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A QUALITATIVE STUDY/A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF A BLACK MALE LOOKING TO TEACH

Hiring Black male teachers must be a focus and a priority. Not all schools in America have a Black male teacher, but all schools in America do have a white female teacher. Only 2% of the nation's 4 million teachers are Black males. This narrative inquiry recounts the journey of a Black male wanting to become a teacher; his story is compelling.

Introduction

Daylen Kyree (a pseudonym) is a 24 year-old Black male living in eastern North Carolina. He received his college education from an historical Black university and his master's degree from a predominately white institution, both in eastern North Carolina. At the time of the initial interview (August, 2010), Daylen Kyree had been teaching for less than one year.

The following narrative provides a looming account of Daylen's journey to become a sixth-grade English/Language Arts teacher in eastern North Carolina. Daylen's experience will not only illuminate the complexities of his lived experiences but will also juxtapose the life histories of other Black males by providing a contextual perspective in understanding how culture and race can aid in shaping a world-view (Bell 2011; Howard, 2008; Henry, 1995). Daylen's story is an interpretive description that offers a reflective, introspective, and pensive revelation of his efforts to get a job. The purpose of this narrative approach, which is situated within the qualitative research method, is to understand Daylen's route to employment through the eyes of a Black male looking to teach and to further explore if race and/or gender were barriers in Daylen becoming a teacher. Out of eight interviews and six declined interviews (by Daylen), Daylen was offered only one job. The questions that guided the researcher are:

- (1) What were Daylen's interviewing experiences?
- (2) Did race and/or gender play a role in Daylen being hired?

Daylen's experiences will enlighten the perceived social/cultural nuances of discrimination and/or racism that may have been inconsequential factors during his interview process. The *Critical Race Theory*, which is a lens that is provided as a foundation to acknowledge the presence of race, racism, and discrimination, will aid in analyzing and interpreting Daylen's experiences (Howard, 2008). This theory provides a methodological guide for discussion and as a means to challenge ideologies and to offer individuals the opportunity to illumine their voices, oftentimes from disenfranchised people (Howard, 2008).

Narrative research provides a literary tradition in collecting stories and arriving at interpretations by transcribing and analyzing an account of one's life (McQueen and Zimmerman, 2006; James, 2002; Lieblich, Tuval- Mashiach, and Zilber, 1998). A narrative is not fact finding, but provides arguable information to the reader (Polkinghorne, 2007). In addition, the interpretive narrative approach provides readers the opportunity to hear amplified voices, especially from those marginalized groups (McQueen and Zimmerman, 2006; Howard, 2008).

The nation decries the scantiness of Black male teachers in classrooms. The paucity of Black males in the classroom is not a recent phenomenon (Daniels, 2010; Bell, 2011, 2010a, 2010b). The absence of Black male teachers from classrooms can also be attributed to many factors; however, the prevailing ones appear to be other career options and the assumption that teaching is a female-dominated profession (Dogan, 2010). Today only 2 percent of the nation's 4 million plus public school teachers are Black men (Cottman, 2010). Some may contend that race and/or gender of the teacher does not matter as long as the teacher can effectively teach all children. However, Dee (2004) postulated that race and gender do matter in student achievement.

Teacher education programs across America are constantly beefing up its curriculum toward 21st Century Learning and being globally competitive; even so, research supports the notion that Black students' teacher education experiences need to be as positive as their peers, which suggest that even preparing Black males for teaching may be fraught with compromise (Siraj-Blatchford, 1991). National Board Certified teachers are on the rise; highly qualified teachers have increased, and accountability standards have ascended to unparalleled levels within the educational arena. Processes are in place to deal with these identifiable needs, yet the need to employ an appreciative number of Black male teachers has not taken on the same prominence.

