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Teachers' Perceptions of Symbolic Violence in School Curriculum

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Approval Page

This applied dissertation was submitted by Nahum Jean-Louis under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

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Statement of Original Work

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Abstract

Teachers' Perceptions of Symbolic Violence in School Curriculum. Nahum Jean-Louis, 2022: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. Keywords: Symbolic violence, curriculum relevance, cultural biases, teacher's professional discretion, Eurocentrism

The study explores symbolic violence (SV) in school curriculum as a phenomenon that has historically been a problem for Black students in schools around the United States. Defined by Bourdieu as the legitimization of cultural and social domination of the working-class by the dominant elite, SV is expressed in curriculum through various forms, including racial and cultural exclusion of Black students from the curriculum.

The literature review explored research conducted over the past few decades that address various aspects of SV and how they manifest in school curriculum. More specifically, an important segment of the literature review has focused on the extent to which SV has permeated the curriculum and how it has played a role in impeding Black students' academic success.

Using Bourdieu's theory of practice and the critical race theory as the guiding theoretical frameworks, I investigated and analyzed the phenomenon through its characteristics and various manifestations. In total, seven teachers were interviewed for the study. The data were then coded and organized by themes.

The data revealed that teachers believe that SV permeates Florida school curriculum and contributes to undermine Black students' academic success. Additionally, the data demonstrated that beyond the curriculum, SV also permeates the testing system and the schools' textbooks. Finally, the data revealed how teachers use their discretion to help students cope with these challenges.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Since the early days of public education in the United States, Eurocentrism has played a central role in shaping school curriculum (Asante, 2012; Mulder, 2016). From the selection of the content from which students learn to the method of instruction in the classroom, the Eurocentric influence on the curriculum has been ubiquitous and pivotal in producing and normalizing a type of knowledge that extols European history and cultural traditions while sidelining other cultures as secondary (McKnight & Chandler, 2012;). As McKnight and Chandler (2012) argued, "Modern U.S. school curriculum mutes and erases the stories of people of color" (p. 80). Villenas et al. (1999), further noted that, "schooling and "colonial education" are the greatest normalizer of White supremacy" (Villenas et al., 1999, p. 48). By marginalizing other cultures, the proponents of the Eurocentric approach help to promote a curriculum that limits democratic education as advocated by Dewey (1916). In the process, they also help perpetuate social and racial inequality that has characterized the U.S. school system for centuries (Aronowitz, 2016; Collins, 2009; Saltman, 2014). Although the Eurocentric view of knowledge has historically been an integral part of the curriculum, it has been revitalized in recent decades following the works of cultural conservatives such as Bennett (1993, 1997), Hirsch (1987), and Bloom (1987) who have advocated for the application in the curriculum of a *common core knowledge* inspired from the Western canon (Saltman, 2014, p. xxiii). Hirsch (1987) illustrated this narrow view of knowledge in his book where he published a list of 5,000 names, events, and concepts that he thinks "every American needs to know" (Hirsch, 1988). Bloom (1987) took a similar stance in his book in which he lamented what he considered as the devaluation of Western thought in

education. As a solution, he proposed a curriculum based on the great books inspired by Western culture and tradition (Bloom, 1987). The dismissal of Black students' culture, history, and experiences in the curriculum and their subjugation to learn from curricula that do not reflect their way of life (Balfanz et al., 2014; Brathwaite, 2017; Castenell & Pinar, 1993; Mulder, 2016; Pinar et al., 1995), is rightly characterized by the French sociologist Bourdieu (1991) as *symbolic violence*, which constitutes practices that legitimize the cultural and social domination of the working-class members by the dominant elites (Bourdieu, 1991). Writing specifically on the characteristics of the educational system, Bourdieu and Passeron (2000) explained:

> Every institutionalized educational systems (ES) owes the specific characteristics of its structure and functioning to the fact that, by the means proper to the institution, it has to produce and reproduce institutional conditions whose existence and persistence (self-reproduction of the system) are necessary both to the exercise of its essential function of inculcation and to the fulfillment of its function of reproducing a cultural arbitrary which it does not produce (cultural reproduction), the reproduction of which contributes to the reproduction of the relations between the groups or classes (social reproduction). (p. 54)

Often misrecognized, these practices aim at mollifying the individual to the point that he/she unconsciously accepts his/her inferior position in the social hierarchy. As Bourdieu characterized symbolic violence, the misrecognition and the legitimization of certain practices play an essential role in securing the victim’s compliance in his/her subordinate role (Bourdieu, 1991). Summarizing this practice, Banks (1991) wrote that “School and societal knowledge that present[s]issues, events, and concepts primarily

from the perspectives of dominant groups tends to justify the status quo, rationalize racial and gender inequality, and to make students content with the status quo" (p. 128). He further emphasized that "An important latent function of such knowledge is to convince students that the current social, political, and economic institutions are just and that substantial change within society is neither justified nor required" (p. 125). Despite being praised by cultural conservatives as academically beneficial to all students (Saltman, 2014, p. xxiii), growing evidence has shown that the application of the Western canon in the curriculum has carried significant negative effects on Black students' ability to learn and to succeed academically (Bujorean, 2014; Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008; Taggart 2017; Torres, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

Symbolic violence has been a problem that Black students have had to face during their experience in schools in the United States. From their prohibition in the education system, to wholesale segregationist policies they have had to endure for decades, symbolic violence has been an integrant part of Black students' experiences in the school system (Du Bois, 1935; King, 2017; King et al., 2012; Noltemeyer et al., 2012; Reddick, 1934; Woodson, 1933). However, while less visible and more subtle than these forms of violence, symbolic violence in the curriculum has nonetheless been one of the most potent and enduring problems that continues to negatively impact Black students' performance (Bourdieu 1977, 1992; Bujorean, 2014; Connolly & Healy, 2004; Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016). As Bujorean (2014) argued, this subtlety resides in

> The shift from direct and obvious physical violence to subtler forms in the shape of a symbolic type of violence, located within the values promoted, the type of

> relationships within the school environment and the imposition of certain models of behaviour. (p. 634)

The long-lasting effects of such practices on Black students' academic performance and their future careers often linger beyond the years they spend in the school system (Baker, 2005). Subjected to learn from a Eurocentric curriculum in which their culture, history, and experiences are excluded, Black students face the daily challenges to succeed in a school environment that barely relates to their culture (Bujorean, 2014, Woodson, 1933). Woodson (1933) noted that "Minority students are required to learn the culture of the dominant group to succeed, but their own experiences are often excluded from the academic discourse, which can make their learning experience alienating" (as cited in Wiggan, 2007, p. 318).

Since the 1954 Supreme Court's landmark decision *Brown v. Board of Education*, measures have been put in place to curb the effects of symbolic violence in schools. Among these measures are, school desegregation, affirmative action, and the Higher Education Amendments of 1972. However, since the 1980s, there has been significant scale back on the progress made during the previous years. Studies conducted over the past few decades have shown that numerous practices associated with the standards-based reforms such as testing have created conditions for more inequities both in school's environment and in the curriculum (Brathwaite, 2017; Conn & Tenam-Zemach, 2019; Jia et al., 2016; Lomax et al., 2015). Initiated on the promise to improve student achievement, an increased amount of data collected over 30 years have shown that the reforms have not been equitable, and that they adversely impact Black students' achievement in some circumstances (Balfanz et al., 2014; Brathwaite, 2017, Hargreaves

& Skerrett, 2008; Madaus & Clarke, 2001; Murnane, 2013). As a result, Black students continue to be the victims of widespread symbolic violence. Although unofficial, schools continue to be segregated along racial lines, and practices such as tracking and low teacher expectations of minority students continue to be the hallmark of U.S. schools. As remarks Nettles et al. (1994) remarked, "The progress made is eclipsed by the magnitude of the remaining problems and the challenges that are emerging with a changing demography" (p. 3).

Phenomenon of Interest

This study investigated teachers' perceptions of symbolic violence in school curriculum. Defined by Bourdieu (1991) as the legitimization of cultural and social domination of the working-class by the dominant elite, symbolic violence is expressed in curriculum through various forms, including racial and cultural exclusion of Black students from curricular content they are required to learn. Since the term was first coined by Pierre Bourdieu in the 1970s, numerous studies have investigated symbolic violence in schools from a wide variety of perspectives (Bourdieu 1971, 1991; Brar, 2017; Bujorean, 2014; Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016). However, how it is manifested in school curriculum, and how teachers perceive it has never been fully explored. This study shed a light on the phenomenon from the vantage point of teachers as figures who often play a two-dimensional role in the classroom as public intellectuals who influence knowledge and as witnesses of students' struggles both academically and personally. As public intellectuals, Giroux (1994) argued that,

> Teachers need to provide the conditions for students to learn that the relationship between knowledge and power can be emancipatory, that their histories and

> experiences matter, and that what they say and do can count as part of a wider struggle to change the world around them. (p. 44)

Teachers also play a significant role in the shaping of students' meaning makings in the classroom through the lessons they choose to articulate from the curriculum. Saltman (2014) noted that "When they choose a curriculum, plan lessons, and teach, teachers are responsible for what meanings they make in the classroom" (p. 4). More importantly, in addition to their role as public intellectuals, teachers also bear witness to events that transpire in the classroom (Berlak, 1999; Felman & Laub, 1992; Hansen, 2017; Rattansi, 1992). They witness the daily challenges Black students face to cope with the effects of symbolic violence both personally and academically. Berlak (1999) remarked that "Bearing witness interrupts the ongoing process of forgetting" (p. 107). From this perspective, capturing teachers' perceptions of symbolic violence though their teachings and their lived experiences in the classroom will go a long way in helping both understand the phenomenon and delegitimize the practices that have been historically associated with it.

Research Problem

Symbolic violence in school curriculum has historically been a problem for Black students in schools around the United States. From early dropout to low academic performance, the effects of symbolic violence on Black students have been wide ranging (Brar 2017; Bujorean, 2014; Waters, 2017). As numerous studies conducted over the past few decades have shown, the heavy emphasis on a Eurocentric vision of the curricula, coupled with pervasive inequities in schools, have led to the alienation of Black students and have created an inclination to accept failure as an inevitable outcome (Baker, 2005;

Brar 2017; Bujorean, 2014; Taggart 2017; Torres, 2017). Baker (2005) noted that "Schooling covertly presents African American children with a disposition to undermine their desire to succeed, reinforce[s] low self-esteem, and emphasize[s] the credence of failure" (p. 244). Further studies have suggested that symbolic violence also contributes to students' lack of engagement, poor attendance, and academic failure (Aaron, 2010; Waters, 2017). Both at the individual and societal levels, academic failure can carry significant consequences, including low employment and high incarceration (Blomberg et al., 2012; Henry et al., 2011; Hyman et al., 2011; Lumby, 2012). As a result, Black students face the prospect of decreasing earning potential due to unemployment and a higher rate of incarceration compared to other ethnic groups (Bloomberg et al. 2012; Doll 2013; Ferra, 2015). In a 2019 study conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the data suggest strong correlations between high school dropout rates and unemployment. The study noted a gap of nearly 20% between those who graduated high school and those who did not have their diploma (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Consequently, the poverty rate among high school dropouts is 25.9% compared to only 12.7% for those with a bachelor's degree (Statista, 2020). Unless there is a solution, the problem of symbolic violence and its toll on Black students' lives may persist for years to come. In this regard, there has been in recent years a growing consensus among researchers about the need to integrate teachers as part of the initiatives to fix this problem (Borrero et al., 2018; Kumashiro, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2014). For too long teachers have been removed from debates and policy decisions pertaining to school policy reforms. As Borrero et al. (2018), remarked "teachers have historically been removed from national policy and debates about education reform, and because current trends towards

standardization and testing are stripping teachers of their agency and ingenuity" (p. 22). Despite the efforts in recent years that seek to move away from teachers' agency in the classroom (Borrero et al., 2018; Kohli, 2012; Kumashiro, 2012), their role nevertheless remains indispensable as agent of change and facilitator of learning whose partnership with students is essential in the construction of an equitable knowledge. Ladson-Billings' prolific works on the topic provide much insight into the potential role teachers can play to bring about changes in the lives of students (Ladson-Billings, 2014). She identified three main areas in which teachers can play a positive role: academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness. As one of the most important aspects in a student education, she characterized academic success as an intellectual growth that derives from positive learning experiences that the student enjoys in the classroom. Another important pillar in students' education is the development of cultural competence which provides them with the opportunity to learn and embrace their own culture while also learning from other cultures. Finally, she identified cultural consciousness as the ability for students to develop critical thinking skills which allow them to analyze and solve real-life problems (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 75). Ladson-Billings (2014) and numerous like-minded writers' perspectives help us understand that far from being mere transmitters of a fixed and unchallenged knowledge, teachers have also the capacity to influence the curriculum in a way that could bring positive changes in the lives of every student, especially Black students whose culture, history, and experiences have been excluded. The teachers' perceptions and understanding are therefore essential to understand how the phenomenon of symbolic violence in the curriculum works and what role it plays in Black students' academic performance. Such

perspectives can provide useful guidance to both education practitioners and policy makers as to how to address the issues related to the problem of symbolic violence in the curriculum. In this regard, the results of this qualitative investigation will help bridge the gap on the topic by highlighting the teachers' perceptions on symbolic violence against Black students in the curriculum. I hope that will help raise the level of awareness of the problem and possibly elicit curriculum changes that could help Black students achieve success both in school and in their personal lives.

Background and Justification

In the past few decades, symbolic violence in school curricula has been the subject of numerous studies (Bourdieu, 1991; Brar, 2017; Bujorean, 2014; Saltman, 2014). Addressing the topic from different viewpoints, researchers have focused on its effects on a wide array of phenomena, ranging from students' aspirations, academic performance, self-esteem, to school dropouts etc. (Brar, 2017; Bujorean, 2014; Nairz-Wirth et al., 2017; Samuel, 2013; Waters, 2017). Using an ethnographic case study of two groups of 10-11-year-old boys living in Belfast, Connolly and Healy (2004), for example, have demonstrated how symbolic violence has contributed to the reproduction of lower-class students' subordinate position in academic and career aspirations (p. 28). Waters (2017) argued that symbolic violence can be embedded in "school rules, structures, relationships and cultural practices" in such a way that it ends up "marginalizing some young people from full participation in education" (p. 27). He further added that, "students from low socioeconomic backgrounds often disengage from education because of their perceived failure as students" (p. 27). Nairz-Wirth et al.'s (2017) study on the effects of symbolic violence on lower economic status students

confirms Waters' argument. They asserted that "Many working-class students or other non-traditional students never even contemplate entering the field of higher education" p. 13).

Deficiencies in the Evidence

While symbolic violence in schools and curricula has been studied from a wide array of views (Bujorean, 2014; Carpenter & Ramirez, 2007; Madaus & Clarke, 2001; Nairz-Wirth et al., 2017; Rumberger, 1983; Rumberger & Lamb, 2003), how teachers perceive the phenomenon has never been fully investigated. As individuals who spend considerable amount of time with students in the classroom implementing the curriculum, teachers' accounts and perspectives are essential to understand symbolic violence as a phenomenon that continues to negatively affect Black students. Such perspectives are similarly important in devising professional development that can help teachers better understand their students, their culture, and their aspirations. As Alismail (2016) argued, "teachers' perspectives towards multiculturalism can change, and through the acceptance of their students' diversity, they may also feel confident and encouraged to incorporate more multicultural experiences into their classrooms" (p. 139). In addition to the teachers' perceptions gap in the literature, a significant number of studies that have addressed symbolic violence related issues have used quantitative approach (Connolly & Healy, 2004; Goldstein, 2005; Herr & Henderson, 2010; Toshalis, 2013). This qualitative investigation provides the rare opportunity to study the issue from the perspective of teachers as figures who spend considerable amount of time teaching Black students and witness their everyday plight with symbolic violence.

Audience

By investigating teachers' perceptions of symbolic violence in school curricula, school administrators and policy makers will have an opportunity to examine the issue from a perspective that has not been addressed previously. Such a fresh look at the issue has the potential to bring a new understanding of the problem and possibly could lead to viable solutions to fix it. But most importantly, minority students stand to be the potential beneficiary of the study, as the phenomenon affects both their academic performance and their future professional life.

Definition of Terms

Symbolic Violence

Rooted in his theory of practice, Bourdieu (1991), explained that symbolic violence is the legitimization of cultural and social domination of the working-class through daily social habits that render an individual to unconsciously accept his/her inferior position in the social hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1991). He further argued that the concept of symbolic violence,

> Presupposes on the part of those who are subjected to it a form of complicity which is neither a passive submission to an external constraint nor a free adherence to values ... The specificity of symbolic violence resides precisely in the fact that it requires of the person who undergoes it an attitude which defies the ordinary alternative between freedom and constraint. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 168).

Capital

Bourdieu defined three types of capital: economic, social, and cultural (1977,

1984, 1986, 1993, and 2011). According to Bourdieu, the economic capital refers to as the sum of any material asset an individual possesses that varies from real estate, automobile, jewelry, to clothing which may be readily converted into cash. In practice, economic capital functions to enable an individual to acquire not only material possessions, but also to buy connections that are susceptible to protect his/her interests. Social capital on the other hand refers to any asset that an individual possesses, including relationships and social networks (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1986, 1993, 2011). While economic capital is materially visible, social capital is more subtle and functions to reinforce the dominant power relations of the elite and maintain its privileges through circles of enduring connections and acquaintances. Bourdieu described cultural capital as "long lasting dispositions of the mind and body in the form of cultural goods" (Bourdieu, 2011, p. 84). Cultural capital ranges from beliefs, values, tastes, to behaviors that an individual exhibits. Cultural capital can be embodied, objectified, or institutionalized. According to Bourdieu, cultural capital is embodied when it reflects long lasting "dispositions of the mind and body" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243). Language, attitudes, and behaviors are all expressions of embodied cultural capital that persist throughout an individual's life. On the other hand, Bourdieu described objectified capital as "cultural goods such as pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc." (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243). Finally, Bourdieu referred to institutionalized capital as anything that is "sanctioned by legally guaranteed qualifications," which "confer on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value" (Bourdieu, 2011, p. 88). These three forms of capital function to enable an individual who possesses the power to decide on a wide range of issues or domains that can potentially impact other people's lives. It must

be noted, however, that every individual possesses a form of capital of one form or another. However, how this capital is evaluated is determined by the dominant group that has the power to define how such capital is valued. In school specifically, each student brings with them a form of capital. But the value of this capital will be evaluated by teachers whose socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds may not match those of the students. As such, he/she may not appreciate it as important. Citing Swartz (1997), Brar wrote,

> The curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation structures of schools are aligned with the cultural ideals of the dominant social group (Swartz, 1997). This inequitable situation leads to a scenario in which the children of the lower class cannot be successful in school because they are thrust into a school system that does not understand them and that they do not understand. (Brar, 2017, p. 26)

Habitus

Bourdieu (1992), referred to "habitus" as the "cumulative collection of dispositions, norms and tastes," which "functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions" (p. 82). Citing Bourdieu, Thapar-Björkert et al. (2016) wrote, "Symbolic violence is produced, reproduced, and deemed legitimate through 'schemes' that are 'immanent in everyone's habitus" (p. 145).

Field

Finally, Bourdieu (1992) used the term *field* to describe "a separate social universe having its own laws of functioning independent of those of politics and the economy," and "autonomous universe is endowed with specific principles of evaluation of practices and works" (p. 162).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of symbolic violence in the curriculum at urban high schools in South Florida. Coined by Pierre Bourdieu in the 1970s as a key concept of his theory of practice, symbolic violence denotes a disposition of working-class students to readily accept their lower social status as ascribed to them by the dominant elites (Bourdieu, 1971). More specifically, Bourdieu explained that symbolic violence is the legitimization of cultural and social domination of the working-class through daily social habits that render an individual to unconsciously accept his/her inferior position in the social hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1991). Expanding on Bourdieu's explanation, Saltman (2014) argued that symbolic violence is the "devaluation of one's culture, knowledge, language, tastes, and dispositions. In a context of symbolic violence, a working-class student may learn to judge herself as inferior, lazy, and undeserving of social rewards" (Saltman 2014, p. 125).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The amount of literature on symbolic violence in schools has substantially grown since the term was first used by Pierre Bourdieu in the 1970s (Bourdieu, 1977). Subsequently, the widespread use of the term *symbolic violence* in the literature of education in recent decades has been critical in the understanding of a wide array of phenomena ranging from academic underachievement among Black students, to issues of racism and inequities in schools across the United States and in numerous industrial countries (Anderson, 2013; Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1986, 1991, 1992; Connolly & Healy, 2005; Nairz-Wirth et al., 2017). As a key concept of his *Theory of Practice,* Bourdieu explained that symbolic violence is "the process whereby power relations are perceived not for what they objectively are but in a form which renders them legitimate in the eyes of the beholder" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. xxii). He further argued that symbolic violence is the legitimization of cultural and social domination of working-class members by the dominant elites through daily social habits that surreptitiously force its victims in a position to unconsciously accept their inferior status in the social hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1991). Often imbedded in misrecognized power relations, Bourdieu asserted that symbolic violence is "violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 167). The misrecognition of the power relations that are at play has the effect to legitimize the practices of symbolic violence without being questioned by its victims. Grenfell and James (1998) appropriately summarized this effect:

Misrecognition operates in the education system, through an arbitrary curriculum

> that is ‘naturalized’ so that social classifications are transformed into academic ones. The result is that instead of being experienced for what they are (i.e. partial and technical hierarchies), such social classifications become ‘total’ hierarchies, experienced as if they were grounded in nature. (Grenfell & James, 1998, pp. 23–24)

Thapar-Björkert et al. (2016), argued that,

> Domination that arises from symbolic violence is less a product of direct coercion, and more a product of when those who are dominated stop questioning existing power relations, as they perceive the world and the state of affairs in a social activity as natural, a given and unchangeable. (p. 148)

This explains both the pervasiveness and the persistence of symbolic violence as a phenomenon that has historically manifested in school curriculum against Black students in various forms. Brar (2017), remarked that symbolic violence “functions largely within various forms of discrimination, which are often accepted as legitimate without question by the victim(s)” (p. 25).

Manifestations of Symbolic Violence in School Curriculum

Although symbolic violence against Black students has historically been a constant fixture in U.S. schools, the question of how specifically it is expressed in curriculum began to catch researchers’ attention only during the first third of the last century (Du Bois, 1935; Reddick, 1934; Woodson, 1933). To a large extent, the failure to document the phenomenon has persisted for so long because race and racism as expressions of symbolic violence have been omitted for decades both in curriculum studies and in school curriculum. Similarly, this failure exists because historically,

symbolic violence has been legitimized through unsuspected curricular practices that have been hardly questioned by scholars, Black students, as well as the Black community at large (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992; Brar 2017; Grenfell & James, 1998; Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016). It is in essence the ideal characterization of symbolic violence as described by Bourdieu, which is precisely a violence that is normalized through regular practices and exercised with the complicity of the victim (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 167). The initial inquiry on symbolic violence against Black students by Black scholars such as Woodson (1933), Reddick (1934), and Du Bois (1935) continues to inspire scholars to investigate the phenomenon as it is manifested in school curriculum on various forms ranging from racism to cultural exclusion of Black students (Bourdieu, 1971, 1991, 1992; Brar 2017; Bujorean, 2014; Saltman 2014). Particularly, a large body of the literature on the topic has focused on racial and cultural biases as two critical issues that have historically pervaded the school environment in the United States (Asante, 2012; Chapman, 2013; Demoiny, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Martell, 2018; Pinar et al., 1995). More specifically, researchers have been investigating the extent to which symbolic violence has permeated the curriculum and how it has played a role in impeding Black students' academic success (Baker, 2005; Murphy & Hallinger, 1989; Walsemann & Bell, 2010).

Biases in School Curriculum

Racial Biases

As a social construct that has continuously evolved across times and spaces, racism or its manifestations as biases in school curriculum must be understood as an expression of symbolic violence that reflects larger sociopolitical and economic dynamics

that are at play in society (Saltman, 2014). These forces ensure the perpetuation of racism in society by shaping the discourse around the concept and by assigning its social functions and economic serviceability. Without these forces that provide vital context to the concept, it would be devoid of its fundamental meanings which are channeled through constructs such as beauty, superiority, and intelligence (Bourdieu, 1977). In this regard, the role of the school is critical in articulating racism and its meanings in the curriculum. In so doing, it also helps to fulfill the elite's primary goal of maintaining its socioeconomic status (Bourdieu; Chapman, 2013; Saltman, 2014). Chapman (2013) remarked that "The school curriculum, in its broader sense, becomes the tool for further marginalization and maintenance of the status quo, rather than a tool of empowerment and social change" (p. 617). Viewed from this standpoint, a full understanding of racism and its different manifestations as biases in school curriculum requires an analysis of the phenomenon both at a theoretical level and a practical level.

