond expected school hours to plan well thought out lesson plans, and are usually one of the first teachers to come to school, and one of the last to leave the building. Mary notes however, that this was “natural” for her to do since she came from a culture of service.

Paula’s caring pedagogy is rooted in her spirituality and religious belief of teaching as a calling. Her spiritual lens for teaching is reflected in the literature on black women teachers who see their work as a special or “scared calling” to describe their purpose for teaching (Irvine, 2003; Loder, 2005). These teachers see teaching as more than a job, but one that has a spiritual purpose. While teaching in Barbados, Paula often talked about the ways she played a Pastoral role in the lives of her students. By her own definition, this role encompassed a caring philosophy that took on the responsibility of a caregiver for students in the absence of their parents. She also taught religion classes and sought to ensure that students’ spiritual, social, and academic needs were met. While in Kentucky, this caring belief continues to foreshadow her teaching practices. She viewed moving to Louisville as God’s plan in
her life to reach out and teach a broader range of students. It is also this spiritual lens that drives her commitment for the academic and social wellbeing of her current students.

These teachers’ narratives point to the importance of establishing a caring pedagogy that is needed to amend the cultural barriers and divide between themselves and their students, and can be witnessed at the very basis of their pedagogical approach to teaching American students.

**Holistic Teaching**

Howard (2001) notes that holistic teaching strategies provide students with the social skills needed in the classroom and in society. These teaching practices are geared to helping students develop intellectually, socially, and morally to be honest, responsible, and respectful citizens. He notes that these approaches also develops faculties of learners so that students are intellectually capable (able to master cognitive and academic tasks), socially adaptable (able to coexist with peers and adults in a respectable manner), and morally sound (able to adhere to teacher and societal norms). (Howard, p. 186-187).

This notion of holistic teaching was most evident in Dr. Bests’ teaching approaches. She noted that solely teaching the language arts curriculum was not enough to provide students with the tools they need to survive and thrive in society. Thus, her teaching incorporates lessons on maintaining positive self-images, rejecting self-imposed stereotypical images (i.e. being the class clown), and aiming to achieve higher than the minimum passing grades. Her holistic lessons reflect her desire to
address students’ moral, academic, and social competences, and aims to equip them with the knowledge needed to enter into society as competent individuals.

**Political Clarity**

It is evidenced in teachers’ narratives, that their approaches to teaching are guided by a political clarity similar to African American women teachers (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002). This political clarity comes from their own commitment to respond to issues of social injustices, like race and gender oppression (Dixson, 2003). This political clarity noted in the literature is also guided by teaching that is sensitive and supportive to anti-racism, and the anti-oppression of students of color. Beauboef-Lafontant (2002), notes that

> Womanist teachers see racism and other systemic injustices as simultaneously social and educational problems. Consequently, they demonstrate a keen awareness of their power and responsibility as adults to contest the societal stereotypes imposed on children. (p. 77)

Dr. Best makes it her duty to address stereotypes and its influences on students’ lives. She noted that since negative stereotypes were often closely related to the images of American Americans, she felt it was her duty, as a black person, to speak out against these images in hope to see positive change in her students’ behavior. Her understanding of the negative ways blacks are treated in America has driven her political agenda to speak out against these images.

Paula also draws from her own experiences of racial intolerance in Kentucky, and uses her classroom as a place to discuss the treatment of racial immigrants who are treated differently based on their accents. She incorporates her own experiences
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with prejudice to also help immigrant students identify and speak out about their similar experiences. Her pedagogy is also driven by a political lens that pushes students to think critically about the ways people are treated in their communities. Both teachers use an overt political agenda that transforms their classroom into sites for anti-racist and oppressionist discussions. They also attempt to raise students’ consciousness about instances of injustice and how race shapes the realities of their classmates, and other people of color.

Summary and Implications

The findings in this section suggest that the teachers in this study share similar philosophical traditions on teaching to their African American counterparts. These teachers’ approaches build on the existing Womanist pedagogical tradition for they infuse an ethic of care for students, believe in teaching the “whole child” through the use of holistic approaches, and use their classrooms as a political arena to address issues of anti-racism and anti-oppression of people and students of color. These findings also suggest that teachers combined their teaching approaches used in Barbados, and have infused them to create a new pedagogical approach to better teach and meet the academic and social needs of their American students.