Despite the call to increase the number of Black male teachers, modest progress has been made. While the "system" bemoans the need to increase the number of Black male teachers, the absolute reality to hire Black males has not been realized. It is conceivable to fathom that some

Black students may not ever be taught by a teacher of their same race or gender. Dee (2004) concluded that there is a positive connection, with respect to race, between student and teacher in terms of improved academic performance. Black male role models may impact student achievement in a positive way (Dee, 2004; Bell, 2010a, 2010b). Policymakers, educators, and stakeholders know all too well the benefits that Black males can bring to the classrooms. The shortage of Black teachers compounds the problems that Black students face in classrooms across America (Thomas-Lester, 2010). Bell (2010a, 2010b) postulated that Black male teachers are positive role models for Black male students; these role models and authority figures might thrust Black males toward successful opportunities and futures. Knowing that only 46% of Black males graduated from high school as compared to 66% White males, it can be assumed that infusing classrooms with Black male teachers may increase the academic performance of Black male students (Bell, 2010a, 2010b).

Daylen was one of 15 students in the teacher education program in eastern North Carolina, and one of two Black males. An initial conversation with Daylen led the researcher to conduct this inquiry. Daylen had dreams of becoming a speech pathologist; he has an undergraduate degree in English/Speech. He was interviewed over a course of five months by the researcher, a Black male, with a doctorate in education. The open-ended interviews and storytelling accounts were transcribed for later analyses; five interviews were conducted (from August-December, 2010), each lasting an hour.

During the course of the interviews, I was befuddled by Daylen's naiveté in trying to make sense out of why he had to go through so many interviews. He assumed that since he was qualified to teach and coupled with the need for Black male teachers, then why the "hurdles" in getting a teaching position. As a Black male, with a master's in education, Daylen learned that being prepared to teach does not mean, you are allowed to teach. Daylen had not begun to understand the subtle ways racism and/or cultural hiring practices can "play" in employment, regardless of qualifications. The manner in which Daylen told his story is one of empathy and sympathy. He had not lived long enough to feel the "undemonstrative nuances or the silent pejoratives" that are often

assailed during the interviewing and hiring process. Daylen's story of perception and/or reality in pursuing employment is commonplace, especially for any underserved group. The absence of Black males in classrooms cannot solely be aligned to the absence of Black males in the career teaching pool, but may be analogous to the biased hiring practices. Daylen's story can be considered one of epic importance for many Black males.

Based on his journey, I decided to retell Daylen's story. This paper is organized as follows: in the first section, I investigated Daylen's yearning and calling to enter the teaching field. In section two, I examined Daylen's educational preparation, in section three I explored Daylen's search for a teaching position. In concluding, I discussed the processes that Daylen took from teacher exploration, to interviewing, to being hired, and to the perceptions of how race and/or gender may have played a part in his career journey.

I want to teach

According to Daylen, he "did not want to initially become a teacher." He had aspiration in becoming a speech pathologist (August, 2010). He received his undergraduate degree in English/Speech and had been accepted for graduate study. However, he had to "wait a year" before he would be able to begin the speech program.

One day Daylen received a call from his father regarding waiting a year for graduate school. Daylen's father asked about his educational plans while waiting. His father proposed that he pursue his teaching credentials while waiting to enter the speech pathology program. "Teaching, I really don't want to teach." For Daylen, teaching was not an option. He had other career dreams and initially resisted the thought of the profession. Interestingly, Daylen began to think seriously about a year without school and thought fleetingly about being a teacher. "Am I really a teacher?" "Although, I enjoy working in after school programs, teaching is not for me." "I had been a student in after school programs since the age of 6." "Well, Black male teachers are needed, so they say."

More specifically, Daylen's comments were: (August, 2010)

Well, I have seen a lot of teachers in action. My father was a teacher...I liked most of my teachers. However, teaching really does not pay. However, I had only one Black male teacher... and that was in 11th grade. Black male teachers are extremely rare. I guess that I am needed! I did want more Black male teachers when I was in school. I experienced more Black teachers when I attended a Black university. Yes, I will teach. Is it my calling? Well, I can get my teaching credentials...and become a speech pathologist.

It is not uncommon for students to receive a K-12 education and not be taught by a Black male teacher. The teaching profession is replete with middle-class White females. One can surmise that the pool of Black male teachers is limited or one can even conjecture that the “system” has not issued a compelling mandate to change the status quo. If the nation had more Black male teachers than White female teachers, there would be a crisis of insurmountable proportions.