Theoretically, racial biases in school curriculum should be analyzed in the context of the history and evolution of curriculum studies as a field that has traditionally informed both the practice of curriculum making and teaching in general (Pinar et al. 1995). Although the issue of race in curriculum has become in recent years one of the most debated topics in the education literature, its reference has for the most part been ignored in curriculum studies during the better part of the 20th century (Brown, & Au, 2014; Heilig et al., 2012; King et al. 201). As Pinar et al. (1995) pointed out, "Before the reconceptualization of the curriculum field in the 1970s, race was regarded as marginal to the effort to develop curriculum" (p. 317). They further noted, that "Any comprehensive theory of curriculum must include race and its concepts - such as multiculturalism,

identity, marginality, and difference - as fundamental" (p. 319). Early voices such as Reddick (1934), Du Bois (1935), and Woodson (1933), who started to raise concerns about racial inequity in the curriculum, were largely muffled by the Eurocentric trend in curriculum studies which was and still dominated by White males of European descents (Brown, & Au, 2014; Fallace, 2012). Fallace (2012; Shubert, 2010) argued that even progressive scholars like Dewey shared the dominant culture's views that both African American and Native Americans were "socially, culturally, and ethnically disadvantaged and deficient" (p. 38). As Shubert (2010) noted, "critical and contextual curriculum scholarship have clearly revealed this bias in the literature" (p. 61).

The renewed centrality of the topic in the literature is due both to the growing diversity of the student body in schools around the United States, and the increased awareness among scholars and educators alike of the gross racial disparities that continue to plague school curriculum (Pinar et al., 1995). As the student body becomes more diversified over the years, the acuity of concerns regarding racial inequities in the curriculum becomes more pressing both at the academic and policy levels. Stressing the importance of raising awareness of racial inequalities in the curriculum, Pinar et al. (1995), remarked that "Making the dynamics of racism visible is one essential function of scholarly efforts to understand curriculum as a racial text" (p. 337). Crichlow's (1990) made a similar remark when he noted that,

> Our collective efforts to contextualize racism and social and structural oppressions of all kinds begin with interrogating how these forms of oppression are already inscribed in prevailing modes of representing truth and knowledge in textbooks, policy and teaching, and in the curriculum and the wider culture. (as

cited in Pinar et al., 1995, p. 337)

The issue becomes even more critical given the growing evidence that racial biases in the curriculum are impeding the chance for Black students to succeed academically (Banks, 2003; Gay, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2014; McCarthy, 1988; Pinar et al., 1995).

On a practical level, racial biases in school curriculum should be viewed and analyzed as an integrant part of a system in which knowledge is used by the dominant class to reproduce its socioeconomic status (Saltman, 2014). It is through the curriculum, which gives shape to the type of knowledge that is valued and prioritized in society, that the dominant elite has historically been able to impose its definition on constructs such as race, gender, class, and beauty. Far from being an academic exercise, this effort aims to maintain control over the discourse and imagery that these constructed concepts convey to Black students and to society at large. By hammering out the negative messages that Black students are inferior, lazy, less attractive, the dominant elite has achieved to maintain its control over lower class students in their subordinate positions both as pupils and future members of the labor force (Bourdieu, 1971; Saltman, 2014). As Saltman judiciously noted, "knowledge represents the interests and ideological perspectives of particular classes and cultural groups and the extent to which knowledge and schooling itself are struggled over to win cultural dominance and claim universality" (p. xxi). Saltman further remarked that "In a context of symbolic violence, a working-class student may learn to judge herself as inferior, lazy, and undeserving of social rewards" (p. 125). To this effect, various strategies have been used by the dominant elite to reach that goal, including subjecting Black students to learn from a Eurocentric curriculum in which crucial curricular elements such as their history, culture, and experiences are

noticeably absent (Castenell & Pinar, 1993; McCarthy, 1988; Pinar et al., 1995;). As Castenell (1990) wrote, the "Eurocentric" character of school curriculum functions to deny "role models" to non-European-American students, understanding to "White" students as well" (Castenell, 1990 as cited in Pinar et al., 1995, p. 328). Mulder (2016) described Eurocentrism as "a pervasive ideology that sneaks into every aspect of life, attempting to erase the diverse histories of peoples" (p. 1). She further argued that,

> The curriculum is Eurocentric at the expense of other knowledges and the implicit class dynamics in education perpetuate an unequal socioeconomic hierarchy with limited chances of upward mobility for the many while privileging the few from the higher social classes. (p.17)

Mulder's claim has been previously argued by numerous scholars who asserted that the exclusion of Black perspectives in the curriculum is equivalent to racism (Asante, 2012; Castenell & Pinar 1993; Pinar et al., 1995). Castenell and Pinar (1993) characterized this absence as a "willful ignorance and aggression toward Blacks" (p. 1). They further remarked that "The absence of African American knowledge in many American schools' curriculum is not simple oversight. Its absence represents an academic instance of racism" (p. 325). Asante (2012) went a step further to note that, "Eurocentrism is not simply racism; it is a superstructure that seeks to impose European consciousness onto other people's consciousness" (p. 38).

The absence of Black perspectives in the curriculum has been the subject of a case study conducted by Martell (2018), in which he addressed how race is taught in U.S. history high schools. The author revealed that, "U.S. history classrooms often lack a substantial discussion of cultural perspectives of the past and how race has been used to

perpetuate social inequity" (p. 63). Furthermore, he suggested that this absence of race-related discussions in the classrooms results from teachers who often view the topic as "controversial" and therefore skip it in favor of more mainstream oriented content which offer predominantly White perspectives. Primarily focused on three teachers who used culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) to teach their students about race and inequity in their U.S. history courses, the author, however, demonstrated that when race is integrated as part of the teaching, both Black and White students' academic outcomes improve significantly. Similarly, the author demonstrated evidence of a significant increase regarding the level of students' consciousness when the topic of race is discussed in the classroom.

A study conducted by Noboa (2012) on the Texas standards provided critical insights regarding the exclusion of important facts about world history. Analyzing the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills curriculum (TEKS), the author shed lights on how these standards have been filled with flagrant omissions and distortions pertaining to historical and cultural facts about Mexico, Latin America, and non-European civilizations. As a tool that guides school officials with regards to textbook selection, teacher training, and high-stake standardized tests, the examination of the TEKS was an important inquiry that provided important insights as to whether these curriculum standards have been inclusive, accurate, and balanced in addressing other non-European civilizations across the world. More importantly, although the TEKS is conceived and primarily applied in Texas schools, numerous states across the United States have been influenced by it (Noboa, 2012). According to the study's findings, there have been numerous instances in which the TEKS curriculum have either excluded or

underrepresented people of color in the United States and other civilizations (p. 59). These cases have been particularly remarkable in the coverage of world history in which the investigation discovered flagrant cases of "biases, exclusions, and distortions" (Noboa, 2018, p. 59). Consequently, the author concluded, among other things, that the TEKS had adopted a Eurocentric approach in its coverage of world history studies. The author furthermore stressed that as a result of these flagrant omissions in the TEKS, students, particularly Mexican American students, who represent more than 45% of the public-school population, will miss the opportunity to learn about important facts such as Third World resistance and revolutions to European imperialism, and the vital support the United States and other Western powers provided to dictatorships in order to keep them in power.

The TEKS' biases and inaccuracies have been so flagrant that they caught the attention of some news outlets. In an article on the controversies, Strauss (2014) reported in the Washington Post that the "Proposed Texas textbooks are inaccurate, biased and politicized" (p.1). Particularly, the article reported numerous inaccuracies in the "American Government textbooks, U.S. and World History textbooks, Religion in World History textbooks, and Religion in World Geography textbooks" (para. 2). Heavily influenced by religious conservatives on the Texas State Board of Education, the article reported a case dated back to 2010 in which there was an attempt to relabel the well-known United States involvement in the slave trade to "Atlantic triangular trade" in the social studies standards.

Goldstein (2020) highlighted how similar events related in social studies textbooks can be shaped differently from one State to another. Investigating eight

textbooks used in California and Texas, Goldstein revealed that while the books cover the same stories, written by the same authors and published by the same publishers, their portrayal of history can vary significantly according to the political views and ideology of policy makers in each State. Most interesting is the coverage of subjects pertaining to race, immigration, gender, sexuality, and the economy. To illustrate her argument, she cited an example of how the publisher McGraw Hill uses a different rationale in each State to explain why Southern Whites resisted reconstruction. While the California version explained that it was because they "did not want African-Americans to have more rights", the Texas edition explained it was because "Reforms cost money, and that meant higher taxes" (p. 10).

Such glaring distortions were also reported by Anderson and Metzger (2011) in a study in which they examined how African Americans are depicted in states standards with regards to their experiences with race and racism during four crucial periods of the country's history: the American Revolution, the early years of the United States as a Republic, the Civil War, and the Reconstruction era. Although the study investigated only four states - Michigan, New Jersey, South Carolina, and Virginia – the authors' findings are nonetheless revealing. They suggested that while the standards amply covered race and racism during these historical periods, their inclusion however lacks depth regarding how slavery as an institution was portrayed. More importantly, they revealed that their inclusion failed to provide students with the opportunity to critically reflect on race and racism during these periods of the country's history.

Investigating the topic from the teachers' perspectives, Demoiny (2017) conducted a qualitative study in which she explored the place elementary preservice

teachers give to race within the social studies curriculum. Similarly, she examined whether pre-service teachers feel prepared to discuss race with their students in social studies lessons. They revealed that often preservice teachers fail to acknowledge the existence of racism in schools and society. The participants' experiences with family and schooling were identified in the study as mainly responsible for the failure to recognize the necessity to address race in the curriculum. It also showed that participants often experience conflicts between their willingness to teach race in social studies and the possibility that such decision may elicit controversy (Demoiny, 2017). They concluded that teacher educators should evaluate their own beliefs about race as they design their methods coursework for elementary pre-service teachers (p. 31).

Cultural Biases

Cultural biases in school curriculum have also been one of the most serious forms of symbolic violence that Black students have to endure during their school experience. Writing on what characterizes the phenomenon, Gilstein (2018) remarked that, "Cultural bias, or ethnocentricity, occurs when an individual interprets the experiences of others through the lens of his or her own cultural experience" (p. 1). She illustrated her point by citing Eurocentrism as an example of cultural bias where European ideas and theories are imposed to other cultures with the goal of creating "a universal view of human behavior" (p. 2). As an expression of symbolic violence, cultural biases are expressed in U.S. schools by submitting Black students to learn from a Eurocentric curriculum in which their culture and history are either rejected or distorted. Growing evidence over the past few decades has indeed demonstrated that the overemphasis on a Eurocentric curriculum has been a major factor contributing to Black students' academic underachievement

(Bujorean, 2014; Cholewa et al., 2008; Taggart 2017; Torres, 2017). As Baker (2005) argued,

> From elementary school to postgraduate studies, something stifles the achievement of African American students at every level of preparation. Clearly, something (i.e. standardized tests, biased textbooks, opposing school and home cultures) contributes to the underachievement when the characteristics for success are present. (p. 247)

Much of the research has focused on the fact that the curriculum is tailored exclusively to reflect White students' cultural backgrounds, while blatantly ignoring Black students' cultural aspirations (Baker, 2005; Boateng, 1990; Pinar et al., 1995). Baker also noted that "Students are usually presented with school programs where their cultural identities are not reinforced, and their personal qualities are labeled as miscues because they don't fit the traditional curriculum" (p. 248). Consequently, Baker argued that "The students that are disempowered by school experiences lack assurance and inspiration" (p. 244). He further remarked that "Three areas that are growing in disempowering African American students are academics, self-esteem issues, and conflict between home and school cultures" (p. 244).

Perhaps no one has captured the phenomenon better than Spring (2001), when he argued that "The dominant culture has used schools as a means to "transmit the culture required for entrance into the (White) middle class" (p. 25). This view was previously shared by Cummins (1985) who argued that the current framework of the school culture is devised to continue its objective of empowering the dominant culture as well as disable the minority cultures in society (Cited in Baker, 2005, p. 253). As McDavis et al. (1995)

appropriately remarked, “African American students want to be understood and accepted without being ignored and rejected because of cultural stereotypes” (p. 250).

Using Bourdieu’s theoretical concept of habitus, Nairz-Wirth et al. (2017) explored in a case study the role habitus plays in non-traditional students’ dropouts in Austria. As defined by Bourdieu (1992) *habitus* refers to the cumulative sum of “dispositions, norms and tastes” that constitutes an individual social-cultural background (p. 82). Illustrating the concept, he wrote, “When habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a “fish in water”: it does not feel the weight of the water, and it takes the world for granted” (p. 127). This illustration explains how students from different social-cultural backgrounds may experience school differently. While students from an elite background may easily fit the existing norms at school, those from the working-class family may feel in a state of constant conflict with these norms.

In the study, Nairz-Wirth et al. (2017) examined how the habitus that non-traditional students carry from family and school background work to make them feel as “cultural outsiders” once they enter university (p. 12). Included in their definition of non-traditional students are student from working-class families who are often minority students or students in paid employment (p. 15). According to the author, the feeling of being culturally out of step with institutional norms and requirements leads non-traditional students to fear of failure in the higher education field. The findings indicated that both ‘Experiences of symbolic violence while in education’ and ‘Willingness to submit to symbolic power structures’ are two serious hurdles that impede non-traditional students’ success in higher education (p. 18). Often perceived to have a lower socioeconomic and cultural status than their privileged classmates, non-traditional

students carry these feelings all the way to higher education. They concluded that an understanding of these students' struggle in higher education requires an understanding of their school experiences with symbolic violence. They further stressed that it is imperative that measures to address social inequality in schools must be considered if the college graduation rate is to improve.

Analyzing the reasons why students across the European Union (EU) dropout from higher education, Quinn (2013) concluded that socio-cultural factors are among the leading factors explaining the phenomenon. The author further noted that students from under-represented groups with poor socioeconomic background are the most at risk to dropout (p. 96). He concluded that in order to remedy the problem, there is a need to address "diversity and equality, as well as to an emphasis on the social and cultural factors that shape drop-out." (p. 95).

Racial Biases in Textbooks

As an immediate auxiliary to curriculum, textbooks have also been one of the most potent tools that have been used to project to society a negative image of Blacks (DuBois, 1935; Ernest, 2004; Reddick, 1934; Woodson, 1933). While Black contributions to society have been mostly ignored in school curricula, school textbooks are replete of stereotypical imagery depicting them in negative terms (King, 2017). As King (2017) appropriately noted, even in cases where Black history and culture are mentioned, it is often a portrayal of negative description of Black communities (King, 2017). Consequently, this imagery has the effects of creating a negative image of Black students about themselves as individuals, their history, and their culture. Swartz (1992) remarked that curriculum shapes thoughts and feelings about "self and about one's own

and others' cultures (Swartz, 1992, p. 85, as cited in Pinar et al., 1995). Although the topic of biases in textbooks has received renewed attention in the literature in recent years, the topic however is hardly new for Black scholars who started to write about the issue since the beginning of the last century. In this regard, Woodson (1933) has been one of the earliest writers who devoted a large part of his writings on the topic. He wrote that "The thought of the inferiority of the Negro is drilled into him in almost every class he enters and in almost every book he studies" (p. 2). Lamenting on how poorly Black people have been portrayed in textbooks, Reddick (1934), noted that Black people are often portrayed as "docile, uncivilized, and lazy" (Reddick, 1934, p. 233). To illustrate his point, Reddick (1934) cited Tryon and Lingley's 1927 book *The American People and Nation* in which they stereotypically depicted Blacks as individuals who "liked to sing, dance, crack jokes, and laugh; admired bright colors, never in a hurry, and [were] always ready to let things go until the morrow" (as cited in Reddick 1934, p. 233).

The omission of race in textbooks has been the subject of a comparative examination conducted by King et al. (2012) in which they analyzed the differences between African American and White progressive scholars as to how they both address curricular issues in their writings during the first quarter of the last century. Comparing two separate social studies and history textbooks written by Rugg, a White scholar and Woodson, a Black scholar, they noted striking differences between the two authors' coverage of the narratives regarding African American during key historical periods in U.S. history such as the Reconstruction era. While the former paid scant attention to this painful period for African Americans, the latter described in detail how the Black community lived these experiences and how they have been stigmatized by them.

According to King et al. (2012), despite the impressive size of Rugg's works which highlighted important social issues such as immigration, his textbooks reflected largely the stereotypical portrayal of African Americans in mainstream textbooks in which they are often characterized as helpless and naïve. More importantly, the authors remarked that Rugg's textbooks failed to address the egregious racial atrocities that were perpetrated on African Americans such as lynching and race riots during the reconstruction era. Lastly, King et al. (2012) noted that Rugg also failed to describe the significance of African Americans' contributions to global history.

Strikingly different however, is how Woodson's textbooks sought to dispel the negative characterizations of African Americans in school curriculum. Rooted in this effort is his belief that knowledge about Black history would help eliminate racist thoughts that have become so engrained in both Whites' and Blacks' psyches (p. 362). According to King et al. (2012), Woodson stressed in his most famous book, *The Miseducation of the Negro*, the necessity to rid the curriculum of its content that are replete with negativities about African Americans. Woodson further emphasized the danger that the internalization of such stereotypical racial schema can elicit in Whites against African Americans (p. 362).

The negative depiction of Blacks in K-12 books has also been the subject of a study conducted by Brown and Brown (2010), who investigated how racial violence against Blacks has been minimized and often distorted in these textbooks. According to the study's findings, while textbooks used in elementary level and middle school level social studies often present detailed accounts of violence perpetrated against African Americans, they however failed to connect the violence from the institutions that

instigated them and ultimately benefited from them. They cited an example of a Harcourt Horizons fifth grade textbook in which it is stated that, "Slaves were treated well or cruelly depending on their owners" (as cited in Brown & Brown, 2010, p. 118). As the authors suggested, the textbooks provided a narrative in which slavery was stripped of its meaning as an institution and the inhuman treatments of slaves were reduced to the caprices of individual owners.

Moreover, the authors suggested that the textbooks' accounts have omitted relating important segments of the history of Africa and its people, including their history before the international trade began, and the struggles of Africans to fight slavery in the United States (p. 150). This failure, according to Brown and Brown (2010), has resulted in limiting the socio-cultural memory and socio-cultural knowledge of students and impeded their ability to understand the extent of racism and its widespread impacts on African Americans' lives. The authors concluded with an emphasis on the importance to shed light on these critical issues that are missing from the official knowledge. They insisted that this knowledge may lead both students and teachers to a better understanding of the role race has played and continue to play in this country (p. 150).

Symbolic Violence and Black Students' Academic Success

The term a*cademic success* has been historically one of the most recurring topics in the literature of education. Its prominence testifies to its centrality in the field as a construct whose meanings and consequences in Black students' lives often reverberate far beyond their years in school. Widely used by scholars, education practitioners, and policy makers alike, the term generally indicates the accomplishment of specific and predetermined goals (Steinmayr et al., 2017; York et al., 2015). Steinmayr et al. (2014)

remarked that, “Academic achievement represents performance outcomes that indicate the extent to which a person has accomplished specific goals that were the focus of activities in instructional environments, specifically in school, college, and university” (p.1). In this context, grades and GPA are often used as measures of academic success (York et al., 2015). However, despite the long history of the term in education, and its widespread use in the literature, much confusion remains among scholars and education professionals as to its specific meaning. As Tinto and Pusser (2006) noted, “there continues to be a good deal of confusion, if not disagreement, about how one should define and in turn measure student success” (p. 1). The ambiguity surrounding the use of the term has become even more pronounced in the past few decades as a result of the increased emphasis on assessments as a way to measure students’ learning (York et al., 2015). “Measurement is essential to success” stated President George W. Bush in a 2009 speech about the “No Child Left Behind” program (Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, George W. Bush, 2001-2009, p. 1525). But what it means to be academically successful and how this success is measured can be subject to different interpretations. For Ladson-Billings (2014), academic success means “the intellectual growth that students experience as a result of classroom instruction and learning experiences” (p. 75). This view goes beyond the mere reflection of student’s grades and embraces a larger perspective of academic success that includes skills that may not be captured in a standardized test. As Jackson (2018) remarked, many non-cognitive skills such as “adaptability, self-restraint, and motivation” are not captured by standardized tests (p. 2072). As to how success is measured, contextual factors play a key role in determining outcomes (Tinto & Pusser, 2006). More specifically, how much

consideration should be given to factors such as culture, history, and socioeconomic background of the student being tested, is a relevant question that needs to be addressed. Tinto and Pusser (2006) argued that "A specific context for student success is shaped by a variety of contextual factors including demographics, culture, available resources, and existing policies" (p. 2).

In the specific context of this study, the term *academic success* is used as a construct that is often used in conjunction of what is described in the literature as "Black students' academic underachievement" with regard to the attainment of certain goals as measured by test results or graduation rates. Similarly, it is used in the context of Black students' academic performance in comparison with White students whose achievements are widely viewed as more successful academically (DePaoli et al., 2017). More importantly, DePaoli et al., 2017 used the term to question both the knowledge content on which Black students are measured as well as the contextual factors surrounding the assessments. While mastering basic skills such as reading and math are important for any student's academic development, the context in which Black students are forced to learn these skills, and how they are assessed is often subject for debates.

In fact, over the past few decades, Black students' low academic performance has been the subject of numerous studies in which expressions of symbolic violence such as racism has been demonstrated to play an important role (Carpenter & Ramirez, 2007; Jia et al., 2016; Madaus & Clarke, 2001; Rumberger, 1983). According to a 2017 report by Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University, Black students trail White students by a 9-point margin in graduation rates (DePaoli, 2017). Although there has been significant improvement in recent years, Black students in high schools continue to

dropout at a greater rate than their White counterparts. In this regard, Brar (2017) noted that "Bourdieu's theory of practice provides a very clear and effective window into an accurate understanding of the achievement gap" (p. 22). He remarked that,

> The children of the lower class are disadvantaged by the school system in terms of achievement and access to opportunities because, lacking the required cultural capital of the dominant class, they are less successful in school. Working class students do not aspire to higher levels of education, because they have internalized the generational preconception of their class that they cannot succeed academically and, therefore, like their parents, they see no value in education. (p. 27)

The argument that symbolic violence in the curriculum constitutes an impediment to students' academic success has been the subject of qualitative study conducted by Tranter in 2012. Using data collected from ethnographic case studies at three Australian disadvantaged secondary schools, the author explored the ways in which school curriculum keeps students of low socioeconomic backgrounds (SES) from achieving success. Specifically, the study focused on Bourdieu's concepts of cultural and social capital to demonstrate that by incorporating knowledge and values that do not reflect the students' backgrounds, the Australian school system and particularly the curriculum have achieved to marginalize them and force them on a path that compromises both their academic success and their chances to access University (Tranter, 2012). According to the author, this is done mostly through the stratification of the school curriculum which has not only limited students' choices with regards to subjects they can select, but also has the negative effects of discouraging them from seeking the pathway to university.

The author concluded on stressing the importance for school authorities and policy makers to challenge both the merit system and to promote a more inclusive curriculum that would take into considerations the values and aspirations of students from lower socioeconomic status.

In a longitudinal, mixed methods study on the topic, El-Amin et al. (2017), investigated whether developing critical consciousness in Black students can have a positive effect on their academic outcomes. The longitudinal investigation was specifically focused on whether schools can play a role in helping to raise Black students' critical consciousness on issues of racial oppression in society (El-Amin et al., 2017). They defined critical consciousness as "the ability to recognize and analyze systems of inequality and the commitment to take action against these systems" (p. 18). They investigated five predominantly Black urban high schools in the Northeast that emphasized critical consciousness as a goal in their mission.

The study's findings suggested that Black students' academic outcomes can improve if schools teach them to identify and challenge racial oppression. The authors stressed that "Critical consciousness of oppressive social forces can replace feelings of isolation and self-blame for one's challenges with a sense of engagement in a broader collective struggle for social justice" (El-Amin et al., 2017, p.20). According to them, because Black students are already aware of ongoing issues of social injustice that take place in their schools, in their community and in society at large, providing them with guidance on how to confront them directly would contribute to enhance their academic achievement. The investigation concluded that in order for schools to help raise Black students' level of critical consciousness, they would have to implement three strategies

that includes the integration of lessons that address the language of inequality, the creation of forums that question racism, and the integration of lessons that empower students to take action (El-Amin et al., 2017, pp. 20-22). Finally, the authors emphasized that implementing these strategies would lead to significant improvement in Black students' academic outcomes.