From this standpoint, we are also led to believe that teachers brought fundamental and experiential notions on what effective teaching practices entail from the Barbadian context. Thus, from a training standpoint, international teachers should be invited to discuss their philosophies on teaching, and the ways their learned approaches can offer suggestions for best practices in American classrooms. This invitation provides an opportunity to learn from the wealth of knowledge
international teachers bring to the U.S., and provides a space for the exchange of ideas, pedagogical strategies and best practices that are universally beneficial to all students. This training approach would also minimize the culture shock international teachers encounter, as it would equip them with a host of strategies that incorporates their own approaches along with those known to be effective in American classrooms, to ensure a smoother transition into their new teaching positions.
Chapter 6: Conclusion and Study Limitations

This research addresses the much-heated debate on the recruitment of teachers of color to meet the growing diverse population of students in public schools (McCoubrey, 2001). To respond to this need, the Jefferson County School Board in Louisville, Kentucky initiated a recruiting initiative to hire teachers of color to help diversify their teaching staff. Left with few options with where to find qualified teachers, they sought for well-seasoned teachers from Barbados to fill this need.

This research, asks two central questions, 1) what are the classroom experiences of teachers who were recruited to teach in U.S. public schools, and 2) how do they perceive their prior training as preparing them for these school contexts? What lay at the root of this inquiry where the ways international teachers interacted with students, and the extent to which teachers felt prepared to teach in these school settings. From teachers’ narratives, we learn that they felt unprepared to meet many of the challenges they encountered in their classrooms. In the finding Unmet Expectations: This is not the America I thought I’d find, I discussed the ways teachers saw American school culture as drastically different than those in the Caribbean. They expected students to be respectful towards adults, well behaved, and have an eagerness for learn like their Barbadian counterparts. These unmet expectations led teachers in their initial years to view American students as rude, disruptive, and lacking the motivation to academically succeed.

The second finding indicates that although teachers experienced cultural shocks in their initial years of teaching, they were committed to learning how to be successful in their new schools. I call this finding Learning on the Job, as teachers
believed that in order to promote learning rich classroom environments, they had to adapt, and learn new ways of effectively meeting the learning needs of their students. Thus, teachers learned how to 1) manage classroom behavior without using the behaviorist methods they used back home, 2) teach through students’ interests as a way to promote learning, and 3) use teaching strategies that appealed to the learning needs of exceptional students in their inclusion classrooms.

The third finding in this research suggests that after five years of teaching in Kentucky, teachers developed a Womanist pedagogical approach similar to African American women teachers. These practices were guided by an ethic of care towards teaching students, and utilized a holistic teaching approach that addressed the social and academic needs of their students. They also incorporated a political activism into their lessons that spoke out against stereotypes and race oppression. This Womanist pedagogical lens, I believe, developed as a result of their own experiences living in Kentucky, and encountering how racism and social stereotypes impact the lives and educational outcomes of their students. As a result, their understandings of hegemony in the American context helped them to develop an anti-oppressionist and racist pedagogy.

Suggestions for International Teacher Diversity Preparation

The findings of this research points to the invalid assumption that Afro Caribbean teachers will automatically understand and relate to the cultural values, behaviors, and characteristics of students of color in their classroom. We learn, in fact, that Caribbean cultural norms and values can sometimes place teachers at odds with American students, and even cause cultural conflicts and alienation between
This research, therefore, suggests five ways to better prepare international teachers for successful teaching in America’s diverse classrooms.

First, teachers should participate in a paid practicum, where they observe the schools they will be teaching in four to six months before teaching in the schools. This experience would provide them with a better understanding of the school culture and student learning needs before tackling these issues in their own classrooms.

Second, teachers’ orientation training should include cross-cultural discussions on their own cultural values and perceptions, and the ways these might conflict with those of their students. Such discussions would engage teachers in a critical analysis on the structures of American schools, and the ways they as educators can work to empower students in their classrooms. Teaching in inclusive classrooms would also enter into these discussions as teachers learn methods by which to meet the learning needs of exceptional students (i.e. teaching through diversified instruction, using assessment and observation to evaluate student learning, teaching through students cultural frames of references, and identifying and altering curriculum when it fails to promote student learning).

Third, international teacher preparation would include discussions on successful lesson planning and effective classroom management techniques. Such discussions would center on the components of Culturally Relevant Teaching, and the ways student knowledge based inquiry can be incorporated into their daily lesson planning. Thus, providing teachers with resources like alternative texts that reflect the cultural backgrounds of students, and samples of class projects that allow students to
tackle pressing problems in their communities, would give teachers a starting reference point to mirror their own lessons.