Preparing to Teach

Daylen’s preparation to teach was marked with slight trepidation and excitement. “Can I be a good teacher?” “ Sure, I can.” Classes were easy to choose and advisors were helpful. Daylen was proud of his grades and took great pride in becoming a teacher. The teacher education program was “strong and laden with a lot of work,” but Daylen’s commitment to the profession was “full-steam ahead!” (September, 2010)

Daylen’s yen for teaching was evident in his jovial and effervescent personality. The lesson plans and the constructive feedback from his “teacher-mentor” and father helped to shape his attitude about the teaching profession. Preparing to teach was not as difficult as he had thought. It was a fulfillment that he had not planned. After earning his master’s degree in teaching, with English/Language Arts certification, Daylen withdrew from the speech pathology program: “WOW, I can’t believe I did that...teaching is now my career, and I am preparing for that calling.” (September, 2010)

The Interview Journey

Daylen admitted that he had not really thought about interviewing process. “Based on my

research, there is a lack of Black males in the teaching profession...even President Obama has spoken on this...I know that there are not enough Black male teachers.” “Most of my college professors, in teacher education program school, reminded me how quickly I would land a job...you are a Black male with a master’s degree...and you will get a job quickly—but, they were wrong.” From Daylen’s demeanor and body language, I was able to discern how sensitive and gripping he felt about the interview experience. “The first interview was one of excitement.” “Yes, my first career is about to begin.” Daylen’s retells his first interview: (October, 2010)

Mr. Kyree, please have a seat...Yes, you have impressive credentials. We are looking for a middle school teacher...Have you taught before? Where is your family from? Tell me about yourself...Well, Mr. Kyree we will be in contact and thanks for coming in...”

According the Daylen, “the first interview was interesting and informative.” It helped him to gauge and to prepare for interviews to come. The prospect for teaching was still exciting. He sensed victory. However, after several interviews, Daylen began to question the interviewing process and the commitment to hiring Black males in the teaching profession. “Seemingly, every interview had the same questions and the pleasant interviewers.” “After eight interviews, in eastern North Carolina, I felt like it’s a game.” “They must need to interview a certain number of Black males to say that they had tried to address the paucity of Black males in the field.” “Does the system really want more Black males in the system or is it just talk.” Daylen reflects more: (October, 2010)

They [principals who interviewed] asked how long I had been teaching. They saw my resume—none. They asked what are you certified in—they saw my resume. Again, I responded that I have middle grades certification in English/Language Arts. Some responded in a patronizing tone. “You are a Black male, with a master’s degree...you will get a job real quick.” I didn’t feel the sincerity in some of the interviews. Some of the schools had no Black male teachers on the teaching staff. What was wrong with me? Here I am, certified and willing—“all degreed up and nowhere to go.” I believe that it is a systematic and cultural expectation that Black males are not hired. I was not looking for a handout. I was just looking to teach. Interviewing became an auction block. I was graded by my looks, actions, size, and color in order to satisfy an interviewing quota. Some interviews were a waste of time. I felt defeated and despondent. I clearly understand why there might not be a larger number of Black males in the teaching field. Perhaps, race, gender, and/or culture prohibit classrooms from having Black male teachers. And

yes, the favorite line of all.... Well, Mr. Kyree you do not have teaching experience. And I am thinking, yes, that is true—it was on my resume. (October, 2010)

Daylen’s perception is key; he interviewed with six White male and two Black male principals. In all of the schools he interviewed, **no** school had more than one Black male as a teacher, and some schools had no Black males on staff. Given the need for Black male teachers, where are the Black male teachers and where are those who are willing hire them?

Daylen comments more: (November, 2010)

Perhaps, my interviewing skills were poor—and maybe so. Yet, I had met current teachers. Some weren’t as impressive as I was! They were teaching—what was wrong with me? I met current principals, and they were leading. I began to measure my skills against them all. Sometimes, I won. (Laughing). Was I being held to a different standard?’ Was race and/or gender a factor? Interviewing became a game. When I would submit my resume, within days, I got interviews. I felt that I received so many interviews based on my published resume. I “looked” good on paper! It got to the point that I turned down some interviews. I did not see the point in playing the interview games.

After several interviews, Daylen received a follow-up call from a principal: “Mr. Kyree thanks for the interview.” “I have decided to go with a more experienced teacher.” You have great skills...I wish you well.” “Mr. Kyree, have you tried blank school...what about blank school?” Mr. Kyree, you interviewed well.” [‘I was thinking, If I were all that, you did not hire me’]. Daylen later found out that a white teacher was hired.