Using a critical race analysis, Chapman (2013) investigated in a qualitative study Black students' experiences in predominantly White suburban high schools. The study's purpose was to explore whether changing aspects of the curriculum could enhance Black students' achievement. Investigating four predominantly White suburban high schools that Black students attended, the author showed how some school practices such as tracking functions to impede Black students' academic success. Specifically, he pointed out how higher tracks in the curriculum served as the "property of White students" by denying most Black students the access to be enrolled in these classes (Chapman, 2013, p. 619). Designed to be more rigorous, the higher tracks curriculum in general provides students with the curricular experiences necessary to access College. By limiting Black students' opportunities to integrate these classes, schools are impeding their chance to access high-ranked universities and thereby reducing their opportunity to be exposed to the cultural capital that is necessary to succeed professionally later in life. The author concluded by suggesting critical multicultural education as a pathway to confront pervading issues in the school system such as "race and racism in the curriculum, school policies, and teacher practices" (p. 611). Emphasizing that multicultural education's goal is to serve all children, he stressed however that it can only work if it is part of an "all-inclusive school reforms" (Chapman, 2013, p. 624).

Numerous scholars have particularly focused on cultural incompatibilities and widespread racial inequities in the curriculum as factors that have contributed to the achievement gap between Black students and their White counterparts. Baker (2005) for example, remarked that "Because of incompatible educational experiences, the growing gap between White and minority students continues to produce inequalities in the classroom, and this inequality is often times transferred to society." (Baker, 2005, p. 249). For his part, Boateng (1990) argued that,

> One of the most injurious of these factors [contributing to poor academic performance of African American children], and the one that seems to have the most damaging impact, is the continuous deculturalization of the African American child, and the neglect of African American cultural values in the curriculum. (p. 73)

He further remarked that "neglecting the experiences of African American people in the curriculum is not only detrimental to African American children, it is also a great source of the miseducation of other children who continue to be poorly prepared for a multicultural world" (p. 77).

Equity in the Curriculum

The concept of equity has long been one of the most debated topics, and one of the most cherished issues in the education literature. Scholars from John Dewey to Harry Wong have long advocated in favor of equity in curriculum. Dewey for example wrote:

> The object of a democratic education is not merely to make an individual an intelligent participant in the life of his immediate group, but to bring the various groups into such constant interaction that no individual, no economic group, could

presume to live independently of others" (as cited in Blankstein et al., 2016, p. 116).

Kliebard (2004) further noted that "... the social significance of the curriculum lay in its promise of social progress … it had to be reconciled with the school as a social institution and its place in the larger social order" (p. 54).

However, while scholars over the years have largely agreed on the ideals of equity in curriculum, they have been divided as to a specific definition of the concept. What is equity in curriculum is a question that has been addressed differently by scholars, education professionals, and even organizations that support education (Banks & Banks 1995). For example, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) noted two dimensions in equity education: the first is *fairness* which entails that students are treated with justice and impartiality regardless of their race, gender, socioeconomic status, or place of origin; the second is *inclusion* which ensures that every student has the same opportunity to enjoy the basic minimum standard of education (OECD 2008, p. 2). This view is not far from Banks and Banks' (1995) approach which defined equity pedagogy as "teaching strategies and classroom environments that help students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively within, and create and perpetuate, a just, humane, and democratic society" (p. 152).

Although slightly different, these two perspectives embody the underlying idea that learning encompasses more substance than just the basic subject matters of schooling such as reading, writing, or computing. It is rather a process that leads the student to become active participants in a democratic society by mastering not only the academic

skills, but also by acquiring critical skills that would allow them to question their surroundings, as well as to solve problems society faces. As Banks and Banks (1995) further note, "... it is not sufficient to help students learn to read, write, and compute within the dominant canon, without learning also to question its assumptions, paradigms, and hegemonic characteristics" (p. 152).

Furthermore, the idea of equity embraces the notion of democratic representation and participation. Denying minority students an equitable curriculum, is also denying them the right to participate and to be fairly represented in the democratic process (Dewey, 1916). In addition, the idea of equity also entails the fundamental questions: Who is making curriculum decisions, and for whom? Historically, curriculum designs have been a domain reserved to White Americans who regularly ignore the aspirations and sensitivities of other racial/ethnic groups with whom they are culturally disconnected and often share no socioeconomic affinity. This disjunction often carries heavy consequences for minority students, both as students and later as professional adults (Saltman, 2014).

Curriculum Equity: Historical Context

In a special message to congress on education in 1962, President John F. Kennedy described education in the United States as, ". . . both the foundation and the unifying force of our democratic way of life . . . it is at the same time the most profitable investment society can make and the richest reward it can offer" (as cited in Noltemeyer et al., 2012, p. 3). However, despite this acknowledgement at the highest level of policy making in the country, and despite the issue has been advocated for years by many scholars and education professionals alike, the history of equity in schools around the

United States has rather been troubling, to say the least. Among a long list of unfortunate examples in history, the case of Indian students' boarding schools in the 1800s, come to mind. Indeed, the students were forced by European settlers to attend boarding schools in which they were subjected to assimilate into the European culture at the detriment of their own culture, traditions, and language. Such treatment was even harsher for Black children who were denied formal education throughout the slavery era (Noltemeyer et al., 2012). Until *Brown v. Board of Education*, minority students from all origins, especially African American students, were subjected for decades to open segregation and mistreatments due to their race, culture, language, or country of origin.

The Current State of Equity in U.S. Schools

Since the enactment of the Higher Education Amendments of 1972, which among other things, has prohibited through Title IX, discrimination on the basis of sex in educational institutions receiving federal aid, there has not been a federal legislation of such scope addressing specifically the issue of equity in U.S. schools (Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972). To the contrary, in the years following the implementation of the standards-based reforms, the issue of equity has receded from school practices and the conditions for minority students in U.S. schools have significantly worsened (Ostrander, 2015; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2018). From budget disparity between White and Non-white Schools to widespread practices of racial and gender discrimination, never since the heyday of active progressivism in curriculum, has the school environment been so inequitable for minority students. As Ostrander (2015) argued, "Today schools are more segregated than at any point in our recent history, and it is largely due to problems with the disparity of funding between districts"

(p. 271). As illustrated by a report published in 2018 by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, an independent bipartisan agency established by Congress in 1957, "the highest-poverty districts receive an average of $1,200 less per-pupil than the lowest-poverty districts, and districts serving the largest numbers of students of color receive about $2,000 less per-pupil than districts who serve the fewest students of color" (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2018, p. 6). The current situation is a far-cry from the era when President Lyndon Johnson declared: "We seek not just freedom but opportunity. We seek not just legal equity but human ability, not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result" (Johnson, 1965). As Brar (2017) remarked,

> The children of the lower class are disadvantaged by the school system in terms of achievement and access to opportunities because, lacking the required cultural capital of the dominant class, they are less successful in school. Working class students do not aspire to higher levels of education, because they have internalized the generational preconception of their class that they cannot succeed academically and, therefore, like their parents, they see no value in education. (p. 27).

Standards-Based Reforms and Equity in the Curriculum

Over the past few decades, standards-based reforms have been one of the most debated subjects in the education literature. At the center of these discussions is the growing concern among scholars as well as education practitioners as to the impacts of the reforms on minority students (Banks, 2010; Brathwaite, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Skiba & Williams, 2014). Most concerning is the question whether the Eurocentric approach of the reforms has negatively affected equity and diversity in school

curriculums (Blanchett, 2014; Ford & King, 2014; Gewertz, 2016). While proponents of standardization had from the beginning presented the reforms as equitable and inclusive (Bennett, 1994), an increasing body of evidence has been piled up to demonstrate that the reforms have failed to take into consideration the diverse body that represents the U.S. student population today (Brathwaite, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Giroux, 1994, 2012; Hargreaves & Skerrett, 2008; Madaus & Clarke, 2001). More than any other group, studies conducted on standardization over the past few decades have established that minority students have been adversely impacted by the reforms (Hargreaves & Skerrett, 2008; Madaus & Clarke, 2001). Further evidence has also revealed that standardization has not been successful in improving the academic gap between Black students and their White counterparts (Madaus & Clarke, 2001; Murnane & Levy, 2001; Slater, & Griggs, 2015). To the contrary, the Eurocentric approach of the standards-based reforms appears to have further undermined the potential for a balanced curriculum that would reflect the needs of a diverse body of students in public schools (Skerrett, 2009).

The Impact of Standardization on Black Students' Performance

Since its introduction in the 1980s, proponents of standardization have aggressively promoted the reforms as the ultimate panacea that stands to cure all the ills of public education. "All children can learn" has become over the past few decades a regurgitating catchphrase that encapsulates the promise of the reforms to improve the quality of public education for all (Seidel, & Meyer, 2006). William Taylor, civil rights lawyer and staunch advocate of the reforms, captured this optimism when he asserted that "Today, new forms of accountability and assessment are the best tools we have to ensure quality education for all children" (Taylor, 2000, p. 3). However, after several years of

the reforms' implementation, the evidence points to a reality that sharply contrasts the optimism of its proponents (Falk, 2002; Kohn, 2000; Meier, 2000). Data collected over 30 years have shown that standards-based reforms have largely failed to meet its basic promise to enhance the quality of public education for all (Murnane & Levy, 2001). In fact, several studies have concluded that standardization has not been equitable, and overall, the reforms have a negative impact on minority students (Hargreaves & Skerrett, 2008; Madaus & Clarke, 2001).

Madaus and Clarke (2001) have been one of the first writers who started to pinpoint on a large scale the adverse impacts of some aspects of the reforms on minority students. In a seminal study conducted in 2001, they have shown that high-take tests have failed to improve student learning and that they are not equitable. Drawing from over 30 years of data research, this article offers one the most exhaustive accounts with regards to the negative impacts of high-stake testing on minority students. Contrary to what have been relentlessly promoted as a success by the standards-based reform's proponents over the past few decades, they concluded that high-take tests do not improve student learning, they are not equitable, and most importantly they have shown to accelerate high school dropout rates among minority populations (Madaus & Clarke, 2001). The authors have shed lights on the fact that student's achievement is a complex and multifaceted issue that cannot be captured in one test. Similarly, contrary to the promises that the reforms will improve education for all children, they have shown that they are exclusionary and failed to take into consideration the basic socioeconomic and cultural interests of the minority student population.

Hargreaves and Skerrett (2008) drew a similar conclusion in their study

conducted on the impacts of the reforms on minority students. In this article, Hargreaves and Skerrett (2008) focused on 3 decades of educational reform strategies on ethno-cultural diversity in the United States and Canada. More specifically, they examined the extent to which policy and school-level responses to the increases in the racial and ethno cultural diversity of their student populations, have been characterized by monocultural, multicultural, or antiracist orientations (p. 914). The authors found that standardization weakens teachers' abilities to develop a culturally and racially appropriate curriculum in response to student diversity (p. 935). It also found that standardization rewards teachers who are traditionally more inclined to monocultural strategies of teaching (p. 936). The authors added to the existing body of literature that attests to the fact that standardization does have a negative impact on minority students. But beyond students' performance, the authors have confirmed that the reforms limit teachers' abilities to develop racially oriented curriculum that would accommodate non-White students.

In the same vein, Lomax et al. (1995) conducted a study in which they evaluated whether current tests administered in the U.S. reflect "thinking, conceptual knowledge, and procedural knowledge in mathematics and science" (p. 172). They specifically examined the effects of standardized testing on minority students with regards to curriculum and instruction in the areas of math and science. They concluded that the tests reflect low-level on thinking, low-level conceptual knowledge, a lack of emphasis on procedural knowledge standardized, and overemphasis on algorithms and formulae in mathematics. Most significant to the findings, the authors found that standardization has negative impacts on teaching practice and on minority students' achievement (Lomax et al., 1995 p. 183).

Similarly, Murnane and Levy (2001) acknowledged that after several years of implementation, assessments in the United States have significantly improved and that educators have a better understanding of the reforms. However, the authors noted despite this progress, the reforms have not been able to close the gap between White children and children of color, as they initially proposed to do. To the contrary, Black students, according to the authors, are likely to suffer the worst impacts of the reforms, as they have traditionally been at the bottom of the achievement distribution. They explained that because they do not perform well in the U.S. school system, they will unlikely meet the standards' requirements to pass the exit tests. They argued that the dire consequence of not passing the exit exam will result in lowering Black students' chances of professional success as they enter the labor market without their high school diploma (p. 403).

The argument that the Eurocentric approach of reforms adversely impacts minority students was further reinforced in a different study conducted by Skerrett (2009). Addressing the topic from a different angle, she pointed out that curriculum standardization and high-stake tests have led to an environment in which historical impediments to teaching diverse students have been strengthened. She argued that responses to the growing diversity in U.S. schools require the development of educational policy that goes beyond "standardization and high-stake assessment." Similarly, she argued that this effort must involve both teachers and schools (pp. 287–288).

Cultural Relevance in Curriculum

Faced with the mounting evidence of incompatibilities between what is taught at school and Black students' backgrounds, a growing number of scholars have advocated for a curriculum that is relevant to Black students' culture, history, and experiences at

home (Byrd, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2014). Ladson-Billings (2014) noted that a culturally relevant education is one that advocates the integration of the students' experiences and their socio-cultural backgrounds into the curriculum and teaching in general. Underlying this idea is the argument that such integration would help to enhance Black students' academic performance (Byrd, 2016; Dee & Penner, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2014).

The argument was investigated in a quantitative study conducted by Dee and Penner in 2017. The inquiry was based on a new ethnic studies (ES) curriculum initiated by the district's Board of Education Curriculum Committee in the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD). Piloted in five different high schools, the idea was that an ES curriculum would help low performing students improve their grades, as it elicits in them more curiosity and more engagement. It included various subjects such as social justice, discrimination, and stereotypes that are generally omitted in mainstream curriculum. Also included are the struggles from different ethnic groups during critical periods in U.S. history that range from the late 18th century to the 1970s (Dee & Penner, 2017)

Using three of the five high schools in which the ES curriculum were piloted, the authors sought to examine the causal effects of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) on students' academic outcomes (Dee & Penner, 2017). More specifically, the authors compared two groups of eighth-grade students: one whose members were eligible to take the ES because they had a GPA lower than 2.0, with another group of eighth graders who were deemed ineligible because they had a GPA higher than 2.0. The results indicated substantial improvement in attendance for ninth-grade students as well as an improvement in credits earned for eighth graders whose GPAs were lower than 2.0 before enrolling in the ES courses.

More importantly, the results appeared to correlate positively with the reduction of students' drop out. Similarly, they have shown strong correlation in improving overall performance of enrolled students (p. 158). Although the authors cautioned on an overgeneralization of the findings because of inherent specificities of the locations in which the study took place, it appeared however that the results convincingly substantiate the scholarly claim that culturally relevant curriculum improves the academic performance of marginalized students.

Similarly, Byrd (2016) conducted a qualitative study in which he precisely asked the question of whether culturally teaching relevant works. Specifically, he explored the link between culturally relevant teaching and school racial socialization and academic outcomes of students. Using a sample of 315 students of different ethnicities ranging from sixth to twelfth grade, the author investigated whether their participation in culturally relevant teaching improves their academic outcomes. Particularly, the students were provided with the opportunity to learn topics as diverse as racism, racial socialization as well as the opportunity to learn about other cultures.

The study's findings confirmed previous investigations which asserted that diverse teaching has a positive impact on students' academic outcomes (Byrd, 2016). Furthermore, the author demonstrated that students feel more connected and more engaged when teachers illustrate lessons with real-life examples. More importantly, the results demonstrated great benefit to students when topics related to race and culture are integrated in the classroom. Particularly, the author indicated that racial socialization in an important factor in fostering students' ethnic-racial identity as well as developing racial tolerance toward people of different groups.

Addressing the issue of culturally relevant teaching in a qualitative study, Epstein and Gist (2015) examined how three teachers in New York City public schools integrated race in the study of history and contemporary society with their low-income students of color. Contrary to other studies that illustrate cases of teachers resisting the idea of addressing racism in their teachings, the authors revealed a slew of strategies these teachers used to teach about race and to confront students' misconceptions and beliefs about race as a social construct. Among the strategies they used were videos, readings, and class discussions to create lessons that challenge the biological view of race and to promote students' knowledge and understanding of the concept (p. 50). Underlying the three teachers' efforts was the motivation to guide the students toward both discovering and embracing their own identity, as well as acknowledging and supporting other ethnic groups who are experiencing similar conditions of racial oppression (p. 56).

From another vantage point, Childs (2017) addressed the issue by criticizing how current "multicultural perspective" is often reduced to a narrow exercise that only focuses on "slavery and civil rights movement" (p. 44). He argued that this oversimplification of multicultural education results from a curriculum that overemphasizes on European American history while neglecting minority cultures (p. 45). Although he acknowledged the importance of these aspects of Black history, Childs (2017) pointed out that educators should explore African American culture in its entirety. Through the lens of critical pedagogy, he proposed educators to explore the history of African American education as a resource that can be used to address "educational challenges in the 21st century" (pp. 46-47). Although Childs' article has tackled the issue from a different position, it is nonetheless significant in offering an alternative that could potentially counter the

outright dismissal of Black culture in the curriculum promoted by the proponents of the reforms.

Conclusion

The literature review has provided ample insights into symbolic violence as a phenomenon that has manifested in school curriculum in multiple forms. From subtle degrading treatments of Black students to more overt racism in the curriculum, the studies have demonstrated that symbolic violence has been historically pervasive and ingrained in school practices around the United States. Consequently, the negative ramifications for Black students are far ranging and long-lasting. In addition to their struggle to perform academically, they also carry the effects of symbolic violence later in their professional careers.

However, although insightful, the literature has shown a serious gap as to the perceptions of teachers with regards to symbolic violence in the curriculum. As the primary agent in charge of relaying the knowledge from the curriculum to the students, teachers are in a unique position to provide useful information and insights about the phenomenon and how it affects Black students' academic performance. Such understanding could in turn contribute to enlighten both school administrators' and policy makers' perspectives into building a more inclusive curriculum in which all students can thrive at school and in life.

Research Questions

1. How do teachers understand symbolic violence as a concept?

2. How do teachers describe the manifestation of symbolic violence in the curriculum?

3. What are teachers' perceptions about the role of symbolic violence on Black students' academic performance? (See Appendix)

Chapter 3: Methodology

Aim of the Study

I aimed to explore symbolic violence in school curriculum. More specifically, I aimed to understand the role symbolic violence may play in Black students' academic performance, and how it is manifested in the curriculum. To explore the phenomenon, I conducted interviews with experienced teachers to document their perceptions of the phenomenon, as they are the agents who both teach from the curriculum and witness Black students' experiences with symbolic violence. In recent years, there has been research addressing the problem of symbolic violence in schools (Bourdieu 1971, 1991; Brar, 2017; Bujorean, 2014; Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016), however, few have specifically investigated the phenomenon in the curriculum. Coupled with this oversight is the neglect to explore teacher's perceptions of symbolic violence. As Borrero (2018) stressed, "as teacher educators and scholars committed to equity and access for all students, we must find new and effective ways to amplify the voices of classroom teachers in educational research" (p. 22). As figures who spend a significant amount of time with students, teachers are in a unique position to witness their experiences with symbolic violence. As such, their perceptions are essential to understand how the phenomenon works and what role it plays in Black students' academic performance. This understanding is vital in guiding both education practitioners and policy makers who may wish to address the problems relating to symbolic violence in the curriculum. Using Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice* as the theoretical framework, the study investigated and analyzed the phenomenon through its characteristics and various manifestations.

Qualitative Research Approach

This study used a qualitative research approach to explore the teacher's perceptions of symbolic violence in the curriculum. As Marshall and Rossman (2016) argued, "qualitative research is pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people" (p. 2). This view was echoed by Korstjens and Moser (2017) when they wrote that "Qualitative research takes into account the natural contexts in which individuals or groups function to provide an in-depth understanding of real-world problems" (p. 274).

In the field of education, qualitative methodology is particularly useful in exploring phenomena that have been neglected in the literature (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) also remarked that qualitative research "makes the world visible" by making available a wide range of interpretative practices to the researcher (p. 4). The ability to study phenomena as they are in their natural settings provides a high degree of flexibility to interpret data and their meanings to the participants. From a larger standpoint, qualitative research allows individuals or groups the ability to express themselves and make public their conditions. Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasized that, "We conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices and minimize the power relationships that often exist between the researcher and the participants in a study" (p. 45). By exploring symbolic violence in school curriculum through the perceptions of teachers who interact with Black students, I aimed to bring to light some perspectives of the phenomenon that have not received the attention that they deserve both in the literature and in the policy making arena. Similarly, it aimed to bring awareness of a phenomenon

that has affected Black students for decades.

Case Study Research

Specifically, I used a case study design to explore the phenomenon. Yin (2014) defined case study as an empirical method that "investigates a contemporary phenomenon ("the case") in depth and within its real-world context, especially when boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (p. 14). Emphasizing on the descriptive and analytical strength of case study design, Creswell and Poth (2018) indicated that a case study begins with the identification of "a specific case that will be described and analyzed" (p. 97). This study identified symbolic violence in the curriculum as a case to be explored, described, and analyzed. Through the perspectives of teachers who have real life experience interacting with the curriculum and Black students, the study provides an explanation the phenomenon.

History of Case Study

Although the use of case study as a research strategy can be traced all the way back to Frederic Le Play's 1855 six-volume study "Les Ouvriers Européens" (European Workers) (cited in Higgs, 1890), it was not until the 1920s that researchers began to formally use it as a research strategy. Specifically, case studies became a prominent research strategy at the University of Chicago Department of Sociology from the 1920s through the 1950s.The 1958 work of Thomas and Znaniecki for example, investigating Polish peasants in Europe and America illustrated a turning point in the use of case study as a viable research design strategy that has been embraced for decades by qualitative researchers (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 97).

In the ensuing years that followed the pioneering works of Thomas and Znaniecki

(1958), case study has gained significant credence in various research across different fields (Creswell & Poth, 2018). From academic disciplines such as psychology and political science to practicing professions such as accounting and nursing, the use of case study as a research design grew significantly. This rapid growth of case study across many scientific disciplines is illustrated in Yin's (2014) book "*Case Study Research and Applications"* in which he provided an exhaustive list of 15 fields that have used case study as a research method (Yin, 2014, p. 6). He also provided concrete examples that illustrate successful case study applications in computer science and business (pp. 202-217). Echoing the growing use of case studies in qualitative inquiries over the years, Ramirez (2016) wrote that "Case studies are widely used among qualitative researchers because of their explicit focus on context and dynamic interactions, often over time" (as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 19).

In the field of education, case study has been used extensively to investigate different phenomena ranging from students' academic performance to issues of widespread inequality against minority students (Toshalis, 2013). Mills et al. (2010) noted that,

> In education research, using the case study approach not only creates knowledge and understanding but also sets a standard for good teaching practices through two main means—development and implementation of policy, and gaining experience through exposure to a particular phenomenon. (p. 2)

Case study design allows the investigator the ability to collect data on events that take place in a real-life context. Yin (2014) remarked that, "The case study allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events – such

as individual life cycles, organizational and managerial processes, neighborhood changes, international relations, and the maturation of industries" (p. 5). A similar approach is found in Creswell and Poth's (2018) book on qualitative research in which they described case study research as "a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple-bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (interviews, observations, audiovisual materials, documents) etc." (pp. 96-97). Baškarada (2014) further indicated that "case studies provide an opportunity for the researcher to gain a deep holistic view of the research problem, and may facilitate describing, understanding and explaining a research problem or situation" (p. 1). Using ethnographic case study of two groups of 10-11-year-old boys, living in Belfast, Connolly and Healy (2004) for example, have demonstrated how symbolic violence has contributed to reproduce lower-class students' subordinate position in academic and career aspirations (p. 28).

Intended Outcome

The intended outcome from using the case study design was to have a deeper understanding of symbolic violence in the curriculum and how it works to impede Black students' success. Creswell and Poth (2018) remarked that, "A hallmark of a good qualitative case study is that it presents an in-depth understanding of the case" (p. 98). Such understanding is rooted largely in the ability this strategy provides to the researcher to study the phenomenon in a real-life context. As individuals who witness Black students in their daily lives, teachers' accounts of symbolic violence can be vital to understand and explain the phenomenon. Through interviews with teachers who have

real-life experiences dealing both with curriculum and Black students, the study provides a deeper and a fresh perspective on the phenomenon. In addition to a better understanding of the phenomenon, teachers' description of their experiences can enlighten both school administrators and policy makers who may wish to address the problem of symbolic violence in the curriculum.

Appropriateness of the Strategy

From a general standpoint, the selection of a design strategy is an important step in the research process, as it impacts numerous levels of the inquiry ranging from the research questions to the data collection. This view is echoed by Walshe et al. (2004) who suggested, "Selecting an appropriate research strategy is key to ensuring that research questions are addressed in a way which has value and is congruent with the overall topic, questions and purpose of the research" (p. 677).