Fourth, international teachers should be provided with mentors who are trusted allies that are committed to seeing teachers through their induction years of teaching in the U.S. These mentors would provide them with assistance on lesson planning, curricular materials, and behavior management techniques. In this vein, teachers would also benefit from participating in cohort meetings with administrators, veteran teachers, and other international teachers in a supportive environment to offer feedback on their progress, challenges, and successes.

Finally, teachers should be invited to discuss best practices that they have found to be effective in their years of teaching. This dialogue would provide an opportunity for a cross cultural and professional exchange of ideas and practices that can be effective with all students. In addition this would also provides an opportunity for teachers to share the wealth of knowledge these teachers bring to the classroom. This exchange of ideas also might reduce the culture shock teachers experience in their initial years of teaching, as they will then learn to incorporate new strategies into their own teaching approach that will help them to address the challenges they may encounter in their new school settings.

Toward Identifying an Afro-Caribbean Womanist Teaching Pedagogy

Womanist theory focuses on the lived experiences and knowledge bases of black women. This framework also attempts to theorize the positioning from which black women acknowledge and respond to instances of injustice in their lives, and
provides a space for them to speak from, their own stance, on the ways they make sense of the world around them (Henry, 1998; Collins, 2000). Beauboef-Lafontant (2005) notes that four principles undergird the literature on Womanist theory as it, 1) values women’s individuality and their relationships with each other, 2) recognizes their contributions to the survival and transcendence of their communities, 3) values their “motherwit”, individual and collective wisdom derived from their own lived experiences, and 4) embraces a reoccurring humanist vision of political activism that seeks enfranchisement for all humans regardless of race, class, gender, or sexuality.

Womanist teaching represents the practices that emerge from black women teachers’ classrooms. It highlights the ways in which teachers’ pedagogy stem from their own life experiences with race, class, and gender oppression to inform a classroom practice that aims to enhance the lives and learning opportunities of their students (Beauboef-Lafontant, 2005). An Afro-Caribbean Womanist teaching pedagogy looks at the direct teaching approaches and philosophies of Caribbean women, attempts to identify what those practices are, and the meanings that lie beneath them.

The findings in this research examine the teaching practices of Barbadian international women teachers to help identify what an Afro-Caribbean Womanist teaching tradition entails. These findings suggest that there are three contours to this practice: 1) teachers embody an **ethic of care** that believes in building trusting and caring relationships with students, but one that is rooted in Barbadian values of hierarchical respect from students towards adults. In this light, teachers can appear to
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be strict and enact a “no nonsense” approach, but hold high expectations for student learning.

These teachers aim to holistically teach the “whole child”. They see the importance of developing students’ academic and social competency for life outside the boundaries of the school context. Such holistic strategies include teaching about hygiene, sex and sexual orientation, peer pressure, and respect for parents along side the standard curriculum.

These teachers also display a political clarity that is rooted in race and race oppression. While it takes some time for teachers to develop a complex understanding of the ways gender, race, and class intersect to form oppressive realities of students of color (Henry, 1998), they use their classrooms to counter these oppressive realities that they believe will affect students’ lives. However, even with this lens, they still believe that students can overcome racial and systemic oppressions by hard work, and sheer individual determination to succeed (Francis, 2005).

While an Afro Caribbean Womanist pedagogy may share similar practices noted in African American women teachers’ pedagogy, their experiences living and teaching in the Caribbean predisposes them to a particular lens that shapes their own pedagogical tradition. On the one hand, their approach can conflict with the norms and cultural values of students in the U.S. (Gilpin, 2003; Francis, 2005; Manswell-Butty, 2003), however, on the other, their pedagogy is also driven by an ethic of care and determination for student success and empowerment in society (Callender, 1997; Henry, 1998). It is also this unique lens that speaks to the ways Afro-Caribbean
teachers across the diaspora are committed to improve the educational experiences of all students regardless of their race or cultural background.

Study Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

As with all research, this study has limitations regarding its theoretical and methodological structure. First, due to the nature of narrative inquiry, the narrator may emphasize points that were most memorable, and add or subtract details from the original event (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990). The teachers in this study spoke about their initial experiences teaching in Kentucky, which occurred five years before our interview. Some of their memories may have been romanticized, particularly as they spoke of teaching in Barbados, while other memories exaggerated, particularly as they spoke about their initial years teaching in the U.S. To further research in this area, a longitudinal approach would better capture teachers’ initial experiences when they first begin teaching in the U.S., as well as their experiences five years later. This would help attain a more accurate analysis of their first year challenges, as well as compare the growth in professional development they made as a result of their experiences.