After the beginning of the school year [2010], Daylen received a call from another principal, who wanted to know if he had been hired. “I was not sure if he were going to hire me or not—still not sure.” I felt that I was, perhaps, a last option. I felt used. I was no longer going to be an interview quota for affirmative action human resource purposes. Interviewing was harder than graduate school. Daylen responds more specifically with clichés from past interviews: (December, 2010)

Mr. Kyree, we are still interviewing, and we will contact you. Mr. Kyree, we have a teacher retiring...and will be contacting you. Mr. Kyree, you would be more marketable if you had dual certification—[‘You knew of my certification’] Mr. Kyree thanks for coming to the interview. As a Black man with a master’s degree, you are marketable [‘I heard this a lot’]. Mr. Kyree, you have impressed me. (December, 2010)

According to Daylen, a sense of failure and betrayal were apparent from all the interviews. He kept feeling that the system had let him and the “students” down. A sense of perfidy was stronger when he interviewed with two Black administrators. “They should know better.” (December, 2010) Daylen’s interview experiences almost led him to stop his pursuit in becoming a teacher and pursue becoming a speech pathologist. He was “sick” of the games and the hypocrisy in the system by claiming a need to hire more Black male teachers. “After my interviewing experiences, there are Black males to be hired. “ I am not the only one to have gone through these experiences.” “Perhaps, some potential Black male teachers just gave up on the games—some do not enter it—and some like me, just continue to dream.”

Understanding Daylen’s perspective from the eyes of a Black man is critical; a feeling of being unwanted is a familiar emotion. Racism and/or discrimination may be the lenses through which to interpret Daylen feelings. It is obvious that the nation is unworried about the lack of Black male teachers. However, if Black teachers out-numbered White teachers, policies and practices would be quickly implemented to change the complexion of teachers. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the Black community to rally to change this dynamic with unyielding support of school superintendents, school board chairmen/members, principals, and the community.

Conclusion

Storytelling is a method for underserved groups to retell their story (McQueen and Zimmerman, 2006; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber, 1998). Stories present as a mechanism to expound upon people *telling it like it is!* Daylen’s experience is not unique. In order to add credibility to this narrative inquiry, Daylen was sent a copy of this narrative to verify the accuracy of this account.

This narrative is based on one Black male telling his story and looking to teach in eastern North Carolina. However, Daylen’s account provides arguable information that can provide an authentic mechanism for discussion. Daylen’s story paints another compelling and plausible dimension as to why there may an absence of Black male teachers. Could it be because of race and/or gender discrimination?

Discrimination does happen in other lines of work. Is teaching any different? Future research

may need to concentrate on whether Black males leave the prospect of teaching because they cannot get hired, even when they are well-qualified. Daylen's experience is not unique. He poignantly narrates the realities that shaped his beliefs and experiences. When there is a minority group with a disenfranchised status, one can look through the lens of the *Critical Race Theory* to begin to question the various ideologies that may influence perceptions and notions of discrimination (Howard, 2008).

The nation wrestles with the lack of Black males in the teaching profession. The evidence is resounding. The nation rests on the fact that only 2% of the 4 million teachers are Black men. The nation graduated only 47% of Black males (Schott Foundation, 2010). When Daylen questioned his interview experience, it was clear why he attributed his experience to race and gender bias. We cannot deny the lack of Black male teachers in the teaching profession. We cannot afford interviewing quotas; we cannot afford to placate Black males by subjecting them to a barrage of interviews when the goal is not to hire. We cannot lean on the excuse, "you lack teaching experiences or we are looking for a teacher with more experiences." Longevity in teaching does not necessarily equate to teacher effectiveness and/or competency. A serious commitment to attract and to hire Black male teachers is questionable and arguable. The fact remains that Black males are not characteristically seen as classroom teachers.

Daylen finally received a teaching assignment—one of the two Black principals hired him. Daylen was hired at the school where he did his student teaching. Daylen remarked: "I guess I had to prove myself." "The principal knew me, and I know some of the school staff...just wondered if I had not known anyone, would I be teaching?" I wondered that, too.

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