For the specific purpose of this study, case study design was deemed an appropriate strategy because it allowed the researcher to explore and understand symbolic violence in real-life context. Paraphrasing Yin (2014), Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that "case study research involves the study of a case (or cases) within a real-life, contemporary context or setting" (p. 96). They further emphasized that, "Qualitative research takes into account the natural contexts in which individuals or groups function to provide an in-depth understanding of real-world problems" (p. 274). This study explored the phenomenon within the context of the teachers' lived experience with Black students. The research questions were framed to elicit from them their understanding of the phenomenon as they perceive it and experience it. Mills et al. (2010) summed it up well when they wrote that, "The power of case study research is that it can ask the questions of

"why" and "how," which are important in education practice. These are the questions that practitioners and policymakers need answered" (p. 6).

Secondly, case study design was appropriate because it helped describe and analyze symbolic violence in the curriculum as a specific case in which the participants shared their experiences and understanding of the phenomenon. As Yin (2014) indicated, the "focus on an in-depth exploration of the actual case" (Yin, 2014, as cited in Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 477). The idea that case study is an appropriate design for researchers who seek a deep level of understanding of the phenomenon is further emphasized by Creswell and Poth (2018) who suggested that "A case study is a good approach when the inquirer has clearly identifiable cases with boundaries and seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the cases or a comparison of several cases" (p. 100).

Finally, the strategy was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to capture the phenomenon from an angle that has not been previously explored. Although the phenomenon of symbolic violence has been previously studied in schools (Bujorean, 2014; Brar, 2017; Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016 ;), it has not been specifically explored in the curriculum. In this regard, this study provides new understanding of symbolic violence. A fresh perspective of the phenomenon may provide to researchers as well as education professionals the opportunity to understand the role symbolic violence may play in the larger context of Black students' academic performance. As illustrated by previous research, case studies have shown to be effective in projecting new light on neglected phenomenon. For example, using case study design Nairz-Wirth et al. (2017) described how habitus conflicts undermine non-traditional students' dispositions to even contemplate the prospect of pursuing post-secondary education (p. 13). Similarly, Khanal

(2017) used case study to demonstrate how reproduced symbolic violence in schools' everyday interactions, practices and dispositions works to victimize ethnic minority students in Nepal (p. 457).

How the Strategy has influenced the Research

The strategy influenced the research in three important ways: (a) the type of questions asked, (b) the form of data collected, (c) the steps of data analysis. First, it influenced the process by the nature of the questions asked. As Burkholder et al. (2020) remark "Your research question wording is important because the words you use to write research questions should be aligned with the selected approach to inquiry and research design" (p. 315). In qualitative inquiries, Creswell and Poth (2018) argued that,

> Qualitative research questions are open-ended, evolving, and non-directional. They restate the purpose of the study in more specific terms and typically start with a word such as what or how rather than why in order to explore a central phenomenon. (p. 137).

Comparing qualitative and quantitative approaches, Korstjens and Moser (2017) wrote, "Where quantitative research asks: 'how many, how much, and how often?' qualitative research would ask: 'what?' and even more 'how, and why?" (p. 275). More specifically, Creswell and Poth, (2018) emphasized that case study research questions "focus on understanding the bounded system" (p. 140). For his part, Yin (2014) argued that the research design helps "defining the study's questions" (p. 34). In this study, the strategy has transpired through the research questions seeking to have teachers' detailed descriptions of how teachers perceive symbolic violence to be experienced and lived by the students.

Second, the strategy also shaped the form of data collection. Yin (2014) argued that the research design helps "identifying the data that are to be collected" (p. 34). Creswell and Guetterman (2019) suggested that in case study "the intent is to develop an in-depth understanding of a case or an issue, and researchers collect as many types of data as possible to develop this understanding" (p. 490). More specifically, the authors emphasized that in case study designs researchers "Collect extensive data using multiple forms of data collection (observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials)" (p. 489).

I focused on interviews and documents to collect its data. The goal was to have an in-depth understanding of teachers' perceptions of the phenomenon. More specifically, how they understand it and what role they think it plays in Black students' performance. Kvale (1996) argued that qualitative interviews can be viewed as "a construction of knowledge" (as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 147).

Finally, this approach influenced the steps of data analysis. Yin (2014) argued that the research design helps "defining the criteria for interpreting the findings" (p. 34). He also suggested that "rival explanations for your findings" can be a viable alternative strategy (p. 33). These views are echoed by Creswell and Guetterman (2019) who wrote that in case study, "overall analysis involves description, analysis, and interpretation" (p. 490).

Participants

In total, seven teachers participated in the study, including six who teach or formerly taught at the BCPS and one who taught at Miami-Dade Public Schools System (MDPS) at the time of this study. Their experiences ranged from third grade to high

school, having taught various subjects including English, science, and health education. All the participants met the criteria pre-established by the study: (a) currently teaches or formerly taught at an urban high school, (b) have at least 5 years of teaching experience, and (c) have experience teaching Black students. In addition to these criteria, I also considered availability of teachers for interviews and meetings as a factor of eligibility to participate in the inquiry. There were no predetermined criteria on the demographics of the participants, as the target population of candidates includes an ethnically diverse pool of teachers who have interacted with Black students over the years.

I used purposeful sampling as the method to select the participants. Purposeful sampling is a reliable sampling method and widely used by investigators in qualitative research. It allows researchers the flexibility to choose the participants, the sites, and the sampling strategy (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 157). “In purposeful sampling” Creswell and Guetterman (2019) wrote “researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon” (p. 206). This ability allows the researcher the ability to have a better understanding of the phenomenon being investigated.

Setting

The interviews were conducted in open public places which varied from public parks to restaurants. The choice of the sites reflected both the participants’ preferences and the need to keep a six-foot social distance between us due the CDC’s COVID-19 guideline requirements. Allowing the choices to the candidates facilitated their participation in the study as their selections are based on convenience, familiarity of the environment, and proximity to their common activities. However, despite the interviews were conducted in remote locations, the researcher ensured that the schools’ settings were

well documented, including a detailed description of their history, their philosophy and mission, and most importantly the socioeconomic background of the students and the community in which the schools are located.

Similarly, I described the overall socioeconomic level of the students and their ethnic background. I also described the ethnic make-up of the faculty and school administrators. I provided detailed account of various subjects in the curriculum, including history, literature, and language. Finally, I described the programs or initiatives taken by the school to address the students' academic performance.

Events

The participants were interviewed about their perceptions on symbolic violence in the curriculum. The interview questions started with a general assessment of the participants' awareness of symbolic violence as a concept. This led to questions that address the teachers' awareness of symbolic violence in school curriculum. These two stages were followed by more specific questions that asked the teachers to describe in detail their experience as to how symbolic violence is manifested in the curriculum. Finally, the participants were asked to describe their perceptions about the role of symbolic violence on Black students' academic performance.

Interviews

The data were collected through interviews which were conducted with the teachers after their prior consent. Kvale (2009) noted that "qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subject's point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, to uncover their lived world" (p. xvii). More specifically, he defined semi-structured interviews as "an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of

the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (p. 8). Through the detailed interviews with the participants, the study provides a better understanding of symbolic violence in the curriculum and how it works to undermine Black students' success.

The main strength of interviews as a tool to collect data is that it provides the researcher with a great degree of flexibility with regards to the questions being asked. As an important strength of interviews, Yin (2014) noted that they can be "Targeted" which means they "can focus directly on case study topics" (p. 114). He also added that they can be "Insightful" which means they can "provide explanations, as well as personal views (e.g., perceptions, attitudes, and meanings" (p. 114). More importantly, interviews allow the researcher the ability to be in proximity with the participant. In this study, being face to face with the participant is important to scrutinize the issue that is being explored, as it allows the researcher to follow up on the participant's statements.

Creswell and Guetterman (2019) warned that although interviews offer important advantages to the researcher, it also carries some disadvantages. One of those disadvantages is that some interviewees may be too shy to provide enough data that could be meaningful to the study. Another major disadvantage is that interviews can be biased. Yin (2014) provided a list of interview biases which include "Bias due to poorly articulated questions, response bias, inaccuracies due to poor recall, and reflexivity, e. g., interviewee says what interviewer wants to hear" (p. 114). In his book *Doing Interviews*, Kvale (2009) provided a list of standards objections to the quality of interview research (pp. 84-87). Chief among these objections is the criticism that interview results can be unreliable due to leading questions (p. 87). Although Kvale acknowledged the existence

of this risk, he however suggested that leading questions can be necessary at times. Citing Bourdieu's and Piaget's use of leading questions, he asserted that "deliberate leading questions are necessary parts of many questioning procedures" (p. 88).

These disadvantages were mitigated by the researcher's mindfulness of the challenges that interviews can present in the process of collecting data. To this effect, special attention was given to the articulation of questions to avoid biases, and to incite rich answers from the participants. Equally important to alleviate the problems associated with interviews, was the researcher's assurance to the participants that they can withdraw a statement, make corrections, or completely withdraw from the entire study. Finally, the researcher reassured participants that their statements are confidential and that pseudonyms will be used to protect their identity.

The Process

Within the setting, the participants were interviewed on their awareness and experience with symbolic violence. They described their experiences according to the subject matter they teach and their interactions with the students. The focus was to document how they perceive the existence of symbolic violence in the subjects and in the curriculum in general.

Data Collection Tools

I used interviews as the main instrument to collect its data. Yin (2014) stressed that interviews are "one of the most important sources of case study evidence" (p. 118). I conducted one interview with each participant that lasted about an hour regarding their experience and their perceptions on symbolic violence in school curriculum. As a case study, it was important that I used interviews as a technique to ask open ended questions,

record them, and then use the transcripts for future analysis. As Creswell and Guetterman (2019) noted, open ended questions provide the participants the opportunity to "best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspective of the researcher or past research findings" (p. 218).

Because the study specifically addressed teachers' perceptions about symbolic violence, a topic that had not been directly addressed previously, I created my own interview protocol. I validated the instrument through (a) an expert panel review and (b) a pilot test with three people who are independent of the study. Additionally, my interview questions were informed by the literature on the topic. I was particularly informed by two theoretical frameworks: Critical race theory and Bourdieu's theory of practice. Finally, I explored various instruments available in different databases as well as instruments used in related investigations. This helped me with the overall understanding of how questionnaires are best structured.

Procedures

The procedures began once I obtained the approval from Nova Southeastern University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). This process started with the distribution of a flyer inviting potential candidates to be part of the study and informing them of the criteria: (a) be teaching or have formerly taught grade level students, from an urban area in South Florida, (b) have at least 5 years of teaching experience, (c) have experience teaching Black students. It also included the researcher's contacts for interested candidates who wish to participate. Once the process was completed, I reached out to those who expressed interest to explain the purpose of the study and the criteria for the participants. I explained to the candidates who agreed to be part of the study, the

expectations of the study, the recruitment process, and the length of time the process would last. I explained to them that the study would take place over a 6-month period. Based on their feedback, I proceeded to the next step of contacting them with the goal of providing them with more detailed information about the study. I held individual meetings with them, and I emailed them the details of the study. I arranged the meetings according to the participants' availability. I ensured that the meetings take place at a neutral and public location where the participants' privacy and safety can be guaranteed. The same letter was also be submitted to the IRB.

Finally, I emailed consent forms to the participants which included detailed explanation about confidentiality and the right of the participant to withdraw from the study any time he/she wishes. I also addressed with the participants how the data will be used, as well as how it will be stored. I explained to the participants the purpose of the study, its requirements, and its goal. I ensured that the participants understand the key concepts that are used in the study. Once I secured the consent of the participants, I set up the first interviews. The time and location of the interviews were picked in agreement with each participant according to their availability and comfort. However, I ensured that the locations were neutral and public where the participants' privacy, safety, and comfort could be guaranteed. Before the interviews took place, I informed the participants of the protocol by which the interviews would be conducted, including safety measures regarding the covid pandemic. Among these guidelines I instructed the participants to follow the CDC COVID-19 requirements of the six-foot physical distancing guideline and the wearing of a mask. Alone with the participant at the location, I started with a briefing of the process, which included a thorough explanation of the participants'

confidentiality, the recording of the interviews, and the storage of information. The goal was to prevent any doubt or discomfort that could prevent the participant from freely expressing his/her point of view and experience. Kvale, (2009) advised that,

> The interview is introduced by a briefing in which the interviewer defines the situation for the subject, briefly explains the purpose of the interview, the use of tape recorder, and so on, and asks if the subject has questions before starting the interview. (p. 55)

After the interview, I proceeded to debrief the participant. The goal was to assuage the participant's apprehension that may follow the process. As Kvale, (2009) suggested, "At the end of the interview there may tension and anxiety, because the subject has been open about often personal and emotional experiences and may be wondering about the purpose and later use of the interview" (p. 55). In this regard the author recommended several initiatives, including a conversation in which the interviewer could invite the participant to comment about his/her experience of the interview. It could also include instances in which the interviewer mentions what he/she learned from the interview. Finally, this step could be concluded by asking the interviewee whether he/she has any questions of comments.

Once the interview was completed, I downloaded it onto my password-protected laptop. I then proceeded to personally transcribe the interview. Besides providing a high degree of control over the data, transcribing personally the interview offers the interviewer the advantage to penetrate the meanings of the content and to relive the atmosphere and context in which the interview unfolded. Kvale, (2009) suggested that "Researchers who transcribe their own interviews will learn much about their own

interview style; to some extent they will have the social and emotional aspects of the interview situation present or reawakened during transcription and will already have started the analysis of the meaning of what was said" (p. 95).

Data Analysis

Creswell and Poth (2018) described the data analysis process as a complex stage in the research which includes various steps such as coding and the organization of themes, the representation of data, and their interpretation (p. 181). Bazeley (2013) argued, "from the time of its [your research project] conception you will take steps that will facilitate or hinder your interpretation and explanation of the phenomena you observe" (as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 185). For the specific purpose of this study, I used the "data analysis spiral" as described by Creswell and Poth (2018) in their book on qualitative research. The idea of using a spiral approach is generated by the fact that the data analysis process is far from being linear. Instead, it relies on the researcher's ability to use appropriate strategies as he/she goes along to reach the right result. As Creswell and Poth (2018) stated, "the researcher touches on several facets of analysis and circles around and around … for the goal of generating specific analytic outcomes" (p. 185).

First, I initiated the process with management and organization of the data. Organizing the data was an important step that ensured that I located and retrieved the information easily. Creswell and Poth (2018) argued that "It is important for researchers to carefully consider these early organizational decisions because of the potential impact on future analysis" (p. 186). In this regard, they suggested that "A searchable spreadsheet or database by data form, participant, date of collection (among other features) is critical

for locating files efficiently (p. 185). Equally important is the manner in which data are stored. Although there are specific computer programs available to do this task, I used Microsoft Word for transcriptions of the interviews. My choice to use this existing application was motivated by my familiarity with word document and its ready access.

Second, I proceeded to the careful reading and noting of the crucial ideas in the transcripts that have been generated from the interviews. Creswell and Poth (2018) advised that "Writing notes or memos in the margins of field notes or transcripts or under images helps in this initial process of exploring a database" (p. 187). Agar (1980) further suggested that "read the transcripts in their in their entirety several times. Immerse yourself in the details, trying to get a sense of the interview as a whole before breaking it into parts" (as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 187).

Third, I proceeded to code the data collected from the interviews. As an essential element in data analysis, this step included description, classification, and interpretation of data that had been collected. The description of the data was particularly important as it required an accurate and detailed account of what the researcher saw in the data. As Creswell and Poth (2018) remarked, "Detailed description means that authors describe what they see" (p. 189). Most importantly, the author added that the detail must be provided "within the context of the setting of the person, place, or event" (p. 189). Also important is the interpretation of the data which must be informed both by the researcher's own discernment and the perspective of the existing literature on the topic. For me, it entailed an exceptional effort to expound the real meaning of the data by paying close attention to the details of the participants' statements. I often played the audio several times over so I could have a real understanding of the participants' life

experiences, their feelings, and their hope to positively impact the students' academic outcomes.

Creswell and Poth (2018) argued that at this stage "researchers built detailed descriptions, apply codes, develop themes or dimensions, and provide interpretation in light of their own views or views of perspectives in the literature (p. 189). In this regard, I was informed by three methods of coding methods: Descriptive coding, In Vivo coding, and Emotion coding. As defined by Saldaña (2015), "A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 4). While each type of coding addresses the specific context of the words or sentences it reflect, they all combined to make the data analysis easier and more coherent. As Saldaña (2015) remarked, descriptive coding helps the researcher to capture in a word or short phrase the core idea that was addressed in the data (p. 6). By helping the researcher to both label and summarize that idea, the coding renders the information more organized and easier to connect to other parts of the data. While descriptive coding helps the investigator to describe the information, In Vivo coding helps to capture the meaning of the recorded words as used in the participant's own language. This helps mitigate the risks of error or biases in the interpretation of the data. As a result, it provides a reasonable degree of credibility in the data and the research to a large extent. Finally, Emotion coding helps the researcher to integrate the participant's inner thoughts and feelings as part of the data that was collected. I also organized the data under the different themes that I captured in the transcripts.

This important step of immersing myself in the data allowed me the opportunity

to develop themes that accurately reflect the true meaning of the participants' understanding of the phenomenon. As suggested by the data analysis spiral, I created visual charts to represent the data that has been collected. Marshall and Rossman (2016) suggested an analytical tool called "clustering." They define clustering as a "creative work in which the researcher creates diagrams of relationships – forming outlines according to what is most overarching" (p. 223). For the purpose of this study, I created three different tables that reflect the coding list, the themes, and the categories. In the coding list table, I used a *Descriptive* column which summarizes in a word or short phrase the basic topic of a passage of the data. I also used an *In Vivo* column which reflected the words or short phrases from the participant's own language in the data record as codes. Finally, I also used an *Emotion* column to note the emotions recalled/experienced by the participants or inferred by the researcher about the participant.

Ethical Considerations

This is a critical phase in the research that requires deliberate effort from the researcher to make sure that the participants are protected from harmful disclosure of data. To ensure the participants' confidentiality and safety, important ethical considerations were implemented. These considerations included securing the consent from participants, and the assignment of a pseudonym that ensures their confidentiality. Furthermore, participants were informed that they can withdraw any time during the study. Only the researcher had access to the data, which was stored in a secured password protected computer and locked in a cabinet. All research materials will be destroyed after 3 years.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness of the investigation, I conducted member checking by providing the transcript to each participant for review of its accuracy. This allowed the participants to revisit their statements and ensured that they reflect their views and perspectives on the questions that were addressed during the interviews. It was a step that was motivated by the concern that qualitative researchers often express regarding trustworthiness, as concepts such as reliability, validity, objectivity, and generalizability are borrowed from quantitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Despite these challenges however, a reasonable degree of trustworthiness can be achieved in qualitative research. Creswell and Miller (2000) proposed a list of procedures that researchers can use to ensure rigor in qualitative enquiry. These procedures include triangulation, the search for disconfirming evidence, researcher's reflexivity, and member checking (as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Potential Research Bias

As someone originated from a Black immigrant community, I am passionate about issues relating to the academic success of minority students or the lack thereof. Both in my personal opinions and in my academic writings, I take positions in favor of a more balanced curriculum that takes into considerations, the history, cultural aspirations and socioeconomic realities of minority students. I am aware of the growing data that demonstrate the impacts of inequity on students' performance. My passion is mainly motivated by a drive to understand more thoroughly the phenomenon of symbolic violence in the curriculum and the role it may play in Black students' academic performance. An understanding of the phenomenon could potentially lead to more

awareness of the problem of symbolic violence that Black students are facing. Similarly, it would provide school administrators and policy makers a better road map as to how to remedy the problem. As a researcher, I believe that addressing widespread inequity in the curriculum, and establishing a school environment free of discrimination against minority students are important steps that could ultimately have positive impacts on minority students' academic performance. Furthermore, I believe that addressing this issue could cement the path for a better future for minority students, both in their personal and professional lives. I intend to manage my bias by maintaining a reflective journal whose main goal is to help me keep in check these biases. Similarly, I intend to have an interpretive support community that would help me analyze the data.

Limitations

The study had several limitations, among which were the restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic that prevented access to the school sites as initially intended. Instead, I held the interviews in remote locations, and I provided general descriptions of the sites based on the participants' statements and public records. Similarly, the study was limited by the fact that the pool of participants included only Black candidates who expressed interest in the study. Although they provided a unique perspective in their description of the phenomenon, a bigger and more diverse pool would have provided a more exhaustive view of the phenomenon. Also, the richness of the information varied with the subject matter and the experience of the participant as a teacher. For example, science as a subject matter was less rich than social studies, as a participant insisted repeatedly that "science is science, no matter where it is being practice." It remains perhaps an area that could be explored in future studies. Finally, the group was limited in the three county

school districts in South Florida. As such, the study findings may only reflect the realities of students and teachers in the indicated areas.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

Using a qualitative approach, I investigated teachers' perceptions of symbolic violence in South Florida's urban schools. I used a case study design to explore the teachers' awareness of the phenomenon in the curriculum, their understanding of its manifestations, their perceptions regarding its impacts on Black students' academic performance, and their views as to the measures that could be implemented to mitigate its impacts on students' learning. Additionally, I described how teachers use their professional discretion to take actions outside the official curriculum and textbooks to help their students. The research used a face-to-face interview guide as the instrument to generate the data which were then coded and organized by themes that reflected the teachers' verbatim responses. As Kvale (2009) noted, "qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subject's point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, to uncover their lived world" (p. xvii). He further described semi-structured interviews as "an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (p. 8). Through the interviews with the participants, I sought to have a better understanding of symbolic violence in the curriculum and how it works to undermine Black students' success.

The following section describes the profile of the urban schools from which most of the participants are recruited. It then presents the profiles of the participants which includes their career and the social economic profiles of the student's population they are currently teaching or formerly taught. Finally, it presents the emerging themes and the

quotes from the interviews with the participants.

School District's Profiles

The district where the study took place is one of largest public school system in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2020) and in the State of Florida. As the state's first fully accredited school system, the district serves about "261,000 students and approximately 110,000 adult students in 241 schools, centers and technical colleges, and 93 charter schools." Additionally, the site notes that the district has diverse student population, representing 177 different countries and 151 different languages). Using data from the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years, the *U.S. News & World Report* confirmed the diverse composition of the district which includes, 19% White, 38.7% Black, 3.7% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, 35.6% Hispanic/Latino, 0.2% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.2% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders.

Participants' Profiles

The participants' included seven teachers who volunteered for the study. Of the seven teachers, six taught or formerly taught at the district school and one taught at MDPS at the time of this study. Their experiences varied from third grade to high school, teaching subjects ranging from English, Science, and Health Education. Although they all had experienced teaching ethnically mixed classes at some periods in their careers, most of their careers were with Black students. The study used pseudonyms to guarantee the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. The researcher used flyers distributed in the tri-county area to recruit participants using the following criteria: (a) candidates must be teaching or have formerly taught grade level students, from several counties in

south Florida and (b) have at least 5 years of teaching experience; (c) have experience teaching Black students.

Adrienne

The first interview was conducted with Adrienne at a restaurant located in a city in the local school district. The participant selected that location for convenience and familiarity, as she lived in the city. Adrienne is an English veteran educator of more than 30 years. Recently retired, she taught language arts, beginning and advanced, and television production courses. Previously a respiratory therapy technician, she was drawn to teaching due to a love for language arts and film. Working as a substitute teacher during her free time, she soon sought to change careers and go into teaching fulltime during the late 80s. She earned her National Board Certification in Adult/Young Adult English/language arts in 2002 and served as a teacher leader and mentor. In September of 2008, she moved from a school deemed "high performing" to serve as a teacher leader and literacy coach in a school deemed "low performing." While there, she became a 2009 – 2010 recipient of a Jordan Fundamental Grant that facilitated the implementation of Text Titans, a literacy building initiative designed by her and funded by Brand Jordan, a private foundation created by basketball great Michael Jordan. Brand Jordan honors teachers who motivate and inspire students toward achieving excellence. During her career, she worked at a variety of schools. Her last appointment was at a school with a diverse population that has a reputation for academic excellence as well as artistic excellence. Nurturing aspiring artists with its STAR arts magnet program, it has matriculated many talented youths that have gone on to achieve successful careers in arts and entertainment.

Kesha

The second interview was conducted with Kesha at her workplace in Miami-Dade County. Kesha is also a former Social Sciences teacher who taught throughout her 18-year career mostly in the local county school district. For most of her teaching career, she worked with students from communities where most families rely on government aid to survive. As a certified teacher for Grades 6-12 Social Sciences, Kesha taught different subjects, including World History, American History, Civics, Intensive Reading, Peer Counseling, and Psychology. Throughout her career, the participant mostly taught in schools located in African American communities where the family income was below the poverty line. Kesha indicated that significant government resources and services had been allocated to these communities to help uplift and support the students and their families.