The second limitation addresses the relatively small sample size in this study. I used a community nomination approach, noted by Foster (1997), to attain the names of teachers who were recruited to teach in Kentucky. Although I was able to attain the names of all four teaches through this process, the teachers who participated in this study only came from two schools in the Louisville area, since the participants did not know teachers in other schools. Thus, future study would include teachers
from diverse schools within in the district to provide a broader scope on their experiences teaching in Kentucky.

The third limitation centers on the lack of dialogue on the ways gender influence Caribbean women teachers’ practices. The teachers in this study did not view their gender as shaping their teaching practices, and as a result spoke minimally on these topics. Thus, additional research is needed to learn more about the ways gender intersects with Caribbean women identities to shape their own unique epistemology. Additionally, it is my hope for more theory to be generated on the ways Afro-Caribbean women 1) assimilate into American society and accommodate particular cultural norms and values present in American school systems, and 2) come to understand how the intersection of race, class, and gender oppression structures their own and students’ social opportunities. Moreover, this theory would take into account not only how race, class, and gender shape their experiences but also what wisdom they have gained through these experiences, particularly as it relates to being immigrant minority Caribbean women living in the U.S.
References


New York, NY: Teachers College Press.


Appendix A:
Interview protocol #1
Focused Life History

Teacher background info:

- How would you describe the school environment you taught in before coming to the US?
  - Student racial and ethnic background?
  - Interactions with students?
  - Size and location of the school?
  - Subject(s) & grade level taught?

The recruitment process

- How did you learn about recruitment efforts in your country?
- How did you come to the decision to move to the US? What perks and advantages appealed to you the most?
- What was the process like once offered the position?
- What excited you most about teaching in the US?
- Can you describe what the teacher orientation was like in the US? Was this helpful in preparing you for your current position?

Teachers’ perceptions about being prepared for the position:

- What did you know about the school or district before coming to the US?
- Did you have any fears/ concerns about coming to teach in the US?
- What strengths do you feel you came with to this position?
- Given what you have said thus far about where you taught, and the training you received in the U.S., how have these experiences (your prior teaching experiences in your home country and in the U.S.) prepared you to teach in the U.S.?
  - What aspects of your training/prior teaching experiences were helpful?
  - What kind of additional training do you wish you had?
Appendix B:
Interview Protocol #2
Details of the experience:

Teachers experiences living in the United States:
- Talk about your first year living in the U.S.
  - What were some of the things you noticed when you first arrived about the culture, food, weather, interactions between people, physical environment...etc.
  - Were there people here you could go to and ask for help if you needed it?
  - Looking back, and even now, what support systems do you wish were in place to help you navigate through this first year of living in the U.S.?
- What is the racial demographic of neighborhood you moved into?
  - What lead you to choose this neighborhood?
  - Do you feel comfortable in the neighborhood?
- Do you see your race/ethnicity as shaping your experiences (and interactions with others-- Whites) while living in the U.S.?
  - More specifically, have you experienced racism while living in the U.S.?
  - Do you feel a heightened sense of (or acknowledgement of) your race and ethnicity while living in the U.S.?

Teachers’ experiences in the school/ classroom
- Talk about your first year teaching at the school?
  - What were your experiences like in the first month? Semester? Can you recall a particular event that stands out in this first year?
  - What were the noticeable differences between teaching in your home country and teaching in the US?
  - Can you give a few examples of the challenges you encountered in your initial year of teaching?
  - How did these challenges impact your teaching? How did you learn to overcome these challenges?
  - Were there support groups, or individuals in the school you could comfortably talk to and ask questions?
• Describe a typical teaching day from beginning to end.
  o What do you do first, second....
  o How do you start your lesson...
  o How do you greet students before class/school begins

• How would you describe your interactions and relationships with students in your classroom?
  o Do you understand/see students differently now, than when you first started? Why/ how so?

**Teachers Approaches to teaching now:**

• Do you see a shift in your teaching approach now from when you first began teaching?
• What kinds of changes have you made to your overall approach?
• What influenced you to make these changes?
Appendix C:
Interview Protocol #3
Reflection on the meaning:

Teacher reflections on classroom experiences in the U.S.

- Given the experiences you had teaching in the U.S., how do you see these experiences as shaping your future work as an educator.

- What lessons have you learned along the way (particularly being in the U.S.) about the best ways to teach your students in your school?

- What skills, pedagogical approaches, and attitudes (about students) do you think an effective teacher needs to have in your teaching environment?
  - How have you come to learn what these are?
  - How do you employ these in your own teaching?

- What factors, do you see as influencing and shaping who you are as a teacher today?
  - In particular, how do you see your gender as shaping how you approach teaching your students?