Fabian

The third interview was conducted with Fabian at a restaurant in the northern part of the county. Fabian is a 25-year veteran educator who has worked as a reading teacher for 15 years, and as a school administrator for 10 years. Having previously worked as a teacher at the Boston Public Schools (BPS), the participant was relocated to Florida few years ago where he worked first as a teacher and then as an assistant principal in the local county district. Throughout his career, he has taught mostly Black students in different schools located in impoverished neighborhoods.

Alea

The fourth interview was conducted with Alea at a public park located in a northern part of the county where the study took place. Having previously worked as a

television operator, Alea started her career teaching television production at the local district in 2003. She held that position until 2020 when she switched to a different school where she was teaching English at the time of her interview. Although she has been teaching mostly Black students throughout her career, Alea is now teaching at a school with a diverse student population. Well known for its reputation of achievement and academic excellence, students from different ethnic backgrounds walk to the school from surrounding neighborhoods or ride busses from around the local county.

Peter

The fifth interview was conducted with Peter at a public park located in the south part of the county. Peter is a 32-year-old high school teacher veteran who has taught mostly Black students in different schools in the county district. Retired from a long career as a US Army Lieutenant Colonel, and as a member of the county Deputy Sheriff's Office Corrections Officer, he recently returned to the county where he is currently teaching physical education. Peter has written three books reflecting his career as a teacher and as a law enforcement officer.

Maria

The sixth interview was conducted with Maria at a restaurant near to the school district. This participant is a current teacher who has been teaching mostly Black students in different schools at the local district for 13 years. Currently, the participant is teaching Intensive Reading to students from sixth to eighth grade in a low performing school established over 100 years ago in a poor neighborhood in the county. The institution is among 66 schools identified by the Florida Department of Education as "persistently lowest achieving." As such, it receives active instructional, curriculum, and intervention

support from the Education Transformation Office (ETO). Additionally, the school receives funding provided by the U.S. Department of Education's School Improvement Grant Fund (SIG) 1003(g) (U.S. Department of Education, 2018, School Improvement Grants).

Jeremy

Finally, the seventh interview was conducted with Jeremy through the zoom video platform. Initially, Jeremy started his teaching career as a math teacher before switching subject to become a science teacher. He has been working for 14 years in the local district where he teaches mostly Black students in different schools. Currently, the participant teaches at a school located in a poor neighborhood of the county.

Findings

The analysis of the data is organized into five significant findings. The related themes are presented for each finding:

1) Symbolic violence is pervasive throughout the curriculum in Florida public schools.
2) Symbolic violence in the curriculum in Florida public schools is evidenced in five ways: a) eurocentrism, b) racial biases, c) cultural biases, d) lack of representation, c) textbook biases.
3) The ways in which symbolic violence is manifested in the curriculum has a negative impact of the achievement of Black students: a) academic performance, b) early dropouts, c) testing biases.
4) The curriculum does not represent the lived experiences of all students, as it should: a) equity; b) diversity; curriculum relevance; balanced curriculum.

5) Teachers' use of professional discretion to compensate for deficiencies in the curriculum.

Symbolic Violence is Pervasive Throughout the Curriculum in Florida Public Schools

This section addresses *symbolic violence* and its pervasiveness in Florida public schools' curriculum. Based on Bourdieu's (1977) definition of the concept, *symbolic violence* (SV) refers in this study to invisible and non-physical actions designed to exclude Black students and their heritage in the education system. In the curriculum, such actions are specifically transpired through the exclusion of Black students' culture, history, and experiences in their own learning, and their subjugation to learn from Eurocentric content. Saltman (2014) described SV as the "devaluation of one's culture, knowledge, language, tastes, and dispositions. In a context of symbolic violence, a working-class student may learn to judge herself as inferior, lazy, and undeserving of social rewards" (p. 125).

The following section describes the participants' understanding of SV both in curriculum and in the textbooks. Although their experiences vary from each other, overall, they described SV as a phenomenon that is pervasive, and that adversely impacts Black students' education.

Adrienne described SV in the United States and other cultures as the domination of the social hierarchy by people of European descent who diminish and exclude other cultures while imposing their own. She noted that SV is characterized by exclusion, racism, and discrimination against other groups. As she put it, these practices ultimately result in creating long lasting psychological stigmas on the victims. Expressing her views on SV, she stated:

> My understanding is it's a phenomenon that occurs, quite frankly, in Western culture, and probably other cultures as well. But it's a phenomenon that basically is a part of the social hierarchy, where you have the White European descent culture at the top, according to their social hierarchy, and any people of color rank below. And because of that, when they are dealing with their institutions, regardless of whether it's education, whether it's law, there's always this exclusion, this structural racism, this discrimination against other groups and cultures that they become a part of why because they live within the particular culture where the social hierarchy exists.

She further explained that SV affects its victims variously, including mentally, intellectually, and financially. Adrienne added that "SV impacts just about everything we do, be taking care of ourselves financially, be taking care of ourselves intellectually, be taking care of ourselves medically or holistically. It affects everything for you. So, it has a negative impact for sure."

Kesha described that the lack of resources to teach Black students their own culture and history, as one of the most important characteristics of SV. She explained her views on SV in the following statement:

> My understanding or my perception of SV is …that is giving to Black or minority students in terms of the content that is being taught to them… (helps) them understand their own culture, cultural values, and how valuable you know they are and how valuable their culture has been to the establishment of America.

Fabian provided a similar description of SV as Kesha's. He commented that SV is characterized by the absence of content that is relevant to Black students' education, including culture, history, and experiences. Explaining his views of the concept, he stated:

> As a concept, I think when it comes to SV what I understand is that there are things that are not included in the curriculum that students of Black descent of African descent, they did not benefit from them. And therefore, they don't find themselves into what it is that they study. And that's something that could apply at a general level to all Black students basically.

Alea described SV as the tendency to treat topics pertaining to Black experiences as trivial and therefore not important to learn. She commented, often they are sparse and relegated as electives as opposed to required courses. She provided the following statement to explain her views:

> I think in the curriculum they treat the Black experience like it's an elective] African American history, … is not a required course, it's an elective, but English is a required course. In that English textbook, you may only have two to three pieces that are dedicated to your Black authors.

Peter described SV as the inclination to dismiss the intrinsic value of Black students as human beings and instead treat them as commodity. He commented that they are educated in a way that prevents them to "to critically look at the system." He added that students are treated like "something that we can use, we can monetize, and we can

generate income from." He remarked that there is a perception that "Stimulating young Black children to blossom, and to become free thinkers and critical thinkers, has no benefit to the country."

Maria used her experience as an ETO teacher to illustrate her understanding of SV. She remarked that issues facing her students are not addressed adequately, and measures that are supposedly set in place to help the students are instead setting them up for failure. For example, she noted that while she is required to use lower materials level to teach her students, she is also asked to accelerate the pacing of the instruction which ultimately contributes to an overload of materials the students must absorb relatively quickly. Additionally, she indicated that despite learning from lower levels materials, these students face the same testing requirements as regular students. Maria explained the school's decisions in the following comments:

> It's not that the curriculum is different, it's the way that we have to deliver instruction that is different. So, it's like you're setting them up to fail because you have this pacing, that is, we're gonna keep moving. We need to keep on pace, but it doesn't matter that they actually get the material. So, I have to teach this by Friday…but it doesn't matter if they understand it. As long as you stand on pace, you're okay, so you set the kids up to fail.

Using the following example, Maria illustrated the situation she experiences daily with her ETO students:

> Let me just give you an example, textbooks. Our ETO schools have certain textbooks that the other schools don't have. The textbooks are two grade levels below. So, to me, that's dummying down. With the kids, you

> can be in sixth grade, but your book is going to be on fourth grade level. So, how do you expect the kids get at grade level at a certain point of time, especially based on the test?

Jeremy described SV as a violence that is exercised psychologically rather than physically. As he phrased it: “I may not be able to see it, but it's happening.” He explained his view of SV in the following statement:

> One of the things we know about it, it is nonphysical. So, it's not like I just come and hit you in your head. But I'm doing something that might even hurt you in your head, but I'm not actually hitting you in your head.

Symbolic Violence in the Curriculum in Florida Public Schools is evidenced in Five Ways

While SV includes a wide variety of expressions, this study focuses on four main characteristics in which teachers perceive SV to be manifested in school curriculum and in textbooks that are used to teach Black students: Eurocentrism, racial biases, cultural biases, and lack of representation in curriculum and textbooks.

Eurocentrism. Eurocentrism refers to a “tendency to interpret the world in terms of European or Anglo-American values and experiences” (Merriam Webster dictionary). Eurocentrism in education is characterized by learning practices that force Black students to learn from a curriculum that excludes their culture and experiences. Mulder (2016) described the concept as “a pervasive ideology that sneaks into every aspect of life, attempting to erase the diverse histories of peoples” (p. 1).

Adrienne explained that Eurocentrism is a phenomenon that creates an incomplete curriculum in which White European culture is overrepresented at the expense of African

history and achievements. She explained:

> An incomplete curriculum is one that creates a curriculum that is one sided from the perspective of the dominant culture, and in this case, White European culture. So, the negative impact, I think, is when you're talking about history and social systems, there's never a complete teaching of history and social systems. For example, when our students learn history, in K through 12 curriculums in the United States, rarely do they learn anything about the vast empires on the African continent that existed long before Europeans.

She added that essential elements such as resistance to colonization that could inspire pride in Black students are ignored. She stated:

> It always starts with Western Civilizations and so you get that even when they began to teach the history of people of color. Never do you learn that there was true resistance to colonization. I think younger people that are of color would take pride in knowing that there were those that fought back against colonization and those that fought back against enslavement, and they organized resistance.

Kesha expressed that an important aspect of Eurocentrism in the curriculum and textbooks is the exclusion of Africa's contributions to modern societies and how it is relevant to Black students. She remarked:

> When I taught world history, Africa, and those who live in Africa, were not included. So, as a Black student, when you're being taught the curriculum that is based off what the textbook is telling us that we

> shouldn't, that the students should know, versus overall what was going on … There's a huge absence of the Africans relevance and importance at the beginning of history based off of what the textbook and the manufacturers are asking for us to teach the students.

Fabian emphasized on the exclusion of materials that are relevant to Black to describe the manifestations of Eurocentrism in his classroom. Explaining some of his experiences with the issue, Fabian stated the following:

> These manifestations are happening every single day in the classroom, simply because you don't have any books in our library that talk about the contribution of these African Americans or Black people per se, in the Caribbean Colombia itself, they don't learn about that. You probably get to what they call Black History Month, where people are mentioning the names of some of the Black people have done. But it is important for me also to understand that this manifestation can be seen on a daily basis, because it's not implemented in the curriculum.

Peter described Eurocentrism as a perspective according to which students are preselected to fit a specific profile that goes along with what has been constructed as whiteness. He stated:

> When you are you being educated from a Eurocentric perspective, if you don't fit into this silhouette, then you fail, or something is wrong with you. And the interesting thing is that the Eurocentric silhouette does not encompass the people who fall into the made-up construct of whiteness, most of them don't fit that concept. But in the society that we live in, they

> have the currency of the designation, which allows them to walk into a room, take the superior position ...Their opinion holds greater weight than all of my research, my experience, and my knowledge.

Describing the case of a student from Chinese descent who preferred to use an English name instead of his real name because he was embarrassed to say his name to his classmates, Peter further explained that it is important to make students confident and comfortable to embrace their identity, culture, and experiences. Very often kids are afraid to display their true identity in front of other kids because they feel they would be marginalized or ridiculed.

Maria described Eurocentrism as the absence in the curriculum of content that relates to Black students' lives and experiences. She remarked that the system is too Eurocentric for Black students to relate to. She lamented that content about Black history are reduced to Black figures like Martin Luther King and Rosa Park. Speaking of the absence of substantial content in the curriculum, she stated:

> I don't see that in my curriculum. Instead, we learn about Europeans, what their contributions are to this planet, to this world… There is always one piece of Black information in the curriculum. There may be something about Martin Luther King, there may be something about Rosa Park, [the kids] they all know about her. Those are the only pieces that you ever see.

Racial Biases. Racial bias or racism is referred to by the Social Science Encyclopedia as "the idea that there is a direct correspondence between a group's values, behavior and attitudes, and its physical features" (The Social Science Encyclopedia, 2004). Racial biases are manifested as an expression of symbolic violence which imposes

in the curriculum a vision that is inspired by the false idea that the dominant White race and its culture is superior to other races. As such, the knowledge that is derived from that race or culture must be imposed and learned by students from other races.

Adrienne pointed out to the unequal treatment that Black students are subjected to as a clear manifestation of racial biases. She indicated that compared to their White counterparts, Black students are often treated differently, and they are provided with materials that are different from their peers. She provided the following comment to explain her views:

> Well, when I was teaching that was an example there that they considered Black schools needing different literary materials than the others. So, there was definitely a built-in bias there. There was built in bias and not thinking that Black teachers had sense enough to exercise academic freedom and make the correct choices for students in terms of building literacy. So that was there, whereas White teachers in the building teaching White children had all academic freedom they need to make choices about materials. So that was very much biased.

Adrienne recalled an experience when she was teaching in a predominantly Black school where the curriculum was stripped of essential elements to build literary skills. She explained how she raised money on her own to get materials that reflect students' cultures in the lessons.

> I was sent to a predominately Black high school, and the Black community consisted of Caribbeans and Americans. So, it was diverse in terms of ethnicity, but it was Black students. However, it was, at the time

> rated as a D school, and I was sent to the school to work on building literacy… They were given these reading materials and these reading plans that couldn't build literacy in anything. It was horrific. And the teachers were mandated to use these materials and the materials were, I say very culturally biased. They were way below grade level materials, not adequate materials for high school juniors and seniors. If the teachers didn't follow the protocol, step by step, they were castigated by teams of White people.

Kesha expressed that the absence of Africa's contribution and how it is relevant to Black students in the curriculum and textbooks reflects how racial biases are prevalent in education. She made the following comment:

> In terms of history, so they know that we were there, we were present, we were important. This is what was going on in the Black community, in the Black life during this time. So, while we're only talking about this President and what this President was able to contribute, there were Black people that were working behind the scenes that helped push and were able to create all these things that we're able to enjoy today. And it's important that they know that.

Fabian commented that the curriculum and textbooks are racially biased first and foremost because there were conceptualized and built for Black people without their inputs by individuals who don't necessarily know much about the Black culture and experiences. He illustrated his views in the following statement:

> I've been in education for 25 years, in classroom for more than 15 years,

> and what it is that I could tell you in terms of racial biases, when it comes to that, think about the people who actually wrote the curriculum, the textbooks that we're using, and where are they coming from, the people who are sharing those standards that have been approved. So, it is already vetted, it is already controlled that way. So, it's going to bring that racial bias at a level, because the Black kids will not find themselves in that curriculum... I think as a teacher, the first thing that comes to mind is, how I bring my own understanding…because there is no relationship or it's not relevant to them. So, the relevancy that you're looking for cannot be found in the curriculum.

Alea took on the imagery in the textbooks to highlight racial biases that the Black student is often a victim of. She stressed that more need to be done to provide Black students with content that could reflect in a more positive light their experience and culture. She illustrated her thoughts in the following statement:

> The imagery and the photos they use to attach to give the kids a visual aid when they're reading, I think those needs to be updated… The same posters that you see in the "Black Lives Matter" movement you can just superimpose those with the "I am a man" poster or "no justice no peace", it's the same slogan 40 - 50 years later. And I keep telling them why is this in black and white when it can be in color?

However, Alea added that all of this may not be enough to improve Black students' success if they're not reflected in the tests that are administered to them. She provided the following statement.

> But again, it's not going to happen if those things are not tested on, the way we're such a testing culture. If those things are not something that the textbook makers can't make a test for, the State of Florida can't make a test for, these kids are not going to do well. I mean, you could use that stuff to get them to see themselves, but at the end of the day they have to know how to read, those basics got to be covered... [is]to engage in a matter that they feel seen when they're on campus, seen in your classroom, seen in the texts they're reading, and I think you'll see a better student show up, better performance, less dropouts.

Peter expressed there's a racial mismatch between the students who are predominantly black and the administrations that are often composed of White people. He illustrated his view in the following statement:

> Let's go to a predominately White high school and a predominantly Black high school. And now here's the thing that you're going to find. You're never going to find in a predominantly non-black high school that the administration staff is either Black or White, it's not gonna happen. So, you find in many instances all of these predominantly Black schools and their administrators are unlike the population.

Responding to the question about the consequences of this mismatch on the curriculum, Peter commented that "It is it's even more symbolically violent." Recounting his own experience as a student who was dismissed as a failure by a White counselor, he remarked that like many students, he lived the experience of being labeled as failure and excluded. He stated: "I was one of these kids who was marginalized when I was a high

school kid, and had it not been for someone who stood up in the face of the symbolic violence, I could have been a throwaway as well." He stressed how important it is for schools to integrate Black teachers and Black administrators who can understand Black students and stand up for them.

Maria explained that racial biases are characterized by the failure to integrate in the curriculum content that matter to Black students. This lack of integration ultimately leads Black students to experience harder time to relate to what they are being taught. She added that often they doubt whether they will be able to contribute to their own community. She commented:

> I think that lack of motivation is not just coming home, but it is coming from the fact that the curriculum doesn't show them, where they are, what part they play in the global community. They don't see themselves in any of the contribution in this world. So, how can I contribute to the global community? I don't see myself in the past, I don't see myself in the present.

Jeremy stressed that there are not enough models for Black students to emulate. He explained that as a kid he also wrestled with the issue of Black representation in the school system. He stated, "even when I was in school, I was like, wow, I don't see people that looks like me enough." As he put it "not enough, that's always the word I'm gonna keep saying."

Cultural Biases. The APA Dictionary of Psychology (2022) refers to *cultural biases* as "the tendency to interpret and judge phenomena in terms of the distinctive values, beliefs, and other characteristics of the society or community to which one

belongs. This sometimes leads people to form opinions and make decisions about others in advance of any actual experience with them" (pp. 1-2). Writing on the topic, Gilstein (2018) remarked that "Cultural bias, or ethnocentricity, occurs when an individual interprets the experiences of others through the lens of his or her own cultural experience (p. 1).

Speaking on cultural biases, Adrienne pointed to content in the curriculum that are not relevant to Black students' experiences and culture. Similarly, she remarked that standardized testing predominantly reflects the White culture while leaving out important aspects of Black history. She explained:

> When you're looking at standardized testing, and children are having to read and deal with concepts like tobogganing and various things that they have no familiarity with, because they're not living in a White community that has four seasons and has something such as tobogganing. It's things like that, the experiences of White culture in a lot of the chosen literary materials on the standardized testing as well. So, those are some of the built-in biases that I've encountered over time.

Kesha emphasized that the exclusion of African experience and culture as an important aspect of cultural biases in the curriculum. She noted that this exclusion is taking place while European achievements are ubiquitous. She noted:

> There's no real presence of the African experience in the curriculum. The biggest thing that they talk about when it comes to Black people, Africans, and African Americans is slavery. But they talk about how powerful the Romans and the Greeks were in terms of the armies and how they built

> their civilization and stuff like that. That is big, big time in the curriculum, but there's very little to no mention of how powerful civilizations and how things were created from Africa.

Fabian spoke of the lack of exposure of Black students with regards to their own culture. He further mentioned how students react in surprise when they learn something new about their own culture and knowledge which they have rarely been exposed to. He explained:

> It's extremely surprising to them [Black students] that we've had even all these Black people that have contributed to so many things. They never knew about it because nobody's ever talking about that. So that is the reaction, kind of surprising in a sense, but knowing it from now on, they embrace that idea that we also have Black people who have contributed. I think we just need to see that included the curriculum.

For Alea, only a fraction of the curriculum and textbooks are dedicated to other cultures, history, and experiences. She commented: “That itself is a crime.”

> There's a standard that talks about cultural experiences, historical background, but not paying attention to other cultures, not just Black culture, Hispanic culture, indigenous people. I mean, we have just a blimp, just real quick example, or a short story written that is written from another perspective. Out of a textbook of 300-400 pages we don’t even have 10% that is dedicated to those different perspectives... I mean that itself is a crime, that itself is a shame.

Maria expressed that it is a deliberate choice to exclude Black students’ culture

because the system does not see any value in it. She expressed that the exclusion is "intentional." She explained her views in the following statement:

> In school, there's nothing showing what my community has contributed and what my culture has contributed. I don't see that in my curriculum. But instead, we learn about Europeans, what their contributions are to this planet, to this world. As a group of Black kids, where do they see themselves? What have had their ancestors contributed?

Lack of Representation. Lack of representation is characterized by the absence of important elements from Black culture in the curriculum. According to a report written at the request of the NYC Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ) and by the Education Justice Research and Organizing Collaborative (EJ-ROC)

> The lack of representation in curriculum presents a developmental challenge for students striving to establish their identity and sense of self; it also presents an academic challenge, as research shows that students engage more deeply and achieve at higher levels when their curriculum connects to their identities and experiences. Research demonstrates that for students of color and White students, culturally responsive education decreases dropout rates and suspensions, and increases grade point averages, student participation, self-image, critical thinking skills and graduation rates. (NYC Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ), 2020)

Adrienne contended that contributions of people of color in science, math, biology, and technology are not represented. She noted that Black students barely know the names of Black individuals who contributed to advance the American society.

> A lot of times, they're not taught, students are not taught the contributions of people of color that have advanced mankind on a scientific and a technical level. You don't learn the names of people. For example, when you're talking about now, students are going to learn in biology about gene therapy and genetics. They don’t talk about Henrietta Lacks, the first person whose cells that they used to do a lot of these genes was an African American woman.

Kesha expressed that the curriculum was not representative of her class demographic which was made of 80% African American students. She indicated only a very small portion of African American contribution to history or society was represented in the curriculum.

> There's a clear absence of it. I probably say the first four, maybe five chapters, there's a huge, huge absence of African Americans presence in history. You don't hear about or if there is a mention of them, it's a very small paragraph, a very small portion of the chapter. So, there's no huge presence.

Fabian contended that contributions of Black people are not represented in the curriculum in terms of Black students’ daily life and experiences. He stressed that the curriculum needs to be revised. He stated the following:

> The makeup of the curriculum is not representative of the population that we're teaching. And that's the reason why it has to be revised, that's the reason why somebody has to look at it and say look I live in this zip code, and this is what I see, this is what I know, these are the stores that I've

> visited, those are the places that I go to. So, therefore those things must be included in the curriculum for me to understand what that means.

Speaking about lack of representation, Alea criticized some school administrators' efforts to censor Black students' initiatives to express themselves. Instead, she stressed the importance to integrate their daily-life experiences into their own learning. She illustrated her point by recounting an episode in which she witnessed a conflict between school leadership and some Black students who wanted to use the Black history week to create a podcast addressing the topic of skin colorization. She explained:

> [The students] were just so frustrated that every time they came up with something, the admin team would knock it down and said we want you to educate our students. That's not how they wanted to do the Black history week. There is some kind of disconnect between what the leadership feels the kids should know and what the kids want to know. It's the kids' education, they are stakeholders, you have to take that into consideration as well.

Peter argued that Black representation in the school system is important for the Black students' success. He remarked that in the school he is teaching, although there is representation in terms of teachers, but "the students are in a desperate situation, because of their inability to fit into the silhouette of the norm."

> At the school that I am right now, the representation as far as the teachers is there, but it's an odd environment, because essentially, what you have is kids that are in a desperate situation, because of their inability to fit into the silhouette of the norm … Even if they are at a school with Black

> principals that represent the population, the curriculum, in terms of what being taught and taught is still controlled.

In response to the question whether Black students are represented in the curriculum, Maria empathetically responded: “Absolutely not… There is nothing geared towards our people. And I know that we have Blacks that are helping to create the curriculum, but there's no incorporation of our kids at all. No representation. It's not equitable at all.” She continued to say that although you find aspects of the curriculum that represents Black history, but it is not enough. She stated:

> [The curriculum] “is strictly biased. Let’s talk about Black history month; they'll have something they put in the curriculum, very minor. Why not teach it all year? Why not use me as a teacher? I've done that before. I taught it all year, based on the curriculum.”

She noted how surprised non-black students are when you tell them of Blacks’ contributions to society: “Telling them about some things from the Black culture, they're in shock.”

Jeremy expressed that although there may be some representation, but it’s just not enough. He stressed on the need to include more content in curriculum and textbooks that are relevant and inspiring to Black students. He explained his views in the following comments:

> Not letting Black kids know that there are other Black scientists that contribute to society, or it’s not in textbooks, or it's not enough of them in textbooks, so you just tell him that Black kids have to go into something else, because this is not for you. It is pretty much kind of way of saying it

> to them. But if they see that, oh, this person looks like me, he's a researcher, well, that means I can be a researcher too.

Textbook Biases. Textbook biases refer to content that failed to consider Black students' and other ethnicities' experiences, culture, and race. In the U.S. these textbooks often reflect a narrative that is Eurocentric and dismissive of non-White cultures. Addressing the potential consequences of textbook biases, Ragusa (2013) argued that "Textbooks are a common source of science information in K-12 science education. Science literacy is a major challenge of students in K-12 and this dramatically affects students' achievement. Biases in textbooks negatively influence students' interest and achievement in science and engineering" (p. 1317).

Kesha remarked that the textbooks available to students only present a one-sided European experience with no regards of that of other cultures. As a result, she feels a need to go outside of the official textbook to find content that are relevant to Black students and connect with them. She made the following comments:

> What the makers of these textbooks are only putting is what the European experience is, and that's not everyone's experience. That wasn't my ancestors' experience, that wasn't my Hispanic students' experience either. It wasn't my Black kids', my Haitian students' that was not their experience. My island, my Jamaicans, and my Bahamians, it was not their experience.

Speaking of the textbook biases Fabian also thinks that because Back contributions are not adequately related in textbooks and in curriculum, Black students don't know about vital information that could help them succeed. He remarked that

information about Black achievements is rare in the textbooks, and whenever they put it, the imagery is often negative. For example, he explained that the location of captions under Black pictures is different, and their size is smaller compared to information relating to the European culture. Additionally, Fabian remarked that the frequency with which Black culture is mentioned is less compared to European cultures. He explained her thoughts in the following statement:

> In textbooks, anytime you see fire, anytime you see red, anytime you see something that's really bad, you see Blacks next to it. And also, the captions that are actually placed into textbooks, right, the captions under the Black pictures, they're totally different from when you see them in any other way, you know, any other areas in the textbook... Whenever they're about to mention something that a Black person did that was kind of good, it will be extremely small. All of a sudden, the font size changes as if it's just a caption. It's not a regular size anymore, it's not something that's boldface, it's not capitalized.

Speaking of representation of Black contribution and culture in textbooks, he stated the following:

> So, when it comes to the textbook, the Black culture if they mention that once or twice, just don't expect to see that in the entire book. Therefore, the number of times that anything Black is mentioned is so minimal, that it seems as if it's not a true representation of what it is that really that they've contributed to. So, their level of contribution has not been represented in the textbooks at all. It's so minimal compared to what you see when it

> comes to the European countries.

Alea lamented on the subtext that accompanies the textbooks content. She remarked that they often carry the image of Black people as being victimized and subservient to other races. She stated the following to explain her views:

> When you teach a kid in school, and you put that text in front of them, what they're reading is victimized Black people, it makes them, you know, subservient to other races... I've taught letter from Birmingham jail, I've taught I have a dream, and the question always comes up, what were these people doing? Or what about these people? So, the kids and not always from Blacks, would say why is it always that Blacks who are always being hosed and chased with dogs.

She added that black and white images of Black people during the civil rights struggle also confuse Black students and give them the perception that the events are from a very distant past. She argued that Black students need to learn more than slavery about their history and more about recent and positive stories.

Peter remarked that vital information is not included in the textbook and the information that is included is biased. He stated, “There's a bias, there's a narrative that's being put forth and the narrative is basically a narrative that is put in place to continue to control power on the masses.” Speaking of the textbooks’ imagery, he highlighted that this imagery generally fosters shame and devaluation, and White heroes are put forth to continue with the domination. He contended that they choose to discuss what fits their narratives and their likings by promoting White figures while obscuring important Black figures like Elijah McCoy and Granville Tailer Woods who were great inventors. He

commented:

> When I pick and choose what is placed in there, it fosters shame. It fosters the devaluation of these kids who are sitting in class. Even when they show pictures of White people during the dust bowl and the depression, but 90 to 99% of the other pictures are, I'm running things, I'm in control... Not gonna go deep on Harriet Tubman and her philosophy and what she did, they're not going to talk about Susan B. Anthony and Sojourner Truth.

Maria expressed that there is not enough about Black history and culture in the textbook and discussions on racial tension are nonexistent. Referring to Black imagery, she contended there's no substantial representation in terms of image to talk about in the textbook. She stated: "For me, the reading books always have one little, one little Black story in the textbook since I've been teaching reading, there's always one that goes throughout the entire year. So, it's just not enough representation of any Black stories in the in the textbook at all."

Jeremy commented that although science remains science wherever you go, students may be more motivated to learn when you use someone that looks like them as an example. He stated: "you're now seeing somebody in that particular standard, actually contributed to you now learning this thing but it was based on somebody that looks like you, that might motivate you to even say, you know what, when I get when I get older let me study this and then add some more to it." He added the following comments:

> All knowledge is knowledge regardless of where it comes from, however having it done by my people and as I'm learning will motivate me to probably get there to do the exact same, or to do something even better.

> But when I don't see enough of me to this particular field, I'm now saying it's impossible, it's gonna be very hard for me to say let me try to invent this or invent that, because I don't see people that look like me over there, so I'm probably going to think about doing something else if I am a student.

The Ways in Which Symbolic Violence is manifested in the Curriculum has a Negative Impact on the Achievement of Black Students

For decades, Black students' achievements gap has been a topic of numerous debates among education scholars, school administrators, and policy makers alike. Parallel to this debate is a growing body of research that has been developed in recent years documenting the effects of symbolic violence on Black students' performance and school dropout rates. (Brar, 2017; Nairz-Wirth et al., 2017; Waters, 2017). For example, Waters (2017) argued that symbolic violence can be embedded in "school rules, structures, relationships and cultural practices" in such a way that it ends up "marginalizing some young people from full participation in education" (p. 27). In the following section, the interviewees offered their opinions on 3 main areas of the topic: academic performance, early dropouts, and testing mismatch.

Academic Performance. Academic performance is defined by students' reporting of past semester CGPA/GPA and their expected GPA for the current semester. The grade point average or GPA is now used by most of the tertiary institutions as a convenient summary measure of the academic performance of their students. The GPA is a better measurement because it provides a greater insight into the relative level of performance of individuals and different group of students (Steinmayr et al., 2017; York

et al., 2015). Steinmayr et al. (2017) remarked that “Academic achievement represents performance outcomes that indicate the extent to which a person has accomplished specific goals that were the focus of activities in instructional environments, specifically in school, college, and university” (Steinmayr et al., 2017). In this context, grades and GPA are often used as measures of academic success (York et al., 2015).

Adrienne stressed that the integration of Black students’ culture and experiences in the curriculum alone will not be enough to help improve their academic performance. She argued that the improvement will come by getting the elimination of the high-stake tests. She provided the following comments to explain her reasoning:

> If you still have a culturally biased testing system that actually creates problems for students when it comes to pass rates, when it comes to acceptable scores, and you still have that dichotomy going on, you're still going to have rocks, you're still going to be stamping failure on kids early in life, you're still going to have that damage. Now do I think if they had better curriculum that is less culturally biased would help? Yes, of course, but that's not gonna do anything if you don't get rid of exams, standardized tests.

To clarify her position, she cited various issues that make testing an ill suitable measurement tool that stands in the way of Black students’ success:

> Tests shouldn’t be used punitively, they shouldn't be used to determine who goes to third and fourth grade, or they shouldn't be used for graduation, they shouldn't be used to judge whether or not a school needs to be shut down, or the staff needs to be moved out, all that “bs” they were

> using it for, if it's still going to be used in that way, you're still creating damage.

Kesha reiterated her position regarding the need to integrate the curriculum with content that reflect Black students' day-to-day life and needs. Responding to the question whether she thinks the inclusion of Black students' culture and experiences in the curriculum will help improve Black students' academic performance, she expressed positively that she "believes so."

For his part Fabian expressed that the inclusion in the curriculum of Black culture and history would definitely help improve Black students' performance, as they would have positive models to look up to. He added that would also help the students have better image of themselves. In the following statement he provided an explanation of his reasoning:

> There is no doubt that the inclusion of all these elements [culture, history, and experience] would improve their [Black students] academic performance. It would also help improve their understanding of who they are and what they need to do and all the things that are great they can be. Because it will remove the negative views of themselves. So, in a sense they'll see oh, I could actually accomplish this as well, just like anybody else, because look, this Black person contributed to this years ago, I can do it too.

Alea expressed that SV definitely plays a role in Black students' low performance. She stressed on the importance of building relationship between teachers and students to motivate them to learn. To the question whether she thinks the gap in

performance between Black students and their White counterparts is due to a lack of inclusion, she responded,

> They're not going to learn, period, if the kids do not have a relationship with their teacher … For me teaching a Black text to Black kids, they just assume that I know what I'm talking about, they recognize she's Black teaching a black text, they just assume.

However, Alea also explained that students will learn regardless of the origin of the text. She stated: "Kids are just gonna learn, some kids are motivated by grades, they're gonna learn regardless of what you put in front of them, they're gonna learn the material. Some kids depending on what the issues are, they might just struggle in general and don't show up to get the lesson. But as far as kids saying I'm not gonna learn because it's not Black in nature, I've never met that kid."

Peter commented there is "no doubt race has a lot to do with Black students' low performance." He stressed that Black students need people who look like them, who can understand their experiences, who can defend them, especially in predominantly White environment. Recounting the experience of his own son who had trouble connecting with a White teacher, Peter stated that Black students need to be seen for who they are as persons, not as commodity. He contended that "they are in a system that is diametrically opposed to them and sees no value in them because they don't have a marketable skill." He added that "many Black people, sociologically, educationally speaking, are dying a slow death, we're dying of oxygen deprivation because we hold our breath habitually on a regular basis trying to fit in and be a part of a system that is violent towards us."

Maria remarked that the inclusion of topics that relate to the Black students'

culture and background can have a positive impact on their academic performance. Addressing the specific question whether she thinks that the inclusion of the Black kids' culture, history, and the day-to-day experience could contribute to improve their academic performance, she emphatically responded: "I do! Yes, if we're represented at a big proportion, these kids can totally relate."

For his part, Jeremy remarked that only partially would inclusion of Black students' culture, and history positively impact their academic performance. He stressed that the performance issue has more to do with the environment at home than the lack of content that relate to them. He stated the following:

> To some extent yes, but not fully. The success of the test I think has more to do with the environment at home. Even if you relate to them, give them an example of a Black person that looks like them, but when they get home, they already have the struggle, they didn't eat, you know, if the belly is not full, the brain doesn't work. So, now they got to go home and deal with all these extra things and take care of this sister, mom is not home, you know, when kids are not supervised, they don't do work.

Early dropouts. "Early dropouts" refers to students leaving school before they graduate high school. According to the NCES, "The status dropout rate represents the percentage of 16- to 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in school and have not earned a high school credential (either a diploma or an equivalency credential such as a GED certificate)" (NCES, 2019). The Florida Department of Education data on Florida's High School Cohort 2019-20 Dropout Rate has shown that although there has been a decrease in recent years, the number of Black students dropping out from high school remains

consistently higher than White students (Florida Department of Education, 2018)

Adrienne expressed that the testing has a direct effect on the dropout rate among Black students. She remarked that not being able to get a diploma because they cannot pass the test facilitates the school to prison pipeline. She stated: “It plays a role in Black students dropping out, particularly with the testing where you spent 12 years in school, and you cannot pass a reading assessment and you don't get a high school diploma, you get your certificate of completion. So, when you look at those students that are not getting their high school diplomas, that school to prison pipeline is real.”

Kesha remarked that the dropout problem is deeper than just the curriculum. She explained that the content being taught to Black students have to address the daily reality they face and their needs for the future. Like Adrienne, Kesha argued the school to prison pipeline does exist and it “needs to stop.” She stated the following to explain her views:

> It is way deeper than just the curriculum that's being presented to the students. You have to meet them where they’re at. I think there is progress, but there's much more progress that needs to be made within the Black community that's going to help curve that gap we have in terms of preparing our Black students for the next phase of their life. The school to prison pipeline needs to go.

Fabian remarked that the dropout phenomenon is also a problem of rigor. He argued that Black students are not challenged enough to master the necessary skills they need to be successful. Consequently, he argued that they face harder time academically when they get to higher grades, which eventually leads to frustration and ultimately dropping out. To the question whether he thinks SV plays a role in Black students

dropping out, he stated the following:

> It does play a role. If I'm only being exposed to standards that are extremely low, where the expectations are not as high for me as it is for other kids, because I'm a Black student, by the time I get to ninth grade, where the rigor of the texts, the curriculum is a lot more rigorous, then I will not be able to sustain, I will not be able to complete the work, I'm going to be so frustrated that there's nothing else for me to do than to drop out. So therefore, there's a direct link with that.

Alea expressed that beyond academic reasons, Black students dropping out from school is a phenomenon that has a lot to do with student teacher relations. She explained her reasoning in the following comment:

> If a kid drops out it's because his needs are not met, it's not just academic needs, it could be a teacher misunderstands a kid. A kid who comes to my classroom, he should feel loved. A kid who comes to my classroom who happens to be a Black kid knows that I already know what his experiences in school are like. A kid who comes to my classroom can sit and be quiet for a day and not get in trouble.

She stressed however that her attitude to that student may be different with that of a teacher who is not Black. She noted that "it's a misconception problem." She argued that Black students get disciplined harder than other kids and they are treated differently compared to other students.

> They're addressed like they are older than they actually are … we tend to be too critical of Black kids or peers of color in general. That comes from

> the images that we see play out in the news and videos, images that we see on platforms like the social media, television. It's just the imagery that we get sensitize to that plays out in the classroom from the teacher down to the student.

She stressed that inclusion of content relating to Black students' life experiences would have a positive impact on the dropping phenomenon.

> I think that would be beneficial, absolutely, if you want kids to improve. That's why we say Black educators are so important, that's why we say Black male teachers are so important. Because if you look at the dropout rates, who is dropping out the most is the Black male student. You put a Black male in front of that kid, he sees that in elementary school, if you include all these things in a textbook, every time I turn a page I see some who looks like me, I read experiences that are similar to my own, from my own country, my own culture, different things that mimic things I see when I go home, I think you will see a different student show up.

Peter expressed that the whole system is set up to play against the Black student through processes like detention, suspension, and documentation. To the question whether SV plays a role in Black students dropping out from school, he responded "yes they have a direct impact on the kids." He added that "the system is set up in a way to squeeze these kids out."

Maria remarked that the dropout phenomenon is in line with the school to prison pipeline logic. She questioned whether policy makers have the will to resolve the problem. Speaking from her experience as an ETO teacher, she explained:

> In my experience, I don't see the value that they see in our kids succeeding. They don't find value in our kids to succeed. Every time we start performing better on a test, they switch the test... There's no money in our kids to succeed, there's money in remediation, there's money in textbooks, there's money in building prisons, and like I said, it's checkbook…And this is where prison pipeline plays a part because you test the kids in third grade, based on their reading levels to determine how many prisons you're gonna build in the future, because they can't read in third grade.

Maria remarked that effort should be made to integrate students' daily life-experiences in the tests to increase Black students' success. She noted that sometimes what could be obvious to some groups of students may not be so for others due to differences in cultures and the way they live their lives. She illustrated her thoughts with the following example:

> I remember a test question asking about a lawnmower. Some kids had no idea what a lawnmower was because if you live in an apartment, you may not know. If you don't have a yard to cut the grass, you don't know. As a Hispanic kid, most Hispanics, they don't have grass, they have concrete. So, they can't equate the two.

Recounting her experience with a seventh-grade student who has difficulty reading, Maria stressed that challenges that kids are facing at later grades need to be addressed early. She stated:

> So, in the first-grade class, you tell me that you met this kid, this kid is

> already struggling reading, but I'm not going to intervene until third grade. I'm not going to do that intervention until third grade, which was determined in first grade that kid is already struggling. Why am I waiting to third grade? Why can't you address it now? Why you can't allocate resources to address it and nip it in the bud in the beginning, in kinder and first grade when you first identified that kid has a struggle.

Jeremy noted that the drop out problem starts at home from early grades. He explained if the kid fails to learn what he is supposed to learn because of challenges he's going through at home, when he gets to higher grades, he will feel frustrated because he is not able to understand and pass the test. The learning problem cumulates until the student drops out. He stressed that the quality of the kid's environment matters. As he explained, the kid will never perform if the environment is an obstacle to his/her learning, no matter the amount lessons that can relate to his/her background. He insisted that this issue has nothing to do with the curriculum. He explained his reasoning in the following statement:

> I would call it it's a ripple effect… If a kid is not learning, and then you move that kid on to the next level, and next level, then later on, he's gonna have a problem. Or the kid is not learning and why, because at home he has all this problem going on. … All the dropout rate is happening again because of these things I just spoke about… Now, you get to that class, for example, you went three years in middle school, you did nothing in science, 6-7 and eighth grade, you learn nothing at all. So, you got to ninth grade and that teacher is teaching… So, what happened, you start getting

> frustrated and eventually you either do two things, you either put your head down when you get into that class, or you start acting out, you start getting behavior problem, and until you say to yourself, you know what, I'm done.

The Curriculum Does not represent the Lived Experiences of all Students as it Should

Equity. Equity refers to all individuals being treated fairly and impartially regardless of their ethnic and socioeconomic background, and they are afforded the same opportunity to enjoy the basic minimum standard of education (OECD 2008, p. 2). Banks & Banks' (1995) defined equity pedagogy as "teaching strategies and classroom environments that help students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively within, and create and perpetuate, a just, humane, and democratic society" (p. 152).

Adrienne noted that despite past efforts to create equity in the curriculum, Eurocentric mentality proves to be an obstacle to achieve this goal. She remarked that standard testing is a real problem to achieving equity in the curriculum. Reminiscing past efforts to make the curriculum more equitable to all students, she explained that the current state of affairs in school does not leave much space for equity. In the following statement, she summarized both the historical effort to integrate equity in the curriculum and its place now.

> There was a movement for multiculturalism … that movement is now being supplanted with a Eurocentric. We're going to teach for these White children, or we're going to not have them ashamed of their ancestors and all this other stuff. There was a time when there was a concerted effort to

> create equity, but when No Child Left Behind came into play with this testing and these standards, all that started getting kicked us out and it started moving once again towards this Eurocentric mentality.

Kesha remarked that Black students are treated differently compared to their peers. She also reiterated how the Black history and experiences are excluded from the curriculum while Eurocentric content is prominently featured. She explained her thought in the following statement.

> [Black students] they're being handled and dealt with differently, versus you know, their peers from other ethnic backgrounds. So, I definitely feel as though there's nothing equitable about how our Black students have been treated.

Fabian noted that equity implies that every student has access to the same resources and the same level of education regardless of their background. He stressed that this also means that we should have the same level of expectation from all students. He explained his thoughts in the following statement:

> Equity means that you have to provide services to all the students, and then you make the necessary modifications to ensure that those who are struggling get to that same level. So that's what that means, resources must be available to all students, total inclusion. And when it's not it’s available, you have to do something about it. So, which means that, for me, as a teacher, it starts with equity. It starts with whatever it is that I'm going to teach to a higher-level student, then the black student has to get that same level of instruction.

Alea expressed that equity entails that Black student have at their disposal adequate resources to learn their own culture and history. She criticized the idea that classes related to African American studies have to be listed as electives. She explained her position in the following statement:

> Equity, you have to mandate it. I don't think it's fair to ask children to go out and search for who they are. They're spending so much time in school, 13 years, and they're not required to learn about other cultures as a whole. A kid who is interested in learning about African American Studies, has to go out and join a club to learn about African American Studies. A kid who's interested in something that reflects of themselves he has to go out and take a class as an elective, and I think that's where the equity part of it falls short...

Peter remarked there can't be equity if Black students are not represented at the table. He stressed there is no equivalent as being on the table and be represented. He stated: "Equity means representation." He illustrates his views of equity by citing an old saying "if you're not at the table, you're on the menu." He stated that the inequitable treatment of Black students is an affirmation of the White domination. By the same token, Peter stated that the inclusion of everything that is Black would be tantamount of questioning the existence of that system of domination and superiority.

To Maria the issue of equity is also an issue of representation. She noted that there is no representation and Black students' needs are not taken into consideration. She illustrated her views by recounting the story of a struggling foreign-born third grade new student who was sent to her class without any assistance from the district or the school

administration. She indicated that the absence of any action from the school to integrate this student in the school is an example of unfairness in the system. Expressing her frustration about that situation, she stated: “It's like a setup for failure for this poor child and I felt really, really bad, and I was so upset even with my principal. How do you do you do this to a kid? If they live in the area, how do you force them to go somewhere else?”

Jeremy also expressed that the lack of representation is tantamount to inequity. He stated: “If it’s not enough, it can’t be equitable … So, if something is not enough, therefore, it's not equitable.”

Diversity. Diversity refers to the inclusion of all students in the learning process while taking into consideration their racial, cultural, and socioeconomic differences and educational needs. The University of Delaware website on “Diversity and Inclusive Teaching” sums it up well when it states: “Teaching for diversity refers to acknowledging a range of differences in the classroom” (Center for teaching and assessment Learning, 2022). Kesha remarked that a diverse curriculum should include not only the European but also the Black experience, their history, and their struggles. As a teacher who experienced teaching a diverse population of students, she emphasized that a diverse curriculum is also taking into consideration the cultural reality and experience of other students from different ethnicities and origins in the classroom.

> [A diverse curriculum] would focus on what is actually going on in America vs what was actually going on at that time, so that everyone is represented. It can be done! If you can give me 27 chapters on just the White American European experience, you can give me 27 chapters of not

> only just the White American European history, but just give me same thing with Blacks, Africans, Hispanics, and Haitians, and other islanders.

Responding to the question what a cultural balanced curriculum would like in her opinion, Kesha explained:

> You would want to direct your curriculum based off of the majority population of that particular school. Definitely equip the teachers, your educators on how to give a culturally balanced curriculum. The textbook makers need to have more of a cultural balanced board or writers or people who are inputting into the content of the textbook, so that all this stuff has been touched on. You don't want to continue to support these textbook makers who are predominantly White, and those who are giving input are predominantly White.

Fabian remarked that the curriculum is not diverse enough for the racial and cultural variety of the student population in the school system. However, he acknowledged that it is getting there through efforts that have been initiated. He stated the following about the issue:

> It's not diverse enough, the curriculum isn't diverse enough, but they're getting there. What I mean by getting there is allowing the teachers to bring in their own views … at least you have the discretion to have that type of conversation with the students… A lot of things that are not present in the curriculum and things that are not present in the textbooks, you've got to bring that based on your own experiences based on your own research, based on your own views, and that's important…By creating

> something for the students to get that same level of experience is going to help them later on. If it's not in the curriculum it's not in the textbooks, you gotta bring it, you've got to use your own discretion to do that.

Alea remarked that the textbook is deficient in addressing critical issues regarding Black challenges and not diverse enough in terms of the proportion devoted to Black authors compared to those of European descendants.

However, she acknowledged that Black students can still acquire basic knowledge beyond the confines of their cultural and racial backgrounds. She stated the following:

> Is the textbook diverse enough for Black students? In a word, the answer is no. It's not diverse enough for a Black student. However, a Black student has to be able to recognize something in that text beyond just the Black perspective. There's something that they're supposed to learn from the human perspective and then being Black a person.

Alea also pointed to the absence of discussions on race in the textbooks as a clear indication of the problem of diversity in the school system. She remarked that instead of addressing critical issues reflecting the struggles that historically Black people have been enduring in the country, the discussions about Blacks rather focus on slavery and its negative aspects.

> They definitely don't talk about race and how racism affects Black students. That's not in the textbook. When they talk about race, they talk about it as if it is a system. They don't talk about the detrimental effects of racism. They talk about slavery, but they don't talk about the detrimental effects of slavery, they don't talk about Black people getting redlined, they

> don’t talk about the separation of families and education and all these things that stem from slavery, being put on the bottom and how you have to actually strive.

For Peter diversity means a combination in which all things are represented. He stressed that there is not enough Black representation in the curriculum and the textbook to qualify them as diverse. He emphasized that this problem will not be remediated by throwing a few pictures representing Black people in the book. As he put it “I don't think the curriculum, or the textbook is diverse because they throw a couple pictures in the book.” Peter explained, as a physical education teacher, he creates space for his students to integrate their daily-life experiences as part of what being taught in class. He stated that “I put them on the main stage because I want to spotlight their normal everyday experiences that are categorized as non-experiences.” He explained his views in the following statement:

> When we talk about diversity, we talk about the narratives that are put into the textbook, we talk about cross cultural education, we talk about you sit down here and hear my story, me hearing your story, you talk about me eating your food, and you eating my food…When we talk about diversity we talk about representation. When we talk about diversity, we talk about openly what happened during the creation of the transcontinental railway and the abusive of Chinese immigrants being held in internment camps, we talk about slavery.