  - How do you see your ethnicity/place of birth/prior experiences teaching as shaping your practice and approach to teaching?
Appendix D:
Teacher Consent Form

Study Title: Afro-Caribbean Woman Teachers Recruited for U.S. Urban Schools: A Narrative Analysis of Experience, Change, and Perception

Principal Investigator: Makini Beck

This consent form briefly describes a research study and what you can expect if you decide to participate. You are encouraged to read this consent form carefully and ask the principle investigator any further questions you may have before making your final decision. This study will be conducted by Makini Walker Sharpe, doctoral student at the University of Rochester’s Warner Graduate School of Education and Human Development. You are being invited to participate in this study because we feel you can provide valuable insights and information into our research study.

Purpose of the Study:
The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Afro-Caribbean women international teachers who have been recruited to teach in American urban schools. I am particularly interested in looking at your experiences, teaching approaches, challenges, and transitions you made as you navigated through your initial years of teaching racial minority students in these urban school settings. You are eligible to participate in this study if (a) you are a female teacher recruited from the commonwealth Caribbean/ English speaking Caribbean, and (b) have had previous experience teaching in your home country.

Description of Study Procedures:
If you decide to participate in this study you will be asked to allow the researcher to observe in your classroom for an entire school day (one to three times), over a period of two months, and will participate in a series of three interviews. Each interview will range between 60-90 minuets. Some of these interviews will be focused on attaining a brief biography as it relates to your experiences living in the US and the ways in which you see these experiences as impacting your teaching.

Number of Subjects:
At this time, the number of participants in this study is unknown.

Risks of Participation:
Since this is a “minimal risk” study, research subjects will face minimal risk of any physical or emotional harm during their participation in this study.

Benefits of Participation:
I hope that through this study, other educators will learn from your experiences and stories. In particular, it is my hope that your narratives can inform teacher training for other international teachers, provide insight to those who chose to teach in urban school settings, and learn the tools to needed to successfully navigate through one’s initial years of teaching.

Confidentiality of Records:
While I will make every effort to maintain confidentiality, it cannot be absolutely guaranteed. Records which identify you (this may include your interview transcripts) and the consent form signed by you, may be inspected by the University of Rochester. The results of this research study may also be presented at meetings or in publications. In these situations, your name will be kept private.

**Contact Persons**
For more information concerning this research, please contact: Makini Walker Sharpe at 585–760-9805 or by email at mwalkersharpe@gmail.com.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Human Subjects Protection Specialist at the University of Rochester Research Subjects Review Board, Box 315, 601 Elmwood Avenue, Rochester, NY 14642-8315, Telephone (585) 276-0005, for long-distance you may call toll-free, (877) 449-4441.

**Voluntary Participation**
Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free not to participate or to withdraw at any time, for whatever reason, without risking loss of present or future care you would otherwise expect to receive. In the event that you do withdraw from this study, the information you have already provided will be kept in a confidential manner.

**Signature/Dates**
Subject Consent
I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I agree to participate in this study. I have received (or will receive) a signed copy of this form for my records and future reference.

Study Subject: ____________________________ Print Name

Study Subject: ____________________________ Signature

____________________ Date

**Person Obtaining Consent**
I have read this form to the subject and/or the subject has read this form. I will provide the [Insert as appropriate: subject or parent/guardian] with a signed copy of this consent form. An explanation of the research was given and questions from the [Insert as appropriate: subject or parent/guardian] were solicited and answered to the [Insert as appropriate: subject or parent/guardian] satisfaction. In my judgment, the [Insert as appropriate: subject or parent/guardian] has demonstrated comprehension of the information.

__________________________ Print Name and Title

__________________________ Signature

____________________ Date
Appendix E:
Participant Demographic Form

Name ___________________________________

Telephone (day time) ________________________ (evening)

Please indicate when is the best time to call?

Email ________________________________

School Information:

School Name ______________________________

School District ______________________________

School Address _____________________________
What grade(s) do you teach ____________________________

Subject Area ____________________________

Total number of students in your class(es) _________________

Student demographic racial and ethnic make up in the school/ your classroom?
(estimated percentages are okay) ____________________________

Would you prefer a pseudonym be used in this research study? (Yes)____
(No) _____

If yes, please indicate a preferred name you would like to use

_____________________

Teacher Information:
Country recruited from ____________________________

How many years have you been a teacher _______________________

How many years have you been teaching in the US (please include current the year)

Have you taken courses at the under graduate or graduate level in the US? If so,
please indicate the name of the college/ university you attended

____________________