Maria expressed doubt as to the possibility of accomplishing diversity in her classroom. She stated that diversity is not reflected in her classroom. She explained that

“When we talk about diversity is when we talk about an education that is diverse and representative of everybody.”

Cultural Relevance. Cultural relevance refers to content that reflects students’ cultural needs and aspirations. The UNESCO International Bureau of Education (IBE-UNESCO) refers to curriculum relevance as the “Applicability and appropriateness of a curriculum to the needs, interests, aspirations and expectations of learners and society in general” (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2022).

Kesha remarked that cultural relevance means the integration in the textbook or the curriculum of the total Black experience, not just slavery. She emphasized that it should be about challenges and how to face them. She further noted that cultural relevance is also tying up the past, the present, and the lived experience of the student. Besides the curriculum, more needs to be done to make Black students’ education relevant to our time and the future. In the following statement Kesha explained her views on cultural relevance.

> It could be a whole lot better if the textbook reflected what really was going on in America during those times and not just reflecting on just slavery and the civil rights movement. Let's talk about the gains, let's talk about the wins. It's okay to talk about the challenges, but let's talk about how we overcame those challenges and become who we are today. Even when Black History Month comes, I tell them Black History Month is just a fraction of what you are going to touch on. So don't just wait, don't think we're waiting to February to talk about all this other stuff and to do projects, no. Black history is all day every day, it’s a lived experience.

Fabian noted that in order for the curriculum to be relevant, the student has to be able to link it to their daily life experiences. He stressed that the curriculum as it is now, is hardly relevant to the student's daily life experiences. He continued to explain that he uses his discretion to organize events for his students to make the curriculum more relevant to them. Explaining his views on the topic, he said the following:

> Curriculum relevance matters. If as a Black student I've never been to a museum, I've never seen a painting in my entire life, I will not understand art. So therefore, that is some type of cultural relevancy. It's where I go, what I do, what my family taught me, what my generation has done prior to me being in this classroom.

Alea explained that from a general standpoint any text with a moral lesson can be relevant to students regardless of their backgrounds. To illustrate her point, she recalled using a poem about someone being incarcerated for breaking the law, to teach her students about remorse and the act of forgiveness. She emphasized the universality of such moral values which transcend racial and cultural barriers. She stated: "Anybody can relate to that." However, she pointed out that does not exclude the need to include content in the curriculum that are cultural relevant to Black students specifically. She explained her thoughts in the following statement:

> When we talk history, we're such a rich people, culturally we've contributed so many things to this nation that just get whitewashed to be honest. When you look at different types of music genres that you've have been doing for years, because they put a Whiteface on it, now it's popular. That stuff has been going on for years and generations. When you talk

> about what you put in the textbook historically and say what Black people have contributed. Culture, that definitely can be stepped up, I would say 100%. What they include now is just surface. It's cute … but it's not enough.

Peter argued that Black contributions and the students' experiences and backgrounds should be reflected in the curriculum. Every student learns from experience sharing: "If you don't have that, everybody doesn't get educated." He continued to say: So, when you look at those things, and we look at the children they can't see themselves in the curriculum, what they do is they shut down."

Peter stressed the need to make the students' daily-life experiences part of their education and the need to genuinely show them that we are interested in them. He also emphasized the need for students of different backgrounds to share their experiences among one another. He illustrated his point by recounting the typical conversation he regularly has with his students about their ordinary routines at home and in their neighborhoods.

> *Peter* - What I would ask the kid is like, how do you do what you do? What do you do where you come from? How do you do it? Share your experiences with us. My kid from Jamaica would say
>
> *Student* - I go to school in the morning and then I go get something to eat.
>
> *Peter* - What do you mean you get something to eat?
>
> *Student* - We leave school, we go, we go away from school, we got some money we go down, we buy something from the store.
>
> *Peter* - From the store? Like a neighborhood store?

> *Peter* - And then to my Hispanic kids, I would say what you all do? They go to the store, they buy something to eat, they eat, and they come back, and they finish the rest of the school day. So, my other kids are like that's crazy because we don't have that, we can't leave school.

Maria remarked that making education relevant to Black students entails an effort to teach them their own history and their ancestors' contributions to society. She explained that some students are often in shock when their teachers inform them about what many Black inventors did. She stated there can be no relevance if the students can't relate and understand the materials. She asked, "What is the relevance here if they [the students] don't get it?" She stated:

> There can be no relevance if the students can't relate and understand the materials. What is the relevance here is that they don't get it. If they don't, they don't get it. They don't, and I think the only way these kids are finding out and knowing about their history is like I said, through us, the teachers. We're exposing them to it, we're talking about it, we're having conversation. That's the only way they're good, and again, not in the curriculum.

Jeremy noted that culturally relevant lessons would definitely make a difference in the students' learning. As he put it, "some lessons do come down to the kid's culture." He stressed that failure to make the content relevant to their culture would be tantamount to a waste of time, as they will learn the lesson and unable to retain it. To the specific question whether culturally relevant lessons would make a difference in Black students' success, Jeremy answered:

> Well, of course, if you're gonna teach and then you're up there teaching, the kids are down there in terms of comprehension level, and you didn't come down to their level, and explain to them what you're teaching so they can see themselves in it, so you're just gonna teach today, they may study in fact, and tomorrow, they forget everything because you didn't talk to them pretty much. You pretty much taught a test or like a robot, feed the information, they got it for one day, they quickly remember for one day, take the test the next day, pass or don't pass, it doesn't matter. Then the next week, next month, next year, everything is gone because you didn't connect the lesson with their culture.

Jeremy added that teaching students with real life examples of their experiences and backgrounds can help students connect with the lesson being taught. Although he reiterated that "science is science", he nevertheless acknowledged that using the students' experiences as illustrations may help them relate better to the content. He said: "Great teachers are supposed to give examples of what the kids are." He added "If you want a relationship with the kids and if you want a better understanding, you have to actually connect to where they're from." To illustrate his argument, Jeremy provided the following example.

> If I'm teaching sound energy and we'll talk about how many decibels your ear can take and higher than that you my mess up your eardrum, so I'll probably say, you know, when you have your uncle inside of his Chevy, and have like two big speakers in the back and then blasting, so now they can relate and say oh my uncle yeah has a car, he's always blasting. So

> now you can relate to this and when you're in the car as well you're going to be affected by this loud music. So now I'm connecting the lesson to their real life.

Balanced Curriculum. A balanced curriculum refers to the integration in the curriculum of instructional content that are susceptible to enrich the students' educational experiences at various levels ranging from academic, health, culture, and extracurricular activities. Writing on the topic, Ornstein and Hunkins (2017) remarked that, "In a balanced curriculum, students can acquire and use knowledge in ways that advance their personal, social, and intellectual goals. Keeping the curriculum balanced requires continuous fine-tuning as well as balance in our philosophy and psychology of learning" (p. 169).

Kesha expressed there is a need for a balanced curriculum that reflects different cultural and historical perspectives. She explained that it is important that all students regardless of their backgrounds be informed about different cultures. She added that textbook writers who are currently predominantly White, should reflect the diversity of the school population. Responding specifically to the question what a balanced curriculum would look like to her, she explained that a balanced curriculum should include everybody's experience, including Europeans, Blacks, Africans, Hispanics, and Asians. She stated the following to illustrate her thoughts:

> It will touch on every aspect of the population that you're serving. I wouldn't even just say, the population that you're serving, because I think everyone should be taught the same information in regard to culture. There is a difference in culture, depending on what ethnicity that you're going to

> be around. As an educator, it was important for me to make sure that my Black students also knew about Hispanic culture. One of my favorite lessons I used to love teaching was about Haiti and how important Haiti was to our history and the cuisines and the culture of the people from Haiti, it was important.

Fabian remarked that a culturally balanced curriculum is one that provides the student a worldview perspective of different cultures. He added that "an inclusive view of history would definitely be beneficial in producing a balanced curriculum …Because it cannot just be unilateral, it cannot be one way." He explained his views in the following statement:

> That's important to have a balanced curriculum. A balanced curriculum balances literacy, balances in terms of diversity. So, allowing all this to be combined into the one will help all the Black students experience. So, a balanced curriculum is where they need to go, it has to be 50/50 in a sense. And that's gonna create an opportunity for them to think a lot higher in terms of the things that they can accomplish. Because symbolic violence, what does it do? In a sense, it stops me from accomplishing certain things, it stops me from being productive, it stops me from accomplishing or achieving my goals, it limits me in a sense.

Illustrating his thoughts through examples, Fabian further explained that

> In terms of cultural balanced curriculum, what you got to think about is, knowing your roots, right, knowing where you're from, the same way that I could learn about Paris, the same way I could learn about Algeria, or

> Africa and everything else, knowing their culture, their backgrounds, their history, knowing my own history as a Black student, that will help me as well, knowing where I'm from, who I am, why I do the things that I do.

Peter remarked that a balanced curriculum would be a comprehensive reflection of America with all its multiplicities. He stated that it would be inclusive at all levels: gender, culture, race, experience, and background. As he put it, a balanced curriculum would be "a snapshot of what was happening in America and what led up to it. That's the story, period." He continued to say, "in other words it would be the representation of everything and every culture … because everything is funneled through this Eurocentric lens disproportionately. So now we go back to diversity and make it truly diverse."

Maria expressed that a balanced curriculum would need to be diversified both at the level of testing and in the curriculum. She provided the following statement about the topic:

> You need to diversify testing; you need to diversify the curriculum. When I say diversify the curriculum, artistically arts have been removed in our schools, there is no real art program, the kids are not learning anything but reading, math, and science…, the kids have no extracurricular, it's just straight academic. So, you have these kids who are frustrated academically but they have no artistic outlet. And that's just on elementary level, when you take it to the middle school level too. Every kid does not want to perform academically, but those arts that you expose them to, the fine arts, that stimulates and that scientifically has been proven that the fine arts stimulate your academic performance. But when you remove that from our

> schools, you take that exposure away from the kids, you set them up for failure.

In addition to adding arts to the curriculum, Maria also think that differentiated instruction would make a difference. She indicated that "differentiated instruction means we all learn differently. So, I'm going to teach you differently because you learn differently. So, I teach you three different ways, whichever way you're comfortable with, that's how you solve the problem." She stated the following:

> I think also you need to differentiate the instruction. They talk about differentiated instruction, but I think people read the definition, but they don't get it. Differentiated instruction means everybody learns differently. So, I'm going to teach you differently because you learn differently. So, I teach you three different ways. Whichever way you're comfortable with, that's how you solve the problem, that's how you arrive at your conclusion. But when I sit here and test you, I'm testing everybody the same way. Not only that, they test on the strategy. So, if I tested the strategy, I didn't differentiate the instruction. I'm not really testing the student; I'm testing a teacher to make sure that she differentiated instruction. So, you set the kids up to fail.

Teachers Use Professional Discretion to Compensate for Deficiencies in the Curriculum

Teacher discretion refers to the ability of teachers to integrate in their instructions components that they deem important to advance the students' learning. Boote, (2006) remarked that, "A teacher has adequate professional discretion for a particular task when

that teacher has the ability to make professional judgments and the capacity to act on those judgments. Those judgments and actions must also be deemed appropriate within a particular social context" (p. 462). In general, such decision is often based on the observations and interactions between the teachers and students. This allows the teacher the privilege to capture and understand the students' cultural inclinations and socioeconomic background which often interplay with their learning. Additionally, the teachers' general experience and judgment are also two important factors that play a role in determining whether such course of actions would contribute to better the student's academic outcome. In this regard Ben-Peretz, (1990) wrote:

> Discretion is the capacity and obligation to decide what actions are appropriate and the ability to take those actions. Thus, a teacher's professional discretion is centered on being able to decide what should be taught and being able to teach it; for teachers, curriculum is inseparable from instruction and improving their ability to make appropriate curricular decisions must always be tied to improving their ability to teach. (Ben-Peretz, 1990, cited in Boote, 2006, p. 465)

This final section proposes to provide an overview of how the participants use their discretion to compensate for what they perceive as deficiencies in the curriculum and in textbooks they use to teach students. The use of their discretion and the nature of actions they take vary from one teacher to another, as there are no prescribed guidelines regarding how teachers' discretion should be implemented. However, although nuanced in their views, they all believe that an integration of these elements would help to better the students' academic outcomes.

Describing how she used her discretion to help her students, Adrienne remarked

that one of the most significant challenges she used to deal with as a teacher is the lack of materials. She explained that the materials are often inadequate and not evenly distributed to schools. She indicated that Black schools are provided with way less than White schools and it is often left to the teacher's discretion to compensate for what is lacking. She explained that she used her academic freedom to make choices of the types of materials that are suitable to compensate for what is missing. As an example, she stated: "when I'm reading a particular text, I would supplement it with Spike Lee's Malcom X. That's a visual I choose to use. That one is what I think they need to see." She further stated that educators have choices, and they can fight. She cited as an example how she integrated in her teaching books written by Black authors to build literacy skills in Black students. In the following statement she explained how she used teacher discretion to help her students.

> Me, as an individual teacher, I incorporated the use of "Between the World and Me" by Ta-Nehisi Coates, but that was my choice to use that to meet the standards. That was my academic freedom. So once again it's left up almost to that individual teacher, as opposed to anything they grip, it's up to the individual. When you look at how the curriculum is set up, you have objectives that go along with speaking, listening, reading, and writing … you can use a variety of materials, it's your choice.

In addition to the choices she made in the classroom regarding the content she deemed relevant to her Black students, Adrienne raised substantial financial resources from independent contributors to buy materials that could help her students build literacy. She stated the following:

> I was awarded $20,000 from Michael Jordan's program. Michael Jordan had a program to apply to where he gave money directly to the educator, it didn't go to the school, it didn't go to the district, it went to the teacher. And with that money I restored literary materials that help build literacy in the students.

Kesha also uses professional discretion to compensate for what she perceives as deficiencies in the curriculum. For example, she took the initiative to teach students history and elements of social studies to foster critical skills. She insisted that students must be taught history. As an example, she included the Bill of Rights in her lesson plan to help students understand their rights as members of the society. She stated the following:

> One of my responsibilities was to make sure that my brown and Black students knew their importance in history. So, if we were covering the Bill of Rights or the Constitution, I made sure that within my lesson plans, we included the importance of why this amendment was important to Black people, why that amendment was important, what role did Black people play in the creation of the concept of the Constitution, the creation of the Bill of Rights, and how those particular things affect us today.

Responding to the question about curriculum relevance to Black students, Kesha argued that teachers are responsible to connect Black history to current events. She explained that it is important to connect Black history to the present so students can learn Blacks contributions to society and how important they are. As she put it “It is their responsibility to take this information, disseminate it to whoever needs to hear it, and

build upon it." Reflecting how teaching civic duties and voting rights are important to Black students, she initiated voting simulation to encourage students to vote. She explained that simulations are important to help the students understand they are important and relevant. She explained:

> That's the responsibility for us as teachers to tie it all together. Like I tell my students, what we are dealing with and what we are seeing today is a huge reflection on what happened 20, 30, 40, 50, 100 years ago. So, it's our responsibility as educators to make sure that we tie it together for these students so that they know that… I do mock voting drives with them, so they are responsible. It's always around election time, I have my students do a mock voting drive where the two weeks prior to the election, we're going to register as many students as possible to vote so that they are able to see the importance, and then on voting day they go then we have poll worker, the whole shebang. And that is putting it in context for them and content for them so that they see that.

Fabian argued that the curriculum is hardly relevant to his students' daily life experiences. Therefore, he uses his discretion to organize events that are susceptible to make the curriculum more relevant to them. He indicated that one way to compensate for what the curriculum is lacking, is to expose the students to things they don't have the chance to be exposed to. Addressing how relevant the curriculum and the textbooks are to Black students, he stated the following:

> Well, it has not been relevant to them, but what I try to do to make a change, to make a modification is to organize field trips that will give

> them that experience, because it's not in the curriculum, it's not in the textbook. So therefore, you got to take them there to see it. So, you got to offer them an educational quality experience, and in order for you to do that, you've got to expose them to things that their parents have never been exposed them to. And that's one way to compensate for the curriculum, to compensate for what it is that's missing in there.

Alea remarked that Black contributions of Black people are not featured prominently in textbooks. Despite this shortcoming however, she indicated that she used her discretion to find other ways to make the texts relevant to Black students. Responding as an English teacher to the question regarding content in the curriculum and in the textbook that are relevant to Black students, she answered:

> If it's in the textbook, it’s going to be a blur. If you’re telling me that the guy who invented the stoplight is Black, there is no short story about that in the literature book. However, if I wanted to do something for my kids, I can take the piece about [that inventor] and pair it with something from the textbook. If we do Shakespeare, and we're talking about betrayal and all these plot twists and stuff, all these things that are going on with communication and betrayal and loyalty, you can find something to engage students of color in the story that they may not see themselves in a Shakespeare piece or English.

Alea added that many Black authors like Maya Angelou and others do not make it in the English textbook every year. To compensate for this omission, she stated that she uses her discretion to supplement.

For Peter going beyond the imagery in the book is important to teach the student life lessons. Compensating for what is not in the curriculum, Peter expressed that he has a responsibility to tell the truth to his students however unpleasing that maybe sometimes. He stated: “I'm clear on what I'm talking about. I'm not here to be liked. And I'm not looking for enemies. But if we don't do this thing, I gotta tell the truth. So, when I talk to the kids, and then they all have to be seen, but in my experience on the spectrum of those to be seen, the darker the experience, the more invisible the child becomes in the education experience.” He further explained:

> In my class, it's mostly tests and measurements, it's a health class. I was able to bring things in, like family, health and relationships, and talk about psychology and things like that. I and my fellow teacher, we were able to make sure that the kids that were sitting in front of us got lessons beyond the imagery in the book, life lessons and things of that nature. None of this was in the textbook.

Maria noted that Black students’ performance challenges are partly rooted in their lack of exposure to ordinary daily-life activities that could enrich their experiences. To compensate for this problem, she used her discretion to diversify her readings with her students by integrating books from Black authors. As she put it, “it’s teacher’s discretion ... so the literature was not just Eurocentric.” She explained her initiatives in the following statement:

> You have teacher’s discretion that will push certain things and expose the kids to their own culture. And I think, personally, that helps you academically, it helps you to aspire for greatness, because when I was in

> school, I had teachers that exposed me to reading literature, reading Langston Hughes, reading about Maya Angelou, reading from Black authors. Now I think back about it, I don't believe that was in the curriculum. I got that in public school and the teachers I remember expose us to that at their discretion. And I believe yes, that is because I've worked with Dade County, and I could see it was never in the curriculum.

Maria also used her discretion to organize field trips to places like a bookstore so students can experience simple things like buying a book. She stated the following:

> I think that's a part of the problem as well, no exposure. There is no exposure, you can have a test question, and these kids have never gone to a certain place, because they never get that exposure, they never go outside of their own surrounding. One year I took those the kids at the school where I'm at now, on a field trip to a bookstore and it has Starbucks inside of it, Barnes and Nobles…I took them on a field trip to the bookstore and did a whole scavenger hunt of the bookstore, and they all purchased a book at the end of the day, and enjoyed the trip, then took them to lunch. It's about exposure. It baffled me that those kids had never gone to a bookstore.

Conclusion

Through the interviews, the participants explained their understanding of symbolic violence and how it manifests in the curriculum. Similarly, they offered their views on the adverse impacts of symbolic violence on Black students' academic performance and their attempt to remediate the effects through discretionary actions

outside the official curriculum and textbooks. Sharing their perceptions and observations in the classroom, has allowed the researcher to have a better understanding of how symbolic violence both manifests in the curriculum and how it impacts Black students' learning experience. It has also provided the researcher with an opportunity to have a better appreciation of teachers' positions and reactions with regards both to the students' learning realities and the official materials that are handed to them by the school administration.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

As described by Bourdieu (1991), symbolic violence refers to practices that legitimize the cultural and social domination of the working-class by the dominant elite. As shown throughout the study, it is a phenomenon that adversely impacts Black students in various ways. From the exclusion of their culture and their life experiences in the curriculum to racial biases in tests that barely reflect their socioeconomic realities, the phenomenon has shown to play a negative role on numerous Black students' learning and performance (Bujorean, 2014; Connolly & Healy, 2004; Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016). However, despite its widespread effects, the phenomenon has not received the attention it deserves in the education research. Most notably, studies conducted on SV (Brar, 2017; Bujorean, 2014; Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016) - however useful they may be in enlightening the education literature of its adverse impacts of on Black students' success - have neglected to fully address teachers' perceptions of the phenomenon. More than anyone, teachers remain the figures that influence the student's educational journey the most. In their multifaceted role, teachers often go beyond their official duty to embrace less visible roles as moral support to the students and witness to their daily struggles (Berlak, 1999; Felman & Laub, 1992; Hansen, 2017; Rattansi, 1992). As such, their views are quintessential to understand the phenomenon. By touching on different aspects of the topic, this study provides a better understanding of its effects in school curricula and I hope through the findings that it sparks new interest in a phenomenon that has for too long negatively affected Black students' success and the Black community at large.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research dissertation was to investigate teachers' perceptions of symbolic violence in school curriculum. Using a case study design, I explored the teachers' awareness of the phenomenon in the curriculum, their understanding of its manifestations, their perceptions regarding its impacts on Black students' academic performance, and their views as to the measures that could be implemented to mitigate its impacts on students' learning. I described how teachers use their professional discretion to take actions outside the official curriculum and textbooks to help their students. I used face-to-face interviews to generate data from seven teachers who have direct classroom experience teaching Black students. As Kvale (2009) noted, "qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subject's point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, to uncover their lived world" (p. xvii). He further described semi-structured interviews as "an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (p. 8). Through the interviews with the participants, I sought to have a better understanding of symbolic violence in the curriculum and how it works to undermine Black students' success. The data collected from the interviews were analyzed, coded, and organized by themes that reflected the teachers' understandings and experience of the phenomenon of symbolic violence.

Another key element of Bourdieu' Theory of Practice is *capital* which includes three aspects: the economic, social, and cultural (1977, 1984, 1986, 1993, 2011). Bourdieu (1991) refers to the economic capital as the total of material assets an individual accumulates. It includes any possession that can be transformed into cash liquidity such

as houses, lands, real estate, automobile, stocks, and so forth. Beyond the financial protection and comfort these material possessions offer to an individual, they are also used as tools to negotiate entry to high powered places which in turn ensure expansion and the perpetuation of the economic capital and the status of its owner.

As a corollary to *economic capital*, *social capital* is described as intangible assets that are articulated in the forms of relationships, social networks etc. (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1986, 1993, 2011). Although less obvious than economic capital, social capital serves to consolidate the position and the gains already acquired by an individual in the social hierarchy. Similar to economic capital, social capital can also be extended to friends and family members.

Finally, the third key concept of Bourdieu, theory of practice is *cultural capital* which he refers to as "long lasting dispositions of the mind and body in the form of cultural goods" (Bourdieu, 2011, p. 84). Cultural capital includes beliefs, values, tastes, to behaviors that an individual possesses and display as markers among his/her peers. Bourdieu differentiates between embodied, objectified, or institutionalized cultural capital. It is embodied when it translates "dispositions of the mind and body" which persist throughout an individual's life (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243). Such dispositions include language, attitudes, and behaviors. In contrast, Bourdieu refers to objectified capital as more tangible items such as "pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, and machines" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243). Lastly, Bourdieu identifies *institutionalized capital* as items "sanctioned by legally guaranteed qualifications," which "confer on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value" (Bourdieu, 2011, p. 88).

When transposed in a school setting, Bourdieu's descriptions help us understand

that students carry to class their own capital that varies according to their cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. The determination of what capital is more valuable than another helps shape the content and orientation of the school curriculum. Citing Swartz (1997), Brar (2017) wrote "The curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation structures of schools are aligned with the cultural ideals of the dominant social group" (p. 25).

Furthermore, the study was enlightened by the critical race theory's (CRT) framework which addresses race as a normalized issue in America. As Delgado (1995) noted, racism "is normal, not aberrant, in American society" (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv, cited in Ladson-Billing, 2014, p. 18). Thus, while Bourdieu's theory of practice provides a general understanding of SV, CRT helps contextualize the phenomenon with regards to Black students' struggles. Swartz (1992) argued that:

> Master scripting silences multiples voices and perspectives, primarily legitimizing dominant, white, upper-class, male voicings as the "standard" knowledge students need to know. All other accounts and perspectives are omitted from the master script unless they can be disempowered through misrepresentation. Thus, content that does not reflect the dominant voice must be brought under control, mastered, and then reshaped before it can become a part of the master script (Swartz, 1992, cited in Ladson-Billing, 2014, p. 25).

The CRT's framework was also useful because of its emphasis on story telling as a way to contextualize experiences relating to racial oppressions. Ladson-Billing (2016) suggests that "The primary reason, then, that stories, or narratives, are deemed important among CRT scholars is that they add necessary contextual contours to the seeming "objectivity" to positivist perspectives" (Ladson-Billing, 2014 p. 19).

Meaning and Understanding

The following section discusses the five themes that have emerged throughout the study: (a) Symbolic violence is pervasive throughout the curriculum in Florida public schools, (b) Symbolic violence in the curriculum in Florida public schools is evidenced in five ways, (c) The ways in which symbolic violence is manifested in the curriculum has a negative impact of the achievement of Black students, (d) The curriculum does not represent the lived experiences of all students, as it should, and (e) Teachers use professional discretion to compensate for deficiencies in the curriculum. Each emerging theme is presented with the related topics that are associated with it. These topics provide an in-depth understanding of the various characteristics relating to each theme.

In the previous chapter, all the transcripts were presented in their original versions to preserve the accuracy of the statements. As a result, some of the languages used by the participants were quite informal. Additionally, when describing their experiences with symbolic violence in the classroom, participants have used interchangeably some concepts such as curriculum and textbooks. Although, these terms may have specific meanings in the education literature, teachers often view them as related instruments they use to convey their experiences and to teach students. Such loose usage of the concepts is also reflected in participants' statements overlapping on different themes covered in the study. Although this may create an appearance of repetitiveness, the researcher decided to leave them as is, as they include unique elements that describe the participants' perceptions and experiences of the phenomenon.

Symbolic Violence is Pervasive throughout the Curriculum in Florida Public Schools

Symbolic violence is described as non-physical acts that deprive its victims of the right to express themselves and to enjoy full participation in a process in which they may be involved in. In the curriculum, SV is expressed variously, including the cultural exclusion of Black students, the racial disparagement of their heritage, and most importantly their subjugation to learn from content that is lopsided towards a Eurocentric view of knowledge from which they hardly identify. I explored teachers' general understanding of symbolic violence in the curriculum and its impacts on Black students' learning experience. Overall, the participants acknowledged the existence of the phenomenon in the curriculum, and they described it as a phenomenon that adversely impacts Black students' education.

The study's findings match the existing literature regarding the pervasiveness of SV in school curricula and its negative impacts on Black students' success. Studies conducted on the topic over the past few decades acknowledge the prevalence of SV in school curricula in the United States. Characterized mainly by its subtlety, it has shown to be embedded in all aspects of the curriculum ranging from content that excludes Black students' life experience and culture to the way they are tested. As Bujorean (2014) suggests

> The shift from direct and obvious physical violence to subtler forms in the shape of a symbolic type of violence, located within the values promoted, the type of relationships within the school environment and the imposition of certain models of behaviour. (p. 634).

Perhaps the most harmful aspect of SV to Black students' learning experience is

“Eurocentrism” which is a subjugation of Black students to learn from content in which they have no cultural connection. According to Woodson (1933), “Minority students are required to learn the culture of the dominant group to succeed, but their own experiences are often excluded from the academic discourse, which can make their learning experience alienating” (as cited in Wiggan, 2007, p. 318).

The Black students’ challenges in the school system are best illustrated by Bourdieu’s concept of habitus which he used to describe how individuals naturally thrive in environments with which they are familiar. In contrast, when confronted in unfamiliar environments, they falter. Bourdieu (1992) refers to habitus as the cumulative sum of “dispositions, norms and tastes” that constitutes an individual social-cultural background (p. 82). He further explained that “When habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a “fish in water”: it does not feel the weight of the water, and it takes the world for granted” (p. 127). In other words, students experience school differently according to their social-economic backgrounds and cultural experiences. In the specific context of the school system, learning may be easier for a White student whose lifestyle may be familiar with elements presented. Compared to a Black student whose socioeconomic backgrounds and cultural experiences are different, such familiarity may not be so obvious. As a result, they are less likely to succeed in this environment. This experience is summarized well by Adrienne, one of the participants, who noted:

> When you're looking at standardized testing, and children are having to read and deal with concepts like tobogganing and various things that they have no familiarity with, because they're not living in a White community that has four

> seasons and has something such as tobogganing. It's things like that, the experiences of White culture in a lot of the chosen literary materials on the standardized testing as well.

The description above throws into sharp relief the CRT approach on "whiteness" as property that guarantees Whites' success, compared to "blackness" that is often leveraged against Black individuals as a liability susceptible to compromise their chance for success. As Ladson-Billings noted that,

> Whiteness when conferred on certain student performances is alienable. When students are rewarded only for conformity to perceived "white norms" or sanctioned for cultural practices (e.g., dress, speech patterns, unauthorized conceptions of knowledge), white property is being rendered alienable. (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 59)

Symbolic Violence in the Curriculum in Florida Public Schools is evidenced in Five Ways

I explored the teachers' perceptions of the manifestations of SV in the curriculum and textbooks. It specifically addressed five expressions of the phenomenon in the curriculum: Eurocentrism, racial biases, cultural biases, lack of representation, and textbook biases. While the participants' perceptions vary regarding the degree to which each of these characteristics of SV are expressed in the curriculum, they overall acknowledge that they are present and do represent a major obstacle to Black students' learning and success.

The study's findings are in alignment with previous research asserting the characteristics described above as expressions of the symbolic violence in the curriculum

(Brar 2017; Bourdieu, 1971, 1991, 1992; Bujorean, 2014; Saltman 2014). In particular, research over the past few decades has focused on racial and cultural biases as prominent expressions of symbolic violence (Asante, 2012; Chapman, 2013; Demoiny, 2017; Martell, 2018, Pinar et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2014). Pinar et al. (1995), argued that "Making the dynamics of racism visible is one essential function of scholarly efforts to understand curriculum as a racial text" (p. 337). Echoing Pinar's view on the topic, Crichlow's (1990) wrote,

> Our collective efforts to contextualize racism and social and structural oppressions of all kinds begin with interrogating how these forms of oppression are already inscribed in prevailing modes of representing truth and knowledge in textbooks, policy and teaching, and in the curriculum and the wider culture (as cited in Pinar et al., 1995, p. 337).

Research studies published in recent years also suggest that these factors impact negatively Black students' success. Particularly, a large body of the literature on the topic has focused on racial and cultural biases as two critical issues that have historically pervaded the school environment in the United States (Baker, 2005; Murphy & Hallinger, 1989; Walsemann & Bell, 2010).

The Ways in Which Symbolic Violence is manifested in the Curriculum has a Negative Impact of the Achievements of Black students

I also explored teachers' opinions on the potential impacts of symbolic violence in the curriculum and whether they think the integration of Black students' culture and experiences would improve their academic outcomes. More specifically, I addressed the potential impact on the following three factors: academic performance, early dropouts,

and testing biases. Overall, the participants agreed on the importance of integrating in the curriculum content that speak to Black students' experiences. However, they provided mixed opinions on whether such integration alone could change Black students' academic outcomes. They indicated that their improvement also requires a change in the way they are tested. They insist that Black students can't be successful if the tests do not reflect their experiences and culture.

The study's findings have confirmed to a large degree previous research regarding the negative impacts of these factors on Black students' success (Baker (2005; Boateng, 1990; Chapman, 2013; El-Amin et al., 2017); For example, in a study on critical consciousness, El-Amin et al. (2017), suggested that Black students' academic outcomes can improve if schools teach them to identify and challenge racial oppression. According to the authors, "Critical consciousness of oppressive social forces can replace feelings of isolation and self-blame for one's challenges with a sense of engagement in a broader collective struggle for social justice." They further suggested, since Black students are already aware of ongoing issues of social injustice that take place in their schools, in their community and in society at large, providing them with guidance on how to confront them directly would contribute to enhance their academic achievement (p. 20). Boateng (1990) also argued that,

> One of the most injurious of these factors [contributing to poor academic performance of African American children], and the one that seems to have the most damaging impact, is the continuous deculturalization of the African American child, and the neglect of African American cultural values in the curriculum. (p. 73).

Despite that the study is aligned with major research findings on the topic, it however, disagrees that the integration of Black students' culture and experiences would positively improve their academic performance. The participants again believe that such outcome can be achieved only if these changes are tied to reforms in the way Black students are tested. They reiterated if students are not tested in matters that reflect their way of living, they will still perform poorly.

The Curriculum Does not represent the Lived Experiences of all Students as it should

I explored teachers' understanding of relevance, balanced curriculum, equity, and diversity. I specifically addressed their perspectives on whether the integration of these elements in the curriculum would improve Black students' success. The interviews reveal mitigated views as to the teachers' perspectives on the positive effects of such integration.

The study found that the curriculum in Florida does not represent the lived experiences of all students as it should. The participants asserted that it is neither equitable nor diverse. It further found that it is not relevant to Black students' experiences and not culturally balanced to address their learning needs. These findings match previous research findings on these topics (Byrd, 2016; Dee & Penner 2017). Results of a study conducted by Dee and Penner (2017) have indeed shown correlation between culturally relevant pedagogy and the improvement of students' academic outcomes.

On this theme also, the study's findings do agree with the literature's overall premise as to the potential benefits of such integration to Black students' learning; however, it disagrees that it would improve Black students' success if changes are made in the way they are tested.

Teachers' Use of Professional Discretion to Compensate for Deficiencies in the Curriculum

Teachers' use of professional discretion has shown to be the strongest emerging theme in this study. It is transpired as a common pattern from all the participants who have expressed an understanding of the Black student's challenges and a willingness to go an extra mile to help them succeed. At play is a combination of interrelated factors among which the teachers' consciousness and empathy for Black students' struggles and understanding of the precariousness of their outlook on the future. Furthermore, it is also rooted in the teachers' capacity to relate to the Black students' experience, the deliberate effort to build relationship with them, the willingness to take risks to stand up for them, and most importantly their effort in investing time to innovate ways to facilitate their understanding of the subject matter.

The findings suggest that the teachers' direct involvement in the students' learning produced positive results in helping them connect their experiences with the content they are being taught and develop political consciousness and awareness of their environment. It also helped students develop a better understanding and appreciation for their own history and culture. Finally, it helped create a healthy student-teacher relation which, in turn, enables the students to speak freely about their struggles both at home and at school.

In the past few decades, there has been indeed a substantial body of literature that argues about the need to allow teachers a more important role in initiatives aiming to help Black students improve their academic performance (Borrero, 2018; Kumashiro, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2014). Borrero (2018), remarked that, "teachers have historically been

removed from national policy and debates about education reform, and because current trends towards standardization and testing are stripping teachers of their agency and ingenuity" (p. 22). Ladson-Billings (2014) argued that teachers can play an important role in academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness.

However, despite the teachers' laudable initiatives to help their students, they expressed doubts as to the possibility to see these efforts translate in measurable results, as set by school administrators and policy makers. Most notable to their skepticism is lingering questions about the tests that Black students are required to take. They emphasized, if there are disparities between the students' experience, what they are taught in the classroom, and the tests that are administered to them, they will never be able to succeed.

Implications of the Study

The data collected through the interviews allowed the researcher to gain significant insight of the symbolic violence both in terms of its impacts on Black students and teachers' perceptions of it. The teachers' descriptions of their experience with SV revealed its pervasiveness in the curriculum and the challenges it poses to Black students' learning experience. From the exclusion of Blacks historical heritage to racial and cultural biases, SV plays a potent role in undermining Black students' potential to achieve academic success. The study also provided rare insights regarding the various coping mechanisms teachers innovate to deal with the challenges SV represents. Various initiatives undertaken by these teachers provide a clear road map as to the steps that can be initiated to remedy many deficiencies that exist in the curriculum. These initiatives include the inclusion of materials that relate to Black students' realities, activities to

widen their educational experience by exposing them the realities of their environment, and most importantly the teachers' relentless effort to empathize with the challenges the students face in their daily lives.

Finally, the study raises awareness on SV as a phenomenon that has been for too long an obstacle to Black students' achieving success. As a result of this understanding, the researcher believes that both policy makers and school administrators are better equipped to take actions that could address the numerous challenges that Black students face throughout their educational journey in the school system.

Relevance of the Study

The study findings emerge in a context of growing concerns regarding recent legislative actions in numerous states aiming at limiting discussions and teachers' initiatives on matters of race, gender, and diversity in the classroom. Among these measures, the Florida "Stop WOKE Act," signed into law on April 22, 2022, illustrates the adverse trend that has been taking place in recent years to suppress minorities' rights to freely exercise their constitutional right to articulate their discontent against racial inequity and social injustice that have historically permeated all spheres of the American society. More worrisome, these measures threaten to do away with teachers' academic freedom by exposing them to potential legal reprisals from parents who may disagree with their teachings. Far from being isolated acts, these encroachments on free speech risk erasing decades of gains on issues of race, equity, and inclusion in the classroom. They furthermore risk sidelining scientific data attesting to challenges Black students face in the educational system and their legitimate need to learn from a balanced curriculum that would take into consideration their experience, history, and culture.

In this regard, the study is relevant in that it offers fresh data on the teachers' practices and their understanding of the challenges Black students face in their educational journey. It proposes to be a road map guiding policy makers, school administrators, and educators in general as to the possible solutions that could be modeled from the teachers' experience to address the challenges that stand in the way of so many Black students' success.

Interpretations and Reflection

Significance and Substance

Exploring symbolic violence in the curriculum provided important insights regarding its impacts on Black students' education and teachers' coping mechanisms to deal with the phenomenon. Although it has been documented in education literature that teachers do use their discretion to address curriculum deficiencies (Boote, 2006; Sweeney, 1981; Taylor, 2007), the study provides additional details as to the nature of some of these actions and the range of areas teachers choose to intervene. For example, Maria expressed how important differentiated learning is to her with regard to actions she would initiate to help a student. Alea expressed the importance of providing students with illustrations that are familiar to the context of their lived experience. For example, as pointed out in the discussion, she initiated mock voting drive to show her students what the process looks like in real life.

Additionally, the study's findings add to the existing literature regarding the importance of integrating content that is relevant to students in their learning. Numerous studies conducted in recent years have provided considerable evidence attesting to a positive correlation between curriculum relatedness and students' performance (Byrd,

2016; Dee & Penner, 2017).

The key departure from the existing study is in the degree to which the participants think integrating content that reflect Black students' experiences would translate into better academic outcomes. As discussed above, although the teachers advocate that the curriculum and the content should reflect Black students' culture, experiences, and socioeconomic backgrounds, they mostly disagree that this measure alone would change their academic outcomes. According to the participants, such a change could take place only if the tests that are administered to the students and the textbooks reflect their real-life experiences and knowledge. The teachers stressed that it is imperative that policymakers and school administrators make a conscious effort to make the curriculum, the content, and the tests relatable to the students in order for them to perform successfully.

Importance to the Discipline of Education

The study is important to the discipline in many regards. First, it widens the existing literature in that it provides new understanding of the phenomenon of symbolic violence. Although the topic has broadly been investigated in the past by a few researchers, no study had addressed the phenomenon in the specific context of the curriculum. By delving in such details through of teachers' experience with symbolic violence in the curriculum, the study offers rare insights that will allow the discipline to have a better grasp of the many facets of the phenomenon.

Additionally, the study is important to the discipline in that it provides a practical road map as to the teachers' numerous initiatives to deal with the challenges SV poses to Black students in their daily struggle to succeed. It offers a launchpad from which future

researchers can initiate other investigations to enrich further our understanding of the phenomenon.

Critique of Findings With Recommendations for Change and Future Research

Recommendations

Based on these findings, the researcher recommends that school administrators and policy makers intervene in the three following areas: (a) content; (b) teacher/student relations; and (c) testing.

Choices of Content that is Relevant to Black Students' Lives. Based on the findings, I recommend that more space should be allocated in the curriculum to content that is relevant to Black students' experience and culture. As transpired through the participants' interviews, the choice of relevant content could play a positive role in changing Black students' academic outcomes. Beyond its traditional role in the student's learning, the choice of relevant content could also play a vital role in other aspects of their learning such as fostering interest, curiosity, and self-esteem. A content that remotely relates to the student's experience may be difficult to register and most likely will not be retained. As Jeremy noted, the lesson has to be connected to the student in order for him/her to retain it. He further added:

> If you're gonna teach and then you're up there teaching, the kids are down there in terms of comprehension level, and you didn't come down to their level, and explain to them what you're teaching so they can see themselves in it, so you're just gonna teach today, they may study in fact, and tomorrow, they forget everything because you didn't talk to them pretty much. You pretty much taught a test or like a robot, feed the

> information, they got it for one day, they quickly remember for one day, take the test the next day, pass or don't pass, it doesn't matter. Then the next week, next month, next year, everything is gone because you didn't connect the lesson with their culture.

Alea summed it up well when she said: “There is some kind of disconnect between what the leadership feels the kids should know and what the kids want to know. It’s the kids’ education, they are stakeholders, you have to take that into consideration as well.”

Furthermore, I recommend that school administrators and policy makers seek inputs from teachers who have direct experience working with Black students and understand their challenges. Additionally, it is important to also seek inputs of the students and the Black community at large when deciding on educational policies that can impact their learning and their future.

Finally, I recommend that school administrators and policy makers make an active and conscious effort to accomplish the goal of a more inclusive and balanced curriculum that is equitable to all students, including African Americans, Whites, Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans, and other ethnicities. Such initiative would allow every student to expand their learning spheres to include knowledge that will be useful to them both as students and citizens of the United States. It would also provide them with an understanding of each other’s culture, history, and perspectives. The dividends will be translated into a more harmonious and peaceful society in which all citizens regardless of their race, gender, and origin can prosper.

Teacher/Student Relations. I also recommend that teachers be provided with

more trainings to help them develop understanding of and empathy to Black students' lives and challenges. Additionally, more opportunities should be created to facilitate teachers' exposure to the experience and culture of the students they are teaching. Having the knowledge of the Black students' day-to-day realities would help cultivate a better understanding of the challenges they face. In turn, such understanding will help establish better relations with the students. As shown in the interviews, a healthy relation between teachers and students could help build trust and respect for each other. It can also help foster teacher's understanding of the student's struggle inside and outside of the classroom. Alea for example remarked that building teacher/student relations would create a more suitable environment for students to learn. She stated: "if the kids do not have a relationship with their teacher … I can't imagine what it must be like for a Caucasian teacher trying to teach a Black text to [Black] kids who are probably sitting there making sure he knows what he's talking about… For me teaching a Black text to Black kids, they just assume that I know what I'm talking about, they recognize she's Black teaching a Black text, they just assume."

Testing. Finally, I recommend that the testing be restructured to reflect Black students' experience, culture, and socioeconomic background. For this restructuring to be effective, it should be done with the participation of a diverse group of professionals, including Black educators who have first-hand knowledge of Black students' life experiences and challenges. Additionally, considerations should be given to numerous initiatives undertaken by teachers in the classroom to foster Black students' understanding of the lessons being taught. They should also consider particularities that are specific to the Black communities. the actual teaching that is taking place inside the

classrooms, Black teachers' input, and most importantly the students' life realities and how they perceive their environment and communicate about it. As Adrienne remarked, the world may be viewed differently from one student to another depending on their environment.

Conclusion

I explored teachers' perceptions of symbolic violence in school curriculum. Through seven interviews, the participants shared their understanding and experiences of the phenomenon. The data collected have demonstrated that teachers perceive symbolic violence existing in school curriculum, and it plays an adverse role in Black students' academic outcomes. From systematic inequities to subtle practices that dismiss Black students' culture and experiences, the findings have confirmed the existing literature regarding the pervasiveness of symbolic violence in school curriculum. Furthermore, the findings have confirmed previous research asserting the irrelevance of the curriculum to Black students' lived experience and aspirations.

In contrast, these findings do not align with the existing literature, which emphasizes that such changes would translate into better outcomes for Black students. As shown above, numerous studies conducted on Black students' performance argued that the integration of these factors would translate into better outcomes. Although they acknowledged that the curriculum is inequitable, culturally irrelevant, and racially biased to Black students, the participants did not think that the integration of these factors alone would be enough to change Black students' outcomes positively. According to the interviewees, high-stake tests that do not reflect Black students' experiences are the most significant hurdle that impede their chance to achieve success. They stressed that in

addition to integrating relevant factors of their lives in the curriculum, changes need to be made in the ways they are tested. To them, whatever change is made in the curriculum, if it is not reflected in the tests, it will not translate into better performance for Black students.

Despite the prevalence of SV in education, and despite its negative impact on Black students' success, the study has also shown that corrective actions can be taken to steer the course toward an improved curriculum, more positive content, and a more diverse testing system that could reflect all students' life experience and realities. At the center of these actions, teachers would play a central role in helping Black students to achieve success. As immediate witness to Black students' struggles with the curriculum and the educational system at large, the study's findings have shown that teachers take initiatives on a wide range of areas, including using students' experiences and culture to help them connect with content, exposing them to environments with which they are not familiar. These initiatives aim at increasing the student's capital for a better understanding of the content they are being taught. However, the study has also shown that, in order for these initiatives to be meaningful and to bear substantive results, they have to be reflected in the tests administered to Black students.

The study has brought to light important aspects of symbolic violence that been for too long part of school curricula across America. As I expressed at the beginning of the inquiry, it is my hope that the information highlighted would contribute to help policy makers and school administrators take corrective actions to address these deficiencies in the curriculum. Beyond the benefit that would bring to Black students' academic success, such corrections would also help enhance their professional life prospect and their well-

being as American citizens. In the end, the nation could take pride in a society in which all its members are treated equitably and have an equal chance to succeed.

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Appendix

Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Understanding of symbolic violence as a concept

1) What is your understanding of the concept of symbolic violence?

2) What is your understanding of its manifestations in the curriculum?

3) What is your understanding of its manifestations in the curriculum at your school specifically?

4) Is there content in your school's curriculum that you think exhibit symbolic violence? (Follow up) Can you please tell me more about your experience in this regard?

Experiences of symbolic violence in the curriculum

1) Do you think the curriculum reflects the racial make-up of your school? How so? Can you please elaborate?

2) What is your understanding of racial biases as an expression of symbolic violence in school curriculum?

3) How you describe the manifestations of racial biases in school curriculum that you may have experienced.

4) In what ways, if any, do you think there is adequate representation of Black contributions in the curriculum? Can you please give some examples?

5) Do you think Blacks' history and experiences are represented adequately in the curriculum? How so? Can you please tell us more?

6) How do you describe Black students' reactions to the curriculum content? For example, have you experienced Black students expressing anything for or against the curriculum?

Textbooks

1) How do you describe the manifestations of cultural biases in textbooks?

2) Do you think there is adequate discussion about race in the textbooks? If no, what is missing or what should be added? If yes, can you please elaborate as to how

there is adequate discussion in the textbook? Or can you please give some examples?

3) Do you think there is enough representation in the textbooks of Black contributions to society? Specifically, I am referring to Black contributions in various domains such as science, technology, culture, etc.? How so? Can you please give some examples?

4) How do you think the Black image has been portrayed in text books?

Cultural Relevance

1) What is your understanding of cultural relevance in the curriculum?

2) Do you think the curriculum is relevant to Black students' experiences? How so? Can you please give some examples?

3) Do you think the curriculum is relevant to Black students' history? How so? Can you tell us more?

4) Do you think the curriculum is relevant to Black students' culture? How so? Can you expand your thought further?

Equity

1) What is your understanding of equity in the curriculum?

2) Do you think that curriculum is equitable to Black students? How so? Can you please tell us more?

3) Do you think that curriculum is diverse enough? How so? Can you please give some examples?

Role of symbolic violence in Black students' Academic Performance

1) What role, if any, do you think symbolic violence plays in Black students' academic performance? Can you please give us some examples?

2) Do you think symbolic violence plays any role in the Black students' dropout rates? How so? Can you please give us some examples?

3) Do you think a curriculum that reflects Black students' culture and history could contribute to improve their academic performance? How so? Can you please elaborate more?

4) What would a racially balanced curriculum look like to you? Specifically, what are the main elements that would need to be integrated in the curriculum to make it racially balanced?

5) What would a culturally balanced curriculum look like to you?

6) Do you think inclusion of Blacks' experiences in the curriculum can have a positive impact on Black students' academic performance? How so? Can you please expand further?

7) Do you think inclusion of Blacks' history in the curriculum can have a positive impact on Black students' academic performance? How so? Can you please give us more details?

8) Do you think inclusion of Blacks' culture in the curriculum can have a positive impact on Black students' academic performance? How so? Can you expand on your thought a little further?

End of Interview

Ms./Mr. I would like to thank you four time and patience during the interview. We had the opportunity to cover an important number of topics. Is there any questions or comments you would like to add?